

Photos of Prague Castle 1856 – 1900

When they started representing Prague Castle, photographers in fact followed in the footsteps of the draughtsmen and painters, who revealed its beauty long before the invention of photography in 1839. The panoramic photos in particular demonstrate the way they actually copied their observation points and found inspiration in their views. Unlike the artists, however, the photographers were hindered by the fact that in the first decades after the invention of photography they had to carry bulky baggage with them, as in the photographs created by the wet technique, the sensitive glass plate had to be exposed and developed in wet condition, which meant they had to improvise the dark chamber outdoors. The photos of 19th-century Prague Castle were mostly done by professionals, as the principle of amateur photographs as souvenirs of visited places had only been applied more widely after the photographic process was simplified in the late 1880s. Photos from the 19th century display elements of composition and expression visibly affected by the struggle with this technique. The long exposure time prevented the movement of the figures, clouds are missing in the photos, and the range of tones was limited to brown.

The Castle was one of the “obligatory” Prague photographic subjects. It is thus rather remarkable that the earliest known photos date from as late as 1856, when the first set of Prague photos was taken, by the then most important Central-European photographer of landscapes, Andreas Groll (1822 – 1872) from Vienna. This “first photographer of Prague” re-visited Bohemia and Moravia in 1865, when he also published his catalogue of the photos. According to the catalogue, he took five photos of the Summer Palace Belvedere, two of the fountain at the Belvedere, two pictures of St. George’s sculpture, the tower of St. Vitus’s Cathedral, and he also captured the interiors of Vladislav Hall and the “Königs-Grabmal in St. Veitsdom”. It is interesting that our view of the east end of the cathedral (no. 83) is not included in this list. Naturally, there was also the general view of Prague Castle with Charles Bridge; Groll was the first photographer to have taken this “classic Prague view”. Wilhelm Rupp created his photographic vedute in a manner similar to that of Groll. He is the author of the second earliest Castle panorama taken from the embankment, where he shared a studio with his partner, which was then considered the most successful in Prague.

The first generation of the “photo-vedutists” included Amand Helm from Teplice, whose surviving works feature a rare photo of a photographer working at the Castle, from the first half of the 1860s. The painter and photographer Jan Maloch probably also made photographic vedute of a larger format, his photo of the Castle in the 1850s is not known, though. In 1863 another painter, Jan Brandeis, took a remarkable view of the east end of St. Vitus’s Cathedral from the tower of St. George’s Church. At that time, Gustav Reitter photographed the Castle from Strahov, and he took other Prague shots, as well. In 1865 an album of his own photos entitled *The Belvedere* was published by Josef Schulz, who became professor of architecture later on and who can be considered to have been the first photo-

graphic amateur at the Castle. The earliest views of the various buildings at the Castle and in the town of Hradčany include the small card photos made by von Senteck from Berlin and spread by the art publisher Carl Reichenecker, or K. André's shop in Prague in the mid-1860s. In 1867 a Dresden photographer, Emil Römmler, published larger-format photos of Prague. Von Senteck and Römmler were among those foreign artists whose photos competed with the ones made by local photographers. Anselm Schmitz was another of the photographers of the "first generation", providing large representative photos related to the exhibition of the objects from the St. Vitus treasure. (The exhibition was held in Vladislav Hall in May 1866.) Two years later, the Prague photographer Jindřich (Heinrich) Lachmann (1832-1877) took photos of the coronation jewels at the Castle, which was later recorded by the photographer J. R. Čimera, who worked for Lachmann and with another colleague, took part in the event. Lachmann's photos were spread pasted on cardboard of approximately 10.5 x 6.5 cm.

After 1860, following a period of large-size photographs that were hung on walls like printed vedute, small and cheap photos became popular, to be stored in photo albums. No less popular were the stereo-photographs, which, when viewed with special binoculars, gave joy through the spatial perception of the image. The most important photographer who made the small-format photos and stereo-photographs of monuments in the Czech lands was František Fridrich (1829 – 1892), whose oeuvre include Prague Castle in dozens of variations. From the viewpoint of the history of the Castle photography, the greatest contribution of Fridrich was in his interest in displaying interiors, and in his "codification" of the photographers' viewing stands. Until the early 1920s, his followers took photos from approximately the same places, changing only the optics. Some of Fridrich's photos display the signature of Karel Maloch, the son of his employee Jan Maloch, who used Fridrich's archives for some time, and was a photographer himself. An idea of Fridrich's enormous publishing activity can be found in the *Buch-und Kunst-Katalog. Gesamt-Verlags-Katalog des Deutschen Buchhandels und des mit ihm im direkten Verkehr stehenden Auslandes*, published by Adolf Russell's Verlag in Münster around 1883.

One of Fridrich's contemporaries was Jindřich Eckert (1833 – 1905), considered the most important figure in 19th-century photography in the Czech lands. However, Eckert took fewer topographical shots of the Castle than Fridrich, even though he is recorded as having worked for the Society for the Completion of St. Vitus's. Several shots of the Castle premises also found their way into Eckert's book dated 1898 and entitled *The Royal Prague*, which was the first publication with printed art photos of a city in this country. Closely related to Prague Castle was also the heliotype facsimile of the codex *Scriptum super Apocalypsim cum imaginibus (Wenceslai Doctoris)* published by St. Vitus's Chapter on the 900th anniversary of the foundation of the Prague Bishopric in 1873, for which Eckert received an award at the World Exposition, and was also presented with Voigtländer's medal from the Photographic Society in Vienna.

From the 1880s the history of Prague Castle photography was carried on by the Prague publisher Karel Ferdinand Bellmann (1820 – 1893), who apparently did not take the photographs himself, but commissioned photos, and as the owner of the Art-Typographical Institute marked them with his signature. However, his son Artur Maschka-Bellmann was a member of the Photographic Society in Vienna as early as 1882 and it was probably to his credit that the heliotype Album of the Royal Capital of Prague was published (1883), the first of its kind in this country. Bellmann's firm published small photos, but also large-size authentic photos or heliotypes. In the 1890s Artur Maschka-Bellmann started publishing a number of good-quality heliotype postcards, which are rather sought-after among collectors. From the late 1880s, František Krátký (1851 – 1924) took photos at Prague Castle and by the end of the century he was the greatest publisher of stereophotographs in this country. He regularly published numbered inventories of his photos, so we have a good idea of the motifs that interested him most. Dated 1893, *The Inventory of Stereoscopic Pictures from Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, the High Tatras, Cracow, and Budapest* listed 912 motifs, out of which there were 32 shots of Prague Castle, to which we can add another 14 shots of “the frescoes in the Belvedere”. The Castle shots included almost all the most famous motifs both in the exterior and interior, with the exception of the Golden Lane that was avoided by all 19th-century photographers.

Apart from the main local authors mentioned earlier, photos of Prague Castle can be found in several Prague collections of photographers working outside the Kingdom of Bohemia (for example, J. Wilha, A. Beer, the Stengel & Co. firm). Baron Raimund Stillfried von Rathenice published a dozen photos of the Castle at his own costs in 1885, but unfortunately, they could not be found. It is quite possible that there will be more finds in the future, particularly in various chateau collections. The early history of the photography of Prague Castle rather mirrors the history of the medium in the Czech lands, and the approach is mainly conservative, descriptive, without any remarkable creative approach. Taken by Rudolf Bruner-Dvořák (1864 – 1921), the latest dated photo of the exhibition, an automobile outside the cour d'honneur, symbolically ended one stage of photography. As a “snap-photographer”, Bruner-Dvořák was an author of a new type, like the amateur photographers who “revealed” Prague Castle in the early 20th century as a subject of emotionally picturesque photos. This interest was supported by re-editions of earlier photos provided by the photographers' followers (Karel Maloch, Antonín Cetyl), or the antique dealer Zikmund Reach, who sold numerous postcards of earlier photos as late as the 1920s. The photos of Prague Castle dating from the 19th century are not so important for the history of photography, but they are priceless in documenting the architectural changes that radically transformed the appearance of this legendary place.

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