

## A CZECH INFLUENCE ON BELGIAN BREWING

EVAN RAIL

The influence of Czech brewing often seems surprisingly underappreciated outside of Central Europe. The great Czech brewing scientist František Ondřej Poupě might have written one of the most important brewing textbooks of the Enlightenment (*Die Kunst des Bierbrauens Physisch - Chemisch - Oekonomisch Beschrieben*, first published in a German edition in Prague in 1794) and ranked among the earliest inventors and proponents of the brewing saccharometer, but his name is rarely mentioned outside of the Czech lands. Similarly, the role that Czech brewers, technology and ingredients have played in global beer culture seems unfairly unrecognized.

This is perhaps best illustrated by what happened at Belgium's famous Brasseries Artois at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Long before Stella Artois was first sold to the public in mid-1926, the cutting-edge Artois breweries were highly influenced by Czech beer. Four years before the great Belgian International Exhibition of

1897 - where, in a shock to many local beer makers, one-third of all beer sold was of non-native lager styles like Pilsner, Dunkel and Bock<sup>1</sup> - the Artois breweries were already producing their own bottom-fermented brews.

To do so, the current brewery director Edmund Willems ordered the construction of a new brewery, the Nouvelle Brasserie,<sup>2</sup> to complement the older Artois brewery, Den Horen, which was still turning out the traditional local brews Bière Blanche de Louvain (Leuven White Beer) and Peeterman, as well as several other top-fermenting specialties. According to the company's archives, there were no bottom-fermented beers produced in 1892.<sup>3</sup> But in 1893, the Nouvelle Brasserie also started making three kinds of bottom-fermenting Artois beer: Bavière (brewed around 9° Balling, with about 3.4% alcohol), Bock (brewed around 13° Balling, with about 5% alcohol) and Munich (brewed around 14° Balling, with about 5.6% alcohol).<sup>4</sup>

Ville				Province				Decembre 1910				Total			
Pilsen	Munich	Bock	Somme	Pilsen	Munich	Bock	Somme	Pilsen	Munich	Bock	Somme	Pilsen	Munich	Bock	Somme
162	200	163	525	6592	1021	342	7955	36			36	2190	535	9663	
533	439	533	1505	286	12	2903	650	413	971	68	1452	720	497	9067	
581	324	1144	2049	57	1145	215	1317	97	369	18	505	1500	205	5951	
289	34	711	1024	188	42	1873	2103	1272	661	31	1964	1356	203	6210	
290	84	121	495	114	17	557	728	337	562	48	1147	1357	475	5959	

Figure 1. By the end of 1910 the previous Bock from Artois had been renamed Pilsen.

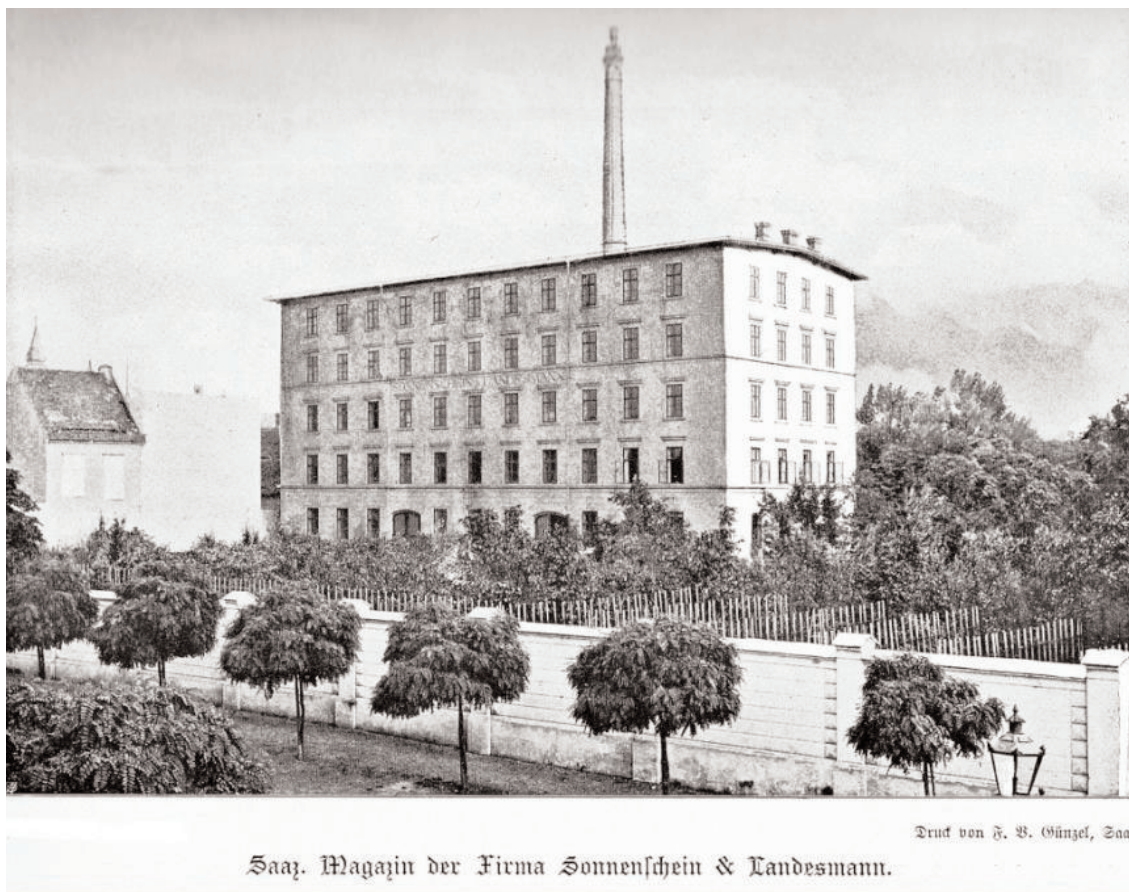


Figure 2. The storehouse of the hop vendors Sonnenschein & Landesmann in Žatec (Saaz), Bohemia.  
Source: Wikipedia Commons.

Those names certainly do sound German. However, according to the brewery's annual Grand Livre accounting books, their Bock started to be sold under a more Bohemian name, Pilsen, in October of 1910. This was the exact same beer as the Bock, simply under a different brand, starting with initial sales in Antwerp and Brussels, while in Leuven itself and the surrounding province it was still sold under the Bock monicker for another month or so. By December of 1910, all Artois Bock was being sold as Pilsen.<sup>5</sup>

It was not just about the name, of course. To make these new, foreign, even 'exotic' beers, the Artois breweries began purchasing ingredients from abroad, by the trainload. For its low-grade Bavière, the brewery used German hops (generally Hallertau, Wolnzach and a less-expensive cultivar, Bavière Montagne), which it

bought from J. Tüchmann & Söhne and Bernard Bing in Nuremberg. But for the higher-grade Munich and the Bock that was later renamed Pilsner, the brewery generally used 100% Saaz, purchased from hop vendors like the Kellner brothers and Sonnenschein & Landesmann, both in Žatec (aka Saaz), Bohemia.

Bohemian hops must have been seen as a very important ingredient, because the amounts the brewery paid for Bohemian hops greatly overshadowed the amounts it spent on German and Belgian hops. In 1895, the Artois breweries paid 230 francs for every 50 kilos of choice Saaz from Bohemia. By contrast, Hallertau (entered in the ledgers as 'Hollédau') cost 140 francs per 50 kilos, Wolnzach commanded 150-155 francs, Bavière Montagne cost 100 francs for 50 kilos, while Belgian hops from Alost were just 37 francs for 50 kilos.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 3. *The Grand Livre accounting book of 1893.*

In 1896, hop prices seem to have dropped in general, but the difference remained: in the brewery's accounting books for that year, Hallertau was listed at 95 francs while Saaz cost 125-170 francs.<sup>7</sup> Similar examples can be found in every year up to World War I.

That added up to rather large amounts. In 1895, the Artois breweries spent a total of 24,957.71 francs on hops for their new bottom-fermenting brewery (not including the 12,202.20 francs' worth of hops in the brewery's storehouse as of 1 January). Of that, the lion's share - 14,208.20 francs - went to the Kellner brothers in Bohemia, 8,586.85 was sent to Tüchmann, 2,116 was paid to Bernard Bing, and just 46.66 francs were spent on Belgian hops used in bottom fermentation.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the higher prices for Czech hops, the brewery clearly preferred them. In 1901, for example, the ratio of kilograms of Czech hops to kilograms of German hops purchased by Artois was more than 3 to 1.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, high-grade hops demand quality malt as well. For their traditional beers, the Artois breweries

purchased less-expensive local malt from Belgian malt houses and breweries like Wielemans-Ceuppens, some of which also made its way into the cheaper Bavière.<sup>10</sup> But the higher-grade bottom-fermented brews were given much more expensive malted barley, which Artois imported directly from maltings in what is now the Czech Republic. In 1896, they paid 22.50 centimes for each kilo of Belgian pale malt from Wielemans-Ceuppens, while the price for Pilsner malt they bought from Schindler & Stein in Brno (aka Brünn) was 33.25 centimes per kilo.<sup>11</sup> They also purchased Czech malt from Selikowsky in Litomerice (Leitmeritz), with whom they appear to have had a close relationship, and from Hamburger 'et fils' in Olomouc (aka Olmütz) - all at higher prices than they were paying for Belgian malt.

Interestingly, in that era the brewery was purchasing almost no malt from Germany: one of the only orders in the brewing logs from that era is very small amount of Farbmaltz (or 'colour malt', roughly akin to Weyermann's Carafa I today) from Schramm in Munich in one year,<sup>12</sup> and the same from Rübsum in



DOIT Houlton Nouvelle Brasserie.					
1895				Helogium	Sur une 2e hel.
Janvier	1 <sup>er</sup>	En magasin			
	1 <sup>er</sup>	à Creditours Divers : Sellner, firm, Saaz, 1/2 p. 24 B <sup>te</sup>		3,584	divers de 120 à 295
	25	à dit. J. Buchmann & fils, Nuremberg : f. 8 Janvier 2 <sup>e</sup>		378	Saaz distiché à 230
		Helldau 1 <sup>er</sup> 1894 à f. 110	hel.	762	à 110 2,106,60
		à f. 110			51,36
		Wolfgang 1 <sup>er</sup> 1894 à f. 150	hel.	1498 1/2	100 4,995,50
Mars	15	à Creditours Divers : Sellner, firm, Saaz, f. 27 Janvier		6,335	
		Saaz (rus) à f. 250		531 1/2	210
Juillet	18	à Creditours Divers : à S. Buchmann & Sohn Nuremberg			
		f. 28 Juin : hel. 615 Wolfgang 1894 1 <sup>er</sup>		615	155
Septembre	30	à Caisse : à Jossé Ferville & Co, Most, f. 20 1 <sup>er</sup>			
		à 65 hel. Most 1895		65	27
Novembre	1	à Creditours March <sup>ts</sup> : Bernard Bing, Nuremberg : f. 18 Octobre			
		à hel. 1058 Savière Montagne 1895 à f. 100		1,058	100

Figure 3. Hop orders for Artois Nouvelle Brasserie in 1895. The highest prices paid are for Czech Saaz hops.

Bamberg in another year.<sup>13</sup> The bulk of all malt used in the brewery's bottom-fermented beers - including Munich and Vienna malts - came from malt houses in what is now the Czech Republic.

Naturally, a brand-new, bottom-fermenting brewery also required new equipment. The Artois breweries went for the best technology available, purchasing lagering equipment from Novák & Jahn in Prague.

(Given the still-pervasive mistaken beliefs about the founders of Pilsner Urquell, it's worth noting that Novák and Jahn were *also* not Germans. They were Czechs.)

Of course, a newfangled, bottom-fermenting brewery in late-nineteenth-century Belgium requires hiring new brewers, too. In that era, the head of the Nouvelle Brasserie was a man by the name of Urbánek. A few observations:

- As brewmaster at the Nouvelle Brasserie, Mr. Urbánek was apparently paid three times as much as Lambert De Becker, the brewmaster at the Anciennes Brasseries, where the brewery's traditional beers were made.
- Mr. Urbánek's second at the Nouvelle Brasserie, Mr. Dietrich, also earned more than the brewmaster who making traditional Belgian top-fermented beers for Artois.
- Urbánek is not a Belgian name.

For the moment, this is one illustrative anecdote too far: I haven't been able to pin down the full identity of the brewmaster at the Artois Nouvelle Brasserie between 1893 and 1896: there is no record of any Urbánek at the city archives in Leuven, and no record of his name at the Rijksarchief in Brussels. The brewery certainly had a penchant for Czech brewing, and Urbánek is most definitely a Czech name: the last

Imp. Aug. Fonteyn.

Figure 4. A typical brew of Belgium's new Bock Artois from 13 August 1895: 100% Pilsner malt from Schindler & Stein in Brno and 100% Saaz hops from Kellner brothers in Žatec, both of which were imported at considerable expense from the Czech lands.

After World War I, the Artois breweries spent several years in recovery mode, rebuilding damaged facilities, before they began making plans to expand, particularly

		Kilogr.			
		38.325	à 26,70; 31,70; 32,70; 32,80,	10.906	
Schindler & Stein, Brunn : 21 H <sup>l</sup>		20.000	Pilsen à 32	6.400	
& Stein, Brunn : 24 & 27 H <sup>l</sup>		40.000		12.800	
		" "		30.106	
Schindler & Stein, Brunn : factures		" "		"	
	à 10.000	30.000	Pilsen à 32	"	
	20.000		" 32	9.600	
Schindler & Stein, Brunn : fr 29 Janv.		20.000	Vienne "	6.400	
& Stein, Brunn : fr 9 février		10.000	Munich "	3.200	
		158.325		49.306	
Schindler & Stein, Brunn : factures				"	
	à 20.000	20.000	Vienne à 32	6.400	
Schindler & Stein, Brunn : fr				"	
	10.000		Vienne	"	

Figure 5. In 1895, the Artois breweries were spending thousands of francs each month on imported Czech malt.

in terms of lager production.<sup>14</sup> In September of 1931, the Artois brewery's director general made a grand tour of Europe's lager homeland, spending three full days ('from 7:30 in the morning until 8 at night') touring the hopyards and placing orders with the Saaz hop dealers in Zatec. He then went to Prague, where he visited the country's barley *Kooperativa*, collecting malt samples. His journey included a number of Czech cities and towns, including Chrudim, Olomouc and Pilsen, whose world-famous brewery he described in a letter back to the Artois brewery as 'vraiment incroyable'. (He also went to Munich, where he wrote that the beers were 'not great', noting that the beer from Spaten was 'très ordinaire'. He added confidently, 'We certainly do just as well'.)

In his final report to the Artois brewery president, the director general wrote: 'Czechoslovakia has really impressed me, the amount of organization achieved by this new republic is really admirable. It's true that the country has some great natural resources'.<sup>15</sup>

That was hardly news to brewery president Léon Verhelst. Five years earlier, he had led the launch of a new Pilsner-style beer called Stella Artois. Of course, today's Stella Artois has nothing to do with Czech beer: the recipe for Stella Artois was altered dramatically after its launch. But just as with Artois Bock and Artois Pilsner back before World War I, the initial batches of that beer were once again made with 100% Czech barley and 100% Czech hops.<sup>16</sup>

1894

Septembre 19 Rachon & Robert Fier à Novak & Jahn Prague

par leur fcs Nouvelle Frigorifique :

		Florins Aut.	Francs
Janvier 2	l'f de devis et contrat de constructions	19.840,45	
Juillet 31	f montage	3.080,46	
	a décharge pour retour	1.600,00	
	300 m de rails inutilisés	1.480,46	
	sur le site fcs Jahn		
	en marche		
	l'facture		
14	leur facture	1.255,14	
	a décharge selon l'lettre du 22 4 <sup>h</sup>	481,57	
	au cours moyen de 203,30		
	pour balance de tous frais portés au crédit		
	de leur compte jusqu'au du 27 Mars au 3 <sup>h</sup>		
		24.594,46	50.001
			14
			1.960
			51.961

Figure 6. Accounting for the 'nouvelle frigorifique' and other lagering equipment purchased by Artois breweries from Novak & Jahn in Prague. Prices here are in florins.

## References

- Godaert, P. (1993) *Les présidents des brasseries Artois: Léon Verhelst, Henry van den Schrieck, Werner de Spoelbergh, Raymond Boon*. Virton: Imprimerie Michel Frères.
- Godaert, P. (1994) *Les Artois et leurs successeurs Albert Marnef, Edmond Willems*. Virton: Imprimerie Michel Frères.
- Artois Archive, Leuven. Grand Livre 1892.
- Artois Archive, Leuven. Grand Livre 1893.
- Artois Archive, Leuven. Grand Livre 1910.
- Artois Archive, Leuven. Grand Livre 1895.
- Artois Archive, Leuven. Grand Livre 1896.
- Artois Archive, Leuven. Grand Livre 1895.
- Artois Archive, Leuven. Grand Livre 1901.
- Artois Archive, Leuven. Fermentation Basse 6.8.1895 - 13.11.1897.
- Artois Archive, Leuven. Grand Livre 1896.
- Artois Archive, Leuven. Grand Livre 1897.
- Artois Archive, Leuven. Grand Livre 1895.
- Godaert, P. (1993) op. cit., pp. 69-70.
- ibid. pp.129-130. 'J'ai visité la Löwenbräu qui ne fera cette année que 750.000 H. Les bières n'étaient franchement pas fameuses. La Hadbräu était bonne, la Spaten très ordinaire. Nous faisons certainement aussi bien.' [...] 'Mon impression sur la Tchécoslovaquie est fort bonne, l'effort d'organisation réalisé par la nouvelle république est vraiment admirable. Il est vrai que le pays offre de grandes ressources naturelles'.
- ibid. pp. 83-85.



<u>Juin 1896.</u>			
30	<u>Anciennes Brasseries:</u>		
	M. Lambert De Becker	166.70	" "
	Ed. Lamme	125. "	" "
	Marc. Van Parys	125. "	" "
	Philippe Deruyter	125. "	" "
	Cug. Deruyter	75. "	" "
	Dupont	125. "	441 70
	<u>Nouvelle Brasserie:</u>		
	M. Urbanek	300. "	" "
	Tietrich.	291.70	" "
	Nys	125. "	91
	<u>Mixtes:</u>		
	A. Carlier	300. "	
	A. Gallemaert	150. "	
	V. Penninckx	150. "	

Figure 7. The head of the Nouvelle Brasserie, the new Artois brewery set up in 1893 to produce lagers, was Mr Urbanek, a brewmaster with a Czech last name and the highest salary of all brewers at the company.