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The Fall and Rise of Prague's Marian Column

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Marian Column of Old Town Square, c. 1900.

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Cynthia Paces

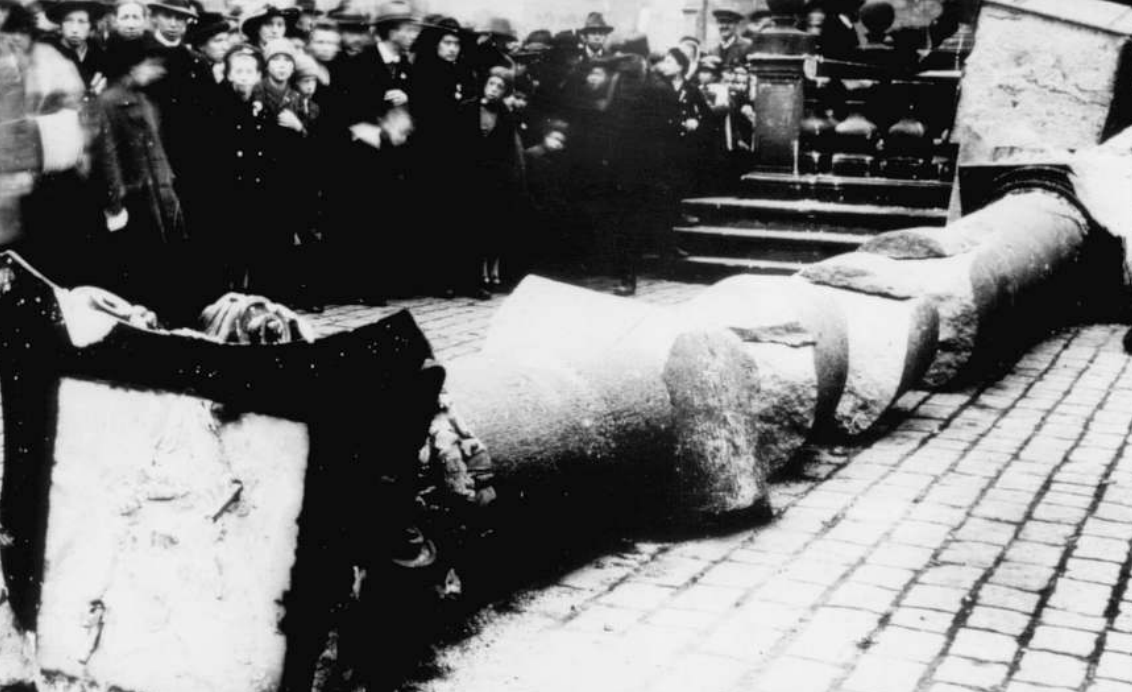
Prague's beautiful monuments, churches, and architectural diversity beckon visitors from all over the world. However, in Prague, empty spaces tell as many stories as the city's many historical monuments. The site of a Stalin statue, which stood in central Prague only from 1955 to 1962, still bears the colloquial name "Stalin Hill."¹ Throughout the Communist era, "empty pedestals" once bearing statues of Czechoslovak founder President Tomáš Masaryk reminded citizens of the former leader's democratic ideals.² And, on Old Town Square, Prague's most important public space, a plaque embedded in the cobblestones tells visitors in four languages: "Here did stand and will stand again—the Marian Column of Old Town Square." The plaque commemorates the empty space created when nationalists, celebrating Czechoslovak independence from Austria in 1918, toppled a baroque monument of the Virgin Mary. After the incident, the city government swept the rubble away and sent the broken pieces to Prague's Lapidarium of the National Museum.³ However, Prague could not sweep away the memories of the Marian Column, which had stood on Old Town Square since 1650. Debates about the meaning of this empty space continue to the present day.

"Objects speak."⁴ Victor Turner's now-famous dictum instructed anthropologists to listen to the messages embedded in tangible objects: statues, buildings, historical sites. Yet the history of Prague's Marian Column in the twentieth century reveals that empty spaces can speak as well. In Prague, each dramatic political transformation of the century has recast the message of the empty space on Old Town Square.

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Toppled Marian Column on Old Town Square, Prague. November 1918.

Czech Nationalism and the Marian Column

The Marian Column originally commemorated the Habsburg defeat of Sweden and the subsequent Swedish retreat from Prague at the end of the Thirty Years' War. The Victory Column dated from 1650 and represented one of the most important pieces of baroque public art in Central Europe.⁵ During the nineteenth century, however, Czech nationalists began to view the column as a symbol of Austrian cultural hegemony in the empire, as opposed to a monument celebrating their city's freedom. As Czech revivalists effectively transformed Prague from a predominantly German-speaking city to the center of Czech culture, Czechs sought to challenge the predominance of Austrian baroque art and architecture in the city.

For Czech nationalists, the Marian Column epitomized the Austrian presence in Prague. Although Habsburg Emperor Ferdinand III donated the column to celebrate the Swedish retreat, most nineteenth-century Czechs believed that the Marian Column represented the Habsburgs' victory over Bohemian Protestant nobles at the Battle of White Mountain in 1620. The Bohemian Estates' loss at White Mountain led to Habsburg hereditary rights in the Bohemian Crownlands and the forced conversion of the predominantly Protestant region to Roman Catholicism. During this period of Counter Reformation, the Habsburg-sponsored Jesuits promoted the Cult of the Virgin Mary to attract converts and built Marian Columns and baroque churches throughout the Habsburg lands. According to Czech nationalist historiography, the Battle of White Mountain and subsequent Counter Reformation ushered in a period of *temno* (darkness), during which national development halted. The Marian Column reminded nationalists that Habsburg hegemony had stifled a unique national culture.

Although over 90 percent of the nineteenth-century Czech population was Roman Catholic, many nationalists began to identify politically with the revived memory of the pre-White Mountain Bohemian heresy, led by Jan Hus in the fifteenth century. In 1890, Prague nationalist leaders began to raise funds for a Jan Hus memorial. The martyred Czech priest, who insisted on using the vernacular language in Mass, appealed to Czech nationalists, who were also fighting for language rights in the Germanized Austrian Empire. The Club for the Building of the Jan Hus Memorial in Prague eagerly anticipated 1915, the five-hundredth anniversary of Hus's execution by the Roman Catholic Church when it would unveil its Hus monument. After bitter public debate and demonstrations by Prague Catholics, the Prague City Council approved Old Town Square as the monument's site partly to counter the symbolism of the baroque Marian Column.

However, some believed that pairing the religious monuments on Old Town Square could actually heal religious tension in the city. Speaking in 1903, at the cornerstone-laying ceremony for the Hus Monument, former Prague mayor and nationalist Jan Podlipný announced that Hus's majestic figure would soon face "the Mother of Christ, for whom Hus had infinite respect."⁶ He explained that Hus never renounced the Roman Catholic faith, or devotion to Mary, but opposed the power structure of the church hierarchy. He further remarked that the Marian Column had no connection to White Mountain, and it was this mistaken notion that accounted for nationalists' bitter feelings. Podlipný's remarks temporarily appeased Prague Catholics who stopped demonstrating against the proposed Hus Memorial. However, Podlipný's fellow nationalists were furious and would eventually oust Podlipný from the presidency of the Sokol nationalist gymnastics organization. The nationalist and socialist press accused Podlipný of making peace with "Hus's murderers."⁷

Other nationalists attempted to show Hus as a purely secular figure who



Jan Hus Memorial, Old Town Square, Prague.
Photo by Cynthia Paces.

advocated freedom of expression. This casting of Hus as an early democrat and liberal was also meant to counter the overtly monarchial image of the Habsburg Marian Column. One way nationalists attempted to secularize Hus was to bring Czech Jews into his cult. In 1903, the National Union of Czech Jews in Prague, the Circle of Czech-Jewish Youth in Prague, and the Association of Academic Jews in Prague enthusiastically marched in the parade for the Hus Memorial Cornerstone Festival. Even though most Prague Jews remained tied to German-speaking culture, those who identified themselves as Czech were willing to accept a secularized Hus more readily than the Catholics' Marian Column.

Most nationalists despised the Marian Column, yet the baroque statue had tremendous influence over them. Ladislav Šaloun, the Hus Memorial sculptor, told the nationalist press that the Marian Column constrained his artistic freedom. Although he speculated that future generations might consider moving the Marian Column, he had to work under the assumption that the two monuments would share the square. In addition to the subject matter that inherently challenged the Marian Column, Šaloun's artistic concept also responded to the column's form. The dark bronze and granite sculpture countered the white sandstone Marian Column. Šaloun claimed that he designed the monument to be massive and horizontally oriented to rival the towering baroque pillar.⁸ Furthermore, Šaloun complicated the gendered symbolism on Old Town Square. On his Hus Memorial, he placed a statue of a breast-feeding woman at the feet of Jan Hus. Šaloun's nursing mother figure competed with the Marian Column's image of the maternal. The secular maternal image updated the baroque symbol of Mary, depicted as *Maria Regina*, the Queen of Heaven, which was popular with seventeenth-century counter reformers.⁹

The Hus Memorial was unveiled as planned in 1915. However, the tense political situation during the First World War forced nationalists to celebrate their statue quietly and without a corresponding nationalist festival. Czechs resented that Austrian politics had stifled their nationalist passion yet again. With newfound political power after the Great War, however, the Czechs would begin to take more direct action against the symbols of Austrian power.

The Fall of the Marian Column

"Down with it, down!"¹⁰

The frenzied mob that crowded Prague's Old Town Square cheered and shouted on the cold evening of November 3, 1918. There was great cause for celebration: less than a week earlier, on October 28, 1918, the National Council had proclaimed Czechoslovakia an independent nation-state and had peacefully broken from Habsburg rule in Austria-Hungary.¹¹ Rejoicing crowds had gathered in Old Town Square all week, but on this November evening the leaders of this mob had a specific purpose in mind. Above the shouts, the onlookers heard a loud crack, and

then a crash, as firemen with ropes and pulleys toppled the Column onto the cobblestones, breaking the baroque column into three large chunks, and shattering the Virgin Mary into pieces. Some of Prague's most radical nationalists had finally achieved their goal: removing what they saw as a blatant reminder of Habsburg dominion over the Czech lands. These nationalists had purified this public space for a Czech nationalist tradition. Radical Czech nationalists viewed Austria's defeat in the Great War as justice for White Mountain. Toppling the column was revenge.

The mob's leader, Franta Kysela-Sauer, was a Prague eccentric, who flirted with socialism and anarchism, smuggled saccharine during the war, and drank in working-class pubs with Jaroslav Hašek, author of the antiwar novel *The Good Soldier Švejk*. Kysela-Sauer's analysis added the issue of class oppression to the baroque monument's already multilayered meaning. In his writings, Kysela-Sauer explained that he recruited factory workers he knew from the pubs for his mob. These national-oriented socialists resented that the Habsburg Army conscripted workers for their main supply of soldiers and that church leaders supported the war.¹²

The Marian Column, according to Kysela-Sauer, was a "political symbol" of class oppression, not a religious one. True Catholics followed Christ, he wrote, not the "international, political clerical movement, whose central committee sat in Rome."¹³ Although Kysela-Sauer admitted that the Column did not directly commemorate Habsburg victory at White Mountain, he warned that this did not render the monument harmless. Any memorial from the Thirty Years' War represented the defeat of Czech culture, especially political, religious, and class liberty.

The destruction of the Marian Column reflected a broader anticlerical movement following independence. As Moric Hruban, a contemporary Czech Catholic politician, remarked: "In Prague one observed the appearance of two main trends of thought: the social revolutionary and the anti-Catholic. The casual observer could not recognize the real situation because everything around was hidden under flags and flowers and covered by a mood of rejoicing for the newly won state and national independence."¹⁴ The Marian Column destruction combined both trends: socialists with nationalist sympathies seized the opportunity to display their concern over Catholicism's power in the region. Attacks on Catholic statues continued into the 1920s.

Concerned with larger issues in the first week of independence, the Czechoslovak National Council did little to prevent or punish the Marian Column vandals. Yet their terse written response argued that the destruction resulted from a "historical misunderstanding" about the Column's original meaning. Lamenting the irrational destruction of the Marian Column, the National Council remarked, "the principle of freedom excludes every violent act, especially during this era of cultivating relations with Slovakia, when we are developing a way for the whole nation to

be happy.”¹⁵ Suddenly Czech nationalist anticlericalism, traditionally aimed at the Habsburg monarchy, could jeopardize the new relationship with Slovakia, a region with more traditional religious devotion. Nonetheless, Kysela-Sauer believed that the common people should choose the national symbols. When a member of the National Council arrived on Old Town Square to reason with the mob, Kysela-Sauer responded: “You are the National Council. We are the Nation!”¹⁶

The Rise of the Marian Column?

If nationalist socialists truly believed that “clericalism” had been destroyed with the Austrian Empire, it is unlikely they would have reacted so violently against its chief symbol. Indeed, populist political Catholicism had not died, and by the early 1920s, under the leadership of Monsignor Jan Šrámek, the Czechoslovak Catholic People’s Party had become a moderate, pro-state bloc. According to historian Miloš Trápl, “Nationalism was very characteristic of the Czechoslovak People’s Party policy because the leaders wanted to conceal the Austrophile attitudes of Czech political Catholicism as soon as possible.”¹⁷ Šrámek rode the political tide as early as October 1918, when he helped draft the Czechoslovak declaration of independence and stood with National Council members to proclaim the Republic. In the early 1920s, Czech populists broke with the more radical Slovaks and joined the governing coalition in 1921.

Political Catholicism’s success in the next decade led some Catholic leaders to revisit the Marian Column issue. Fearing anticlerical violence in 1918, Catholics did not demonstrate against the Column’s destruction. By 1923, however, five years after the act, Catholics had renewed confidence and began to petition for a new Marian Column for Old Town Square.¹⁸

Arguments for a new Marian Column reflected the new political tone in Prague. Rather than attacking nationalism, these Czech Catholics assured the public that they too supported the nation. A new Marian Column would reflect the marriage between Catholicism and nationalism in Czechoslovakia. The populist press, led by Catholic poet and essayist Jaroslav Durych, launched a campaign to raise money for a rebuilt Marian Column, arguing “The Czech nation is not Hussite and never will be. The Czech nation is Catholic.”¹⁹ Therefore, the newspaper argued that the monument in the “most beautiful spot” in the Czech lands should reflect the character of the Czech people, not the fantasies of a handful of “elite politicians and professors” who promoted the symbol of Hus.²⁰ Calling upon fellow citizens to join his effort to rebuild the Marian Column, Durych proclaimed, “The old column was an independent gift of Emperor Ferdinand III. The new column will be a gift of the entire nation.”²¹

The 1923 campaign raised 100,000 Czechoslovak crowns for the rebuilt Column, but the Prague city government did not approve the project. The campaign also found little support in the Czechoslovak People’s Party, which was more con-

cerned with its place in the governing coalition than with cultural debates. The money raised by the campaign went instead to building suburban churches.

The Marian Column and the Second World War

The dream for a new Marian Column did not die. In May 1939, only two months after the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia by the German Nazis, a key figure from the interwar struggle over national symbols reemerged. Jaroslav Durych, who led the 1923 resurrection campaign, petitioned Nazi puppet President Emil Hácha to support the rebuilding of the Marian Column on Old Town Square. In his letter, he argued, “the destruction of the Column of the Virgin Mary has not been atoned for.”²² Unlike the previous Czechoslovak presidents Tomáš Masaryk and Edvard Beneš, Hácha was a devout Catholic. Thus, Durych could appeal to him as a fellow believer, as well as a leader who wanted to portray himself as a true Czech, even though the public knew that Germany was pulling his strings.

Durych did not suggest to the new President that he should abandon Czech nationalism, but instead suggested that the Marian Column could become a symbol of a new form of Czech nationalism. He explained that Mary “is and has always been the national mother, queen, and protector of the country.”²³ The Czechs, in his view, brought shame upon their nation by abandoning Mary as their symbol, while neighboring countries continued to call her “Regina.” He assured Hácha that he only needed his approval for the project; voluntary associations would raise the necessary funds independently. The Presidential Chancellery responded, promising Durych that his request would be carefully considered. However, during the tumultuous period of the Protectorate and the Second World War, when over 90 percent of Prague’s Jewish population was deported to concentration camps and Prague Czechs lived under Nazi rule, the resurrection of the Marian Column never came to fruition. Still, the very fact that the question was even raised in the midst of such international turmoil demonstrates the power the Column had on the nation’s psyche.

The Marian Column under Communism

Catholic activists hoped that the end of the war would bring a government willing to support the Marian Column resurrection. However, the Communist government had no interest in a religious revival and quickly suppressed a 1955 campaign of Czech university students to raise funds for the Column. Under the Communist regime, the empty space on Old Town Square took on new significance. With nationalism no longer at the heart of political discourse, the empty site instead came to symbolize the Communist suppression of religion. In an interview with *The Prague Post*, Father Raymond, a Czech priest, explained that believers used the Old Town Square site as a symbol of anti-Communist defiance, “During communism, I was watched very closely because I put flowers on the spot every Sunday. But of course they were removed immediately.”²⁴

Czech Catholic émigrés in the United States also began to identify with the Marian Column as a symbol of the oppression they had fled. In the early 1950s, Benedictine monk and Czech émigré Lev Ondrák spoke in New York about religious oppression in Czechoslovakia, suggesting that a Marian Column replica be built to honor victims of religious persecution in Communist states. Moved by Abbot Ondrák's stirring speech, the Vatican appointed papal sculptor Monteleone to cast a replica of the Virgin Mary statue. When completed, the statue was placed at Ondrák's abbey in Lisle, Illinois, near Chicago. Czech immigrants in the United States contributed to the project, as did Catholics in Czechoslovakia who gave money to friends leaving the country. A dissident poet, Zdenek Rotrekl, entrusted some gold to his immigrating colleague Emil Petřík for the Marian statue's crown. Forty years later, in 1993, the Chicago abbey donated their Marian statue to a Prague monastery. Reporting on "Our Lady in Exile's return home," a Catholic magazine recently paid tribute to the courage of Rotrekl in the 1950s: "His gold symbolically sparkled on the crown during an era when he himself suffered in a communist jail."²⁵

Rotrekl was not the only poet to be captivated by the rich imagery surrounding the fallen Marian Column. Catholic poet Václav Renc, a political prisoner in Communist Czechoslovakia from 1952 to 1961, wrote "Prague Legend" in 1956. He described the licentiousness of Prague society and likened the mob's glee at their act to an "orgasm, which lasts only a moment."²⁶ Nonetheless, he insisted that his poem celebrated God's love for the Czech people. Even though the Marian Column had vanished from the landscape, in the poem the Virgin Mary still appeared to Prague citizens during an era which had turned its back on religion.

Even Nobel Prize-winning poet Jaroslav Seifert addressed the Marian Column. The former communist turned dissident, famous for his melancholic nostalgic poetry, reflected personally on his youthful complicity in destroying tradition. In "The Head of the Virgin Mary," Seifert receives a vision of the "guillotined head" of the Marian Column after his friend asks the poet if he believed in "the afterlife or perhaps something worse."²⁷ Seifert's narrator suddenly remembers that he gleefully watched the Column's toppling and the Virgin's head rolling toward his dusty shoes. As an old man, sixty years after the vandalism, the narrator regrets his former brashness and asks the Virgin for forgiveness.

In his *Czech Dreambook*, Ludvík Vaculík, the dissident leader of the *samizdat* (self-publishing) movement also wonders if the Marian Column symbolized the Czechs' complicity in their own fate. As he visits a church in a Prague suburb, which housed a commemorative plaque about the Marian Column, Vaculík reports, "I kept thinking that a nation which tears down the monuments it raises in other moods and avoids revamping its character in favor of revamping the record of its character—such a nation deserves to be blurred."²⁸ Common themes in Czech dissident literature included the emptiness of culture under Communism, the loss of authenticity,

and the obliteration of history. Although the Marian Column fell thirty years before Communism's rise, writers used the empty space on Old Town Square to symbolize the void they now felt.

The Marian Column in Post-1989 Prague

The rapid democratization of politics following the fall of Communism has launched a new chapter in the Marian Column debate.²⁹ This “postmodern era”—as a 1991 Czech art history journal described it—has fostered a multitude of opinions about the Marian Column.³⁰ Ranging from religious to political to aesthetic, the debates also differ from the past because they have led to the real possibility that the Marian Column will rise again. Opinions about rebuilding the Marian Column appear frequently in art and preservation journals, daily papers and newsweeklies, free papers handed out in the Prague metro, and even “roving reporter” sections in which local residents have their picture taken and offer a brief opinion on a current issue.³¹

The Society for the Recovery of the Marian Column was formally established on May 14, 1990, and immediately began to raise funds for the “grassroots” movement.³² The 130 members have raised 1.5 million of the necessary 4 million Czech crowns (approximately \$100,000) from private donations.³³ Donors can contribute to special bank accounts of the Czech Savings Bank or the Canadian Bank of Commerce, a fund established by the St. Cyril and Methodius League of Ontario, Canada.³⁴ Many members and donors are Roman Catholics, from the Czech Republic and abroad, who view the “empty space” on Old Town Square as a symbol of the religious persecution endured by Catholics in the twentieth century.

The city government has not blocked the society's plans to restore the monument or to investigate the possibility of erecting it as long as no public funds go toward the project.³⁵ The state's Bureau for the Protection of Monuments has applauded the Society's efforts, but has not contributed any funds because technically this is not a “preservation project.”³⁶ Recently, the city government expressed a stronger opinion on the matter when Prague Mayor Jan Kasl explained that “Town Hall currently has quite different problems” than dealing with the Marian Column.³⁷

Nonetheless, Jan Bradna, a Prague sculptor and president of the Society for the Recovery of the Marian Column has little doubt that public opinion supports his group's efforts. He told the *Prague Post*, “Czech people are happy about the return of such a statue.”³⁸ On November 3, 1993, the anniversary of the column's destruction, the Society staked its claim on the monument's former site by laying a plaque into the cobblestones. The plaque reads “Here did stand and will stand again the Marian Column of Old Town Square” in four languages: Czech, German, Latin, and English.

There was immediate dissent to the laying of the commemorative—and prescriptive—plaque. Within months, vandals attacked the plaque, carving and



Site of the fallen Marian Column. Commemorative plaque with scratched-out inscription.
Photo by Cynthia Paces.

cementing over the words “will stand again” in each language. A letter to the editor of *Lidové Demokracie* (*People’s Democracy*), a populist newspaper, called the vandalism “a barbarous act,” which brought “shame to the whole nation.”³⁹ An opinion piece in a Protestant weekly newspaper, however, explained why the plaque aroused such anger. The author, Josef Gebauer, decried the possibility of celebrating “three hundred years of Habsburg subjugation of the Czech nation.”⁴⁰ His article enumerated Habsburg-era injustices and then asked what would be the “historical purpose” of commemorating this era. In particular, he cited the persecution, executions, and exile of Bohemian Protestants throughout the Habsburg period. Like other anti-Column Czechs, Gebauer admitted that the column originally commemorated the Swedish retreat—not the defeat of the Bohemians—but he argued that its meaning had expanded.

Gebauer also questioned the plans for a new column on historicist grounds: “For a restored column to return to the square, we would also have to refinish Old Town Hall, demolish the Hus Monument, rearrange Paris Street . . .”⁴¹ His statement alludes to the ever-changing appearance of a living city. It is impossible to restore a site to its original state. His article ends with the reminder: “The pre-White Mountain square did not have a Marian Column.”⁴² What he subtly argues is that if the Czech nation commemorates any past historical period, it ought to be one before the Habsburg victory.

Several academic and cultural journals also responded to the revived debate. Vít Vlnas, an art historian who specializes in the Czech baroque, wrote in the cultural review *Přítomnost* (*The Present*), “Old Town Square cannot be turned into a museum.” Vlnas argued that a “baroque Marian Column cannot be an authentic expression of our era.”⁴³ Instead he suggested a modern obelisk dedicated to victims

of fascist and communist dictatorships. The most outspoken critic of the rebuilding efforts, Lubomír Sršen, former director and current research scholar at the National Museum's Lapidarium, agreed. "There is no way to rebuild it exactly as it stood one hundred years ago. I think it should be a modern statue, not a historic copy."⁴⁴ However, in art journal *Umení and Remesla (Arts and Crafts)*, art historian Ivo Hlobil questioned Vlnas's notion that a restored baroque statue would not represent the present period. Explaining that many movements in art history revive earlier periods, Hlobil argued that historicist art can indeed reflect the values of a present era.⁴⁵

The Society for the Recovery of the Marian Column ultimately decided to build a replica, not a modern statue, even though some members questioned the idea of an "authentic" restoration. Even Jan Bradna, the new monument's sculptor, initially "wanted to do something abstract. Something with a set of hands reaching out to the clock tower and another set mounted by the execution site,"⁴⁶ referring to the spot on Old Town Square where twenty-seven Bohemian Hussite rebels were beheaded in 1621, a year after the White Mountain defeat. Thus, Bradna's idea "would represent a bond between modern and past history and help put those souls to rest."⁴⁷ Other Praguers also believe the revived column can heal religious wounds. Father Raymond explained, "That column has the potential to form a bond between Protestants, Hussites, and Catholics in Prague. It needs to return to the square."⁴⁸ Similarly, Josef Štulc, head of the Bureau of the Protection of Monuments, wrote



Sculptor Jan Bradna's replica of the Marian Column Statue. Photo by M. Sosková. Permission by Společnost pro obnovu mariánského sloupu v Praze.

that the former relationship between the Marian Column and the Hus Memorial formed a “creative dialogue between symbols of both main spiritual traditions, Husite and Catholic, which together created spiritual life and Czech national culture.”⁴⁹

This logic, however, eludes many Czechs, including the Roman Catholic hierarchy, which surprisingly does not support the Marian Column project. Prague Archbishop Miloslav Vlk issued a statement in 1993: “Restoring the Marian Column on Old Town Square is not an official priority of the church, rather [our goal] is to try to revive spiritual life.” Furthermore, Vlk feared that a restored Marian Column would increase religious tension in the city. “We do not want to create the impression of rivalry in the arena of ecumenism.”⁵⁰ Similarly, Petr Ettlér, a spokesperson from the archbishop’s office, explained that the Marian Column represents “the old church.”⁵¹ Officially, the church leadership has no interest in returning to the Counter-Reformation era. The Roman Catholic Church has not donated any funds to the Marian Column project.

With so much opposition to the monument, and only one-third of the necessary funds collected, the Marian Column’s resurrection seems doubtful. Yet the society continues to work passionately and declares that the column will indeed “stand again.”

Conclusion

At the heart of the ever-shifting debate about the Marian Column is the Czechs’ perception of their own suffering throughout history. Robert Pynsent, an expert on Czech culture, has written that Czechs choose martyrs for national heroes to find historic meaning in four centuries of perceived political and cultural subjugation under the Habsburgs, Nazis, and Communists.⁵² One cannot overstress the strange religious history of the nation, which experimented with early Protestantism, experienced forced conversion during the Counter Reformation, came of age as a nation during the secularizing nineteenth century, and stagnated under an atheist regime. Many scholars—and Czechs themselves—simply dismiss the nation as totally secularized. Yet the polemics surrounding the Marian Column demonstrate that Czech national identity is intrinsically tied to the religious complexities of its history. Those involved in the twentieth-century Marian Column debates seem determined to prove that *their* group has suffered the most. Attacking or defending the Marian Column has come to represent a way to heal symbolically.

As contemporary Catholics and Protestants, as well as secular critics, grapple with the empty space on Old Town Square, it seems necessary to point out the religious group missing from the debate. Although Prague’s Jews were almost entirely wiped out during the Second World War, their small community of approximately 1,500 has recently engaged in the post-1989 debates about national and urban symbols and history. This year they have fought to protect an ancient Jewish cemetery

surprisingly unearthed during a construction project and to place explanatory plaques on a controversial eighteenth-century Prague statue proclaiming Christ as “Holy” in Hebrew letters.⁵³ If, as many have argued, the statues on Old Town Square should acknowledge the suffering as well as the complexities of Prague's religious history, the Jewish contribution to the city's identity also cannot be overlooked.

Notes

This article is part of a continuing series on the public presentation of the nation, reflecting the political transformations that have challenged or refuted the legitimacy and national stories told by past regimes. For the first installment of this series, see *Radical History Review* 75. Several people have contributed to this article and deserve recognition. Special thanks to Jan Bradna, President of the Society for the Rebuilding of the Marian Column, for providing me with photographs and materials. Eagle Glassheim, Claire Nolte, Alice Podobová, Petr Skalník of Charles University, Cenek Kuta of the Lapidarium of the National Museum in Prague, and Nancy Wingfield all contributed information and source materials to the article. Diane Paces-Wiles assisted with the illustrations. Jay Carter and Nancy Wingfield both read drafts of my essay and provided helpful suggestions.

1. Vladimír Macura, “Minus Stalin,” in *Masarykové boty (Masaryk's Shoes)* (Prague, 1993).
2. F. Gregory Campbell, “Empty Pedestals?” *Slavic Review* 44, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 1–15.
3. See the museum catalog *Lapidarium Národního muzea Praha* (Prague, 1993), 77–78, for photographs of the fragments.
4. Victor Turner, “Liminality and the Performative Genres,” in *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*, ed. John J. MacAloon (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), 19–41.
5. Antonín Sorm and Antonín Krejca, *Mariánské sloupy v Čechách a na Moravě (Marian Columns in Bohemia and Moravia)* (Prague: Tisteno a vydáno u A. Danka, 1939).
6. Speech reprinted in the organ of the Sokol Gymnastics organization, *Vestník sokolský* (vol. 17, 1903), 504–5.
7. “Stanovisko,” *Právo lidu* (July 7, 1903).
8. “Ladislav Šaloun, o svém Husovi” (“Ladislav Šaloun on His Hus”). Reprinted newspaper article from unacknowledged source, no date (most likely, 1903). Archiv Hlavního Mesta Prahy, Spolek Zbudování Pomníku Husova, notebook 1.
9. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).
10. Quoted in Libor Gottfried, “Kterak socha Mariánská byla stržena” (“How the Marian Statue Was Demolished”), *Dejiny a současnost* 5 (1994): 29–30.
11. Czechoslovakia became a state after the defeat of Austria-Hungary in World War I. The Austrian “Czech lands” of Bohemia, Moravia, and a piece of Silesia joined Slovakia and Ruthenia, formerly of Hungary. Although Czechoslovakia was founded on Woodrow Wilson's principle of national self-determination, it was not monoethnic, since historic borders were also taken into consideration. Consequently, in addition to Czechs and Slovaks, who were legally considered one nationality (Czechoslovak), Czechoslovakia had large German, Hungarian, and Ruthenian populations and a small Polish population.
12. František Kysela-Sauer, “Naše luza, jesuité a diplomaté” (“Our Mob, the Jesuits, and the Diplomats”) (Prague, 1923).
13. *Ibid.*, 24.

14. Moric Hruban, *Z casu nedlouho zaslých (From the Recent Past)* (Rome: Krestanská Akademie, 1967), 199. Quoted and translated in Frank Joseph Hajek, "Catholics and Politics in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1929: Jan Sramek and the People's Party" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1975).
15. Quoted in Ferdinand Peroutka, *Budování státu*, vol. 1 (Prague: Lidové noviny, 3rd ed., 1991), 118. This source, originally published during the 1920s, is a firsthand account of Czechoslovakia's early years by a journalist and close political associate of President Tomáš G. Masaryk. See also *Národní listy* (November 5, 1918).
16. Quoted in Kysela-Sauer, 8. Also quoted in Peroutka, 117, and the Catholic newspaper *Lidové listy* (November 11, 1923).
17. Miloš Trapl, *Political Catholicism and the Czechoslovak People's Party in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1938* (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 1995), 9.
18. For a more thorough discussion of Czech Catholic nationalism as well as the 1923 movement to rebuild the Marian Column, see Cynthia J. Paces, "'The Czech Nation Must be Catholic!' An Alternative Version of Czech Nationalism during the First Republic," *Nationalities Papers* 27, no. 3 (1999): 407–28.
19. Jaroslav Durych, "Český národ musí být katolický!" ("The Czech Nation Must Be Catholic!") *Lidové listy* (May 10, 1923).
20. Even though one of the main arguments for using Catholic symbols in the new state was that it would appeal to Slovaks as well as Czechs, the populist press still used the terms "Czech nation," "Czech lands," and "Czech people" in their articles. It is unsurprising that Slovak nationalists felt distanced from the symbols of their state, when even the Czech groups supposedly advocating their cause often neglected to use the term "Czechoslovak."
21. Durych, "Český národ."
22. Jaroslav Durych to Presidential Chancellery. Sign.: D 7116/39, čís.: D 3078/39. Archiv Kancelár Presidenta Republiky.
23. Ibid.
24. J. M. Giordano, "Resurrecting Mary: A Controversial Historical Landmark May Soon Rise Again," *Prague Post* (July 22–28, 1998), B12–13. Thank you to Eagle Glassheim, who provided me with this source.
25. Ludmila Konopíková, "Paní z exilu vrací domu," ("The Lady Returns Home from Exile") *Naše rodina (Our Family)*, no. 33 (1993), 16–17. See also Ludmila Konopíková, "Strahovské (s)vitání," ("Strahov Welcome"), *Naše rodina*, no. 44 (1993), 2–3.
26. Václav Renc, *Pražská Legenda (Prague Legend)* (Prostejov: Credo, 1994), 16.
27. Jaroslav Seifert, *Hlava Panny Marie (Head of the Virgin Mary)* (Prague: Národní muzeum, 1998), 9.
28. From "A Czech Dreambook: Excerpts from Ludvik Vaculík's *Ceský snár*," trans. Michael Henry Heim, in *Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Benjamin Stolz, vol. 3 (1984).
29. Slovakia broke from Czechoslovakia in January 1993, removing Slovak Catholics' potential attitudes about the Marian Column from the debate.
30. Ivo Hlobil, "Obnova mariánského sloupu?" ("Renovated Marian Column?"), *Umení a remesla (Art and Crafts)* 3 (1991): 97–98.

31. See, for example, Matej Hušek and Bohumil Vostal, "Obnova monumentu na náměstí má příznivce i odporce" ("Renovating the Monument on the Square Has Supporters and Opponents") *Zemské noviny* (November 3, 1999) and Tomáš Cechťický and Petr Kovarík, "Stín sloupu, stín historie" ("The Shadow of the Column, the Shadow of History"), *Týden* (October 26, 1998).
32. Giordano, B12.
33. Information on the size of the group comes from personal correspondence with Jan Bradna (March 4, 2000). Information on the fundraising comes from Zuzana Pitrová, "Boj o Mariánský sloup" ("Battle over the Marian Column"), *Metro* (March 16, 2000).
34. See the self-published brochure *Celonárodní sbírka na obnovu sloupu Blahoslavené Panny Marie na Staroměstském Náměstí v Praze (All-National Collection for the Renovation of the Most Holy Virgin Mary Column on Old Town Square in Prague)* (Prague: Credo, 1996).
35. *Výstava 99. Budoucnost a přítomnost Prahy 1 (Exhibition 99: Future and Present of Prague 1)* (III. Rocník, 4.11–7.11.1999). No publishing information. This source is a photocopied guide to a small exhibit held in November 1999 in Wenceslas Square. Eagle Glassheim provided me with this source.
36. Hušek and Vostal.
37. Pitrová.
38. Giordano, B12.
39. P. Antonín Odvárka, "Barbarský čin" ("Barbarous Act"), *Lidové demokracie (People's Democracy)* (July 15, 1994), 7.
40. Josef Gebauer, "Na tomto místě stál a opet bude stát" ("On This Spot Stood and Will Stand Again"), *Evangelický týdeník (Evangelical weekly)*, no. 41 (1993).
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. Hlobil, 97.
44. Giordano, B13. See also Srsen's article "Je proveditelná rekonstrukce mariánského sloupu na Staroměstském náměstí v Praze?" *Zprávy památkové péče* 59, no. 7 (1999): 233–40.
45. Hlobil, 97–98.
46. Giordano, B12.
47. *Ibid.*, B12–B13.
48. *Ibid.*, B13.
49. Josef Štule, "Památková péče a tolerance," *Zprávy památkové péče* 60, no. 1 (1999): 1–7.
50. Miroslav Frankovský, Milan Zezula, Jaroslav Skarvada, and Miloslav Vlk, "Mariánský sloup na Staroměstském náměstí v Praze" ("The Marian Column on Old Town Square in Prague"), *Evangelický týdeník* 79, no. 4 (1994): 2.
51. Giordano, B13.
52. Robert Pynsent, *Questions of Identity: Czech and Slovak Ideas of Nationality and Personality* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 1994).
53. Steven Erlanger, "Prague Journal. A City in a Hurry, Stumbling on its Medieval Dead," *New York Times* (March 20, 2000).