

Mining Bethlehem at Banská Štiavnica - example of mining heritage in Slovakia

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ABSTRACT

In the article we are dealing with the specific mining religious masterpiece mining Bethlehem. We would like to explain its grandeur and importance for Banská Štiavnica mining tourism. In the article is detailed description of the Bethlehem. At the end are mentioned few prices, which was the Bethlehem awarded. In the conclusion is reference on methods how to promote this masterpiece.

Key words: mining tourism, Banská Štiavnica, Bethlehem

INTRODUCTION

The Slovak Mining Museum in Banská Štiavnica is an extraordinary source of information on the history and evolution of mining traditions, as well as artifacts of the material history of this culture. It is the only institution of its kind in Slovakia. It includes documentation on symbols and attributes pertaining to mining and also extremely rare materials on student traditions from the Mining and Forestry Academy in Banská Štiavnica, as well as material concerning the artistic and sacral life of the miners. In the recent past only a few mining associations and guilds, as well as individual mining enthusiasts, have focused on this cultural tradition.

MINING TOURISM, MINING HERITAGE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Mining heritage in Slovak terminology forms a part of the category "technical monuments". But term mining heritage has a much wider meaning. Incorporates all: natural, historical, architectural, technological, technical, artistic,

documentary, geomorphologic, and other aspects. Thus mining heritage includes, in great part, the heritage of the miner as a human being within the mining communities that had invested their possessions and lives into specific mining conditions (Rybár, 2013; Rybár & Gómez, 2014).

According the classification of mining heritage made by Javier Carvajal Domingo Gómez (2010), Pavol Rybár (2013) modified this classification on the way we usually understand in terms of Institute of Geotourism (Tab. 1). All subsets shown in the table, as natural heritage, geological heritage, etc., relate to mining heritage or to geosites.

One of the most interesting area of the cultural (mining) is the preservation of customs, and mythology associated with mining.

As good examples of cultural (mining) heritage we should present:

- The "Mine in a Bottle" and "stufenwerk" (models of mining machinery), with their thematic portrayals (often including mineral samples) of the working life of the miners and their activities represent a specific type of mining folk art. Both kinds of models are represented in the

Tab. 1 Distribution of Mining Heritage (after Gómez, 2010)

Mining heritage			
Natural heritage	Geological heritage	Mixed heritage	Cultural heritage
Fauna	Paleontology	Landscape	History
Flora	Mineralogy	Ecology	Prehistory
Minerals	Petrography		Ethnology
	Geomorphology		Architecture
	Structure geology		Technology
	Hydrology		Technical objects
	Hydrogeology		Mining school
	Vulcanology		Development of science
			Royal Institutions
			Mining museums
			Archives
			Significant families bound with mining and metallurgy
			Mining law
			Customs, manners, mythology

gallery of the Slovak Mining Museum with its more than 600 works. The mechanized “stufenwerks”, consisting of multiple levels (usually 4), illustrate the life and work of the miners both on and beneath the surface. Many of the themes representing the mine and miner’s activities which we find in the “Mine in a Bottle” are repeated; thus, we commonly find the Knocker, horses, dumping machines and the cross/Calvary on the highest horizon. Below we often see tunnels and scenes from working life – e.g. miners entering and exiting the mine or pushing the trolleys, or the mine’s carpenters fashioning wooden equipment.

- The “Mines in a Bottle” – mine models inserted into glassy bottles or built on a wooden base – are linked to similar European folk art (for example the “ship in a bottle” found in 16th century Western Europe). The primary material used for the inserts was wood, which was combined with materials like paper, moss and mineral samples used by the miners for decoration. These portrayals of the work and lives of the miners is a specific folk art only found in mining regions. The miners who produced these works named them “The Mine in a

Bottle”, but they were also known as “The Bottles of Patience”, a name which applies to all similar art, regardless of motif. This broader appellation demonstrates the character of the artist well, since patience was certainly a requirement additional to the required technical knowledge and skill. An additional special characteristic was that the wooden insert could not be removed without breaking the bottle.

THE GENESIS OF THE MINING BETHLEHEM OF BANSKÁ ŠTIAVNICA

The creator of the Banská Štiavnica Bethlehem is Ing. Arch Peter Chovan, graduate of the faculty of architecture SVŠT Bratislava. Since his childhood he has a very special relationship with wood. The Bethlehem he has created represents the rich mining history and famous traditions of one of the most beautiful cities in Slovakia.

He conceived of building the biggest Bethlehem in Slovakia in early 2007, and the idea was solemnly presented to the town on December 15 of that year. It is now located in a gallery in the town center,

opposite the Hall Square.

The creator of the Bethlehem did the initial work along with his nephew, and they were later joined by Bc. Michal Votýpka and Ing. Martin Baja. While the latter are amateurs, they readily accommodate their work to the creator's style and imagination. The primary materials used are basswood, cherry and oak (Herčko, 2009; Novák, 2009).

The right side of the Bethlehem, dominated by a portrayal of the city center, was completed first and presented to the public in March 2008. The left side, depicting the New Castle, was presented in December of that year, when the length of the Bethlehem had reached 14 meters, with a width of 2.5m and a height of 3m. The central section, devoted to crafts and craftsmen, was added in December 2009 around a supporting column of the gallery and is the newest addition. The creator continues his work on the final version, mostly by refining and adding to the moving figures.

At present the Bethlehem is 21 meters long, 2.5 m wide and 3 m high. Of the approximately 800 figures, half are moving. According to its creator, this is not the final

version, as the theme of mining in Banská Štiavnica is inexhaustible. See the figure1.

The base of the Štiavnica Bethlehem is formed by eight elves, the monarchs of the underground. Above them are representations of the medieval methods of gold and silver mining, complete with figures of the miners in typical clothing. Above the mining shafts we find various pumping mechanisms, from primitive bailing with pails to the sophisticated modern water-column machines designed by the Hell family.

In the center between the elves is placed the historical emblem of the city, along with Biblical motifs of Bethlehem and Jesus' birth – such as the Three Kings worshipping along with shepherds and miners. Behind these we find the panorama of Banská Štiavnica with its dominant and most famous buildings. The foreground shows the main street in perspective along with its upper terrace, the Trotuar. This street is the site of the traditional Salamander parade, depicted here with 28 figures in historical costumes and other figures typical of the parade, led by a shepherd carrying a lizard (Fig. 2).

Above Academic Street in the Upper



Fig. 1 Front view of the mining Bethlehem (photo by: Herčko)

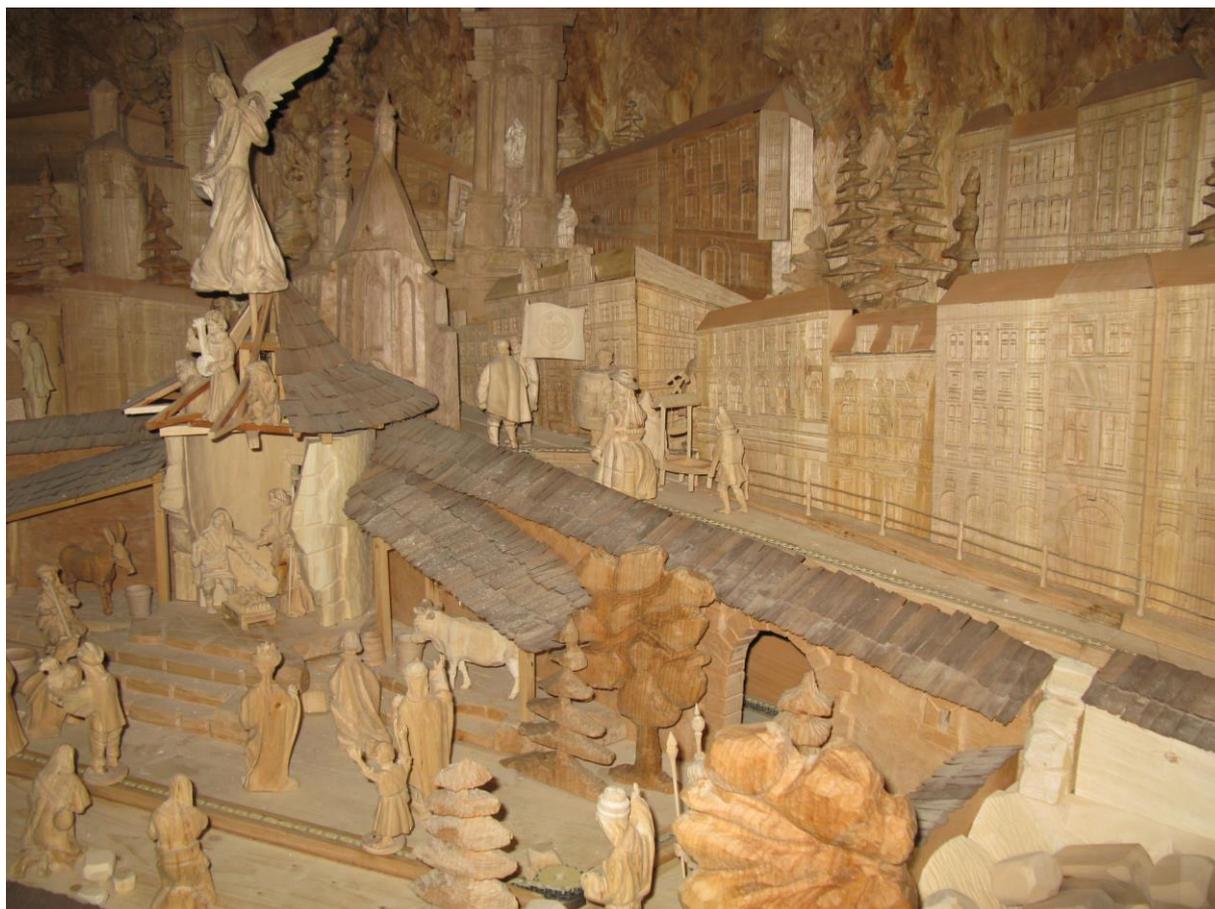


Fig. 2 Bethlehem main view (photo by: Herčko)

Botanical Garden are elaborate new buildings of the University with figures of its students, with the Chemistry building and its laboratories on the left, and the Mining and Metallurgy Academy on the right. Between is the Forestry Academy building. These structures all date from 1894-1912. Also represented in the panorama of buildings are facades of the Kammerhof, Jewish synagogue, Evangelical church, City Hall with its Virgin Mary statue, Fritz House, Plague Column, Trinity Square, Old Castle and statues of St. Cathrine (the patron of miners) and St. Barbara and Piarg Gate. On the right side of the Bethlehem we find the Kalvaria which dominates the city, along with the church of St. Alžbeta at the end of Kammerhof and Dolnastreet. We also find Antol's gate, built for protection during the time of Turkish attacks (Fig. 3). On the left side of the Bethlehem, still in progress, is a representation of the New Castle, an important city monument built in

1564-1571.

In the background is Sitno, the highest hill in the Štiavnica Mountains. Below it we find coal diggers and miners at work.

In the newest part of the Bethlehem, traditional crafts are depicted along with the Štiavnická Anča train. Above the train are craftsmen, millers, bakers, butchers, etc. Atop is a typical city scene with music.

During 2014 additional scenes will be added, showing 7 miracles of Štiavnica's world.

This extraordinary Bethlehem with its moving figures and machines is still not completed, but the work continues into the future.

THE PRESENTATION

The creator attended a worldwide exhibition of Bethlehems in France in 2011, which annually presents over 1200 Bethlehems from around the world. The



Fig. 3 Kalvaria Source (photo by: Herčko)

Banská Štiavnica Bethlehem was deemed the most interesting in the exhibition. He receives many requests to appear from international exhibitions every year, but faces difficulties with transportation.

CONCLUSION

This Bethlehem and its creator are very important to the culture and history of this city. The Visiting Book in the gallery records numerous visitors such as the Slovak President, the King of Norway and several ambassadors.

Well presented advertisement should elevate Mining Bethlehem to the piece of coveted element of mining tourism complex offer in Banská Štiavnica.

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