

Letterprint in Pilsen

Books were very rare in the Middle Ages. Each book was an original, whose content was usually handwritten by a monk from one of the monasteries. A revolutionary event that greatly contributed to the development of education all over Europe was the invention of the letterprint (see glossary of terms). An ancient printing press can be seen in a simple exhibition called Letterprint in places along the tour of the Pilsen Historical Underground.

The first printed books were probably made in Pilsen. Around the year 1468, a printing house, which was not only the first, but also the oldest in Bohemia, was established in Pilsen. It even ranked among the oldest printing offices in Europe. This printing room operated in the city until 1533. *The Trojan Chronicle* is proof of the existence of a press room. It recalls just the era of 1468. *The New Testament* followed, published in 1475, then there was *Passionál* or *Lives of the Saints*. The fourth book was once again *The New Testament* and the fifth print, *Statuta provincialia Arnesti*, was from the year 1476. These books mention the then “New Pilsen” as the place of their printing. The sixth printing is generally considered to have been *Agenda*, which was followed by the sacred book *Missale ecclesiae Pragensis*, published in 1479. Between the years 1479 and 1498, there were probably no new books printed in Pilsen. Currently, experts are doing research to determine whether it wasn't actually Prague that was first in book printing, as it may have preceded Pilsen by ten years.

From 1498, letterpress printer Mikuláš Bakalář worked in Pilsen. He published about 21 books before 1513. His printing house was located in the building where today you can see a **corner house (no. 143/9) on the corner of Bedřicha Smetany and Bezručova. The house bears a memorial plaque.**

In addition to Mikuláš Bakalář, we also know the name of the letterpress printer Jan Pekka from Švabach, who came to Pilsen from the vicinity of Nuremberg. Pekka practiced letterpress printing in Pilsen in the years 1521 and 1532. At first, he worked with Jan Fencl, sometimes called Mantuán, a Pilsen burgher. **Mantuán's house** is found on the present-day **Republic Square** near the NAVA bookstore. The Vídeňka café is in the courtyard of **Mantuán's house**, no. **135/21**, is decorated with a rich Renaissance portal from the late 16th century that features a Bohemian lion in a cartouche. Jan Fencl lived here between 1520 and 1544. Along with his friends, he liked to provoke conservative and established Pilsen burghers. This printer printed the so-called Franta's rights, compiled by Pilsen doctor Jan Franta, in Nuremberg in 1518. This work, full of hyperbole, caustic satire, and provocation, is mentioned in nearly all secondary school textbooks in the chapter on Czech Renaissance literature. The importance of this work went beyond the borders of Bohemia. **Jan Franta lived in the house** which is now numbered **no. 253 Solní ulice (street).**

After Pekka's death, the printing office closed and another letterpress didn't appear in Pilsen until the 19th century. The owner's name was Jan Josef Plaguegensäuler. This **printing house was in the house on the corner of Republic Square and Dominikanská ulice** which is near the Pilsen City Hall.