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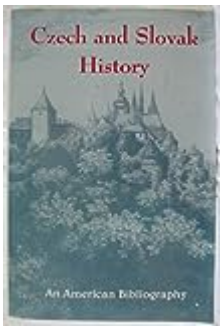

George J. Kovtun, ed. *Czech and Slovak History: An American Bibliography.* Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1996. xxiv + 481 pp. $23.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8444-0929-0.

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A Recent English-language Bibliography of Czech and Slovak History

As stated in his preface, George J. Kovtun has indeed produced the first extensive bibliography of books and articles on Czech and Slovak history devoted exclusively to those appearing in the English language. Although the great majority of works cited were published in the U.S., the subtitle "An American Bibliography" fails to capture the full extent of the bibliography, which includes numerous significant works published abroad.

The book consists of nineteen chapters, an index of authors and editors, and an essay written by Stanley B. Winters entitled "The Beginnings of American Scholarship on Czech and Slovak History." The nineteen chapters that form the bulk of the work can be divided into three distinct types. The first five chapters are devoted to bibliographies, general works including broad surveys, description and travel accounts, collections of articles and biographies, and memoirs. The next seven chapters contain works covering specific historical periods, the first three of which are defined according to Czech or Bohemian periodization: From Antiquity to 1306, From 1306 to 1618, and From 1618 to 1914. Thereafter, the chapters are titled in accordance with common Czech and Slovak periodization: WWI and its Aftermath, From 1918 to 1939, The Second World War, 1939-45, and From 1945 to 1989. Chapters Thirteen through Fifteen are devoted to three seminal figures of Czech history: Jan Hus, Jan Amos Komensky, and Tomas G. Masaryk. Chapters Sixteen through Eighteen treat thematic areas: Czechs and Slovaks in the United States and Other Countries, Jews and Jewish Affairs, and Culture, Science and Economic History. The final chapter is devoted to Historians and Historiography. Within each chapter, the entries are organized alphabetically by author or editor. The bibliographic entries provide publishing information and a page count.

Individual entries were chosen, again according to the preface, upon the basis of "satisfying the general reader's interest in historical developments related to the Czech Lands and Slovakia" with "factual accuracy and scholarly quality." This said, certain minor works published in the U.S. and located in other, older bibliographies such as Thomas and Anna V. Capek's *Bohemian (Cech) Bibliography: A Finding List of Writings in English Relating to Bohemia and the Cechs*[1] were not found.

These, it should be repeated, were minor works and perhaps failed to fit the criteria mentioned above. Also missing were references to bibliographies which contain a wider coverage of English-language works on Eastern Europe. This is a more significant fault. Works by Dagmar Horna, Robert F. Byrnes. Paul Horecky, Murlin Croucher[2] were all absent from mention. In addition, Kovtun did not include the ongoing *American Bibliography of Slavic and East European Studies* and *European Bibliography of Soviet, East European and Slavonic Studies*. References to bibliographies of English-language works within a wider Central or East European context would certainly be helpful to the scholar and general reader alike.

While the chapter organization and index of authors and editors is very helpful for quickly finding works by authors and editors known to the reader, a subject index would have greatly assisted in the location of unknown works. This has been partially accomplished with the inclusion of thematic chapters and cross referencing of works on Hus, Komensky and Masaryk, but a search for works on lesser figures or more tightly defined topics than Jews and Jewish affairs or culture, science, and economic history forces the reader to dig through the relevant chronologically- defined chapters, page by page. Such a process can certainly provide the same benefits as a library with open stacks, but a detailed subject index would be more helpful. Similarly, there is no way to index a subject by region, i.e. Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Slovakia.

In addition to the bibliography, Kovtun has included an essay written by Stanley B. Winters entitled "The Beginnings of American Scholarship on Czech and Slovak History." In twelve pages, Winters examines the relative neglect of Czech and Slovak history in American historiography. According to Winters, Czech and Slovak history has traditionally suffered in the U.S. from a general lack of interest punctuated only on the occasion of some great crisis involving more powerful states. Events such as the Munich Conference of 1938, the Soviet-Warsaw Pact invasion of August 1968, or the Velvet Revolution of 1989 are identified by Winters as just such occasions when world or western attention was momentarily focused on the region, and histories began to appear to explain these events. The diplomatic crisis of September 1938, the Munich Conference, and the destruction of the Czechoslovak state in March 1939 preceded the first English-language surveys of Czechoslovak history, Robert W. Seton-Watson's *A History of the Czechs and Slovaks* and S. Harrison Thomson's *Czechoslovakia in European History*, each published in 1943.

While Slavic studies as a whole was importantly advanced during the 1920s and then received far more extensive funding after WWII and the onset of the Cold War, the development of Czech and Slovak history has remained slow. The first Ph.D. dissertation in Bohemian history was completed in 1914, and the second appeared in 1930. The first history dissertation focusing on Moravia appeared in 1957. And the first dissertation on Slovakia was accomplished only in 1961 (p. ix). Taking note of such limiting factors as the relative availability of Czech- and Slovak-language instruction, the paucity of commercial contact, the Americanization of first-generation Czech and Slovak immigrants and the generally negative image of Slavs in mainstream U.S. culture, Winters identifies a "lack of leadership and organization" as the "foremost weakness" preventing Czech and Slovak history from "overcoming its peripheral status both in Slavic studies and in the historical profession" (p. xv).

Although Winters is absolutely correct when he writes that the field of Czech and Slovak history would have benefited from the emergence of "towering figures" such as Michael T. Florinsky, Frank Golder, Paul N. Miliukov, B.H. Sumner or George Vernadsky in Russian history or Arthur J. May, Robert A. Kann or R. John Rath in Habsburg history (pp. xvi-xvii), his contention that through greater organization and leadership Czech and Slovak history might have entered "the core of historical studies" is problematic. Contrasting the failure of American historians to advance Czech and Slovak history with the successes of John K. Fairbanks and Arthur O. Lovejoy in advancing Chinese history and intellectual history respectively is a bit unfair. The Czech and Slovak lands have not been the center of a major political power in the modern era, and therefore will most likely not join "the core of historical studies," particularly now as the field moves away from a primary European focus. This said, it should be noted that studies of the Czech and Slovak lands, such as those conducted by Karl Deutsch and Miroslav Hroch, have figured prominently in the historiography of thematic fields.

Although Czech and Slovak history still lacks a "towering figure" and its practitioners at present account for only slightly over 100 of the 3,600 members of AAASS (p. xvii) Kovtun's four hundred and eighty one page bibliography provides testament to their dedication and to their impressive contributions in the historical profession. The bibliography, despite the limitations mentioned above, is

an impressive work in its own right and a valuable reference tool for both the general reader and the scholar.

Notes:

[1]. New York, Chicago: Fleming H. Revell [c. 1918], 256 p.

[2]. Dagmar Horna, *Current Research on Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Mid-European Studies Center, Free Europe Committee, 1956); Robert F. Byrnes, *Bibliography of American Publications on East Central Europe, 1945-1957* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958); Paul Horecky, *East Central Europe: a Guide to Basic Publications* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); and Murlin Croucher *Slavic Studies: A Guide to Bibliographies, Encyclopedias and Handbooks* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc, 1993).

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