

Questionnaire

1. What were the characteristics of the knowledge in the second half of the XVIth century?
2. Who were the masters of Rudolph II?
3. How was the education of the king?
4. What were his favourite subjects?
5. How was the knowledge in Viena and Prague at the end XVIth century?
6. And in other parts of the world?
7. What kind of scientific and artistical exchanges did it exit between different centres?
8. Why did the king choose Prague as the centre for his activities?
9. Who were the most remarkable figures?
10. What kind of works did the king patronize?
11. What kind of works were realized at the time?
12. How these works were known and who did it?
13. What is left of this works?
14. How was the art and the alchemy in Prague?
15. Is this time the origin of the legend of Prague the misterious or magic?
16. What relevance have the works made in the court of Rudolph II?
17. What kind of learning we can take from this period?
18. Can we say Rudolph II was interested in the development of knowledge or was this development a matter of history?
19. How could you summarize the meaning of knowledge in the court of Rudolph II?

RUDOLPH II and THE COURT OF PRAGUE

Documentary Script

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, Europe divided, and communication beyond its borders and among its peoples largely disintegrated. Historical time was frozen and a great step backward in all areas of knowledge occurred.

In spite of this, the ideal of a united Europe, emulating the time of the Empire, persisted. And in the 12th and 13th centuries, with its God-centred and closed view of the world, the Middle Ages began to show symptoms of exhaustion.

Now there were the first signs of opening up and the horizon began to widen. Ancient knowledge was re-discovered. The Muslim world, with its much more advanced civilization, had preserved and developed the knowledge of the Classical and Alexandrian world, incorporating elements from the Chaldean and Egyptian cultures.

Supported by their culture-loving kings, places like Toledo and Sicily, with their multi-cultural relationships and exchanges, developed the art of translation., Muslims, Jews and Christians lived together in these places, and through their efforts and their work in common turned them into points of entry for and dissemination of Knowledge gathered until then. These cultural recovery phenomena are the forerunners of the Renaissance, and when the Middle Ages came to a close, the search for new horizons began in Europe.

During the 15th century, and particularly after the fall of Constantinople, Byzantine scholars took Greek literature to Florence where it was translated. The classical world was rediscovered in its full splendour: art, philosophy, science, the organization and values of Greece and Rome, became models in all the fields. And together with the scholars and the texts, the ancient myths and religions arrived.

The 16th century was already heralding a change of epoch: new research, travels and discoveries had brought new information to the world which did not fit into the axioms inherited from antiquity.

Intellectuals and artists attempted not only to imitate the classical masters but also to set the ground for a new stage.

At Charles V abdication in 1556, his empire was split: his son Philip II would reign over Spain, the Low Countries, and the domains of the Catholic King and Queen; his brother

Ferdinand would hold the eastern part of the House of Austria and, from 1558, he would be Emperor of the Germanic Holy Roman Empire. Charles hoped that at Ferdinand's death both parts of the crown would become united.

Ferdinand's successor in the Empire was finally his son Maximilian. Philip II accepted this, on condition that the Archdukes Rudolph and Ernest, (sons of his sister Mary and of Maximilian), travelled to Spain to receive an adequate Catholic religious education. This was because Maximilian's Roman orthodoxy was held in doubt.

Evans.

Rudolph was actually educated in Spain from the 11th year to his 19th year, so in the most formative period of his education he was at the Spanish court. He was of course the heir to the Austrian Habsburg lands, over which he was due to become their Emperor. His uncle Philip II made very sure that he was heavily influenced by the Spanish branch of his family. Subsequently that relationship was not all that smooth. For example, Rudolph steadfastly refused to marry whom he was supposed to marry, his cousin the Spanish Infanta. And that may have been to do psychologically with a sense of being repressed, perhaps dominated by the Spanish influence later on. But while he was a youth he seems to have responded perfectly sanguine to the Spanish influence at the court in Madrid, the early years at the Escorial and so on, and the kind of figures like Herrera who were influential at the court of King Philip. And there are some reasons why we might say that the mentality of Rudolph was quite close to that of Philip, and that is not by accident. But equally, there are ways in which they became utterly different, for instance in religious toleration, we should find that Rudolph took a different line.

The trouble is, we know very little about the way in which Rudolph was actually educated. We just have the names of a few pedagogues, a few teachers who were with him in Spain, but apart from that we can only surmise from the kind of books that would have been in the royal library and the kind of books that Rudolph had in his own collections, and he later would have been reading those. But it is perfectly clear is the kind of interests that were expressed in the grandeur of Spain in that period, a very cosmopolitan range of Spanish interests, from Western Europe to the Americas and the Mediterranean.

In 1571 Rudolph returned to Maximilian's court and was crowned, first as the King of Hungary and Bohemia and later as the Emperor of the Germanic Holy Roman Empire. Because of the type of organisation within the empire, his powers and room for manoeuvre were limited. From the beginning, he had to face the religious confrontation between Catholics and various Protestant denominations.

More interested in the arts and the sciences than in religious wars, Rudolph II left Vienna and settled in Prague in 1582.

Pesek.

Asking the question why Rudolf chose Prague for his seat, why he had not stayed in Wien, where his father, Maxmilian II, had been living, we would find more reasons. One of them is

the succession of the Prague court tradition originated in the times of Ferdinand II Tyrolean, who had had his residence there between 1548-1565. The second obvious reason is constant peril of Wien by Turks. After all, Prague was also much larger than Wien. I guess it was six times larger, Charles establishment is fantastic and Prague was and is a beautiful city. Rudolf evidently liked Prague and its background, for example hunting castles. He went to the castle in Brandýs. Prague enchanted him with its surroundings. Also the extensive castle area which was being rebuilt and modernised gave him the opportunity to be at the same time in the centre of the European events and have enough space for his total intimacy or escaping to his scientists, artists and architects. So Prague fascinated him like this.

Prague, at the time of Rudolph II, lived through one of its golden periods. It was a frontier town, the heart of Europe, the seat of different cultures. As a result of this Prague was chronically undergoing great effervescence and instability. Cultural phenomena had expanded and even become distorted, as if in a curved mirror.

Martínez.

On the other hand, it has been said that the Republic of Letters was something that continued functioning and that the epistolary communication systems were very important during the 16th century, that is, scholars wrote extensively to each other in a very open way that today we are far from conceiving. Today, no one could possibly write the number of letters, the extraordinary epistolary collections that were written in the 16th century.

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They were a means of communication, communication of ideas, and not until there is a partners institution in the 17th century the mechanisms remain irregular: the epistolary system, the printing press and other things we have mentioned, travels, that is to say, there is some movement of scholars, a constant academic migration; people do not normally teach at a single university, and they do not remain forever in any of them but journey through various universities. A scholar would lecture in one place for a few years and in a couple of years would move on to another: they are asked to give some lectures and then they go away, perhaps to return later on. So we can see mobility within the intellectual world, perhaps greater than one might think.

As in Rudolph II's court, so Maximilian II, who kept a good part of his father's dominions, witnessed a growing elite of historians, antiquarians, collectors, specialists in botany, minerals...

New and old books were published. Rudolph II and many members of his Court accumulated a treasure of great libraries, in addition to the ones already existing in monasteries such as Strakhov.

There was a fascination with accounts of travels, which included topographical, ethnological and archaeological descriptions. A large number of inventions and mechanical devices were produced. Alchemists developed pharmacy and mineralogy. The observation of heavenly

bodies and the detailed understanding of their movements made great historical strides forward.

The Prague court was often visited by figures such as John Dee, astrologer of the Elizabethan court and a Christian Cabalist. Or by Giordano Bruno, philosopher and disseminator of the hermetic tradition. The various intellectual and artistic disciplines, which related to the religious or mystical trends, referred to the same philosophical background and concept of the world that gave birth to the European Renaissance.

Each element that is studied, exists as a part of a whole and within a harmonic order. A system of relationships links heavenly bodies, plants, minerals, medicines, colours. Likewise the different parts of the human being were thought of as a microcosm. The intimate understanding of reality can not be reached without the guidance of some inner light. This intuitive way to approach the underlying reality of perceivable phenomena blends the figures of the scholar, the magician and the artist.

Evans.

Rudolph patronised all forms of art, and there, it is interesting to note that those who actually lived in Rudolph's court, who spent their careers there are on the whole not the most famous artists even of their own day. Although one of them, who was Giuseppe Arcimboldo, has become more noted in recent years. and Claudilius, particularly with his extraordinarily composed heads, which he created, actually objects from the natural world that look like particular persons, one or two are made to look like Rudolph himself.

Arcimboldo and others like Spranguer and Von Aachen are considerable painters, and then there are also important sculptors and so on at the court. But on the whole Rudolph had to overcome the fact that this artistic school, if significant, was not of such artistic importance as great as that of other artists of his time, but he built a collection including both living and past artists that can really be considered the most centrally important collection of his day. So he was celebrated in his time for bringing together the works of artists like Dürer and Breughel and by Peter Breughel "The Elder", and of great Renaissance artists in Italy such as Veronese and Titian and so on. And not only painters but also a great range of artifacts, sculptures and works of applied arts, and in some ways it is the applied arts in Rudolph's court which are the most striking of all, some of them created with local materials like Bohemian glass. Some of the most notable objects brought together in Rudolph's collections. And this induced the artists themselves, who might be absent. And this allowed him, and this is very interesting about the collections, we don't fully understand the mentality of those who collected in the Renaissance period but we do have a sense that they were seeking in their collections, if they had the money and the scope to create them, they were seeking to bring together this world, this fractured universe which they were trying to maintain as a single whole, so they did attribute particular virtues and properties to a good deal of the material they had present in their collections. And that explains why they were keen to make part of their collections not only the works of, as we would say, the works of the most famous artists, and artifacts of that kind, but natural objects, perhaps works created from natural objects.

The urge to gather all known wisdom went hand in hand with the various attempts to reorganize or synthesize knowledge in general. But in order to provide a ground for such synthesis, a substantial, supporting truth is necessary; such truth was kept hidden.

The collections of art and rare objects, or objects with a special meaning, as well as alchemy and astrology, were Rudolph II's main interest. All kinds of experiments took place in Prague castle, and Rudolph got directly involved in many activities, from handicrafts to those of an occult character. Some of his close collaborators such as Hajek, his advisor in these matters, or Michael Maier, were court alchemists and physicians.

Fucikova

As for the alchemy, it was a strange case. At that time, alchemy was not only about producing the philosophers' stone or elixir of life. It was something more. It was about practical experiments that were important and meaningful. It was quite interesting that before one could work at Rudolf's court, he had had to pass some examinations. Not everyone who came was hired. There were more charlatans at Rožumberk's court than at Rudolf's II, because he was a practician and educated so it was hard to cheat him. That relation is very important. The relationship between chemistry and alchemy is similar to the relationship between astronomy and astrology. These are two sides of one coin. It is necessary to understand alchemy and chemistry at that time as a whole, where the research aspect of the matter has its own value and the spiritual aspect we discover nowadays because it is sometimes hidden in complicated explanation of processing things. Many of those paranormal phenomenons are presently considered a bit differently than some time ago.

The observation of nature and experimentation gained new intensity. Anatomical studies were made. Collections, gardens and zoos, plus the books on botany and zoology, show an intention to unify the diversity of all the manifestations of life.

Prague's Jewish community was a large and prosperous one, with intellectual figures of great prestige in the world of the Jewish cabalistic tradition. Such was rabbi Loew, who was associated with the Golem legend of a living being created from mud. This legend and other searches such as the one for the elixir of youth and the diverse and extensive research of natural phenomena, speak to us of the birth of an interest in understanding the secret of life: how to give life to the inanimate. It is the attempt to discover that which remains hidden inside the human being and in nature, what imparts life and what drives it.

Rudolph managed to attract to his court the famous astronomer Tycho Brahe. His discoveries through the observation of stars and comets put an end to the Aristotelian conception of an eternally invariable firmament. Tycho Brahe's great contribution was the accuracy of his measurements, which he systematically accumulated over many years and for which he invented and built new instruments.

Soon after settling in Prague, Tycho offered a job to Kepler, who was then suffering persecution for being a Protestant.

Kepler had already adopted the then revolutionary Copernican model advocating the orbit of the planets around the Sun. Using Tycho Brahe's measurements he developed the formulae that define the motion of the planets. The three Kepler laws, and Newton's later explanation of the Law of universal gravity, laid the bases for modern cosmology.

Moreover Kepler's ideas and aims are in tune with Renaissance Neo-platonism. In his research he tried to understand the work of the Creator, who must necessarily have started from the pure geometrical forms to express His laws in a mathematically harmonious world: "...I can wait a hundred years for a reader, since God has waited six thousand for a witness".

In the field of art Rudolph II's role as a patron went beyond economic funding. He invited, encouraged, praised, directed and even conferred titles on various artists.

Although nominally a Catholic, Rudolph II did not take part in religious persecutions. He allowed a denominational plurality which went against the religious monolithic trend being forced on the great European nations.

Fucikova (1:52)

What we can learn from the Rudolfean phenomenon is especially the high degree of tolerance. It was immensely characteristic for Rudolf. He did not mind whether people were Catholic, Protestant, Adamite, Calvinist, if they had one or two legs. Fundamental for him was whether a man could do anything and could be excellent at that. So the assorted society, that represented the best in Europe regardless of political, national and religious affiliation, could meet in Prague. Rudolf also had peculiar ability to keep balance among individual groups which formed the society. His seemingly negative approach to problem solving was, in fact, intentional delay of decision in order he did not have to agree with somebody and so disturb the balance. In my opinion, it was the most significant quality of Rudolf's government. In the moment, when Matyas, noticeably Catholic-oriented, disturbed this balance and pursuit of tolerance, Europe collapsed into the tragedy of Thirty Years' War.

This was a time notable for its changeable and convulsive religious atmosphere. You could sense the change of epoch. Apocalyptic prophesies got ample diffusion, but there was also a belief in an imminent arrival of a new era of peace and prosperity, rooted in a spiritually reformed human being.

Neo-platonic thinkers like Bruno referred to a natural religion that preceded Christianity and that is believed to go back to ancient Egypt and from which all the greater Western and Middle Eastern religions derived. Others looked into the cabala for the essential meaning of biblical revelations.

By going back to an earlier and rooted truth these formulations created the basis for solving religious confrontations. Christian ecumenism and humanism with its cosmopolitan and tolerant character were moving in the same reconciling direction. But these tendencies did not materialize into a force capable of overcoming circumstances.

The abandonment of the sacraments and the many visits of magicians and alchemists, plus Rudolph's increasing absence from public life, gave rise to the rumour that he was possessed by demons, and this spread among the Catholics.

Rudolph progressively lost power. In 1608, his brother Mathias took over Austria, Hungary and Moravia. Rome and Spain gave approval to his military advances. The Protestant side obtained the Majesty Chart from Rudolph II, which allowed a free choice of religious practise.

In 1611 Mathias entered Prague in triumph, and Rudolph, forced to abdicate, remains in the castle as a recluse until his death in 1612.

In 1618, after failing to comply with the Majesty Chart he was ousted, and this gave rise to the 30 Year War that devastated the centre of Europe.

Martínez.

(Grand Prague that lasts very little) because in 1620 the Battle of Vlahora takes place, that is, the Battle of the White Mountain, and this is a blow for Prague, for Bohemia. Then, in the year 1648, the last year of the 30 Year War, the extensive sacking of Prague is another blow and Prague would not again be, until much later, what it had been under the reign of Rudolph II. Furthermore, even his collections became totally dispersed; today, many of the things he collected are part of thousands of museums separated by many kilometres. And be it precious books as the Codex Argenteus or marvellous pictures, whatever, from gold or silver articles, they are spread over the four cardinal points. That is, in that sense the Czechs have seen clearly that the highlight of Prague's splendor coincides with Rudolph II, that after him came very sad times and that Prague meets a true iron age, an age of calamities, after Rudolph II's death.

Evans.

But in many other ways Rudolph's court might seem to be the end of an era, it is the end of the Renaissance, it's an end of the belief that classical learning, as transmitted through humanism, in fact was sufficient for an understanding of the world. It's the end or course of the kind of religious toleration which Rudolph stood and in favour of state religions which for a century and even more were profoundly intolerant of other kinds of faith, so free thinking in many ways becomes more difficult. In many other sorts of ways we can see a caesure, a break after Rudolph, and after what happened in the 17th and throughout the 18th centuries is different. Of course, occult sciences are increasingly viewed in disfavour and gradually they are associated with an old world view which seemed to be incompatible, and, for quite a long

time seemed to oppose the idea of the enlightenment and the idea of rationalism as they were understood in the 19th century and the 20th century, but it's come back to a fuller recognition, but perhaps of the understanding of the world around as a part of a truer understanding of the world. So we might say there is a very perceptual way, but also we might say that there are features of the court of Rudolph which look forward across that break to more modern times. Of course, we have subsequently come to value the toleration of the 16th century withi ideas that vie at the time and are thought more highly, and we recognise that there are features of the progressive thinking of the Rudolph's court which are picked up only much later, as with some of the artistic creativity as well ideas which are associated with some of the more radical, more unorthodox features of court life under Rudolph

The Modern Age set out on the path of rationalism and naturalism and let to a complete divorce of faith from reason; of knowledge from existence; and of the sciences and technology on the one hand and the arts and humanities on the other, creating an incongruous mix.

To this we have to add geographical fragmentation, plus an abandoning of Latin as the common language for cultural exchanges because knowledge developed more within national areas and in vernacular languages.

Having assumed positions of power 'official' science and religion progressively relegated other conceptions of the world to marginality, deleting gradually any traces of them.

Compared with the reigns of other kings of that epoch, the Rudolphian world has been largely ignored. It has been hidden from history, like the dark side of the moon. But if we are to understand our present day condition we can not ignore it.