

Astronomy and “Musaeum Mathematicum” at Prague Clementinum College

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“Musaeum Mathematicum Collegii Clementini”, first mentioned in 1638, was the oldest museum in the Bohemian Kingdom open to public and one of the oldest in Europe at all. The collections in Clementinum grew spontaneously until 1722 when Franciscus Retz, rector of the Prague University and later Superior General of the Jesuit Order (1730–1750), officially constituted the Museum and opened it for public visitors. The Museum is reported in year-books of Bohemian Jesuits (*Annuae provinciae Bohemicae Societatis Jesu*, Univ. Library Vienna) in the years 1722, 1723, 1724, 1732. Mechanician and watchmaker Caspar Pflieger (1665–1730), author of the largest globes in the Baroque Hall of Clementinum, was appointed as the first custodian of the Museum. Mechanician and watchmaker Johann Klein (1684–1762) took care of it for the next 30 years and enriched the collections by constructing unique mechanisms and instruments, e.g. two astronomical clocks, with Copernican and Tychoian planetaria. The next custodians were Joseph Stepling (1716–1778) and Franciscus Zeno (1734–1781). After 1773, when the Jesuit Order was dissolved, the collections were administrated by Antonín Strnad (1746–1799).

Since no earlier catalogues remained preserved, we can recognize the extent and diversity of collections only from the inventory written by Strnad in 1781 (*Consignatio rerum in Museo Mathematico Caesareo Regio. Die 5. Augusti 1781.*). Since Clementinum became a state institution - Astronomical Observatory, University Library and many rooms were used for lectures etc., the collections were concentrated in only 3 rooms instead of original 5 large rooms close to the New Mathematical Hall, and finally the Museum was abolished in 1785. The astronomical and meteorological instruments remained at the observatory, physical instruments were transferred to the High Polytechnic School and the exhibits connected with natural sciences and so called *curiosa* were granted to the Learned Society of Bohemian Kingdom. Astronomical instruments are since 1951 in the National Technical Museum in Prague, the astronomical clocks are displayed in Clementinum and several dozen of other exhibits were identified among the collections of the National Museum in Prague.