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‘THAT HOPELESS LITTLE TOWN HERE’ – THE LOW COUNTRIES CONNECTIONS WITH EDUCATION IN OLOMOUC

‘THAT HOPELESS LITTLE TOWN HERE’ – THE LOW COUNTRIES CONNECTIONS WITH EDUCATION IN OLOMOUC. The year 2022 marked the 75th anniversary of the appointment of Aimé van Santen, then first secretary of the mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Prague, which reopened after the liberation of Czechoslovakia in August 1945, as a lecturer in Dutch at the University of Olomouc, reconstituted in February 1947. This article examines academic links between Olomouc and the Low Countries from the 16th through the 20th century and the circumstances of the beginning of the study of Dutch there in 1947.

Keywords: Dutch Studies, Olomouc, Jesuits, Josef L. Fischer, Aimé van Santen

‘EZ A KIS REMÉNYTELEN VÁROS ITT’ – NÉMETALFÖLD OKTATÁSI KAPCSOLATAI OLMÜTZCEL. 2022-ben volt éppen 75 éve, hogy Aimé van Santent, Csehszlovákia 1945. augusztusi felszabadulása után újonnan megnyitott holland prágai misszió első titkárát, kinevezték az Olmützi Egyetem holland tanárának 1947 februárjában. Jelen tanulmány Olmütz és Németalföld kapcsolatát vizsgálja a 16. századtól kezdve a 20. századon keresztül, illetve bemutatja a holland nyelv oktatásának 1947-es kezdeti körülményeit.

Kulcsszavak: Holland oktatás, Olmütz, jezsuiták, Josef L. Fischer, Aimé van Santen

Introduction

Unlike Dutch Studies at time-honoured Charles University in Prague, which date back to the year 1921, making it now the oldest in Central Europe outside Germany, Dutch Studies in Olomouc belong to the list of departments established after World War II. The rather provincial town at that time, was referred to by the first Dutch lecturer Aimé van Santen (1917–1988) in a letter to his friends as “dat hopeloze stadje hier”



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(That hopeless little town here).¹ Even here, however, there is present one of the most active chairs of Dutch Studies, which celebrated its 75 year anniversary in 2022. This article aims to provide a look into the contacts between Olomouc and the Low Countries from an academic viewpoint, focusing on several interesting events. To give an idea of the background of the university, where Dutch was opened as a lectureship in 1947, and where the subject is still flourishing, we first go back to a distant past.

Zdík and the scriptorium

Almost 900 years ago, in 1126, Jindřich Zdík, or *Henricus qui et Sdik*, as he called himself in Latin, was elected Bishop of Olomouc. This city, 275 km east of Prague, has been since 1066 until today the second most important ecclesiastical centre of the Kingdom of Bohemia.² His descent is not exactly known; it is suspected that he was a son of the chronicler Cosmas of Prague (c. 1045-1121). In any case, he came from a better-off family and, like his presumed father, was able to study abroad for extended periods, probably at the widely renowned cathedral school of St Lambert in Liège.³ Despite the diocese's position, the local conditions were rather modest. There was no truly substantial church building, nor could the newly-elected Bishop have a fine palace to match his position. In the following years, Zdík would provide for all these elements. He completed the church of St. Wenceslas in 1131, transferring the function of cathedral from the old St. Peter's church to the new building, founded a cathedral chapter there in 1140, had a palace built next to it in the Romanesque style of the time, and established clear regulations for priestly ordinations in the diocese. For the significance of Olomouc as a cultural centre, his most important act was that he also founded a scriptorium, which soon became one of the leading cultural centres in the Czech Lands.⁴ His merits for cultural life in the Czech Lands were rounded off with the surrender to the Premonstratensian order of two of the oldest Czech monasteries, that

¹ Letter to Jeanne and Jacob Evenhuis, 29 November 1948. Quoted by Niels Bokhove, "Dat hopeloze stadje hier: Olomouc als bakermat van Aimé van Santens Kafka-visie", in: (ed.) Leopold Declodt, Wilken Engelbrecht & Kateřina Málková, *50 jaar neerlandistiek in Moravië / 50 let nederlandistiek na Moravě* (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1999), 245-246 with note 2.

² The first king of Bohemia was Vratislaus II (c. 1032-1092, King since 1085) but the title was not declared hereditary until 1212 for Přemysl Ottokar I (c. 1155-1230).

³ Data on Zdík's life are taken from Josef Žemlička, "Jindřich Zdík – biskup, diplomat a organizátor", in: (ed.) Jana Hrbáčová, *Jindřich Zdík (1126-1150). Olomoucký biskup uprostřed Evropy* (Olomouc: Muzeum umění, 2009), 13-27, and Zdeněk Fiala, "Jindřich Zdík a Kosmas. O původu Jindřicha Zdíka", *Zápisky katedry československých dějin a archivního studia* VII (1963), 7-19.

⁴ Jan Bistřícký, "Studien zum Urkunden-, Brief- und Handschriftenwesen des Bischofs Heinrich Zdík von Olmütz." *Archiv für Diplomatik, Schriftgeschichte, Siegel- und Wappenkunde* XXVI (1983), 135-258; Miroslav Flodr, *Skriptorium olomoucké: k počátkům písařské tvorby v českých zemích* (Praha: SPN, 1960). Flodr, *Skriptorium*, 107-119, identified as many as 30 different copyists, making the scriptorium among the most important in Europe at the time.



Picture 1. Dedication page of the Olomouc Horologium (Olomouc: Hradisko Monastery, c. 1140), now Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket Stockholm, Theol. Mss. A 144. The bishop marked H(enricus) E(piscopus) holding a long list is Jindřich Zdík (Hrbáčová, Jindřich Zdík, 108).

of Strahov on the western side of Prague (founded in 1143) and Hradisko at Olomouc (founded in 1070 as a Benedictine monastery and handed over to the Premonstratensians in 1143). Ties to the Western European cultural sphere were also strengthened here.⁵

⁵ Jan Bistrický, "Muž reformy na olomoucké stolici. Jindřich Zdík." In: (ed.) Libor Jan & Zdeněk Drahoš, *Osobnosti moravských dějin 1* (Brno: Matice moravská, 2006), 27–43.

Like similar cathedral schools in Liège and Utrecht, the cathedral school in Olomouc did not develop into a university.⁶ The Moravian principality of Olomouc died out with Břetislaus of Olomouc († before 1201), and although there were highly competent bishops among Zdik's successors like Bruno von Schauenburg (c. 1205-1281, Bishop since 1245),⁷ none of them had the authority to found a university. With the foundation of Charles University in 1348 by Emperor Charles IV, there was also no chance in the highly centralised kingdom to establish a second university in Moravia.

A university as a reaction to the Reformation

Although the municipal school founded around 1386 at the city parish church of St Maurice with papal permission was formally under the management of the cathedral chapter, clergyman Albert Crux was denounced to Pope Boniface X in 1390 for disobedience to the cathedral chapter.⁸ Despite the fact that the Pope ordered the school should be abolished, it continued to exist, and until the end of the 15th century the city tried to disentangle it entirely from the chapter's jurisdiction, until this finally succeeded in 1465. The chapter protested and the papal legate and Bishop of Wrocław Rudolf von Rüdeshaim (c. 1402-1482) tried to settle the issue amicably, but this time the magistrate stood firm and in 1505 Pope Julius II confirmed the right of the city of Olomouc to independently appoint a rector at the higher school of St Maurice.⁹ The first rector in 1504-1511 was Marcus Rustinimicus. This was one of the propagators of the Renaissance and humanism in Olomouc.¹⁰

During the 15th century Hussite Wars, unlike the majority of Czech towns, Olomouc was always a faithful Catholic city. This changed significantly a century later. As early as 1522, the books of the Lutheran Paul Speratus (1484-1551), who had preached in Iglau (Jihlava) and had been imprisoned on the orders of Stanislaus Thurzo, Bishop

⁶ The exception was Cologne, where, however, the Free Imperial City of Cologne was the organiser who paid a significant part of the professorships.

⁷ Under Schauenburg, the cathedral school became an Episcopal scholastery in 1274 with its own foundation for 20 students. In the 15th century, this school gained considerable importance; it is known that in the years 1447-1521, out of the 270 students from Moravia at the University of Kraków, no fewer than 150 came from Olomouc, while Brno was already a larger and economically more important city at the time (39 students came from Brno). (Zdeněk Kašpar, "Dějiny školství v Olomouci do příchodu Jezuitů", in: (ed.) Jiří Fiala, *Univerzita v Olomouci (1573-2013)* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2013), 15.

⁸ Vincenc Prásek, *K dějinám škol olomouckých, sv. Václavské a sv. Mořické* (Olomouc: R. Promberger, 1901), 29.

⁹ Kašpar, *Dějiny školství*, 18-19. Prásek, *K dějinám*, 30, notes that the school at St. Maurice had in 1492 already 516 pupils.

¹⁰ Prásek, *K dějinám*, 30-31, cf. Ivo Hlobil & Eduard Petrů, *Humanism and the Early Renaissance in Moravia* (Olomouc: Votobia, 1999), 45-46, 177.

of Olomouc, were publicly burnt on the Olomouc Upper Square. After his expulsion from Prague, Burian Sobek of Kornice († after 1549), a friend of Luther, settled in Olomouc, where he translated Lutheran works into Czech. Jan Olivetský (†1547), who opened the first printing house in Olomouc in 1538, was convicted and executed for producing heretical works.¹¹ We do not know what position the urban school occupied in the inter-confessional conflict, but since Abraham Schremmel of Strasbourg, who ran the school from 1557 to 1560, was a well-known Lutheran, it is more likely to have been Lutheran.¹²

In response to growing Lutheran influence in the city, Bishop Marcus Khuen (†1565) reorganised the cathedral school, gave it a new building erected in 1562 and new regulations. His successor William Prusinovský of Víckov (1534-1572) went a step further and invited the Jesuits to Olomouc in 1566. This started a new chapter in the relationship between the Netherlands and Olomouc. The Counter-Reformation in the Kingdom of Bohemia was foremost the work of the Jesuit order. It was introduced here in 1555 by none other than Petrus Canisius (1521-1597), son of the mayor of Nijmegen and, from his accession in 1543 to the order founded 11 years earlier, one of the most effective organisers of Jesuit missionary work, thanks in part to his catechism *Summa Doctrinae Christianae* (1555), which was also translated into Czech in 1615.¹³ Until the end of his life, five colleges (Prague, 1555; Olomouc/Olmütz, 1569; Brno/Brünn, 1578; Český Krumlov/Krumau, 1584; Chomutov/Komotau, 1590) and four residence houses (Plzeň/Pilsen, 1561; Třebon̄/Wittingau, 1566; Borovany/Forbes, 1566; Krupka/Graupen, 1587) were founded under his auspices. The first two, in Prague and Olomouc, grew into full-fledged universities.¹⁴

In May 1566, the first group of three Jesuits led by the Spaniard Hurtado Pérez (1526-1594) came from Vienna to Olomouc.¹⁵ Their teachings were so effective that the Bishop asked them to establish a school. Pope Pius V then authorised the estab-

¹¹ Kašpar, *Dějiny*, 21-22; Hlobil & Petrů, *Humanism*, 111-112.

¹² Kašpar, *Dějiny*, 22, cf. Jiřina Holínková, *Dvě studie z dějin městské školy na Moravě v předbělohorském období* (Olomouc: Monse, 2005), 155-162.

¹³ Petrus Canisius, *Katechyzmus Petra Kanysia Soc. Iesv Th: Obrázky vypodobněny* (Augusta Vindelico-rum = Augsburg: Christophorus Mangius, 1615). A new translation especially for youth was made in Olomouc a century later: Jakub des Hages (= Jacques des Hayes, 1615-1682), *Katechyzmus Katolickeg Petra Kanýzya tého Pisma Doktora [...] W nowé a hognégssý Otázky a Odpowédi rozwedeny* (Holomouc = Olomouc: s.n. (=Universitas Olomoucensis), 1726).

¹⁴ The main study on Jesuits in the Kingdom of Bohemia is the proceedings of the 2006 conference on the occasion of 450 years of the Jesuit Order in the Czech Lands, ed. Petronilla Cemus, *Bohemia Jesuitica* (Praha: Karolinum, 2006; 2 volumes). For this study, two articles are important: Petrus Begheyn, SJ, "Petr Canisius: mystik a manažer — otec zakladatel Svatoklementinské koleje v Praze" (Cemus, *Bohemia Jesuitica*, vol. I, 173-192) and Miloš Kouřil, "Počátky jesuitské akademie v Olomouci" (Cemus, *Bohemia Jesuitica*, vol. I, 319-328). A good general introduction to the history of Jesuits in the Czech Republic is written by Ivana Čornejová, *Tovaryšstvo Ježíšovo: Jezuité v Cechách* (Praha: Hart, 2002, 2nd edition).

¹⁵ The other two were the Austrians Jan Aschermann and Stefan Rimmel. Cf. (ed.) Jan Navrátil, *Kapitoly z dějin Olomoucké university 1573-1973* (Ostrava: Profil, 1973), 11 with note 7).

lishment of a Jesuit college in a breve of 9 August 1566, Pérez becoming the first rector. The school was planned with four years of study and immediately in its first year the school had 225 students. The Jesuits were given the abandoned monastery of St Jacob that stood on the site of today's Faculty of Humanities and the adjacent Minorite monastery with a church (on that site the Collegium Novum was established in 1711, which now houses the Military Archives). Prusinovský's successor, Bishop Jan Grodecký (1525-1574) managed to get the Jesuit school elevated to a university by Emperor Maximilian II on 22 December 1573, initially with an art faculty and a theological faculty.¹⁶ That the new university was soon considered to be a quality one is shown by the fact that by a breve of Pope Gregory XIII of 10 December 1578, the so-called *Collegium Nordicum* was added for the purpose of a mission to northern Germany (including the Republic of the United Provinces), Scandinavia and Prussia. This training school for missionaries had 571 students during the period of its existence (1578-1624).¹⁷

The University itself also grew prosperously: at the matriculation of 15, 16 and 21 October 1576, 85 students were enrolled, and on 14 December 1609 Rector Joannes Decker, a Fleming from the now French town of Hazebroek (Hazebrouck, 1560-1612) could report that there was a total of 721 students.¹⁸ The success of the university and the associated academic grammar school meant that those who were Catholic went to study there. The once proud cathedral school paid the price and closed its doors probably in 1588.¹⁹ The urban school at St Maurice now openly became a Protestant school, very much against the wishes of the Bishop who protested several times to all possible higher authorities, from the city's magistrate to even Emperor Rudolf II. The urban school flourished and became a rallying point for the city's Protestant elite. The end of this school came only after the so-called *Verneuerte Landesordnung* (Renewed Land Code) that took effect in the Margravate of Moravia in 1628. All higher and middle class Protestants were expelled, the lower class people were compulsively

¹⁶ For the beginnings of the university, see Jiří Fiala, "Jezuitská akademie a univerzita v Olomouci (1573-1173)", in: Fiala, *Univerzita v Olomouci*, 26-58, and Jiří Fiala, "Olomoučtí Jezuité a jejich školy", in: (ed.) Ondřej Jakubec & Marek Perůtka, *Olomoucké baroko. Výtvarná kultura le 160-1780. 3. Historie a kultura* (Olomouc: Muzeum uimění v Olomouci, 2011), 66-82.

¹⁷ Numbers according to Oskar Garstein, *Rome and the Counter-Reformation in Scandinavia. Jesuit Educational Strategy 1553-1622* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 387, Table 2 (Studies in the History of Christian Thought XLVI).

¹⁸ Fiala, *Olomoučtí Jezuité*, 68. The matrices of the old university have been published recently by Libuše Spáčilová and Vladimír Spáčil, *Nejstarší matrika olomoucké university z let (1576) 1590-1651 / Die älteste Matrikel der Olmützer Universität aus den Jahren (1576) 1590-1651* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2016).

¹⁹ In that year, the cathedral chapter of Olomouc asked Bishop Stanislav Pavlovský to renew the cathedral school. The Bishop did not grant this request. (Kašpar, *Dějiny školství*, 17). Prásek, *K dějinám*, 21, believes that the cathedral school was closed as early as 1568 because that year saw the establishment of the convict for the nobility, i.e. a school not specifically aimed at training priests.

reconverted to Catholicism.²⁰ At that time, the Jesuit academic grammar school already had six-year courses, offering thus secondary and higher education in one institution.

We came across the Fleming Decker above. Among the group of twelve Jesuits who came to Bohemia with Canisius and opened their new college on 8 July 1556 in the former Dominican monastery of St Clemens in Prague, no fewer than six originated from the Netherlands: Rector Ursmar Goisson (1524-1578) from the Hainaut town of Beaumont, the Minister Mag. Cornelius Brogelmans from Netersel-Bladel, Johannes Tilianus (Jan van der Linden) from the Duchy of Guelders, Mag. Willem Balmakers from Antwerp, Petrus Sylvius (Pieter van den Bossche) from Lievens Houtem and a Flemish friar Roger.²¹ The provincial of the Jesuit province of Germania Superior, founded in 1562, which included the Kingdom of Bohemia, Nicolaus Lanoy (1507-1581) also came from the Low Countries, from Blandain near Tournai.

The situation was no different in Olomouc. Three of the first nine rectors before the Jesuits were forced to leave the city in 1619 during the Bohemian revolt against the Habsburgs were from the Low Countries: Bartholomaeus Villerius (1538/9-1626), rector from August 1585 to April 1590, came from Bastogne, Petrus Torrentinus (1548-1614), rector from October 1595 to October 1599 was from Venray and the already mentioned Johannes Decker, rector from June 1607 to June 1614 as said from the West Flemish town of Hazebroek. Several teachers in Olomouc were also from the Low Countries. Jos Vercruyse mentions some thirty persons, who during a shorter or longer stay functioned in Olomouc.²² The occupation of the college was variable, as it was (and is) customary not to leave brothers in one place for much longer than four years.

The common language of all these people was Latin, the language in which they were raised as priests, which was the language of instruction at the college and university, and which in any case must have predominated in the very international composition of the Jesuit order. With the people of the city, the Dutch-speaking friars will also have spoken some form of German; the city was largely German-speaking at the time. The

²⁰ By then, Protestants could no longer have church services in Olomouc, but had to rely on the smaller surrounding towns like Velká Bystřice/Groß Wisternitz. The last Lutheran church service in Olomouc had been held on 22 January 1621 (Oskar Sakrausky, *Die Deutsche evangelische Kirche in Böhmen, Mähren und Schlesien III*. (Heidelberg & Wien: Johannes-Mathesius-Verlag, 1989), 29.

²¹ Data about the Jesuits from the Low Countries are taken from Jos Vercruyse, "Nederlandse Jezuiten aan de wieg van Moravische universiteiten." In: (ed.) Leopold Declodt, Wilken Engelbrecht & Kateřina Málková, *50 jaar neerlandistiek in Moravië / 50 let nederlandistiki na Moravě* (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1999), 187-198.

²² From the more important persons: Paulus Schodaeus (Paul van der Schodeye, 1548-1606) from Ronse, the metaphysic 1575-1576; Leonardius Corcelius (†1584), the minister of the college, Theodoor Uytgeest (c. 1559-1622) from Leiden, teacher of syntax 1584, 1599-1600; Georgius d'Oyenbrugge (1548-1607), rector of the Seminarium 1583-1585, before becoming in 1594 provincial of the Belgian province; Lambertus Fabius (Lambert Lefèvre, c. 1548-1596) from Limont, 1584-1596 spiritual in Olomouc; Judocus Brandt (†1601) from Ghent, 1583-1584 teacher of rhetoric and 1599-1601 professor of philosophy.

archives sometimes provide, however, an interesting glimpse into the national feelings of the friars.²³ Thus, in 1597/8, two young brethren from the Netherlands, Georgius van der Boon from Delft and Johannes Goyer from the province of Overijssel, mentioned as their native language at the registration for the noviciate *hollandica* (Van der Boon) and *belgica* (Goyer).²⁴

The number of friars from the Low Countries was, after the renewal of the Jesuit Order and University in Olomouc on 10 March 1621, smaller. Nevertheless, two excelled, Eustachus Remigius from Liège (1598-1655)²⁵ was rector of the University from 1652 till his death in 1655. During his life, he was rector of the colleges in Jihlava (1638-1640, 1641-1643), Brno (1640-1641), Neiße (now Nysa, 1646-1649). The very effective organiser died because he cared for students who had been struck by the plague and became infected himself. The other was Carolus Grobendonque (1600-1672) from Mechelen (Malines), moral theologian, who was Dean of the Faculty of Arts in 1633-1634.



Picture 2. Jesuit Colleges and the Church of the Holy Mary in the Snow in Olomouc, engraving by Martin Engelbrecht, 1740 (<https://www.afolomouci.cz/kostel/>).

²³ As Vercruysse, *Nederlandse Jezuieten*, 191 remarks, the *Catalogi triennales*, triennial reports of the Austrian province of the Jesuits have been published for the period 1551-1640 by Ladislaus Lukács, in *Monumenta Historiae Societatis Iesu* 117 (1978) and 125 (1982).

²⁴ Vercruysse, *Nederlandse Jezuieten*, 192.

²⁵ Thus Fiala et al., *Univerzita v Olomouci*, 150. Navrátil, *Kapitoly*, 280 gives as his birthplace Leiden.

From an ecclesiastical to a state university

On 23 July 1773, the Jesuit order was banned by Pope Clement XIV under pressure from the kings of France, Spain and Portugal. Empress Maria Theresa followed with some hesitation on 7 September 1773. After a year in which the properties were inventoried, the university became a state university on 1 October 1774.²⁶ This was preceded by a number of events, including a rather bitter battle between the supporters and opponents of the Enlightenment. One Dutchman had a central role in this struggle. A small fact, in which a shipment of Dutch books played a role, illustrates this.

Since the *Verneuerte Landesordnung* of 1621 (1628 in Moravia), censorship in the Lands of the Bohemian Crown had been entrusted to the universities of Prague and Olomouc and was thus firmly in the hands of the Jesuits. They carried out both preventive censorship, prior to the publication of a book, and repressive censorship, afterwards. The latter particularly concerned works imported from abroad. Based on the ecclesiastical *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, index of forbidden books, first drawn up in 1564 at the Council of Trent and regularly updated thereafter, non-Catholic publications were confiscated and assessed for their heretical or non-Catholic content, with a division into four classes: 1) forbidden books, 2) non-correctable books, 3) books suitable for correction and 4) suspect books. Books from the first two categories were burned or ‘incarcerated’ in the non-public section *libri prohibiti* of the university libraries in Prague or Olomouc, the other ones were returned after correction. The Habsburgs had been trying to get censorship into state hands since 1707, without success.

The Austrian War of Succession (1747-1748) demonstrated the weaknesses of the Habsburg state system. In this situation, moderately enlightened individuals from the so-called *Beamtenadel* were given an opportunity. The members of this new class were persons who had been elevated to the peerage on the basis of personal merit by the Habsburgs and were absolutely loyal to the ruling house. Among them were vice-chancellor Johann Christoph Bartenstein (1689-1767), the Viennese professor of police and constitutional law Joseph Sonnenfels (1732/3-1817) and the personal physician of the Empress and first director of the Imperial Court Library, Dutchman Gerard van Swieten (1700-1772). Bartenstein had been born into a Lutheran family of professors in Strasbourg and had become a Catholic in 1715. He was ennobled as a *Reichsfreiherr* in 1732. Sonnenfels had been born the son of a Jewish professor of oriental languages Lipman Perlin in Nikolsburg (Mikulov). His father had officially become a Catholic with his entire family in 1735. The family was ennobled as Barons von Sonnenfels in 1746. Van Swieten had come from a Catholic family in Leiden, had studied medicine and was the best student of Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738).

²⁶ Jiří Fiala, “C.K. univerzita v Olomouci a v Brně (1774-1782).” In: Fiala, *Univerzita v Olomouci*, 60-74, here p.61.

Although Boerhaave had put him forward as his successor, Van Swieten's Catholic faith proved an obstacle. In 1745, Van Swieten was able to take over the position of imperial corporal physician in Vienna. He was ennobled as Baron van Swieten in 1753.

Van Swieten was a sworn opponent of the powerful Jesuits and supported a reform of state censorship. He also tried to take it away from the Jesuits and succeeded in 1749. Already in 1713, there had been an attempt to have the German philosopher Leibniz found a *Societas Caesarea* in Vienna. Those attempts had failed mainly because of opposition from the Church, especially from the Jesuits.²⁷ What failed in Vienna turned out to be possible in Olomouc. On 15 December 1746, Joseph Freiherr von Petrasch (1714-1772) and the Olomouc cathedral canon Francesco Conte Giannini (1693-1758) founded in Olomouc the *Societas Incognitorum Eruditorum in Terris Austriacis*, the Society of Unknown Scientists in the Austrian Lands. The name of the society promptly aroused the ire of the Jesuits, who saw in it a persiflage of their own *Societas Jesu*. The Empress approved the statutes, however, in person on 16 March 1747.²⁸ Van Swieten was one of the members of the *Societas*, although he lived in Vienna.²⁹ The next step was that at Van Swieten's suggestion, censorship was itself taken away from the university and placed in the hands of the *Societas*.

This was a logical consequence of earlier steps. Maria Theresa's husband, Francis I, Duke of Lorraine, had already joined the lodge in 1731 during a stay in The Hague at the residence of the British ambassador, i.e. before his marriage in 1736.³⁰ Even as Emperor, he had remained a Freemason in the Vienna lodge *Aux Trois Canons*. Van Swieten and Sonnenfels were active freemasons as well. Whether the *Societas* in Olomouc secretly operated as a lodge is unclear, but likely. Van Swieten became head of the *Bücher-Censur-Hofcommission* in Vienna in 1751, to which all other censorship commissions were subordinate. He made his friend Petrasch head of the commission in Olomouc. According to the new rules, the commission had to preventively check Catholic books as well before they were allowed to be printed, a clear humiliation for the Jesuits. At the same time, entirely in line with the enlightened aims of the Emperor and Van Swieten, licences were issued, permitting the ownership of books that were on the index, according to the index classification mentioned above.³¹

²⁷ The attempt to found a *Societas eruditorum Germaniae* or *Societas Caesarea* was made twice, in 1669 and in 1713. The last was supported by the famous general prince Eugen of Savoy (1663-1736) but was blocked by the Jesuit Order. Antonín Kostlán, *Societas Incognitorum. První učená společnost v českých zemích* (Praha: Archiv Akademie věd České republiky, 1996), 32.

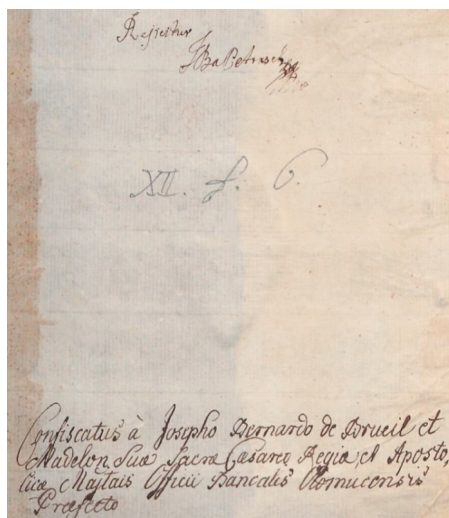
²⁸ Kostlán, *Societas*, 40.

²⁹ Petrasch was, before he came to Olomouc, as First Lieutenant the Adjutant of General Eugen of Savoy. The young Sonnenfels was in 1749 his subordinate. When Sonnenfels decided to leave the army and take up law studies, it was Petrasch who helped him. Abafi, *Geschichte der Freimaurerei*, 156.

³⁰ Christian d'Elvert, "Die Freimaurer in Österreich, besonders Mähren." *Notizen-Blatt der historisch-statistischen Section der kaiserlich königlichen mährisch-schlesischen Gesellschaft* Beilage 1866, no. 1, p. 2; Lajos Abafi, *Geschichte der Freimaurerei in Österreich-Ungarn I* (Budapest: Ludwig Aigner, 1890), 57-59.

³¹ Johann Goldfriedrich, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels 3* (Leipzig: Börsenverein des deutschen Buchhandels 1909), 346.

Since the *Societas* actually ceased its activities after Petrasch's departure to his castle in Neuschloß (Nové Zámky) in 1752, and was dissolved after the death of Canon Giannini in 1758, it was long believed that it never exercised the censorship entrusted to it. A chance discovery of a group of 38 books from the Netherlands among the prohibited books preserved in the Vědecká knihovna (Scientific Library) in Olomouc, probably seized more or less by accident, indicates that the *Societas* did make an attempt to show that it did indeed exercise censorship.



Pictures 3 and 4. Confiscation remark in VKOL shelf mark 3.251 (former shelf mark XII f6 (picture by the author) and the confiscator, Joseph baron Petrasch. Engraving by Johann Balzer (Prague, 1772) (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_von_Petrasch#/media/Datei:Josef_von_Petrasch.jpg)

The group of books must have been sent in 1749 or 1750 by Ernst Willem Higt (1723-1762), then rector of the Latin school in Alkmaar,³² to his study friend István Paksi Száthmari (1719-1791), at the time a teacher at the Reformatory Academic Gymnasium in Debrecen.³³ All the books have been preserved with the handwritten notice: “Confiscatus à Josepho Bernardo de Bruetil et Madelon, Suae Sacrae Caesareo Regiae et Apostolicae May[es]tatis officii Bancalis Olomucensis Praefecto” (confiscated

³² Abraham Jacob van der Aa, “HIGT (Ernst Willem)”, *Biographisch Woordenboek der Nederlanden* 8, 2^e stuk (Haarlem: J.J. van Brederode, 1867), 805-809.

³³ Jenő Zoványi, “Száthmári Paksi István”, *Debreceni Református Kollégium Nagykönyvtára Elektronikus Könyvtár*, <http://digit.drk.hu/?m=lib&book=3&p=2711> [accessed 19 April 2023].

by Joseph Bernard of Brueil and Madelon, Prefect of the Bank Office of her Imperial and Royal Majesty at Olomouc). Most of the books were censored by a “pater Oliverius”, who signs in one case “Pater Oliverius Societat[is] olom[ucensis] secretar[ius]”,³⁴ six others were censored by J.B. a Petrasch. Both censors can be easily identified as Oliverius Legipont (1698-1758), who was in 1750-1751 secretary of the *Societas*, and as Baron Petrasch himself, who took over the censorship after the departure of Legipont in 1751.

The confiscator was Joseph Bernard Brueil (ennobled 1758, Prefect of the Bank Office 1763). Apparently Brueil intercepted the consignment *en route* to Debrecen around 1749/50 at a routine customs check and passed it to the censorship board for review. Some books were found harmless, according to the notes. One problem was probably that the consignment should not have been confiscated at all, and Brueil in all probability kept the books with him, and the books were handed over around 1763 to the University of Olomouc, which, after the dissolution of the *Societas* until the dissolution of the Jesuit order in 1773, regained control of the censorship. The group of books is thus a silent witness to the power struggle between the enlightened *Societas* and the Jesuits.³⁵

The Jesuit triumph over the Enlightenment, after which Olomouc was rather a bastion *against* the Enlightenment, was a Pyrrhic victory given the dissolution of the Jesuit order in 1773, after which the Enlightenment, under Josephinian state supervision, finally made its entrance into the university.

The beginning of Dutch studies

Under the name *K.K. Franzens-Universität* (Imperial and Royal Francis University), the university became one of the pioneers of liberal thought in the Austrian Empire in the early 19th century. Students and faculty participated enthusiastically in the revolutionary year 1848: while the Emperor fled to Olomouc, a group of 250 student legionnaires travelled by train to Vienna to help the revolutionaries there with their revolt against that same Emperor. His successor, Frans-Joseph I, crowned in Olomouc, retaliated and from 1849 one faculty after another was closed, until, by imperial decree of 17 May 1860, the entire university was shut down. The university insignia had to be handed over to the stadholder’s administration in Brno, which in turn handed them over to Leopold-Franzens-Universität in Innsbruck in 1869. Only the law-abiding

³⁴ In the book Johannes d’Outrein, *Het goude kleinoot van de leere der waarheid* (Amsterdam: Nicolaas Byl, 1724). Now Vědecká knihovna Olomouc shelf mark 3.251 (old shelf mark XII f 6).

³⁵ For a detailed account of the case, see Wilken Engelbrecht, “De lotgevallen van een groepje ‘ketterse’ boeken uit de Lage Landen,” in: (ed.) Jana Emgelbrechtová, *De Nederlandstalige cultuur international-aal. Centraal-Europa en de Lage Landen* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2015), 189-2013, with a list of the confiscated books.

theological faculty was allowed to remain, with promotion rights retained. The theological faculty is therefore still in possession of its historical insignia from the 17th and 18th centuries.³⁶

When Czechoslovakia declared independence, the now majority Czech-speaking magistrate tried in vain to have the university's faculties, which had been abolished in the 19th century, reopened. The new government preferred the larger and better-equipped Brno, which had also been the capital of the Moravian region since 1782. A role will certainly also have played that the city of Olomouc had long been too Habsburg loyal, and Habsburg loyal was also the theological faculty, although the faculty leadership had already declared its loyalty to the new republic directly on 28 October 1918.³⁷

Full renewal of the university therefore did not come about until 21 February 1946. The behaviour of the Olomouc theologians during the occupation and the zeal of the theological dean František Cinek (1888-1966), who had spent much of the war as a prisoner in a variety of Nazi concentration camps, certainly played a role in this.³⁸

The first Rector of the re-established university, religious phenomenologist Josef Ludvík Fischer (1894-1973) was also the main propagator for the establishment of a professorship in Dutch. Since Fischer had been an active socialist before the war, he had good reason to fear German reprisals and fled to the Netherlands in April 1939, where his colleague, the religious historian Gerardus de Leeuw (1890-1950) helped him go into hiding when the Netherlands were also occupied by the Germans in May 1940.³⁹ Fischer learned perfect Dutch during those years and after returning became vice-chairman of the *Spolek Československo-Nizozemsko* (Association Czechoslovakia-Netherlands) founded in May 1946. After his appointment as rector in Olomouc, he campaigned for the establishment of a lectureship in Dutch and asked the Slavist Aimé van Santen (1917-1988) to take up this lectureship. Van Santen had begun studying Slavistics in Leiden in 1940 and had met Van der Leeuw through the editor of the magazine *Podium*. This is how Fischer, who knew Van der Leeuw well and had by now nominated him for an honorary doctorate, must have come into contact with Van Santen. Van Santen had become first secretary to the chargé d'affaires Allard Merens in August 1945, who had been tasked with rebuilding the Dutch embassy in Prague. Merens considered Van Santen unfit for diplomatic service and sent him back to the

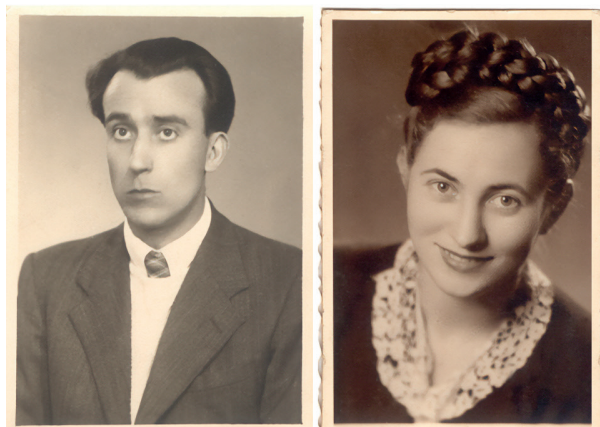
³⁶ Jiří Fiala, "C.K. Františkova univerzita v Olomouci (1827-1860)." In: Fiala, *Univerzita v Olomouci*, 75-84. The theological scepter was made in 1658, the Dean's chain is from the 18th century. Cf. Jiří Fiala, "Čtrnáctero žezel olomoucké university", <https://www.dzurnal.cz/index.php/2021/10/31/ctrnactero-zezel-olomoucke-univerzity/> (Accessed 19 April 2023).

³⁷ Miloslav Pojsl, "Teologická fakulta v Olomouci (1860-1946)", in: Fiala, *Univerzita v Olomouci*, 85-96, here p. 88.

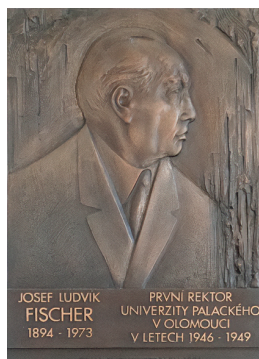
³⁸ Pavel Urbašek, "Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci (1946-2013)", in: Fiala, *Univerzita Palackého*, 103-123, here p. 105.

³⁹ Jiří Musil, *J. L. Fischer v nizozemském exilu (1939-1946)*. With English version (Olomouc: Psychologická a výchovná porada, 2016), 41-59 (English part of the booklet).

Netherlands. Fischer's request must have been very welcome to him. He had meanwhile married Ukrainian Yevgenia Haničenko (*1924), a marriage that would break down 12 years later, but from which a daughter, Nadja van Santen (1947-2018) was born.



Pictures 5-6. The first Olomouc lecturer of Dutch Aimé van Santen and his wife Yevgenia Haničenko, c. 1950 (pictures from the archive of Lucy Topolská, Olomouc).



Picture 7. Memorial plaque (1994) of Josef L. Fischer at the Olomouc Rector's Office (picture by Michal Maňas, 2012).

Indeed, Aimé began teaching Dutch in September 1947, while also trying to finish his studies in Slavic studies. In 1950, he graduated with a thesis *Asmodai in Prag*.⁴⁰ Together with his wife, he then lived with the Jewish family of JUDr. Leo Hrbek on Palackého 8 in Olomouc. Through them, he became acquainted with Franz Kafka's nieces Věra and Helenka David, daughters of Kafka's youngest sister Ottla. In this way,

⁴⁰ The thesis is at present in the library Vědecká knihovna v Olomouci, shelf mark II 203.380.

he got hold of a letter written by Kafka in Czech in late September 1917 to his cleaning lady Růženka, which was later taken to the Netherlands by Van Santen. The letter was found in Van Santen's legacy in 2002.⁴¹

In February 1948, the communists had taken advantage of a government crisis in the coalition cabinet. Democratic ministers had resigned in the belief that this would lead to early elections, which would most likely be lost by the communist party. The communist Prime Minister Klement Gottwald took advantage, however, of the fact that regular elections were already scheduled later that year. With pressure from massive communist protest demonstrations, intimidation of political opponents and the fact that the state security service was in communist hands, he convinced President Edvard Beneš that a minority government was the best solution. Even before the elections, Gottwald had a new constitution adopted, went into the elections with a 'coalition list' and won the elections convincingly. After this, a communist state was quickly built. Although the Olomouc rector Fischer had joined the communist party KSČ in February 1948, he soon became disappointed, resigning all his political posts in April 1948. He did remain in office as Vice-Rector until 1951, but was eventually barred from higher functions in 1955 after criticism on his part of the communist reform.

Van Santen thus effectively lost his patron and was expelled from the country in the summer semester of 1951. His wife, child and mother-in-law, who were all formal Soviet citizens, were not allowed to go with him. Eventually, Van Santen's older brother, Dutch communist MP Joop van Santen (1908-1992) managed, through his contacts in the Red Army, to get first Van Santen's wife and child, and a few years later the mother-in-law, out of Czechoslovakia.⁴² Thus, Van Santen's activities in Dutch Studies ended.

During the Prague Spring, there was an attempt to get the lectureship functioning again. This attempt was soon brought to an end. Van Santen's spirit remained, however, dormant. In 1990/91, a Dutch medievalist from Utrecht Wilken Engelbrecht (*1962) spent a year in Czechoslovakia as part of his postgraduate research on Ovid manuscripts. At the time, Doc. PhDr. Lucy Topolská (*1933), the daughter of Leo Hrbek, was head of the Olomouc department of German Studies. She seized the opportunity to revitalise the teaching of Dutch. Engelbrecht started regular teaching in February 1992. This caught on and gradually a department emerged that took its place among the other departments of the Faculty of Arts. In 1995, Dutch Studies organised its first international conference in Olomouc, on the occasion of which the Central European Association of Netherlandists *Comenius* was founded. A full master's degree was opened in 1997, by which time Engelbrecht was no longer alone. After Engelbrecht's defence of his doctorate in Utrecht, the department was already strong

⁴¹ Pictures of the letter have been published by Niels Bokhove, "Kafka-brief duikt op", *De Parelduiker* 7 (2002), no. 3, 70-72.

⁴² Bokhove, *Dat hopeloze stadje hier*, 263-264.

enough with seven staff members to form its own unit.⁴³ At that time, a building at Křížkovského 14 became vacant, of which Dutch Studies gradually took possession of the entire ground floor. With this, it became the thus far only independent department of Dutch Studies in the Czech Republic. Engelbrecht's Full Professorship in 2015 and the transfer of the Dutch Full professor Hubert van den Berg (*1963) from Poznań to Olomouc in 2017 opened the way to the accreditation of a PhD study programme. From 2017 onwards, Olomouc Dutch Studies offers the complete academic study trinity of bachelor's, master's and PhD studies.



Picture 8. Wilken Engelbrecht
(picture Vojtěch Duda 2022).



Picture 9. Dutch studies building
(picture by the author 2022)

An interesting detail is that the current building of the Dutch Studies at Křížkovského 14 was inhabited from 1575 to 1579 by the cathedral canon Stanislav Pavlovský (Stanisław Pawłowski, †1598), who had been very creditable to the diocese and to the university.⁴⁴ Here originally stood a monastery near St Peter's Church (demolished in 1898/9), Olomouc's old cathedral before Zdík moved the cathedral to its present site in 1131. We might note that this completes the circle: Zdík came to the Low Countries for study in the 12th century; in 1991, the culture of the Low Countries came to Olomouc.

⁴³ Marta Kostecká, "Dutch Studies in Moravia", *Czech and Slovak Journal of Humanities, Linguistica* 1/2021, 43-48.

⁴⁴ Wilken Engelbrecht, "Het gebouw van de neerlandistiek," *Acta Universitatis Palackianae Olomucensis, Philologica* 96, *Neerlandica III, Aspecten van de extramurale neerlandistiek* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 2008), 175-178.