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ENLARGED DETAILS AND CLOSE-UP VIEWS:  
ART REPRODUCTION IN 1930S CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Years ago, while writing my diploma thesis in art history at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague, I came across several reproductions in a 1935 issue of a magazine called *Volné směry* (*Free Tendencies*), depicting the whole and details of a medieval aquamanile from Hradec Králové (ill. 1). I managed to identify these reproductions using photographs and large-format negatives from part of the estate of the photographer Josef Sudek, which were stored in the photo archive of the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences.<sup>1</sup> Thanks to these reproductions, I could date the images as belonging to the period before 1935, when they were reprinted in the magazine, while the existence of vintage prints confirmed my suspicions that the reproduced photographs could have been taken by Josef Sudek. This first experience with historical photographic material, with information gleaned on the basis of comparing negatives, vintage prints, and photo-mechanical reproductions, pre-determined the nature of my approach to further research in the field of art reproduction. This paper clarifies the circumstances in 1930s Czechoslovakia – historical, institutional, and personal – that led publications devoted to art and art history to begin using photographic detail to a previously unheard-of extent, both for aesthetic and practical reasons. Detail can enlarge the work (or a part of it), zoom in, cut out the surrounding context, emphasise motifs, or depict the surface or structure of the material.

“Photographs of sculpture are as culturally determined, as ‘datable,’ as self-referential, and as individual as the verbal art-historical essays that accompany them; and they will vary as much in imagination and enduring quality,”<sup>2</sup> Mary Bergstein wrote in 1992. Along with other art historians who, at this time, began asking questions relating to the function of photographs

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<sup>1</sup> Available through an online database at [www.sudekproject.cz/en](http://www.sudekproject.cz/en) [accessed: February 18, 2022].

<sup>2</sup> M. Bergstein, “Lonely Aphrodites: On the Documentary Photography of Sculpture”, *The Art Bulletin* 1992, 74(3), pp. 475–498, quoted p. 498.



1. Josef Sudek, [Aquamanile from Hradec Králové, 13th century], period reproduction, in: *Volné směry* 1935, 31, pp. 252–253. Photo © Martin Netočný, Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences. © The Estate of Josef Sudek

of artworks with greater intensity, she helped establish art reproduction histories.<sup>3</sup> Texts were published on the transformation of artworks through the medium of photography; describing the mutual influence between art and

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, *Pygmalion Photographe. La Sculpture devant la caméra, 1844–1936*, eds. R.M. Mason, H. Pinet, Geneva 1985; *The Kiss of Apollo: Photography and Sculpture 1845 to the Present*, ed. J. Fraenkel, San Francisco 1992; B.E. Savedoff, "Transforming Images: Photographs of Representations", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 1992, 2, pp. 345–356; *Sculptor-Photographer. Photographie-Sculpture*, ed. M. Frizot, D. Păini,

photography; mapping photography as an irreplaceable technology of modern art history, or else as a tool that allowed for the development of connoisseurship; and other related topics. It is clear – also on the basis of these numerous references to older literature that aimed to prove the importance of photography to making the field of art history more “scientific” – that research with this focus presents a new and important perspective.<sup>4</sup> At around the same time, an interest in the materiality of photography appeared in photography studies, with the attention of researchers shifting to photographs as objects and to their “social lives”. “Materiality translates the abstract and representational ‘photography’ into ‘photographs’ as objects that exists in time and space”, to quote Elizabeth Edwards. In this perspective, a photograph is understood “as belonging in a continuing process of production, exchange, usage and meaning”.<sup>5</sup> A series of conferences on photographic archives, the publication of the Florence Declaration,<sup>6</sup> aiming to draw attention to the value of analogue archives in a digital era, and publishing and exhibition projects initiated in recent years then consummately confirmed the validity of the material approach also in the field of the photography of artworks.<sup>7</sup> Studying photographic reproductions thus means untangling complex networks of agents (photographers, publishers, photo agencies, picture libraries, printing companies, etc.), works (photographed artworks and photographs of artworks in all their different materialities, including original prints as well as printed reproductions), and their various relationships and functions, always with a view to the specific use of the given image.

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Paris 1993; G.A. Johnson, *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension*, Cambridge 1999.

<sup>4</sup> See E.N. Bohrer, “Photographic Perspectives. Photography and the Institutional Formation of Art History”, in: *Art History and Its Institutions*, ed. E. Mansfield, London 2002, pp. 246–259; G.A. Johnson, “‘(Un)richtige Aufnahme’: Renaissance Sculpture and the Visual Historiography of Art History”, *Art History* 2013, 36(1), pp. 12–51; *Photography and Sculpture: The Art Object in Reproduction*, eds. S. Hamill and M.R. Luke, Los Angeles 2017; *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension*, ed. G.A. Johnson, Cambridge 1998.

<sup>5</sup> E. Edwards, J. Hart, “Introduction. Photographs as Objects”, in: *Photographs, Objects, Histories. On the Materiality of Images*, ed. E. Edwards, J. Hart, London 2004, p. 2 and 4.

<sup>6</sup> Available online: <<https://www.khi.fi.it/en/photothek/florence-declaration.php>> [accessed: February 21, 2022].

<sup>7</sup> See *Photo Archives and the Photographic Memory of Art History*, ed. C. Caraffa, Berlin 2011 or *Photo-Objects: On the Materiality of Photographs and Photo Archives*, ed. J. Bärnighausen, C. Caraffa, S. Klamm, F. Schneider, P. Wodtke, Berlin 2019, available online: <<https://www.mprl-series.mpg.de/studies/12/2/index.html>> [accessed: February 18, 2022].

## FROM SURPRISING CUTOUTS TO TELLING DETAILS

The arc drawn by photography in interwar Czechoslovakia<sup>8</sup> is, to an extent, characterised by Anna Fárová's description of Josef Sudek's photographic oeuvre: "from pictorialism to objecthood, from picturesque compositions to an understanding of form and object. That is the meaning of Sudek's development in the 1930s. And this quality was imported into his artistic photography by reproducing statues and paintings".<sup>9</sup> In his 1931 text "The Tasks of Modern Photography", Karel Teige lists the important moments in photography that took place at the end of the previous decade (the exhibitions *Film und Foto* in Stuttgart and *Das Lichtbild* in Munich, the books *Foto Auge* by Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold, *Es kommt der neue Fotograf!* by Werner Gräff, *Die Welt ist schön* by Albert Renger-Patzsch, *Métal* by Germaine Krull, *Köpfe des Alltags* by Helmar Lerski, the *Arts et métiers graphique* review, or Roh's Fototek book series). He quotes Lázsló Moholy-Nagy's statement that "photography invented a century ago is being truly discovered only today", claiming that avant-garde photographs "have enriched our visual experience and sharpened our ability to look and see", whilst also alerting us to the dangers of "sick l'art-pour-l'artism" and the irrelevance of photography as a "sport for the bored bourgeoisie". Instead, he suggests the example of the Soviet amateur worker and peasant photographers – "sensitive seismographs and tachometers of the rhythm of construction and the grandiose epic of the new world".<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See M.S. Witkovsky, *Foto: Modernity in Central Europe: 1918–1945*, Washington 2007; A. Dufek, U. Eskildsen, *Tschechische Fotografie 1918–1938*, Essen 1984; A. Dufek, "Světlo, stín a objekt v české fotografii třicátých let" [Light, Shadow, and Object in Czech Photography of the 1930s], in: *Linie / Barva / Tvar* [Line / Colour / Form], ed. H. Rousová, Prague 1988, pp. 87–113; A. Dufek, "Fotografie dvacátých let" [Photography of the 1920s] and "Fotografie třicátých let" [Photography in the 1930s], in: *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění 1890–1938* [The History of Czech Fine Art 1890–1938], IV/2, Prague 1998, pp. 205–221 and 323–353; *Czech Photographic Avant-garde 1918–1948*, ed. V. Birgus, Prague 2002; V. Birgus, J. Mlčoch, *Czech Photography of the 20th Century*, Prague 2010; J. Toman, *Foto/montáž tiskem / Photo/montage in print*, Prague 2009; P. Tausk, "The Roots of Modern Photography in Czechoslovakia", *History of Photography* 1979, 3(3), pp. 253–271. For a historical overview of photography of artworks in Czechoslovakia, see J. Mlčoch, "Josef Sudek and the Photography of Works of Art – his Predecessors and Contemporaries", in: *Instant Presence: Representing Art in Photography*, ed. H. Buddeus, V. Lahoda, K. Mašterová, Prague 2017, pp. 59–79.

<sup>9</sup> A. Fárová, *Josef Sudek*, Prague 1995, p. 104.

<sup>10</sup> K. Teige, "Úkoly moderní fotografie" [The Tasks of Modern Photography], in: *Moderná tvorba uživatelská*, Bratislava 1931, pp. 77–78. For an English translation, see K. Teige,

In the 1930s, the newly defined, revolutionary potential of photography could develop not only in the field of photography as art but also in other spheres of society. An important part was played by the exhibitions organised by the Marxist photography and film theorist Lubomír Linhart, as well as his publication *Sociální fotografie* (*Social Photography*).<sup>11</sup> The use of photographic detail or a strong diagonal was suddenly no longer an aesthetisation or making strange of the seen but, most importantly, a way of bringing closer and drawing attention to the content depicted. These are no longer unexpected segments<sup>12</sup> but functional details that allow the content to stand out. In 1936, the International Photography Exhibition (Mezinárodní výstava fotografie) was held at the Mánes Union of Fine Arts in Prague (Spolek výtvarných umělců Mánes), a belated local twist on the Film und Foto exhibition,<sup>13</sup> presenting photography not only as an artistic medium but also as a significant social agent. Modern photography, as Linhart expressed it at the time, also encompassed scientific photography, including photographs of artworks.<sup>14</sup> At the very end of the 1930s, the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague (Umělecko-průmyslové museum) put on an exhibition titled One Hundred Years of Czech Photography (*Sto let české fotografie*), “a demonstration of the concept of modern photography in all its breadth – in art, technology, advertising, poster production, printing, and life in general”,<sup>15</sup> which, similarly to the projects that preceded it, showed photography as a pan-societal phenomenon.

A key part was played by the State Graphic School in Prague (Státní grafická škola), headed from 1932 by the graphic designer Ladislav Sutnar, with photographers including Jaromír Funke, Josef Ehm, Rudolf Gilbert, and Otokar Hejzlar on the staff. Several significant publications were created at the school in the 1930s, exceptional in their innovative approach to the use of reproductions. These included experiments with the use of reproductions on a scale of 1:1, i.e. details in real size, using full bleed printing (to the edge

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“The Tasks of Modern Photography”, in: *Photography in the Modern Era*, ed. Ch. Phillips, New York 1989, pp. 312–322, quoted p. 313, 318, 319 and 320.

<sup>11</sup> L. Linhart, *Sociální fotografie* [Social Photography], Prague 1934.

<sup>12</sup> See Birgus, Mlčoch, *Czech Photography of the 20th Century*, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> F. Parkmann, “A Czechoslovak Variation on *Fifo*”, *Études Photographiques* 2012, 29, available online: <<https://journals.openedition.org/etudesphotographiques/3475>> [accessed: February 20, 2022].

<sup>14</sup> After the Film und Foto exhibition in Stuttgart, scientific photographs were also presented at the exhibitions of new photography in Prague in 1930 and 1931. See Birgus, Mlčoch, *Czech Photography of the 20th Century*, p. 63.

<sup>15</sup> *Sto let české fotografie 1839–1939* [One Hundred Years of Czech Photography 1839–1939], ed. Z. Wirth, Prague 1939.

of the paper, with no margins), as in the case of a book on the details of painterly styles<sup>16</sup> by the art historian Vojtěch Volavka<sup>17</sup> (ill. 2). In the mid-1930s, the Photographed World (Fotografovaný svět) editorial series was created at the school, aiming to promote photography “as a means of objective knowledge and not as a means of poor expression of objective impressions”.<sup>18</sup> In the end, only the first announced title was released, *Photography Sees the Surface* (Fotografie vidí povrch), with graphic design by Ladislav



2. Laboratoire du musée du Louvre, Institut Maïnini, [Frans Hals, *The Gypsy Girl*, 1628, detail], period reproduction, in: V. Volavka, *Malba a malířský rukopis* [*Painting and Brush-work*], Prague 1939. Photo © Martin Netočný, Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences

<sup>16</sup> The Czech word “rukopis” is used, meaning handwriting or manuscript and signifying the manner in which a painter or sculptor approaches technical details. In the case of painting, “brush-work” may be more precise, but in order to include also the details of individual sculptors’ styles, we have opted for the more general “painterly styles” – translator’s note.

<sup>17</sup> V. Volavka, *Malířský rukopis ve francouzském obraze nové doby* [*Painterly Styles in French Paintings of Modernity*], Prague 1934 and V. Volavka, *Malba a malířský rukopis* [*Painting and Brush-work*], Prague 1939.

<sup>18</sup> L. Linhart, “Fotografie objevuje svět” [*Photography Discovers the World*], *Panorama* 1935, 6, p. 84.

Sutnar and detailed photographs printed full bleed.<sup>19</sup> It is most likely that it was Jaromír Funke,<sup>20</sup> a leading Czech theorist of new photography, author of photograms and avant-garde photographs, and teacher, who wrote in the unsigned introduction to this book about photography as a “truthful witness and document of the state and appearance of objects”, “technically perfect and photogenically interesting.”<sup>21</sup> Among the printed reproductions are several details of artworks, accompanied by texts written by art historians. In his essay, the art historian Vincenc Kramář makes several references to the reproduced photograph of Albrecht Dürer’s *Feast of the Rosary*. He writes on the convoluted fate of the painting, claiming that “the photograph tells us about all of this in great detail”, such as when shadows alert us to spots that have been inpainted.<sup>22</sup> In his commentary on the photograph of Josef Václav Myslbek’s portrait bust of Knight Vojtěch Lanna (ill. 3), the art historian Václav Vilém Štech made use of the photographic rendering of the surface of the statue to provide support for a detailed description of the sculptor’s approach to material: “the photograph conveys a lively, un-academic modelling that uses small, diagonal surfaces, which slant and rise in a continual transition among contrasting heights and depths”. He refers directly to the reproduced frame: “The enlarged photograph provides insight into the details and individual qualities of a work that is one of the greatest achievements ever reached in Czech art”.<sup>23</sup>

The same photograph of the detail of the bust of the Prague industrialist (and also art collector and benefactor) Knight Vojtěch Lanna is also

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<sup>19</sup> *Fotografie vidí povrch. La Photographie reflète l’aspect des choses* [Photography Sees the Surface], ed. J. Funke, L. Sutnar, Prague 1935, unpag.

<sup>20</sup> See M.S. Witkovsky, J. Toman, “Scratching the Surface of Czech Modern Photography”, in: *Photography Sees the Surface. La photographie reflète l’aspect des choses*, ed. L. Sutnar, J. Funke, Ann Arbor 2004, unpag. See also A. Dufek, “Jaromír Funke and Czech Photography, 1920–39”, in: *Object: Photo. Modern Photographs: The Thomas Walther Collection 1909–1949*, New York 2014, available online: <<https://www.moma.org/interactives/objectphoto/assets/essays/Dufek.pdf>> [accessed: February 20, 2022].

<sup>21</sup> “Photography sees the surface”, in: *Photography Sees the Surface*, unpag., trans. by J. Toman and M. S. Witkovsky.

<sup>22</sup> V. Kramář, “Detail of a Painting by Albrecht Dürer: The Feast of the Rosary”, in: *Photography Sees the Surface*.

<sup>23</sup> V.V. Štech, “Metal, Richly Articulated Through Treatment and Lighting, Retains Traces of Modelling by the Sculptor’s Hand”, in: *Photography Sees the Surface*. For more on Štech and photographs of artworks, see H. Buddeus, “Mlsný a zvědavý V.V. Štech” [The Sweet-toothed and Curious V.V. Štech], in: T. Dvořák et al., *Fotografie, socha, objekt* [Photography, Sculpture, Object], Prague 2017, pp. 7–29.





3. Josef Ehm and his pupils, [J. V. Myslbek, *Knight Vojtěch Lanna*, 1909, detail], period reproductions, in: *Fotografie vidí povrch. La Photographie reflète l'aspect des choses [Photography Sees the Surface]*, ed. J. Funke, L. Sutnar, Prague 1935, unpag. Photo © Martin Netočný, Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences. © The Estate of Josef Ehm

reproduced in a monograph on Myslbek published in 1942 with a text by art historian Vojtěch Volavka, already mentioned above in connection to his book dedicated to painterly styles.<sup>24</sup> All photographic documentation was made for this purpose by Josef Ehm, who built a reputation as one of the leading photographers of artworks, along with Josef Sudek or Alexandr Paul. Vojtěch Volavka's list of publications makes it clear that his interest in the painterly or sculptural style of individual artists went along perfectly with the use of photographic detail. Here, for instance, it is manifested in two reproductions detailing the sculptural approach to the pleating of Cardinal Schwarzenberg's mantle, a statue by Myslbek located in St. Vitus Cathedral (ill. 4). For an example of the link in content between reproduced photographs and information contained in the text, we can also look to Volavka's monograph of the painter and son of the renowned Czech scientist, Kar-

<sup>24</sup> V. Volavka, *Josef Václav Myslbek*, Prague 1942.





4. Josef Ehm, [J. V. Myslbek, *Cardinal Schwarzenberg*, detail], digitally converted negative, before 1942, Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences. Photo © Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences. © The Estate of Josef Ehm

el Purkyně. Using reproductions of details of Purkyně's paintings, Volavka draws the reader's attention to the unusual height of "the colourful dough that the brush is literally wading through."<sup>25</sup> A combination of detailed shots of the canvas with Volavka's juicy description of the painterly style gives the reader the opportunity to see painting not merely as the depiction of a particular subject matter, but as a physical process, as the recording of an authorial gesture, and as a material work.

<sup>25</sup> V. Volavka, *Karel Purkyně*, Prague 1942, p. 77.

## BETWEEN PRACTICAL AIMS AND AESTHETIC CHOICES

For the purposes of this study, I have selected as an exemplary close-up view<sup>26</sup> the 31st volume of *Volné směry* (*Free Tendencies*) magazine, a significant artistic periodical published in Prague between 1896 and 1949 by the Mánes Union of Fine Arts. The fact that the reasons for purchasing the 1935 volume were purely personal ultimately plays an insignificant role. (I was inspired to make the purchase by several reproductions of the Hradec Králové aquamanile mentioned in the introduction that I identified as photographs by Josef Sudek years ago.)<sup>27</sup> It became clear that the magazine allows one to follow a number of other specific micro-histories that deserve a more detailed analysis and that also possess broader validity with regard to the debate about photographs of artworks and the use of photographic detail. The series of detailed views framed by one year of the magazine's publication provides clear borders we can operate in, as well as stepping beyond them if needed.

Pages 205–210 of this volume of *Volné směry* present an article by Bohuslav Slánský titled “Repairing the Paintings at Karlštejn Castle”, illustrated by several photographic details of 14th-century panel paintings attributed to Master Theodoric<sup>28</sup> (ill. 5). Since the early 1930s, Slánský had been developing scientific restoration methods making use of X-ray and microphotographic images.<sup>29</sup> He was a champion of conservation methods and also produced diligent written and photographic documentation of the individual steps. Part of the detailed photographic documentation of Theodoric's

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<sup>26</sup> Concerning microhistories and close-up views in photography studies, Costanza Caraffa refers to Elizabeth Edwards as the one “who programmatically proposed the technique of close reading in the interpretation of photo-objects” (E. Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums*, Oxford and New York 2001). See C. Caraffa, “Objects of Value: Challenging Conventional Hierarchies in the Photo Archive”, in: *Photo-Objects: On the Materiality of Photographs and Photo Archives*.

<sup>27</sup> See J. Květ, “Akvamanile z Hradce Králové v Národním muzeu v Praze” [The Hradec Králové Aquamanile at the National Museum in Prague], *Volné směry* 1935, 31, pp. 250–257.

<sup>28</sup> B. Slánský, “Oprava obrazů z hradu Karlštejna” [Renovation of the Paintings of Karlštejn Castle], *Volné směry* 1935, 31, pp. 205–210. The author of the reproduced photographs remains unknown. We can assume that they were taken by Josef Sudek, as among his original negatives are some details depicting other sections of the same paintings, e.g. that of St. Anne.

<sup>29</sup> B. Slánský, “O restaurování obrazů” [On the Restoration of Paintings], *Umění* [Art] 1931, 4, p. 173; B. Slánský, “Zkoumání obrazů přírodovědeckými metodami” [Examining Paintings Using the Methods of the Natural Sciences], *Umění* 1932, 5, pp. 371–372.



5. Unknown photographer, [Master Theodoric, *Saint Anne*, detail], gelatin silver photograph, likely 1935, Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences. Photo © Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences

paintings that Slánský was tasked with restoring in the 1930s,<sup>30</sup> and which I managed to locate in the photographic archives of the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, comes from the graphics company of Jan Štenc (Štencův grafický závod). Since 1910, this firm, located in a newly developed modern building in Salvátorská Street in the centre of Prague, offered all manner of photographic and reprographic services, supplying reproductions for diverse artistic and art historical publications, *Volné směry* included. The founder and owner, Jan Štenc, who also published his own magazine between 1918 and 1945, *Umění* (*Art*), did not list the individual photographers he worked with as the authors of the images, with copyright

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<sup>30</sup> See also B. Slánský, "Oprava tabulových obrazů v kapli sv. Kříže na hradě Karlštejně" [The Restoration of the Panel Paintings at the Chapel of the Holy Cross on Karlštejn Castle], *Zprávy památkové péče* [Historical Preservation News] 1938, 2, pp. 24–27; B. Slánský, "Oprava obrazů z hradu Karlštejna" [The Restoration of Paintings at Karlštejn Castle], *Volné směry* 1937, 33, pp. 26–28.

attributed to his company. The archive was stored in the State Office of Historical Preservation (Státní úřad památkové péče) from the nationalisation of the firm in 1948 until finally a part (numbering over seventy thousand large-format glass negatives) returned to Štenc's heirs during the restitution processes of the 1990s.<sup>31</sup>

If we wanted to write the history of photography as a history of dissemination, as formulated by Geoffrey Batchen,<sup>32</sup> Štenc's archive, which has not yet been processed by experts,<sup>33</sup> would be an excellent case study. The company, highly successful in its time, built its reputation not on originals and authorship, but on reproducibility and distributability – for instance, they did not present the names of the photographers and they always published the photographs under the name of their company. While the heirs are now administering an archive of original negatives for which, given the absence of written documentation, it will be virtually impossible to determine authorship, the prints with the original blind embossing and copied images are dispersed across the photographic archives of the National Heritage Institute (Národní památkový ústav), the National Gallery in Prague, the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, and other institutions. The copies, sometimes pasted onto card indexes bearing information about the depicted work, and occasionally also on the source of the image, were mostly created with the aim of being reproduced in publications, used as visual information on the photographed object. They thus embody what Batchen discusses in relation to photography as a “haunted entity, eternally oscillating between material and immaterial manifestations, between physical objects grounded in specific configurations of space and time and apparitional images floating free of any particular substrate and capable of endless reproduction in a variety of media and formats”.<sup>34</sup>

In connection to Štenc and his photographs of the Cathedral of St. Vitus in Prague, Jan Mlčoch states that their “technical precision [...] shows that in the early 1930s the photographic work of the company had absorbed the influences of the aesthetic of *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) in its effort to convey in detail both the structure and the texture of works of art”.<sup>35</sup> We

<sup>31</sup> See <<https://www.archiv-stenc.cz/>> [accessed: February 2, 2022].

<sup>32</sup> See G. Batchen, *Obraz a diseminace: za novou historii pro fotografii* [Image and Dissemination: Towards a New History of Photography], Prague 2016. For English, see G. Batchen, *Apparitions, Photography and Dissemination*, Sydney, Prague 2018.

<sup>33</sup> See J. Škabrada, “Štencův archiv negativů” [Štenc's Archive of Negatives], *Historická fotografie* 2007, 7, pp. 23–31.

<sup>34</sup> Batchen, *Obraz a diseminace...*, p. 160.

<sup>35</sup> Mlčoch, “Josef Sudek and the Photography of Works of Art – his Predecessors and Contemporaries”, p. 64.

could say the same of the photographic details of the surface of Theodoric's paintings, of which it can certainly be stated that they are photogenic and the chosen compositions have a modern feeling. At the same time, we must be aware of the fact that they were probably created on the basis of highly specific demands from the conservator, who, for instance, wished to document the details of the plastic decorations (ill. 6). On the one hand, then, we can discuss the formative role of the commission and its practical circumstances, just as Philippe Jarjat did using the example of the Adolphe Braun & Cie's 19th-century album of photographs documenting Michelangelo's frescos in



6. Štencův grafický závod (Štenc Graphic Company), [Master Theodoric, *Saint Juda Tadeas*, detail], likely late 1927, gelatin silver photograph mounted on cardboard, Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences. Photo © Martin Netočný, Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences

the Sistine Chapel.<sup>36</sup> In relation to some detailed photographs and the unexpectedly “modern” diagonal composition, Jarjat writes about the necessity to differentiate between “an intended visual innovation and a practical one”.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, the example of Theodoric’s paintings and their photographic documentation can be considered with the knowledge that these were created more than sixty years later. This was a time when the practical aim of the commission could be a good match with the aesthetic choices of the photographer, shaped by the development of interwar photography with its emphasis on sharpness and detail. The photographer retains creative freedom, even within this highly specific commission, as regards framing the shot and placing the motif within a format.

## COMPARATIVE MATERIAL FROM PHOTOGRAPHIC CAMPAIGNS

Also dedicating continued attention to Theodoric’s paintings was photographer Alexandr Paul, another key figure on the scene. From the early 1930s, Paul and his associate František Illek operated as a private agency, “Press Photo Service” (or “Illek & Paul” from 1938 onwards).<sup>38</sup> They established close collaboration with Umělecká beseda (Artists’ Club), particularly with the art historian, artist, and tireless organiser Karel Šourek. This collaboration included large photographic commissions linked to the exhibition projects *Staré umění na Slovensku* (Old Art in Slovakia) and *Pražské baroko* (The Prague Baroque), both closely related to political interests associated with the need to acclaim Czechoslovak cultural roots as independent from the German milieu. In the late 1930s, this successful collaboration gave rise to the idea of establishing a publication series of photographic albums thoroughly documenting Czech art,<sup>39</sup> using the potential of photography to foster the national narrative, which was in demand at a time of the growing threat from neighbouring Germany.<sup>40</sup> Although the first album was only published

<sup>36</sup> P. Jarjat, “Michelangelo’s Frescoes through the Camera’s Lens: The Photographic Album and Visual Identity”, *Studies in the History of Art* 2011, 77, pp. 151–172.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 167.

<sup>38</sup> Their third partner, Pavel Altschul, left the firm in 1934.

<sup>39</sup> See E. Pospěchová, “Documenta Bohemiae Artis Phototypica. ‘Vlasti služ! I svou fotografii!’” [Documenta Bohemiae Artis Phototypica. ‘Serve the Nation! In Your Photography, Too!’], in: *Ve službách českých knížat a králů. Kniha k počtě profesora Jiřího Kuthana* [In the Service of Czech Princes and Kings. A Book to the Honour of Professor Jiří Kuthan], ed. M. Šmied, F. Záruba, Prague 2013, pp. 349–357.

<sup>40</sup> See *Photo Archives and the Idea of Nation*, ed. C. Caraffa, T. Serena, Berlin 2015.

in 1944, it is clear that the history of the project is firmly rooted in the 1930s. Karel Šourek, who co-initiated the photography project, was already considering the need of documenting art in Czechoslovakia during the two exhibitions mentioned above, and also played a part in the creation of an extensive collection of photographic documentation of Slovak art, which included the work of Illek and Paul as well as Josef Sudek. Among the photographs taken by Sudek for this project in 1937, the most striking ones, in Šourek's opinion, were the blown-up details of ornamental and figural decorations of liturgical textiles and metal objects.<sup>41</sup>

The reasons that led him and Paul to publish the photographic albums *Documenta Bohemiae Artis Phototypica* were clarified by Karel Šourek in 1945 in an article published in *Fotografie* magazine.<sup>42</sup> He mentions photographic documentation of Czech art (insufficient both in quantity and quality; random in focus), setting as his goal the creation of what was lacking: a programmatically delimited, exhausting whole. He thus also set himself apart from the work of the State Photo-Measurement Institute (Státní fotoměřický ústav), established in 1919 at the behest of the art historian Zdeněk Wirth. One of the stated aims of the institute, in addition to keeping an inventory of monuments and surveying historical sites, was image documentation, including older photographs and engravings documenting the state of the monuments, acquired from various inheritances, for instance, and also the production of new photographs.<sup>43</sup> Šourek was also critical of the photographs produced by the competition, Štenc's well established graphic works, which "taste a little of ash, seeming to today's viewer a little dry, lacking zest and spatial understanding, particularly in the images of architecture. Photographs were meant to serve as documents of artworks, but over time, they themselves became documents of the standards and conception of photography in their time".<sup>44</sup> The title selected, *Documenta Bohemiae Artis Phototypica*, suggests

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<sup>41</sup> See H. Buddeus, "Vanished Statues: Finding Images, Creating Pictures", in: *Sudek and Sculpture*, ed. H. Buddeus, Prague 2020, pp. 153–233; see also the exhibition that I curated with K. Mašterová: "Fešandy ze šuplíků. Sudek and Slovakia / Lovelies from the Files. Sudek and Slovakia", 29.10.2021 – 30.1.2022, City Gallery of Bratislava, Slovakia.

<sup>42</sup> K. Šourek, "Fotografie a umění, Documenta Bohemiae Artis Phototypica" [Photography and Art, Documenta Bohemiae Artis Phototypica], *Fotografie* 1945, 1(2), pp. 26–28.

<sup>43</sup> In 1938, when the institute was rebranded the "Institute for the Listing and Mapping of Monuments", the collections contained over a thousand diapositives, twenty thousand photographs, twelve thousand negatives, and two thousand printing plates. See A. Friedl, "Zdeněk Wirth a státní ústav fotoměřický" [Zdeněk Wirth and the State Photo-Measurement Institute], *Zprávy památkové péče* 1938, pp. 124–125.

<sup>44</sup> Šourek, "Fotografie a umění, Documenta Bohemiae Artis Phototypica", p. 27.



(and Šourek's own words confirm this) that their photographic campaign references but also defines itself against the academic project *Monumenta Artis Germaniae*.<sup>45</sup> The nationalist and hierarchical "monuments" are here transformed to horizontal "documents". In accordance with this strategy, Šourek, Illek, and Paul do not select the works – as they explain on the example of Karlštejn, they create "photographic material that is so detailed in its treatment of the given theme that the researcher can be given a truly full picture of the painterly decorations now surviving at the castle."<sup>46</sup>

The idea of mapping Czech art as a whole, however, remained – once again – only partly fulfilled. The Karlštejn album<sup>47</sup> was complete photographically, but it seems that some printed materials were missing, and the album probably never reached distribution.<sup>48</sup> Even so, it provides – along with the albums that were realised fully – a clear idea of its authors' intentions. Even though the aims were perhaps a bit too ambitious, this project is remarkable in many respects, including the emphasis placed on opening a perspective "into the formal mechanisms of the art work" through enlarged details, as well as bringing closer works that are distant from the eye: "In practice, this leads to an extensive use of blown-up details when publishing photographic documents on the history of manuscript illumination, goldsmithing, and engraving coins or medals on the one hand, while on the other hand, for publishing photographs pertaining to the history of monumental mural painting, a large format was chosen for the photographs [25 x 35 cm]"<sup>49</sup> (ill. 7 and 8). In the case of Karlštejn Castle, in addition to details of the individual paintings, the album also offers the possibility of comparing details of eyes, beards, hair, hands, or fabrics from various paintings by Theodoric on a single page. What's more, the form of the album, with the photographs arranged consecutively on single, unbound pages, mirrors the idea of a comparative study. This brings us to another possible source of inspiration – the postcard series *Kunst der*

<sup>45</sup> See J.B. Blower, "Max Dvořák, Wilhelm von Bode and The Monuments of German Art", *Ars* 2011, 44(1), pp. 92–124.

<sup>46</sup> Šourek, "Fotografie a umění, Documenta Bohemiae Artis Phototypica", p. 27.

<sup>47</sup> A. Paul, F. Illek, K. Šourek, *Deskové obrazy Mistra Theodoricha na Karlštejně z XIV. st.* [The 14th-century Panel Paintings of Master Theodoric at Karlštejn Castle], *Documenta Bohemiae Artis Phototypica*, undated, Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences.

<sup>48</sup> Here, I am drawing – for now – on a personal conversation with Prokop Paul, who, together with his wife Marcela, administers the Archive of Atelier Paul and part of the estate of the Illek & Paul company (Press Photo Service) in Dolany nad Vltavou, and on the fact that the Karlštejn album is missing from public library catalogues.

<sup>49</sup> Šourek, "Fotografie a umění, Documenta Bohemiae Artis Phototypica", p. 27.



7, 8. Alexandr Paul – František Illek – Karel Šourek, [*Deskové obrazy Mistra Theodoricha na Karlštejně z XIV. st. (The 14th-century Panel Paintings of Master Theodoric at Karlštejn Castle)*], *Documenta Bohemiae Artis Phototypica*, undated (likely 1930s), sheets from an unpublished album, Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences. Photo © Martin Netočný, Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences. © The Estate of Alexandr Paul

*Welt*, published by the Institute of Art History at the University of Marburg under the leadership of Richard Hamann beginning in 1933. The Marburg photographic campaigns and publishing projects were well known in Czechoslovakia, and Šourek mentions them, too. Just as in the case of *Documenta Bohemiae Artis Phototypica*, the *Kunst der Welt* series were individual, freely arranged pages created using photographic technology and kept in a paper folder.<sup>50</sup> Unlike the large-format albums allowing for detailed comparative

<sup>50</sup> That same year, the *Veledila středověku (Masterworks of the Middle Ages)* exhibition took part in Prague as a collaboration between *Krasoumná jednota (The Fine Arts Association)* and the Institute of Art History in Marburg, presenting 235 photographs. I would like to thank Jan Salava for this information. See J. Chalupecký, “Středověké sochy” [*Medieval Sculptures*], *Světlozor* 1933, 33(35), pp. 4–5; *Magazin DP*, 1933/34, 1, p. 154; *Dílo* 1933–1934, 25, p. 51.

study offered by Šourek, Illek, and Paul, the team in Marburg selected a practical postcard-size format. Another difference was the strategy of selecting the works, which corresponded more closely to the aims of popularisation: the works were arranged into folders not only by the respective monument or region but also by theme (e.g. Christmas in Folk Art, Animal Paintings, Mother and Child, Dance, Boats, etc.).

Also still unprocessed are the photographic campaigns initiated by the State Photo-Measurement Institute.<sup>51</sup> Karel Šourek made a humorous comment on the fact that their private enterprise were ahead of the state institution: “When we photographed in full the artistic riches of Karlštejn Castle for the first time, having brought electric lighting up to the highest floors of the castle, we thus allowed this state institution to work on the same topic – thanks to our cable, they also began photographing the castle in detail for their own purposes.”<sup>52</sup> He is most probably referring to the photographic campaign that became the foundation for a comprehensive publication on Czech panel painting between 1350 and 1450,<sup>53</sup> written by the students of Professor Antonín Matějček under his leadership and signed with his name, for which Štenc also took pictures at Karlštejn in 1938.<sup>54</sup> In comparison to the common practice at the time, this book uses an unusual amount not only of details (104 out of the total 276 reproductions) but also reproductions in colour. Despite the fact – or perhaps precisely *because* of the fact – that all these generously planned photographic campaigns were ultimately never implemented according to the original plan and remained torsos, they mapped thoroughly some of the most significant historical monuments in Czechoslovakia, such as Theodoric’s paintings at Karlštejn or the interior of St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague, thus providing excellent comparative material not only for researchers exploring medieval art but also for historians of photography.

## UNSPOILT VIEWS AND THE MONUMENTALITY OF ENLARGED DETAILS

As follows from the aptly named article “The Work of the Eye” (“Práce oka”), the manner of handling reproductions on the pages of “our” volume of *Volné směry*, including the emphasis placed on depicting details of artworks,

<sup>51</sup> Friedl, “Zdeněk Wirth a státní ústav fotoměřický”.

<sup>52</sup> Šourek, “Fotografie a umění, Documenta Bohemiae Artis Phototypica”, p. 28.

<sup>53</sup> A. Matějček, *Česká malba gotická* [Czech Gothic Painting], Prague 1938.

<sup>54</sup> M. Bartlová, *Dějiny českých dějin umění 1945–1969* [The History of Czech Art History 1945–1969], Prague 2020, p. 125.

was no coincidence. In this text, Emil Filla, artist and, beginning in 1934, also the editor-in-chief of *Volné směry*, discusses the specifics of considering every period of art history, claiming that along with the development of art forms, our eye changes, too, making it clear why there are so many photographic details during his tenure at the magazine. A longer quote is appropriate here:

Every concluded period of artistic creation, every epoch of visual desire demands its own particular perception in order to be seen correctly, its own specific location of the eye, and specific methods of regarding and reflecting on the retina. [...] What has changed is not only the appearance of contemporary painting compared to Purkyně's realistic paintings or Slaviček's impressionist works, what has changed, primarily, is our eye. [...] We see the metamorphosis of ocular perception clearly in the development of photography, which was – despite its mechanical foundations – an image of the desires and tastes of contemporary artistic tendencies. [...] Only now, partly given the new spirit of art and partly through the new conception of the meaning of its mechanical possibilities, does photography become factual, acquiring clarity and a sense of detail, distinctiveness both in plasticity and spatiality. The eye learns to see anew. Good nature photography, and especially photography of artworks, aids in this learning process, because our eye, habituated to the Impressionists, looked falsely not only at nature, but also at the primitives and Rembrandt and Romanesque miniatures – always with an illusionistic bias. Through photography, particularly through enlarged details, the eye relearns how to perceive. It is led to insights which, in its damaged state, it has been unable to comprehend when faced with the original. It becomes aware, primarily, of the possibility and necessity of seeing anew.<sup>55</sup>

When Filla writes that it is only now that photography has become factual, he is responding, of course, to the development that photography underwent following the First World War. In contrast to “artistic” photography, which imitated painting through various interventions and printing techniques and a predilection for impressionist blur, modern photography strives for clarity and a true rendition of reality. This is probably why Josef Sudek was reluctant to call photography an art, instead claiming that it is “a nice craft demanding a certain degree of taste”.<sup>56</sup>

“The Work of the Eye” is, in a sense, a manifesto, justifying the treatment of reproductions on the pages of *Volné směry*, whose selection of details is to contribute to the liberation of the reader's eye from the bad habits brought about by Impressionism, teaching it to see anew. Although the magazine only

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<sup>55</sup> E. Filla, “Práce oka” [The Work of the Eye], *Volné směry* 1935, 31, pp. 22–24, quoted on p. 22.

<sup>56</sup> See his response to the survey “Is photography art?”, *Světobzor* 1936, 36(29), p. 486.

rarely included the photographers' names, I have discovered, through comparison with existing negatives, that the artist who most often taught readers how to see anew during Filla's tenure as editor-in-chief was Josef Sudek. Given the financial demands of this approach, with a large portion of the reproductions made on commission, the idea for a new editorial series was born, one that would provide a new application for these reproductions. Together, Mánes and the publisher Melantrich put out a series of monographs on Czech artists called "Prameny" ("Sources") between 1935 and 1943: "The division of costs will be as follows: Mánes will supply the printing plates for the images and the text for the introductory essay, and will pay the fees for this text, Melantrich will provide the necessary paper, printing, the cover, and advertising for the monographs. The creation of new printing plates, if this were to prove necessary (this circumstance will surely only arise sporadically), would be paid in half – half by Mánes, half by Melantrich."<sup>57</sup>

Filla's manifesto is entirely in line with an article by the art historian Jan Květ on the Vyšehrad Codex printed on the following pages.<sup>58</sup> Květ refers directly to reproduced photographs of details of this precious Romanesque illuminated manuscript, enlarged by several orders of magnitude, as an "uncommonly valuable tool" (ill. 9). On the basis of the "monumentality of the idea", he even states that it will allow us to create at least a foundational idea of the murals of this time that are now lost. And, finally, reproductions turn "our heightened attention [to detail], and, enlarging it, enrich our knowledge with the highly particular, even surprising factuality of Romanesque painting."<sup>59</sup> In this case, too, the photographs are by Josef Sudek. A reproduction of his photograph – a detail of the console on the Jewish Gate in Brno, exceptionally accompanied by a "Foto Sudek" inscription – is also included in a further text by Filla, "An Introduction to Romanesque Sculpture". Commenting on the rediscovery of Romanesque art in his time, Filla writes: "Romanesque art had to be discovered anew [...]. Only the period immediately preceding the war and our own time opens up an unspoiled perspective on this grand, monumental art."<sup>60</sup> He is thus evidently following the thread of "The Work of the Eye" as he emphasises the "unspoiled" nature of the present perspective of this art.

<sup>57</sup> Prague City Archive, fond no. 1349 SVU Mánes, carton 109, inv. no. 4399, editorial activity 1936–39.

<sup>58</sup> J. Květ, "K obrazům z evangelistáře Vratislavova, zvaného Kodexem vyšehradským" [On the Paintings of Vratislav's Evangeliary, Known as the Vyšehrad Codex], *Volné směry* 1935, 31, pp. 24–30.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 29 and 30.

<sup>60</sup> E. Filla, "Úvod k románské plastice" [An Introduction to Romanesque Sculpture], *Volné směry* 1935, 31, pp. 214–231.



9. Josef Sudek, [*Codex Vyssegradensis, Coronation Gospels of King Vratislaus, Last Supper*, after 1080, detail], likely 1935, gelatin silver photograph, Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences. Photo © Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences. © The Estate of Josef Sudek

## THE WORK OF THE PERIOD EYE

“There is no question of fully possessing oneself of another culture’s cognitive style, but the profit is real: one tests and modifies one’s perception of the art, one enriches one’s general visual repertory, and one gets at least some intimation of another culture’s visual experience and disposition. Such excursions into alien sensibilities are a main pleasure of art”, writes Michael Baxandall.<sup>61</sup> Baxandall sets off from medieval German drama and period prints to bring the reader closer to period perceptions and the characteristic

<sup>61</sup> M. Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculpture of Renaissance Germany*, New Haven and London 1980, p. 143.

forms of German Renaissance woodcarvings. Our excursion into the “alien sensibilities” of mid-1930s Czechoslovakia has shown that this was an era of fortuitous confluence between an interest in factual photographic treatment (“certainly and precisely capturing the detail of space in the detail of time”, as Funke wrote in another of the articles printed in our volume of *Volné směry*),<sup>62</sup> and the recognition of the role of photography as an essential tool for art history.<sup>63</sup> In the spirit of modern photography, detail is used entirely practically, to faithfully capture the work from up close, allowing viewers to study its surface, personal artistic styles, or level of damage. A combination of artistic and art historical texts from the period supported by specific photographs made on commission are an example of conscious work on the shaping of the period’s taste and perception of artworks.

Details of artworks, of course, were already appearing on the pages of art historical publications in the 1920s and we would be hard pressed to define a clear boundary. Nevertheless, it is evident that the common practice of the 1920s was different from later practice. The illustrations were often separated from the text, and if there were reproductions directly in the text, they were usually small illustrative images, with large details appearing only sporadically. It is therefore no exaggeration to claim that 1930s Czechoslovakia saw the standardisation of the use of detail in art historical publications take hold to a much larger extent than ever before, and that this was the result of the synergic efforts of remarkable individuals from different fields responsible for partial improvements: the artist Emil Filla, who, as editor-in-chief of *Volné směry*, emphasised high-quality photographic reproductions, and devoted an entire theoretical essay on the pages of the magazine to the use of detail; the photographers Josef Sudek, Josef Ehm, or Alexandr Paul, who developed a professional approach to photographing artworks; the art historians Zdeněk Wirth, Václav Vilém Štech, Vojtěch Volavka, and others, who – each from their own position – recognised the key role of the photographic document for the field of art history; or the graphic designer and pedagogue Ladislav Sutnar, who introduced to the debate an emphasis on rhythmically alternating wholes and details and the use of full-page reproductions printed with no margins.

*Translated from the original Czech by Ian Mikyska*

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<sup>62</sup> J. Funke, “Fotografie zůstane fotografií” [Photography Will Remain Photography], *Volné směry* 1935, 31, p. 48.

<sup>63</sup> See V.V. Štech, “Smysl a metoda dějin výtvarného umění” [The Meaning and Method of the History of Fine Art], *Umění* 1938, 11, pp. 455–459. Reprinted in: V.V. Štech, *Pod povrchem tvarů* [Under the Surface of Forms], Prague 1941, pp. 9–19.



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## ENLARGED DETAILS AND CLOSE-UP VIEWS: ART REPRODUCTION IN 1930S CZECHOSLOVAKIA

### Summary

Each photograph captures an artwork within a particular frame of space and time, providing a perspective that is contingent and dependent on the era the photograph was made in (Bergstein 1992). Moreover, every photograph is always embedded in specific material conditions and has its own social life (Edwards–Hart 2004). The aim of this article is to show the particularity of reproductions of artworks in 1930s Czechoslovakia and the motivations and discussions behind the extensive use of detail. I argue that the pronounced interest in close-up views is a result of a series of circumstances specific to the period. There is an important pre-condition in the development in the field of art photography and graphic design that took place in the late 1920s, bringing about an interest in sharp and faithful images and full bleed prints, as well as a recognition of the social impact of the medium. As a result, photographers, artists, art historians, and graphic designers living in Czechoslovakia also began to rethink the use of photography in the art field. This was manifested in period publications such as the well-known *Fotografie vidí povrch* (Photography Sees the Surface), published in 1935. In terms of art reproductions, it shows the importance of close-up views for providing an insight into individual artistic approaches and into the history of the respective artwork.

The same year saw the publication of the 31st volume of the art magazine *Volné směry*, which enables us to follow several micro-histories that can also be applied more generally to the period discussions. As illustrated by a text by Bohuslav Slánský and the reproduced photographs of medieval panel portraits from Karlštejn Castle attributed to Master Theodoric, one of the purposes behind the commissions of enlarged photographic details of artworks were planned restorations. Moreover, examples from the photographic campaigns led by the company of Jan Štenc, the State Photo-Measurement Institute, or the project by Karel Šourek, Alexandr Paul, and František Illek (*Documenta Bohemia Artis Phototypica*) show that detail is generally used for showing the structure and texture of the work, for zooming in on otherwise distant works, or for the purpose of comparison. According to *Volné směry* editor-in-chief Emil Filla and his manifesto article “Práce oka”, the new method of working with reproductions and the frequent use of photographic detail precipitated a change in the observational habits of the audience. This intention was materialised through his long-term collaboration with the photographer Josef Sudek, who helped him show the artworks in a new light. It is evident that by the mid-1930s, the synergic work of individuals from different fields brought the use of detail in art-related publications to an unprecedented level.

Keywords:

photography, detail art reproduction, Prague, Czechoslovakia, 1930s