

THE MYSTICAL CORRIDOR

The publication *The Mystical Corridor* unveils the mystery of the statues and sculptural groups on Prague's Charles Bridge and introduces the general public to the real and legendary lives of the saints who were their models. Who are these figures? How and with what did they change the course of the world? And what is the mystical experience of crossing Charles Bridge?

The thirty statues and sculptural groups on Charles Bridge form an open-air art gallery that is unparalleled in the world. They are mostly unique Baroque works depicting Christian saints – the patron saints of religious orders, university faculties or benefactors of the nobility or the Prague bourgeoisie who in their time financed their creation.

What is unique is that saints from literally all over Europe have gathered on Charles Bridge: besides Czechs, there are also French, Spanish and Italian saints; there is a Portuguese, a Hungarian, a Belgian, a Sicilian, a German and a Burgundian, and there are even Algerians, Syrians, natives of present-day Turkey, and Israelis. In their lifetime, they were famous as scholars, philosophers, writers and preachers; there are medical doctors, a lawyer, a carpenter and a prophet, hermits, nurses, healers and miracle workers. In the form of stone statues, Charles Bridge can be said to be guarded by the elite of European history.

Statues have been installed on the bridge since the second half of the 17th century. Some of the original Baroque sculptures were replaced by new works in the 19th century. The oldest and only bronze statue on the bridge is from 1683 and represents St. John of Nepomuk, "the most famous Czech". The youngest bridge sculpture is a depiction of Saints Cyril and Methodius, which was installed on the bridge in 1938.

The Mystical Corridor publication provides a list of all the bridge's statues and sculptural groups and gives a brief art-historical description of them, but mainly focuses on the personalities depicted. In a readable form, it tells the often dramatic stories of people who became famous for extraordinary deeds or miracles during their lifetimes. This opens up the grand theatre of European history for the reader, in which the saints played a significant role. The book is richly illustrated with black-and-white photographs by Jiří Chalupa, who photographed the statues on Charles Bridge over the last three years. The photographs of the details and attributes of the statues, together with comprehensive descriptions, are an excellent aid to understanding the sometimes complex stone compositions and scenes. This gives the reader a unique opportunity to "read" the statues of the saints with a similar insight to that of a person in the Baroque period.

The author of *The Mystical Corridor* is the writer Alena Ježková (1966), who has written more than twenty successful titles on historical or Prague-related topics for both children and adults (*77 Prague Legends, A Lion Walks Through Prague, Old Czech and Moravian Tales, Silent Hearts I and II, Charles IV and his Prague, The Guardians of Prague Streets*, and others.)

"Until 100 years ago, the statues on the bridge were an integral part of the lives of Prague citizens, who turned to them in moments of anxiety, decorated them with flowers and lit votive candles on their pedestals," notes Ježková. *"Today, the statues are frequently photographed by visitors to*

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Prague, but their real meaning remains somewhat overlooked. It is amazing that the GHMP has initiated the creation of a publication that offers so much more to curious visitors."

*And where did the title *The Mystical Corridor* come from? "There is a lot of mysticism in the statues themselves, which often depict miraculous events or mystical raptures. If we have a knowledge and understanding of the lives and works of the saints, crossing Charles Bridge can be a truly mystical experience for us," adds Alena Ježková.*

"The statues of Charles Bridge belong to an extended family of public sculptures that we as an institution manage. And they are, of course, among the most visible. We wanted to present them from a different perspective than before, as we have traditionally focused on the artistic qualities of this exceptional collection of mostly Baroque works. However, it is also a gallery of important personalities. They have remained somewhat obscured in the shadow of the fame that the bridge, as an architectural gem, evokes, and the stories of the saints venerated here have somewhat disappeared from the overall narrative of the bridge in recent years. The book also sheds light on the motives of most of the donors and why they chose to glorify this or that saint. Alena Ježková was the perfect choice for this task, as she has an extensive background in popularising the cultural and religious history of Prague," summarises GHMP director Magdalena Juříková.

"The statues of the Charles Bridge are not only an essential adornment of the beautiful panorama of Prague; they also tell the stories of historical figures that European Christian society has engraved in its collective memory. They bear witness to the great influence these figures had on the culture and spiritual life of their time. It is wonderful that this publication tells their stories in the context of the whole story of Charles Bridge and its genius loci, and they should not be forgotten in the "tourist hustle and bustle," says Deputy Mayor of Prague for Culture, Tourism, Exhibition Sector, Heritage, National Minorities and Animal Welfare JUDr. Jiří Pospíšil

Launch of the book: 4 November 2024 at 5 p.m. at the Stone Bell House.

Advent walk on the Charles Bridge with Alena Ježková, the author of the book: 1 December 2024 at 3 p.m., meeting in front of the smaller Lesser Town Bridge Tower at Mostecká 1, Prague 1.

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Prague City Gallery is one of the most important galleries in the Czech Republic, focusing its exhibition activities mainly on modern and contemporary art. It collects, preserves and professionally manages the art collections of the City of Prague. Currently, the GHMP exhibits in seven buildings: the Stone Bell House, the Municipal Library - 2nd floor, the Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace, the House of Photography, the Bílek Villa, the Troja Château and František Bílek's House in Chýnov.

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