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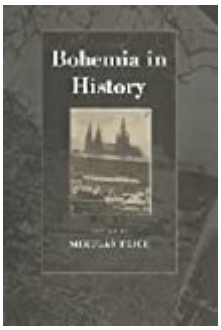

Mikulas Teich, ed. *Bohemia in History.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Xiv + 389 pp. $126.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-43155-2.

Reviewed by Catherine Albrecht (Division of Legal, Ethical, and Historical Studies, University of Baltimore)

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An Excursion through Bohemian History in English

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This collection of essays reprises an earlier volume of new work on Czech history, *Nase ziva a mrtva minulost* (Our living and dead history), published in 1968. Like the earlier volume, *Bohemia in History* seeks to "readdress critically the enduring mythicization of some themes of Czech historiography" (p. 2). In chapters ranging from the earliest Bohemian history to the late twentieth century, the essays in this volume make the work of Czech historians more accessible to those who do not read Czech. The essays were commissioned immediately after the "velvet revolution" of 1989, although the volume did not appear until 1998. In the interim, two of its contributors, Josef Macek (1991) and Otto Urban (1996), had died. The collection represents a summation of the work of Czech historians who were prominent in pursuing innovative research over the two decades preceding 1989. It does not take into account research by younger generations of Czech historians who were active during the 1990s.

The chapters are arranged chronologically. Jiri Slama analyzes the early settlement patterns and history of the Bohemian lands, while Zdenek Mrinsky and Jaroslav Meznik discuss the early medieval state under the Premyslid and Luxemburg dynasties (tenth through fourteen centuries). Bohemia benefitted from its central location, from the weakening of imperial authority following the investiture crisis, and from agricultural, economic, and demographic growth beginning in the twelfth century. Frantisek Kavka goes on to examine the reign of Charles IV, arguing that although the mid-fourteenth century represented the height of medieval cultural and politics, Bohemian society was already showing signs of the decline that was to follow, particularly in the economic sphere.

Frantisek Smahel elaborates on this decline in his essay on the Hussite movement. Smahel places the Hussite movement in its historiographic context, noting that contemporaries viewed it as a religious conflict, while nineteenth century historians saw it as a national conflict, and communist historians emphasized the social aspects of the Hussite wars. Smahel analyzes each of these perspectives in turn. The religious and cultural revival associated with the Hussite movement was relatively short-

lived, and Smahel argues that "there is no need to conceal the cultural losses and forfeitures suffered by the Czech lands in consequence of their premature Reformation" (p. 94). The national dimension of the conflict is easy to exaggerate. Only a small group of university intellectuals seems to have been inspired by the notion of a national community, although Hussite appeals were drafted first in Czech and only later issued in German. Social conflict was increasing in the fifteenth century, as the burdens of serfdom became heavier to bear, impoverished nobles sought employ as professional soldiers in the warring armies, and towns lost influence. After the conflict, the nobility began to reassert its power and influence.

The changing political balance of power is also addressed by Josef Macek in his chapter on "The Monarchy of the Estates." Although historians beginning with Frantisek Palacky saw the fifteenth-century dominance of the estates as "destructive" and "anarchic" (p. 98), Macek agrees with Karl Bosl in his positive assessment of the potential of government based on strong representation of the estates. The church was weak, as was King Vladislav II (1471-1516). This allowed towns and the nobility to rise to prominence. Reflecting their values, the Diet of Kutna Hora agreed on principles of religious toleration in 1485. By the late sixteenth century, as Josef Valka relates, Rudolf II (1576-1612) had begun to reassert Catholicism, a "Spanish circle" had begun to eclipse Protestant nobility, the towns had lost much of their autonomy, and the Habsburg ruler had "laid the financial foundation of a modern state by exacting regular taxes" (p. 122). Valka focuses on Rudolf's interest in culture, science, and magic, which compensated for his failures in politics and diplomacy. His essay emphasizes areas of continuity in the cultural sphere from the Hussite era through the Baroque period, particularly with regard to the use of the Czech language for religious and other popular tracts.

The symbolism of the Battle of White Mountain (1620) is the focus of Josef Petrar and Lydia Petrarova's contribution. Even before the battle, the estates had lost power to the monarchy. Historical debates have focused on "the relative progressiveness of the constitutional systems (estates and centralism) which clashed in the rebellion" (p. 145). As early as the seventeenth century, Jan Komensky and Bohuslav Balbin discussed the concept of patriotic attachment to the "vlast" or homeland, from which perspective the Battle of White Mountain created a divide between "us" (Bohemian patriots) and "them" (monarchical centralizers). In the eighteenth century, Josef Dobrovsky saw 1620 as a crucial event that "exhausted the Czech people both physically and spiritually" and from which it took more than a century to recover (p. 152). In the romantic view of Karel Hynek Macha, White Mountain was a symbol of the desecration of the nation, which was an innocent victim of oppression. This led to a political program that sought to redeem the loss, and Czech political leaders ignored the social and cultural reality of the seventeenth-century rebels by claiming that the nation needed to regain the legitimate (presumably democratic) heritage that had been defeated in 1620. Positivist historians rejected these myths, but their analyses did not evoke strong popular emotions. Under the influence of Zdenek Nejedly, the Battle of White Mountain was fitted into a notion of class conflict between "the people" and the ruling class, designed to conform to the rhetoric of the left.

Following a survey of the Enlightenment in Moravia by Jiri Kroupa, Vladimir Macura discusses the national revival of the early nineteenth century. Macura argues that because the Czech cultural revival preceded the development of modern Czech society, it was an artificial construct. Cultural leaders focused on those areas that would present "an illusion of a well-developed society with clear-cut national characteristics" (pp. 186-87), particularly language use. Facility in Czech served a gatekeeping function for membership in the nation, while the development of a full range of conceptual terms to describe politics and the nation simulated the existence of a fully developed national society. In this context, the fake Zelena Hora and Dvur Kralove manuscripts were part and parcel of a wider project of forging a mythical past that was a "hoax" (p. 193).

Otto Urban analyzes the national revival from the perspective of social and economic development, emphasizing the importance of population growth, migration, urbanization, and the development of both a Czech working class and a Czech bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century. Economic prosperity led to demands for a more substantial voice in political affairs, a demand that was partially satisfied under the "iron ring" of Prime Minister Taaffe. Jan Havranek examines a subset of the new bourgeoisie in his essay on university professors and students, while Irena Seidlerova discusses the establishment of parallel Czech and German institutions of higher learning and science.

The chapters on twentieth-century Czechoslovakia are shorter and less analytical than the essays on early modern history, perhaps because this era is more familiar to the English-reading audience. Robert Kvacek surveys the First Czechoslovak Republic from the point of view

of politics, social legislation, foreign policy, and the economy. He emphasizes the plight of minorities, particularly Germans and Slovaks, in a "Czechoslovak" national state that was in fact dominated by the Czech political elite. Alice Teichova analyzes the economic aspects of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in a competent summary of her more extensive studies published elsewhere. Milan Otahal briefly surveys the communist era, focusing on periods of rebellion and the rejection of the Soviet model.

Three final chapters, by Jan Kren, Helena Krejcova, and Dusan Kovac, describe the roles of Germans, Jews, and Slovaks in Czech and Czechoslovak history. Like all of the essays in this volume, these three do not add to the body of scholarship on the topics at hand, but rather summarize the authors' longer works in an accessible format.

Although this is a valuable compilation of historical work by Czech scholars, one is left with a question of who the audience for this book is. Many of the essays presume some background knowledge of the topics at hand. As a result, the book is not well suited for a general or undergraduate audience. Readers with expertise in the field will already be familiar with the original scholarship on which the essays are based. The volume seems best suited for scholars in related fields who do not have a strong command of the Czech language, for graduate students entering the field, and for historians who welcome the opportunity to read essays summarizing significant research outside of their immediate areas of expertise.

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