

The Long Path to the New Moravian Diet Building

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Abstract. This study examines the politically charged process that led to the construction of the Moravian Provincial Diet building in Brno between 1863 and 1878. This involved, in fact, a fifteen-year debate on whether to build a new or renovate the historic House of Estates. The issue quickly became intertwined with early manifestations of Czech vs German national rhetoric. An open architectural competition in 1867–1868 failed to produce a satisfactory design, despite a noteworthy Neo-Gothic proposal by August Prokop and others. Subsequent attempts to renovate the existing House of Estates—including plans by Theophil Hansen—proved technically and financially infeasible. Ultimately, the deputies directly invited several Vienna-based architects to submit designs, finally selecting a Neo-Renaissance project by Anton Hefft and Robert Raschka. Constructed between 1875 and 1878, the new building was meant to embody stability, prosperity and unity through its monumental architecture and rich allegorical decoration. The case illustrates the complex interplay of nationalism, bureaucracy, architectural ambition, and financial constraints in shaping Moravian political representation during the late nineteenth century.

Keywords: historicism, architecture, nationalism, politics, public building design, Moravia, August Prokop, Theophil Hansen

The February Patent of 1861 established provincial assemblies in the individual crown lands of the Habsburg Empire as parliamentary, elected and self-governing bodies that ruled on provincial internal matters.¹ However, these new political bodies needed a headquarters and a place for administration and to carry out their other activities. In many of the crown lands, older buildings were used for this purpose. The Silesian Provincial Diet in Opava was housed in a former monastery (today the seat of the Provincial Archives),² while the Bohemian Provincial

1 I use the English term ‘Province’ as probably the best translation of the Czech term *země* (adjective *zemský*) and the German term *Land*, because the English word ‘land’ has a different meaning and connotations and is not appropriate in this context. For the history of the Diet as a political body, see e.g., Malíř, “Der mährische.”

2 In 1916, a design for a new building was drawn up in Opava, but it was never realised; see Šopák, *Století*, 30–31.

Diet in Prague adapted the Thun Palace, where the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic still meets today.³ However, new assembly palaces were built in the capitals of some crown lands: in Lviv (*Galicijsky Sejm Krajowy*, 1877–1881, Juliusz Hochberger, today Lviv University),⁴ in Ljubljana (*Kranjski deželni dvorec*, 1896–1902, Jan Vladimír Hráský and Joseph Hudetz, today the University of Ljubljana),⁵ and in Brno (*Moravský zemský sněm/Mährischer Landtag*, 1875–1878, Anton Hefft and Robert Raschka, today the Constitutional Court of the Czech Republic).⁶

Hard discussions: historical continuity or functional modernity?

In the capital of Moravia, members of the Provincial Diet had been considering the construction of a new assembly building since 1863,⁷ because the Diet and other provincial authorities had to be housed in the unsuitable Baroque Governors' Palace. On the other hand, however, there was the possibility of converting the House of Estates (also known as the Old Provincial House/*Starý zemský dům/Alt Landhaus*) on Dominikánské náměstí in the city centre (Figure 1). This original seat of the Moravian Estates was incorporated into the medieval



Figure 1 House of Estates, postcard ca. 1908.

Source: Wikimedia, [Public Domain](#)

3 Vybíral, “Buildings.”

4 Purchla, “Wpływy,” 39; Lewicki, “Przestrzenie.”

5 Prelovšek, “Olbrichov projekt,” Sapač and Lazarini, *Arhitektura*, 479; Gindiciosi, “Poslopje.”

6 See Zatloukal, “Brünner”; Zatloukal, *Brněnská okružní*, 85; Zatloukal, *Brněnská architektura*, 57; Zatloukal, *Meditace*, 117; Marek, “Monumentalbauten,” 162–63, Plans and documentation are stored in the MZA Collection D 24, sig. 701.

7 *Moravské noviny*, 30 June 1863, 206.

Dominican monastery in the sixteenth century and extended in the seventeenth century by a new baroque wing. In 1784, however, the building was acquired by the army as part of Emperor Joseph II's reforms. The military still owned it in the 1860s, when it was offered for sale to the Provincial Diet.

The deputies were divided. One group wanted to build a new edifice, while the other advocated rebuilding the Medieval-Baroque House of Estates. This division was formed along national lines, as the former were mostly German liberals (*Deutschliberale Partei*), and the latter were mainly Czechs from the National Party in Moravia (*Národní strana na Moravě*). The division among them was not only national, since German liberals were defenders of the new constitution and centralism; Czech nationalists, on the other hand, called for the federalisation of the realm. The system of political parties of the one hundred member-strong Moravian Diet was in its first two decades of existence, that is, just in its infancy. Besides the two above mentioned parties, there was only one more major power—the Landowners, consisting mostly of nobility. But the Landowners were also divided into two groups, one connected with Germans, the other with Czechs.⁸

In the 1860s, however, any sharp and bitter rivalry between the two Moravian national groups under the banner of nationalism was still rare on a daily basis. The Germanophone and Czechophone inhabitants of Moravia did not yet put obstacles in one another's way and were able to live and work together in peace. The deputies in the Diet managed to handle economic and administrative matters without any national or political friction. The real surge of nationalism in Moravia occurred mainly from the 1880s onwards.⁹

This makes the whole situation concerning the Diet building even more remarkable as an early example of national rhetoric connected to architecture, monuments, and the arts. This kind of argument was used especially by the Czech Moravians. The *Moravská orlice* newspaper, published by the National Party, claimed that German deputies did not want to repair the House of Estates because it was a monument to the Czech-speaking Moravian nobility of the sixteenth century, before the Habsburgs came to power. The article stated ironically:

“[O]ur leftists [German liberal deputies] do not want to know anything about the old provincial house, because they want to erase all monuments that are older than 26 February 1861! However, the coats of arms of old Moravian families with their Czech inscriptions are located up there. If anyone saw them, they might be convinced that Czech used to be the official language in Moravia and, moreover, that it was spoken not only by

8 Malíř, *Biografický*, 11–46.

9 Cp. Řepa, *Moravané*; Malíř, “Die Parteien”; Malíř, “The Moravian Diet.”

maids, servants and a few Czech fanatics, but that even the nobility did not shy away from speaking Czech. Such a memento cannot, of course, be pleasing to the pseudo-liberals, who would like to convince the world that before 26 February, there was no true constitutionality in Moravia. They might have been able to put up with those coats of arms for a while, if only the inscriptions had been in German: but the coats of arms of the Žerotín, Dubský, Sedlnický, Liechtenstein and other families with Czech inscriptions—that would have been an insult to the German Confederation, to which Moravia belongs.”¹⁰

Moreover, the article, which summarised the events at the Diet, argued for the restoration of the House of Estates not only from a national perspective but also from artistic and historical perspectives. The author linked the ceiling paintings in the assembly hall by Daniel Gran from the first half of the eighteenth century to his work in Vienna (e.g., Karlskirche) and described them as valuable and worthy of repair and preservation. This is a relatively early appreciation of Baroque art in Central Europe.

The Germanophone deputies, on the other hand, argued their case primarily on financial grounds. According to them, repairing the old building would cost much more than building a new one, burdening the province's budget and forcing it to forgo other much-needed investments.¹¹ According to the daily press, the debates were very heated, full of argument and vicious attacks. Deputies from the traditional Moravian nobility also favoured Czechophone politicians in this case and argued for the preservation of tradition and continuity. These debates and votes ultimately led the Provincial Diet to a judgement of Solomon in February 1866. The Provincial Committee (*Zemský výbor/Landesausschuss*, i.e., the Provincial ‘government’) was to have “plans drawn up for the construction of a new or the repair of the old provincial building.”¹²

In the hands of architects: the competition for a new building

However, the situation changed in March 1867. Elections were held which changed the distribution of seats in the Diet in favour of those who supported the new building.¹³ At the end of 1867, the Provincial Committee announced an architectural competition for the Provincial Diet building.¹⁴ A site was chosen on the newly built

10 *Moravská orlice*, 6 February 1866, 1. The name Liechtenstein is written in Czech transcription as ‘Lichtenštejn.’

11 *Moravská orlice*, 20 January 1866, 1–2.

12 *Moravská orlice*, 14 February 1866, 1.

13 Malíř, “Der mährische.”

14 *Moravské noviny*, 15 June, 1867, 287.

Ring Road, on the edge of today's Moravské náměstí. The Austrian Associations of Engineers and Architects (*Österreichischer Ingenieur- und Architektenverein*) in Vienna was asked to judge the competition. It selected Wilhelm Doderer, Heinrich Ferstel, Heinrich von Förster, Theophil Hansen, Josef Hlávka, Carl Schumann, and Carl Tietze as jurors.¹⁵ The choice of Josef Hlávka, who was Czech, could be seen as a response to the aforementioned national disputes. However, all members of the jury were prominent Viennese architects of the time, reflecting the importance of the new building, which was not only intended to have a significant impact on the city's appearance and urban structure, but, above all, to represent the entire province. The importance of this is also underlined by the fact that several articles assessing the quality of the fourteen submitted designs were published in the daily press. Moreover, some of them were quite severe.

An anonymous author writing under the pseudonym 'Vitruvius' critically evaluated almost all designs and claimed that a third of them were at the level of student work. 'Vitruvius' even exaggeratedly connected the low quality of designs with the low prestige of the new state constitutional system. In his words, the competition showed:

"Just how much the latest constitutional reforms in Austria are still in their infancy; just how little a proper understanding of our current state structure has penetrated the wider public; and just how shameful, even absurd, is the notion of the dignity, power, and prestige of the parliamentary assembly in a state governed by the rule of law..."¹⁶

But another writer, hiding behind the pseudonym 'Penther,' disagreed with 'Vitruvius'.¹⁷ This author, for example, cast doubts on the conditions of the competition, when stating:

"More seasoned and established masters are well aware of the arbitrary practices employed in such competitions; moreover, the prizes are so small that an experienced professional would think twice before embarking on such a large-scale project, which typically yields little prestige."¹⁸

Based on their wording, both anonymous critics were most probably architects. The third serious evaluation of the designs also came from an architect, August Prokop, who wrote a detailed six-part article about the competition, discussing each design in turn.¹⁹ This, however, put him in a somewhat bizarre situation,

15 *Zeitschrift des Oesterreichischen Ingenieur- und Architekten-Vereins*, no. 3/4 (1868), 80.

16 *Mährischer Correspondent*, 3 January 1868, 1–2.

17 The pseudonym Penther is an obvious reference to the eighteenth-century architect and theorist Johann Friedrich Penther.

18 *Mährischer Correspondent*, 5 January 1868, 2.

19 Prokop, "Die Concurs-projecte."

as he himself was participating in the competition. He was therefore evaluating his competitors' designs as well as his own, which, from today's perspective, is rather inappropriate; at the time, however, it was not perceived as a conflict of interest.

The jury's verdict of 1 March 1868 was also rather severe. Neither the first nor the second prize was awarded, and none of the projects was recommended for implementation, except with "major changes." The report literally states that "based on the given programme and limited construction site, a complete solution to this problem [the construction of the Diet] is not possible."²⁰ The jury thus criticised not only the architects but, above all, the actual assignment from the Provincial Committee, which must have been a somewhat bitter finding for the deputies. It can thus be said that the jury swept the entire competition off the table. The jury recognised only five projects as "relatively the best," but, due to their overall unsuitability, it refused to rank them.

The five projects included two alternative designs by August Prokop (Neo-Gothic and Neo-Renaissance), a plan by the Brno native Josef Blitzfeld, who worked in Vienna, and a project by the aforementioned Joseph Hudetz.²¹ The authors of the two remaining designs are unknown. However, the Provincial Committee led by Provincial Governor (*Zemský hejtman/Landeshaupmann*) Emanuel Dubský of Třebomyslice did not follow the recommendation. It determined the rewards as follows: Prokop, 1000 florins; Blitzfeld, 500 florins; and Hudetz and two unknown architects, 200 florins each.²² August Prokop thus received the highest reward as if he had won first prize, even though, in practice, he had not, in line with the jury's decision.²³

Only two projects from the competition have been preserved. Joseph Hudetz's project was in the Italianate Neo-Renaissance style, with the main façade on the longer side and the chamber hall in the courtyard between the four wings.²⁴ His project had the third-highest cost of all fourteen, at 412,166 florins (excluding interior furnishings)²⁵ (Figures 2 and 3). The second known design is from August Prokop.

20 *Zeitschrift des Oesterreichischen Ingenieur- und Architekten-Vereins* XX, no. 5/6 (1868): 118.

21 *1842 Vienna – †1909 Vienna. He studied at the polytechnic and academy in his hometown and, in addition to apartment buildings, he also designed the former town hall in Místek (1898) and the aforementioned parliament building in Ljubljana. Ursula Prokop, entry Joseph Hudetz, *Architektenlexikon Wien 1770–1945*, <http://www.architektenlexikon.at/de/248.htm>, accessed 9 October 2017.

22 *Brünner Zeitung*, 4 April 1868, 480.

23 The often-repeated claim that Prokop was the 'clear winner' is therefore inaccurate (Zatloukal, *Příběhy*, 281; Marek "Monumentalbauten," 162), as is the stated number of forty competing projects (most recently Zatloukal, *Meditace*, 117).

24 Hudetz, *Projecte*, 10–16.

25 Prokop, "Die Concurs-projecte," 46.



Figure 2 Joseph Hudetz, design for the Moravian Diet, perspective view, 1867.

Source: Repro: Hudetz, Joseph. *Projecte für Öffentliche Bauten*, Vienna: Commissions-Verlag von Ad. Lehmann, 1886, plate 11.

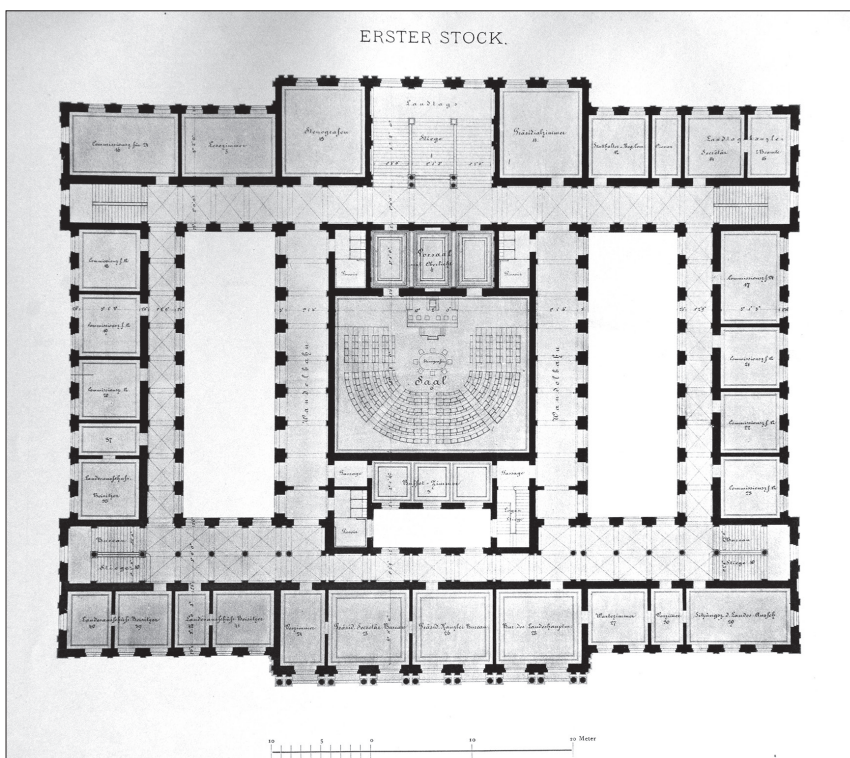


Figure 3 Joseph Hudetz, design for the Moravian Diet, ground plan of First floor, 1867

Source: Repro: Hudetz, Joseph. *Projecte für Öffentliche Bauten*, Vienna: Commissions-Verlag von Ad. Lehmann, 1886, plate 13.

“The best” from the competition: A northern dream in Central Europe

Almost forty years later, August Prokop (1838, Jihlava – 1915, Gries near Bolzano)²⁶ published some of his plans from 1867 for the building of the Provincial Diet.²⁷ At that time, he was already a respected architect, having executed many projects, working in heritage conservation, at the Museum of Applied Arts in Brno and at technical universities in Brno and Vienna. However, in 1867, when he had designed the Moravian Diet, he was not yet thirty years old. He had just arrived in Brno after studying at the Vienna Academy and gaining his first practical experience with other architects. Nevertheless, he managed to obtain prestigious commissions in Moravia, including the Turnverein gymnasium in Brno (1866–1888) and the synagogue in Velké Meziříčí (1867–1880) (Figures 4 and 5). These buildings, constructed with red-brick façades, reflect English and Hanseatic Gothic architecture and bear the indelible stamp of the experience Prokop gained in the studio of architect Gustav L. Martens (1818–1882) in Kiel, where he worked around 1866.²⁸ Similarly, this ‘Martensian’ red-brick Neo-Gothic style can be seen in Prokop’s unrealised designs from the same period, such as the Aristocratic Casino in Vienna (1866) and the design for the Vienna Stock Exchange (1867) (Figures 6 and 7).²⁹ In these projects, Prokop actually quotes and varies the motifs he learned from Martens.³⁰



Figure 4 August Prokop, Turnverein Gymnasium in Brno, 1866–1888. Kirk, 2011, Millenium187, Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)



Figure 5 August Prokop, Synagogue in Velké Meziříčí, 1867–1880. PaulT (Gunther Tschuch), 2023, Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

26 Zatloukal, “Architektura,” 20–23; Galeta, “August.”

27 Prokop, *Markgrafschaft*, 1387.

28 Prokop, *Euere*, 34.

29 Wien Museum, inv. no. 157199/42, 157199/43, 157199/46, 157199/47, 157199/48.

30 Cp. Martens’ designs for a Unitarian church and villa in Middlesbrough, England (1867), a

As mentioned earlier, Prokop submitted two designs to the competition for the Diet building, one Neo-Gothic and one Neo-Renaissance. According to the architect himself, apart from the style, they differed only in details. He made full use of the plot's shape, which meant a rectangular building with inner courtyards. He was one of the few competitors to place the main façade not on the longer side of the building, but on the shorter side, facing Moravské náměstí. The dominant feature of the building was to be the central tower above the hexadecagonal assembly hall covered by a cross vault, or, according to Prokop's words, "a tent roof with corner turrets characterises the Gothic version, and a dome characterises the Renaissance design."³¹



Figure 6 August Prokop, Design for the Aristocratic Casino in Vienna, perspective view, 1866

Source: Unbekannt (Reproduktionsfotograf), August Prokop (Architekt), Entwurf eines Adeligen Casinos für Wien, Perspektive (Reproduktion), 1866, Wien Museum Inv.-Nr. 157199/47, CC0, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/979343/>

As far as the Neo-Gothic design is concerned, both shorter façades were dominated by risalits with sculptural decoration and high gables (it is impossible to say whether the gables were triangular or stepped, as Prokop used both) (Figure 8). Most interestingly, however, the façades were to be made of red brick. Prokop wrote: "The Gothic project acknowledges its material [*Materialbau*], but the author himself, in

morgue in Kiel (1867), and schools in England, on which Prokop could hypothetically have worked in Kiel. The school is undated; the collection describes it as from 1857, but 1867 is probably more accurate. Architekturmuseum der TU Berlin, Inv. Nr. 11727, 11822, 11800, 20199.

31 Prokop, "Die Concurs-projecte," 46.

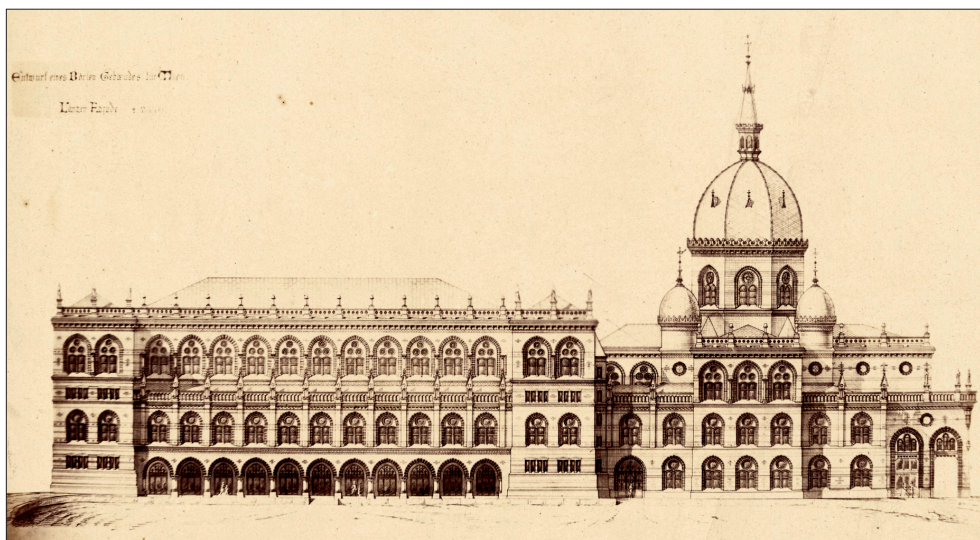


Figure 7 August Prokop, Design for the Stock Exchange in Vienna, side view, 1867
Source: Unbekannt (Reproduktionsfotograf), August Prokop (Architekt), Entwurf für ein Börsengebäude in Wien, Ansicht der Seitenfassade (Reproduktion), 1867, Wien Museum Inv.-Nr. 157199/43, CC0, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/979338/>

the absence of good bricks, is inclined to plastering.”³² We cannot say much about the Neo-Renaissance version, as the plans are unknown. It is interesting, however, that it was to be more expensive than the Neo-Gothic version (280,000 florins compared to 260,503 florins without interior furnishings).³³

August Prokop thus planned another Gothic-revival edifice in Brno, as he had learned from Martens, in a truly monumental form. His project for the Aristocratic Casino and Stock Exchange gives the best impression of what the Diet’s exterior might have looked like. However, it is worth noting that Prokop studied at the Vienna Academy under Friedrich Schmidt until 1865, and he incorporated some elements from his teacher’s buildings into the project. He was clearly well acquainted with Schmidt’s competition designs for the building of the House of Representatives and House of Lords in Vienna. This took place at the turn of 1864 and 1865, when Prokop was still Schmidt’s student (Figure 9). One can find so many parallels when comparing the teacher’s and the pupil’s plans that it makes no sense to count them.³⁴ Again, this points to a conscious citation.

³² Prokop, “Die Conkurs-projecte,” 46. For the term *Materialbau*, see Horáček, *Přesná*, 73.

³³ Prokop, “Die Conkurs-projecte,” 26, 46. We do not know whether it was to be in the Italianate or Transalpine style, but the Italianate style is more likely, as only the Neo-Gothic variant is described as *Materialbau*. Prokop commonly designed in the Italianate Neo-Renaissance style.

³⁴ Planner-Steiner, *Friedrich*, Appendix 6–9; Haiko, *Friedrich*, 90–93.

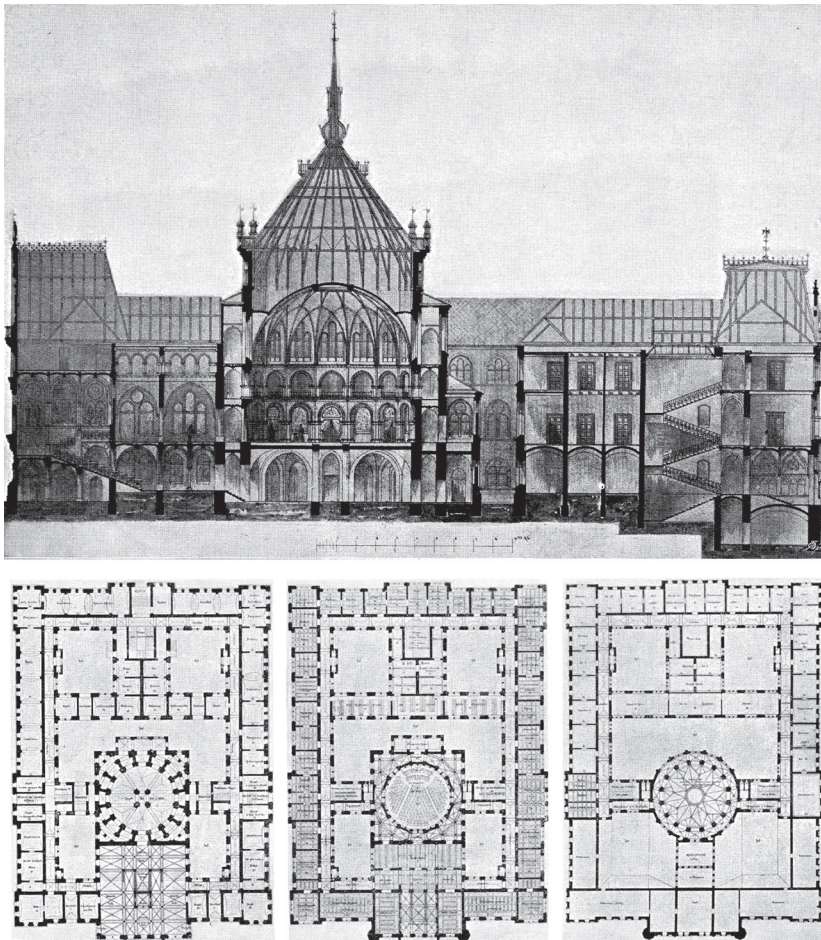


Figure 8 August Prokop, Design for the Moravian Diet, 1867, section and ground plans

Source: Repro: Prokop, August. *Die Markgrafschaft Mähren in kunstgeschichtlicher Beziehung*. Vol. 4. Vienna: Druck und Kommissionsverlag von R. Spies & Co, 1904, 1389.

Although one could logically classify Prokop's project as 'national German' architecture inspired by the golden age of the Baltic Hanseatic League, this would probably be a view of the past influenced by our present ideas. We could just as easily discuss English influences on this type of red-brick architecture. At the same time, such a picturesque visual style, with glazed bricks, mouldings and decorative patterns, had only a few parallels in the Austrian Empire—this was not how buildings were designed in Central Europe. From Prokop's point of view, it was more a business strategy than nationalism. He delivered a new style that could charm potential clients. And in Moravia it worked. If the clients themselves then attributed national connotations to it, that is another thing. After all, the fact that Prokop was a German Moravian, but not a German nationalist, is evidenced by his wife's Czech-speaking family, his Czech-language advertisements in

the press, and even by his unexecuted design for a Czech national house (*Besední dům*) in Brno.³⁵

Strangely enough, the Czech press did not write about the competition results or the visual appearance of Prokop's plans. If the Czech-speaking society, its deputies, or its journalists had perceived the style as 'German,' they would certainly have made it loudly known. Thus, the earlier hypothesis that Prokop's project was rejected due to public embarrassment with Neo-Gothic architecture as such is not valid,³⁶ and nor is the hypothesis that, by rejecting the Neo-Gothic design and later accepting a Neo-Renaissance design by other architects, the Provincial Committee sought to show the unity of both provincial nations.³⁷ In short, this decision was not about style and nationalism, but rather about the province's financial capabilities.³⁸

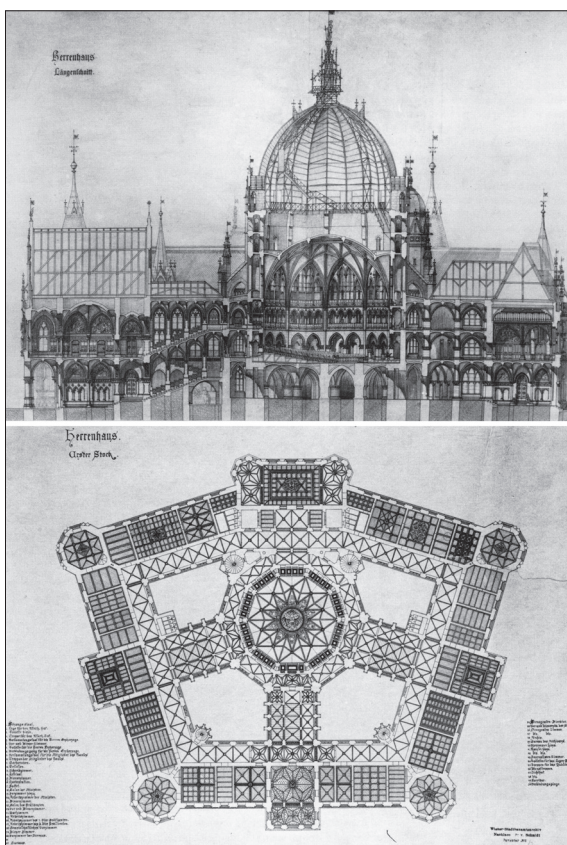


Figure 9 Friedrich Schmidt, Design for the House of Lords in Vienna, 1865, section and ground plan
Source: Repro: Haiko, Peter, et al. *Friedrich von Schmidt: Ein gotischer Rationalist*. Vienna: Böhlau, 1991, 92.

The watchful eyes of provincial representatives

The plan for a new building was thus temporarily rejected following the competition results. In the second half of 1868, only the reconstruction of the House of Estates in a 'modern style' remained in play.³⁹ According to Deputy Johann von Chlumecký,

35 Galeta, "The Advances."

36 Sedlářová, "Brněnská," 58.

37 Marek "Monumentalbauten," 395, note 152.

38 AMB fund A1/33 Archiv města Brna, Ústřední spisovna z let 1851–1896, inv. no. 1446, box 486.

39 *Brünner Zeitung*, 29 July 1868, 1063.

the decision to renovate was made because “the current conditions in the province, especially concerning the urgent high demands on the treasury for production and humanitarian purposes, do not allow for the construction of a new provincial house, given the anticipated costs.”⁴⁰

As August Prokop had clearly impressed the deputies with his previous competition project, they offered him the job of designing the renovation and extension of the House of Estates at the beginning of 1869.⁴¹ However, as the architect had moved to Vienna, his involvement fell through, and the whole matter was put on hold for some time.⁴²

It was not until January 1871 that the Provincial Committee charged Anton Ullrich, an engineer employed by the Provincial Building Authority,⁴³ to draw up plans for the reconstruction of the House of Estates and the construction of a new Provincial Diet.⁴⁴ Such an ‘internal’ assignment testifies to the Provincial Committee’s interest in saving money and maintaining as much control over the project as possible. Later that year, however, Theophil Hansen was approached with the idea to rebuild the House of Estates at a cost of up to 100,000 florins. He had previously built the Provincial Hospital of St Anne in Brno (1865–1868) and was therefore well known to the deputies, especially the Czech ones. It was deputy Alois Pražák, the leader of the Czech National Party in Moravia, who was the chairman of the Commission of deputies responsible for the construction of the hospital. Pražák then commissioned Hansen to design the Czech National House in Brno (1869–1872), and his own tenement house (1873–1874).⁴⁵ Therefore, it was probably Pražák who proposed Hansen for the Diet design.

In 1871 the Provincial Diet also approved the future purchase of land for the extension of a new building between the House of Estates and Husova Street.⁴⁶ Hansen visited the House of Estates in October 1871 and then drew up the following plans: 1) for the renovation of the House of Estates (conversion of the large hall into a ceremonial hall); 2) for the extension of a new assembly hall towards Husova

40 *Brünner Zeitung*, 22 September 1869, 1336.

41 *Moravská orlice*, 9 February 1869, 3.

42 Dřimal, *Zemský*, 142.

43 *1825 Brandýs nad Labem – †1878 Brno. He studied at the Prague Technical University, devoted himself to road and bridge construction, worked for the Bohemian Building Authority in Prague and for the Ministry of Trade, and worked in Vlašim and Ljubljana before moving to Brno in the mid-1860s. *Mährischer Correspondent*, 18 May 1878, 2–3.

44 *Moravská orlice*, 26 January 1871, 2.

45 Zatloukal, *Brněnská*, 90–96; Malíř, “Společnost”; Galeta, “Theophil.”

46 *Moravské noviny*, 24 October 1871, 1.

Street; 3) for the regulation of Dominikánské náměstí.⁴⁷ He submitted them on 18 December 1871,⁴⁸ only a few days after elections in which German politicians and their allies gained a majority in the Diet.

According to a report by Deputy Eduard Ulrich, chairman of the Commission for the Construction of the Provincial Diet and Sale of the House of Estates from 1874, three proposals were available at that time:⁴⁹ 1) Reconstruction with preservation of the old assembly hall for the Provincial Diet by Anton Ullrich; 2) Reconstruction with the conversion of the old assembly hall into a ceremonial hall and the addition of a new assembly hall by Anton Ullrich; 3) Reconstruction with preservation of the old assembly hall and the addition of rooms for the regional offices, with the façade facing today's Husova Street by Theophil Hansen.

However, the report was critical of all three projects. Simply put, it proved difficult and impractical to fit all the necessary administrative functions into the old walls. The old Baroque hall also proved insufficient in terms of space, acoustics, and lighting for an assembly hall. In short, the old building was constructed in such a way that "the talent of the most prominent architects tried in vain to accomplish the hopeless task of its reconstruction."⁵⁰ In addition, the costs, ranging from 230,000 to 350,000 florins (plus 180,000 for the purchase of the surrounding land), were assessed in the report as too high. On 13 January 1872, the Provincial Committee decided to thank Hansen respectfully, pay him 1,000 florins for his work, and not use his plans.⁵¹

Consequently, in February 1872, the opinions of the members of the Provincial Committee and the Diet changed. The idea of adapting the House of Estates was abandoned due to its high cost, and instead a new building was to be built, "worthy of the province, but simple and inexpensive in its architecture" for 400,000–500,000 florins.⁵² Both decisions are not surprising, because from the elections they lost in 1871 until the end of 1873, the Czech Deputies from the National Party boycotted the meetings of the Provincial Diet. Therefore, the Diet was solely in the hands of the German Liberal Party and the Landowners, and they aligned the process of building a new Diet with their preferences.

For the new building, a plot of land on the Ring Road was acquired, as the original one from the 1868 competition had meanwhile been built over for the interim

47 *Brünner Zeitung*, 24 October 1871, 975.

48 *Moravská orlice*, 22 December 1871, 2.

49 AMB fund A1/33 Archiv města Brna, Ústřední spisovna z let 1851–1896, inv. no. 1446, box 486.

50 AMB fund A1/33 Archiv města Brna, Ústřední spisovna z let 1851–1896, inv. no. 1446, box 486.

51 *Brünner Zeitung-Morgenpost*, 5 February 1872, 111–112. Neither Hansen's nor Ullrich's plans have yet been traced. The scholarly literature did not mention Hansen's involvement in this task. Cp. Wagner-Rieger, *Theophil*; Reiter and Stalla, *Theophil*.

52 *Brünner Zeitung-Morgenpost*, 5 February 1872, 111–12.

theatre building. But the new plot was just next to it (and next to the new Evangelical Lutheran church by Heinrich Ferstel) and was even larger. The Provincial Committee began negotiating with the city for this plot in January 1871,⁵³ and in 1872, the land was finally purchased.⁵⁴ *Moravská orlice* (and thus also the Czech National Party in Moravia) systematically criticised the efforts to build a new building. Newspaper articles suggested that the intention was to sell the House of Estates cheaply and construct the Building of the Diet expensively. The Czech press suggested that certain unnamed people connected to deputies promoting the new building wanted to enrich themselves secretly.⁵⁵ Nationalism may have blinded the journalists in this case and stoked public debate, but some of the attacks in the Czech press were based on truth (such as that the city intended to demolish the House of Estates after purchasing it at the end of 1872 from the Province).⁵⁶ The city council had considered using the plot for new development and new street connections.⁵⁷ But later, this idea was abandoned under pressure from local experts, and the building served as a grammar school and as part of the municipal administration. In 1935, it was rebuilt as the new City Hall.

Regarding the municipality of Brno, it is necessary to say that the control of the city council was constantly in the hands of Germanophone politicians until 1918. And in the second half of the nineteenth century, all the city councils were advocates of the modernisation of the urban fabric of the city centre. Even some artistically and historically important monuments were demolished in the name of modernisation, like the so-called Royal Chapel from the thirteenth century.⁵⁸ The metamorphosis of the city in this era is accurately described in the book *Neu-Brünn* by the mayor and provincial Deputy Christian d'Elvert. The city representatives wanted to have the new Ring Road embellished by monumental buildings,⁵⁹ therefore, the council negotiated accommodatingly not only with the Provincial Committee in the case of the Diet, but also with other institutions, such as the Evangelical Lutheran church, Turnverein, Technical University and the Museum of Applied Arts.

In 1872, Arnold Weber was chosen as the new architect of the Diet building by the Provincial Committee.⁶⁰ He was to draw on the experience and documen-

53 *Moravské noviny*, 24 January 1871, 2.

54 *Brünner Zeitung-Morgenpost*, 3 January 1872, 6.

55 *Moravská orlice*, 1 November 1871, 1.

56 *Moravská orlice*, 8 December 1871, 2.

57 d'Elvert, *Neu-Brünn*, 68.

58 Galeta, "Images," 180–84.

59 d'Elvert, *Neu-Brünn*, 37, 56, 57, 74.

60 *1843 Náměšť nad Oslavou – †1875 Brno. A graduate of the German Technical University in Brno, he designed several apartment buildings in Brno and participated in the 1870 competition for the municipal theatre. See Zatloukal, *Brněnská architektura*, 232, note 1. The plans

tation generated during the 1867/1868 competition, as well as the documentation prepared by Anton Ullrich.⁶¹ According to the aforementioned report by Eduard Ulrich, Weber's plans were "under the direct influence of the Provincial Committee and, with the participation of the chairmen of the provincial authorities, subjected to repeated and thorough review [...]."⁶²

Deputies—only the German one, as Czechs boycotted the Diet meetings—and provincial officials thus became direct participants in the architectural design process. At the same time, Weber had to comply with the requirement to save the provincial treasury's money. Nevertheless, Eduard Ulrich and his Commission found several unsuitable layouts and functional solutions in the design (including, among others, the size and lighting of rooms). As for the exterior, Ulrich's report stated: "True to the monumental character that such a building's purpose gives it, the exterior appearance is simple, calm, and not without taste."⁶³ Critical voices were raised in the daily press against this 'cheap' project, calling for an open competition and architects with more experience. The press literally demanded someone "*à la Hansen*."⁶⁴ Another article stated that unnamed Viennese experts did not evaluate Weber's project positively.⁶⁵

In the same way as Prokop, Hansen and Ullrich had experienced, Weber's work was not to be realised either, after events took a completely different turn at the end of 1872. Eduard Ulrich's report stated that it was great that Weber's design had tested the possibilities of a new construction site, but that new plans needed to be drawn up on the basis:⁶⁶

"However, to prevent the final resolution of this long-standing issue from being postponed into the unforeseeable future, a public competition does not seem to be a particularly suitable way of obtaining alternative plans. Rather, it would be advisable to recommend a shorter procedure, namely, to invite several renowned architects to draw up new plans, preliminary dimensions and cost estimates within a specified, not excessive, period of time. However, for the representatives of the province to have ready, usable and verified plans at their next meeting next year, the Provincial

stored in ÖStA are probably a fragment of Weber's project for the Diet (sig. AT-OeStA/AVA PKF PS II A-XII-c/23).

61 *Tagesbote aus Mähren und Schlesien*, 19 June 1872, 3; *Mährischer Correspondent*, 10 November 1872, 2–3.

62 AMB fund A1/33 Archiv města Brna, Ústřední spisovna z let 1851–1896, inv. no. 1446, box 486.

63 AMB fund A1/33 Archiv města Brna, Ústřední spisovna z let 1851–1896, inv. no. 1446, box 486.

64 *Mährischer Correspondent*, 21 January 1872, 3.

65 *Tagesbote aus Mähren und Schlesien*, 10 October 1872, 3.

66 AMB, fund A1/33 Archiv města Brna, Ústřední spisovna z let 1851–1896, inv. no. 1446, box 486.

Committee should be strengthened by five deputies who will be appointed by the Provincial Diet for the purpose of obtaining and verifying these plans, both to ensure that any differences of opinion on this matter can be easily resolved through direct exchange of views, and to give the final result greater value thanks to the consensus of a larger number of individual judgements, thus bringing its implementation closer.”⁶⁷

This recommendation was accepted, albeit in a very peculiar manner. Members of the Provincial Diet with personal contacts in Vienna were asked to directly approach at least three renowned architects there to draw up plans for a building costing 500,000 florins.⁶⁸ This, again, was the action only of German deputies, as the Czechs boycotted the Diet until the autumn of 1873. The Provincial Committee therefore decided to keep the entire process firmly in its own hands, including the preparation of the documentation and specifications (the so-called Construction Programme) and the selection of the best project, with five other deputies involved in the decision-making process. Experts from among the provincial employees were to have only an advisory vote, and external architects were not even invited to evaluate the plans. The rejection of an open competition on the grounds of its supposed length sounds almost like a cliché.⁶⁹ Such usurpation of decision-making power over architectural issues by politicians, as well as the previous direct approach to architects or even provincial employees, shows that the members of the Provincial Committee were no longer willing to allow any expert or professional body to interfere with their plans, as was the case with the competition in 1868. They also clearly wanted to avoid any public debate such as that stirred up in the press in 1868 and 1872.

In January 1874, however, the Commission for the Construction of the Provincial Diet had received designs from only two architects and was still seeking a third ‘prominent’ one.⁷⁰ This was not achieved until the middle of the year,

67 AMB fund A1/33 Archiv města Brna, Ústřední spisovna z let 1851–1896, inv. no. 1446, box 486.

68 *Brünner Zeitung*, 29 November 1872, 1945; *Brünner Zeitung-Morgenpost*, 3 February 1873, 106. Perhaps Weber’s long struggle with tuberculosis, which could have prevented him from working, was also a factor. He succumbed to the disease in 1875, at the age of only thirty-two.

69 It was therefore not a regular architectural competition, as had been the case a few years earlier, but rather, in today’s terms, a kind of tender for the preparation of project documentation. Architect Robert Raschka himself calls it a “limited competition” (Raschka, “Das neue”), and this is the source of the repeated references to the “competition of winter 1872–1873” in scholarly texts (Zatloukal, *Brněnská okružní*, 85; Marek, “Monumentalbauten,” 162). On the contrary, August Prokop writes that the project was selected without a competition (Prokop, *Die Markgrafschaft*, 1389). The truth, therefore, lies somewhere between the two subjective opinions of the two architects who were involved.

70 *Brünner Zeitung*, 15 January 1874, 44.

when it was finally announced that the plans and budgets of architects Lothar Abel,⁷¹ Ludwig Zettel⁷² and Robert Raschka with Anton Hefft for the new Provincial Diet would be publicly displayed in the Governor's Palace.⁷³ Since these names are not widely known today, it is clear that the Moravian deputies did not approach figures who were as prominent as they might have wished. There was no Hansen, Schmidt, Ferstel or Semper. Those appointed were among the numerous Viennese architects of the second or third rank.

On 17 September 1874, a new Commission for the Construction of the Provincial Diet was elected. At this time, Czech deputies were once again present in the Diet, and thus became part of the decision-making process. The members were Alois Pražák (Deputy Chairman of the Commission), Josef Fanderlík, Josef Aresin-Fatton, Emanuel Dubský of Třebomyslice (Chairman of the Commission), Béla Kálnoky of Köröspatak, Julius Gomperz, Josef Kafka, Julius Rittler and Anton Leydolt. That is, two members of the Czech National Party in Moravia, three representatives of the Party of the constitutionally loyal large landowners (i.e., the nobility cooperating with German liberals), and four members of the German Liberal Party.⁷⁴ It was therefore not balanced at all, but it reflected the actual division of power in the Diet, where Czechs were in a minority. In September, the aforementioned gentlemen selected the Neo-Renaissance plan by architects Hefft and Raschka, with an estimated cost of 650,000 florins, to be implemented between 1875 and 1878.

The minutes of the Diet's meeting of 13 October 1874, when this decision was presented to the deputies and they were to vote on it, indicate that it was not an easy discussion. It was not at all a question of which proposal to choose or what kind of architecture it was. Rather, the deputies of the Czech National Party in Moravia, especially Alois Pražák, were opposed to the construction of a new building as such. Once again, they tried to push through the restoration of the House of Estates, which they considered an important provincial monument. However, it would have been necessary to buy it back from the city of Brno. Christian d'Elvert, a deputy and mayor of Brno at the same time, responded to Pražák:

“Dr Pražák proposed buying back the provincial house. The city would immediately return the building at the purchase price if it were to be

71 Lothar Abel (1841–1896) studied at the Vienna Polytechnic and Academy and was mainly active in Vienna, primarily as a landscape architect (e.g., today's Sigmund Freud Park).

72 Ludwig Zettel (1821–1891), a native of Velké Zboží near Poděbrady, studied at the Polytechnic in Prague and Vienna and at the Vienna Academy. He specialised in hospitals (Vienna, Bratislava, Krakow) and in apartment buildings, and in 1864 he took part in a competition for the Parliament in Vienna.

73 *Amtsblatt zur Brünner Zeitung*, 29 August 1874, 649.

74 *Moravská orlice*, 18 September 1874, 2.

restored. Still, according to the speaker, the restoration would cost 500,000 florins, so in my opinion, a new house for 600,000 is better.”⁷⁵

With this succinct statement, unburdened by nationalism, d’Elvert perhaps best summed up the feelings that led him to vote in favour of the new building. On the other hand, during this period, almost none of the numerous proposals put forward by Czech politicians were adopted by the Diet, and so this decision, too, was evidence of the overwhelming dominance of German deputies and thus another episode in the nationalist rivalry.

Anton Ullrich was then appointed to supervise the construction; Raschka and Hefft acted as artistic supervisors; and the building was constructed between 1875 and 1878 by Josef Arnold’s company, with the assistance of many specialists. In the end, what *Moravská orlice* had hoped for at the beginning of the whole story in 1863 came to pass:

“We wish for ourselves, for our assembly, for our provincial authorities, for the provincial archives, museum, etc., to have a neat, stately, dignified building—worthy of our beautiful homeland, standing, as is customary in other countries, in a spacious location, and that its magnificent exterior inspires in the observer that sense of solemnity that corresponds to the solemnity of the idea associated with the building.”⁷⁶

Executed building: The vision of prosperity and unity

The relationship between the two chosen architects was not only professional but also personal, as Robert Raschka married Ernestina, the daughter of Anton Hefft (1815, Vienna – 1900, Vienna). At the time of the ‘competition’ in 1872, the older of the two men was already at the end of his career, having reached almost sixty years of age. Previously, he had prepared the blueprints for small-scale private edifices mainly for various members of the Habsburg dynasty.⁷⁷ He probably joined forces with his young son-in-law to support him with his experience, and it was probably he that the Moravian deputies approached for the commission. Robert Raschka (1847, Bucharest – 1908, Vienna) graduated from the Zurich Polytechnic in 1867 under Gottfried Semper, then studied under Friedrich Schmidt at the Vienna Academy and in 1873 became an assistant at the Vienna Polytechnic. He built several apartment buildings in Vienna and, in later years, made his living mainly as a watercolour painter, after being unsuccessful in several major architectural competitions throughout the monarchy.⁷⁸

75 *Moravská orlice*, 15 October 1874, 2.

76 *Moravská orlice*, 13 May 1863, 2.

77 Brandstetter, “Anton.”

78 Galeta, “Der Wiener.”

The Provincial Diet in Brno became the most important project not only for Raschka but also for Hefft. They designed it in accordance with the building plot as a block structure with inner courtyards, similar to Josef Hudetz's earlier plan. The building's serious expression is mainly due to its Neo-Renaissance Italianate symmetrical massing and horizontality (Figures 10 and 11). With other Raschka's projects, critics have noted the architect's tendency to draw on motifs from his famous Zurich professor's buildings,⁷⁹ and it can also be said that the Brno building is based on the work of Gottfried Semper. Coherence with the building of the Zurich Polytechnic itself, where Raschka studied (opened in 1864), is particularly evident. This is clear not only from the overall layout of the façade and floor plans, which are not innovative in either case, but also the individual details: for example, the attic above the main risalit or the rusticated Tuscan half-columns at the entrance.

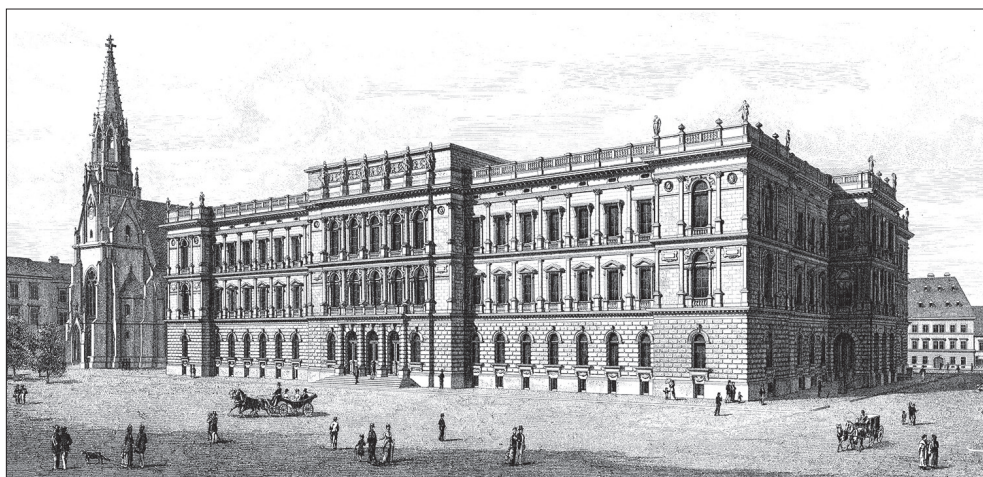


Figure 10 Robert Raschka and Anton Hefft, design for the Moravian Diet, perspective view, 1874
Source: Repro: *Allgemeine Bauzeitung*, (1879), table 68. ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

The building's floor plan was well-designed to accommodate various functions and the needs of provincial authorities. The ground floor served primarily as an administrative space, housing the Provincial Pawnshop, the Mortgage Bank, the Treasury, and the steward's apartment. Two entrances in the central risalits of the longer façades were dedicated to these institutions. The first floor was the most significant, reserved for the deputies. They accessed it through a separate entrance located in arcade of risalit on the east side of the building, allowing them to arrive by carriage via a ramp. Upon entering the vestibule, they could ascend the staircase to this level, which featured the assembly hall, conference rooms, and offices for members of the Provincial Committee and the Provincial Governor. Additionally,

79 F., "Die Concurenz."

The above mentioned external decorations were designed directly by Raschka and Hefft in the form of statues and dozens of figural reliefs. The attics of the two main risalits on longer façades are crowned with figures representing Peace, Lawmaking, History, Prosperity, Poetry and Patriotism⁸⁰ (Figure 12). Above the windows of the risalits, there are a total of fourteen different female personifications and fourteen male personifications, which are in some cases repeated. These include music, architecture, education, hunting, the figure of Hercules and, next to him, a boy with a plaque bearing the inscription LYKU — SOLON — NUMA, i.e., Lycurgus, Solon, and Numa Pompilius, who were three great ancient lawmakers. However, one could also find ‘new’ personifications, such as those of the railways or the arts industry (Figures 13 and 14). The allegorical figures together thus ideologically represent all the wealth and knowledge that Moravia and the Moravians possess, while some point to what the legislators who use the building should be like. The Provincial Diet building thus represents the entire country not only through its serious and monumental architecture, but also through its decorative programme, which is linked and subordinated to architecture. On the other hand, Raschka and Hefft designed the façades decorations in a classical way. The personifications are universal and convey general ideas; they are not bound to any local traditions or history. As such, they could in fact embellish almost any type of public building in almost any location in Europe or its colonies. It is also questionable whether the public or the deputies recognised all



Figure 12 Josef Schönfeld, study of statue of Prosperity, photo Josef Kunzfeld
Source: [Wikimedia](#)

80 Cenková, *Vkusné*, 133–37. Originally, the sculptures on the main façade were created by Josef Schönfeld from Vienna and those on the rear façade by the company Loos & Tomola (Adolf Loos Sr. and Johann Tomola) from Brno, with clear differences in quality between the two workshops. Today, identical copies of Schönfeld's sculptures are located on both sides. The reliefs above the windows are also from the Loos & Tomola workshop based on drawings made by Raschka and Hefft.



Figure 13 Loos & Tomola, Anton Hefft and Robert Raschka, Figure of Hercules and Personification of Justice, holding plate with inscriptions LYKU – SOLON – NUMA. Photo: Author, 2014.



Figure 14 Loos & Tomola, Anton Hefft and Robert Raschka, Personifications of Drawing and Architecture. Photo: Author, 2014.

the themes. Therefore, one must see the decorative programme as a general artistic idea that visually highlights the building's significance but does not mirror the local context. Given all the nationalistic frictions, this may well have been the intention.

In addition to allegorical figures outside, the interior of the assembly hall features the Moravian coat of arms and other symbols.⁸¹ Moreover, in the vestibule on

81 There is a Moravian eagle on the cornice, opposite which used to be an Austro-Hungarian eagle (apparently in the form of a small state coat of arms), which was repainted as a Bohemian lion after the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic. On the other two sides are the coats of arms of the two historically important cities of Brno and Olomouc (in their pre-1918 forms,

the right side of the building, which served only as an entrance for the deputies, there is the so-called final stone: a memorial plaque with an inscription celebrating the Emperor and the Provincial Committee (Figure 15). This inscription is in Latin; that is, they found a clever solution to represent both Czechs and Germans without the need for a bilingual inscription. On the border of the plaque, linden and oak leaves unfold peacefully side by side. The former are a symbol of the Slavs (Czech Moravians), the latter of the Germanic peoples (German Moravians). The visual metaphor of the sprigs growing from the same 'root' and coexisting peacefully side by side indicates the cooperation and strong bond between the two nations of Moravia, which ceased to be possible just at the time of the construction of the Provincial Assembly.



Figure 15 Adolf Loos Sr., Anton Hefft and Robert Raschka, Final stone with leaves on the bottom. Photo: Author, 2015.

Conclusion

Fifteen long years passed from the start of negotiations to the grand opening of the Diet building. During this time, numerous architects prepared plans in vain, and, financially, thousands of florins were spent needlessly on preparatory work (according to the press, at least 20,000 florins by 1871, with another 10,000 allocated for new plans in 1872).⁸² In addition, the Diet decided to spend no more than 500,000 florins on the new building that, as stated, should be “worthy of the country, but simple and inexpensive in its architecture.” All members of the Diet agreed that the province needed the funds for other priorities. However, the final amount rose to 891,610 florins, an increase of almost eighty percent.⁸³

which do not correspond to today's). The rest of the decoration is purely decorative, except for the recurring female head with nine rays, whose iconographic meaning is unclear (perhaps Freedom?).

82 *Moravská orlice*, 9 April 1871, 2; *Brünner Zeitung*, 29 November 1872, 1945.

83 *Mährisches Tagblatt*, 18 June 1880, 6.

The protracted process of constructing the Provincial Diet building in Brno reveals the complex interplay of politics, finance, architectural practice, and the emerging nationalist-political discourse in the Habsburg Monarchy following the introduction of parliamentarism in 1861. What began as a seemingly straightforward infrastructural need—securing an adequate seat for the newly established representative body—evolved into a multifaceted debate in which questions of historical continuity, functional suitability, fiscal responsibility, and symbolic representation intertwined. For Czech deputies, preserving the historic House of Estates was not merely a matter of practicality or economics, but a means of asserting historical legitimacy and cultural memory rooted in the pre-Habsburg past. In contrast, German liberal deputies tended to frame their arguments in terms of rational modernisation and financial efficiency, though their stance was heavily influenced by nationalist ideas.

In the new constitutional system of the Dual Monarchy, the architectural competition of 1867–1868 represents the first attempt to create a building of this type. As such, it reveals some level of uncertainty about the appropriate form for this kind of building. The jury's criticism of the competition conditions itself points to unclear requirements for the Diet building. August Prokop's ambivalent approach—he submitted both a Neo-Gothic and a Neo-Renaissance design—illustrates the diversity of stylistic options being considered at the time, but also shows that style alone was not the decisive factor. Financial constraints and practical considerations were equally important, if not more so. The subsequent shift toward direct political control over the design process represents a major turning point. By rejecting an open competition in favour of invited proposals and internal decision-making, the Provincial Committee asserted its authority over the architectural outcomes. This step reflects both dissatisfaction with earlier procedures and an effort to ensure that the final project aligned with economic priorities. At the same time, it reveals the extent to which architecture had become an instrument of governance and dominance—particularly during periods of Czech political boycott, when German liberal and aristocratic representatives effectively monopolised decision-making.

The final form of the building by Anton Hefft and Robert Raschka, in a restrained Neo-Renaissance style, represents a compromise influenced more by pragmatic than ideological considerations. The choice of style, often misinterpreted in retrospect through a national-political lens, appears in this context to be a conventional, widely accepted architectural language suitable for the public institutions of the time.

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