

Václav Chaloupecký and „the 1914 Generation“

ISSUES OF CZECH AND SLOVAK
HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE YEARS
OF THE FIRST REPUBLIC

The 100 years anniversary of the establishment of Czechoslovak Republic seems to be a suitable occasion for exploring the legacy of “the 1914 generation“ in historiography (as it was metaphorically called by Czech historian Jaroslav Werstadt), especially with the emphasis on the Czechoslovak perplexities, continuities and discontinuities of topics of the historiography of inter-war Czechoslovakia.

The book aspires to question the discourse of the traditional interpretation of Czech and Slovak historiography in Modern Age (esp. the late 19th and first half of the 20th century), preferring problem-based questions to biographical issues. The emphasis lies here on methodology, the use of nationalist political agenda behind a historiographical framework and the question of generational (dis)continuity, especially concerning the emergence of Marxism within the Czech and Slovak social sciences during the 30's.

The individual chapters of this collective monograph focus mainly on the historical context and the reflection of the work of Václav Chaloupecký (1882–1951), a distinguished Czech historian, the pupil of Jaroslav Goll and Josef Pekař, professor of Czechoslovak history and also (in 1937/38) the rector of the Comenius University in Bratislava, who after the Munich treaty and again after 1945 continued his academic career at the Charles University in Prague.

Due to recently published monographs on Václav Chaloupecký and Karel Stloukal, two of the most important academic figures of the “1914 generation“, biographical and overview chapters are not part of this monograph. Via Chaloupecký's web of social and professional connections, the authors rather focus on particular subject matters and problems open to interpretation. Chaloupecký's role as the Bratislava-based promoter of the newly forged “picture of Czechoslovak history“ serves here as a *pars pro toto*, a crossroad leading to a different contemporary field of questions. The monograph attempts to address mainly the critical reception of Chaloupecký's theses and works, usually and generally linked to the “Czechoslovakism“ label and the issues of historiographical practice and public actions of Chaloupecký's Czech and Slovak professional companions including teachers, colleagues and pupils as well.

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By the end of the Great War, Czech historiography stood apparently at the crossroads. The traditional three-generational concept of the so called “Goll school” maintains the semblance of the multigenerational teacher-student continuity and the persistence of closer links within the professional social network. However, at the same time, emphasizing the traditional dominance of the decades of the First Republic, the concept somehow misses the great political shifts of the age as well as the cultural and social transformation from the late 80’s to the years following World War II. The generally felt crisis of sciences connected to serious doubts about the tradition of “*Historism*” and questioning the unconfessed heritage of the 19th century resulted in attempts to abandon the German empirio-critical tradition in historiography, represented in the Czech context by the work Václav Vladivoj Tomek or Jaroslav Goll. The inter-war transformation of Central Europe brought into question the tensions between the approach to explain Czech and newly “Czechoslovak” history on the basis of historical law on one hand and natural law on the other. The official, constitutionally pronounced demand for the fulfillment of the overall idealistically based merging with Slovaks into an unified “Czechoslovak nation” as an state-forming part of the independent Czechoslovak state pushed the Czech social scientists into attempts to deal with the aforementioned discrepancy, which, as we know now, has never been solved: how to credibly adjoin the idea of Czecho-Slovak unity with scientific knowledge and, at the same time, how to prevent it from becoming just another utilitarian defender of the new establishment and status quo in the competition of inter-war Central European nationalist and/or revisionist agendas. The creation of a credible, scientifically-based image of „Czechoslovak history“, while remaining true to the spirit and methodological demands of the empirio-critical historiography, was a task entrusted especially to the youngest generation of Czech historians, who in the creation of the new state found themselves blessed with previously unattainable career possibilities in public administration, diplomacy and at newly founded universities in Brno and Bratislava. The obvious gap between the detailed empirio-critical analysis of sources and the call for a synthetic and widely acceptable picture of the Nation-building and “common Past” (bound up with the declared “Czechoslovak” collective self-determination and mobilization) seems to be the key dilemma of the inter-war historiography in Czechoslovakia.

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„The 1914 generation“ in the Czechoslovak historiographical context consisted entirely of men who grew up in the years when Czech society was still in shock caused by the disclosure of the Královédvorský and Zelenohorský manuscripts as fabricated falsificates. They lived their teenage years through

the fights for language settlement and universal equal suffrage – however, again, only for men. This generation was represented especially by Václav Chaloupecký, Karel Stloukal, Jan Slavík, Josef Borovička, František Hrubý, Jan Heidler, Václav Vojtíšek, Jan Hanuš Opočenský, Vladimír Klecanda, Jaroslav Prokeš, Josef Kazimour, Fridolín Macháček and Jan Morávek, and, with some reservation, even also Bedřich Mendl. And, at the same time, this generation had to face the growing authority of other related scientific fields. For example, it was their peer Albert Pražák within the historiography of literature, František Trávníček in historical linguistics, Zdeněk Wirth in art history, Inocenc Arnošt Bláha and Anton Štefánek in sociology, Jiří Malý and Vojtěch Suk in anthropology, Jan Eisner or Josef Schráníl in archeology, and Karel Chotek in ethnography, the last three being followers of Lubor Niederle, the last Czech poly-historian.

Despite the modernist, socialist and even anarchist tendencies from their college years, their decisive formative experience was their military service during the Great War (however not necessarily having ever done battle) and later especially the founding experience of the coup d'état and “national revolution” of 1918 to which they often personally participated. This subjective focus of “creators of the state” often prevented them from remembering the late passion for the radical solution of the social question. Due to that they often refused to focus their academic work through Marxist concepts and ideas, because it was prevalently (with the notable exception of Jan Slavík) considered by most to be too “revolutionary”. More of that, after the defeat and humiliation of Imperial Germany Palacký's idea of “associating and wrestling” with other nationalities living in the area of Czech lands and former Upper Hungary, was not fancied by many. That same attitude stood also for competing with the ideas pursued by Hungarian historiography (disputed only rarely except perhaps by Czechoslovak scholars based in Slovakia), which (in contrast to the situation of German Studies at the German University in Prague) lacked any institutional support in Czechoslovakia and, after the storming revisionism wave after the Trianon treaty, simply did not play an important role in the discussion sections of Czechoslovak scientific journals. However, their university students, who happened to study history during the years of the First Republic, such as Zdeněk Kalista, František Kutnar, Otakar Odložilík, Daniel Rapant or Branislav Varsik, lived through a very different intellectual development and gained other founding experiences, not to mention the generation of Jaroslav Charvát and Josef Polišíenský, who grew up in the years of the Great Depression and Nazi occupation.

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The book is divided into three sections. Each of them uses Chaloupecký's work as a common ground for asking different questions and analyzing different problems. Because of the diverse group of authors from Czech and Slovak

Republics, who participated in the creation of the book, these problems are viewed through the perspective of several generations. Particular chapters are therefore born out of different research and methodological traditions, contemplating the topics from ego history, methodology, social and geopolitical aspects of historiography, medievalist insights, the formation and transformation of sites of memory to the focus on the area of regional, intellectual and cultural history, genealogy, history of literature, topography and even pomology. In general, the book provides a multilayered approach of interpretation based in various discourses. However we dare to argue that in spite of the aforementioned differences, the individual sections and chapters “communicate” with each other, so it is hopefully possible to read them either chronologically or in a different order as a patchwork.

The first section is dedicated to professional networks, created by Czech, Slovak or Czechoslovak historiography during the interwar period and resulting in discussions and antagonizing interpretations, as well as the already mentioned question of thematic and methodological continuity. The continual confrontation and mutual dialog and inspiration at the same time between the Czechoslovak (and of course also Czech and Slovak) historiography and the German, Hungarian and Polish ones is discussed especially in the chapters written by Milan Ducháček, Tomáš Pánek, Karol Hollý, Miroslav Lysý or Dalibor Státník.

First in line is Robert Kvaček’s introductory reminiscence of Václav Chaloupecký’s “footprints” in the Faculty of Arts in Prague after World War II, recognizable even in spite of his early death. Bohumil Jiroušek begins the analytical section with his essay on the continuity of agrarian historiography, focusing on topics mentioned during the contemplation of the influences of the German research tradition already by Josef Kalousek and Jan Peisker, who later inspired the works of Josef Pekař, Josef Šusta, Václav Chaloupecký etc. Besides the marginal interest of Jaroslav Goll in this subject, Jiroušek mentions a difference within a periodisation framework, as mentioned by František Kutnar’s thoughts on the Czech tradition of agrarian historiography, with the emphasis on differences from a generational interpretation of the “Goll school”.

The methodological chapter of Milan Ducháček attempts to analyze the influence of Wilhelm Dilthey and the traditions of German *Geistesgeschichte* and Hermeneutics in general on the works of Czech historians of the interwar period. In spite of the very strong neo-Kantianism present in the contemporary philosophy of science, it is obvious that (maybe with the exception of the works of Zdeněk Nejedlý) any direct influence of Dilthey’s thought can be defined in the Czech setting only with great difficulties, and even then with notable delay and through intermediaries, such as Jaroslav Werstadt’s translation of Ernst Troeltsch’s crucial essays.

Based on the analysis of Václav Novotný's popularization-oriented texts, Roman Pazderský questions the stereotypic portrait of him as the notorious positivist "fact-recorder". The study shows Novotný as a talented writer and stalwart follower of Masaryk's interpretation of the Hussite/Evangelical line of Czech history.

The beginnings of the Czech-Slovak medievalist dialogue and the change of reception of Czech historical thinking in the minds of the most important Slovak journalists can be found in Karol Hollý's study on the Czech historian and archaeologist Josef Ladislav Píč. Píč is introduced here through the until now only marginally analyzed part of his Slovakistic work, depicting him as one of the predecessors of the later efforts to „tear Slovakia out of Magyarország“.

Adam Hudek recapitulates the thoughts František Hrušovský, a co-founder of independent Slovak concept of national history, proving that despite Chaloupecký's formative university lectures, the Slovak graduates from Comenius University in Bratislava converged to a different conceptualization of the national past, notably thanks for example to Hrušovský's contacts with Polish historians, especially Władysław Semkowicz. The professional dialogue and confrontation of opinions between Chaloupecký and the works of Polish medievalists like Stanisław Zakrzewsky or Gerard Labuda is also the subject of a chapter written by Marek Ďurčanský's, who also widens the Slavistic context of the Czechoslovak network of historiography, including the important role of Jaroslav Bidlo.

Tomáš Pánek's broad chapter chronologically goes beyond the decades of the First Republic, but for obvious, clear reasons: the political instrumentation of historical arguments, serving to defend or destroy the status quo of the Versailles peace system, culminated in 1938 and 1939. Czech (or Czechoslovak) science had its considerable limits in the historiographical competition arguing for (or against) geopolitical claims. Pánek describes the ways of politicization of history phenomenon that formed the arguments for establishing the "German national ground" and their connection to approaches and tools of topography and history of settlement. At the same time he proves that the same stood for Hungarian and Slovak historians. Confronting the volume of toponomastics and historical regional science texts, as represented by Josef Pfitzner or Erich Gierach at the German University in Prague, and from the Hungarian side, for example by the works of Elemér Mályusz, he claims that in this competition (in spite of efforts by Josef Vítězslav Šimák and František Roubík) the Czech and Czechoslovak historiography was methodologically and quantitatively backward.

Jitka Rauchová contemplates the science politics of the Commission of the Czechoslovak Institute of History in Rome and Chaloupecký's role as

a patron of Slovak students visiting Vatican libraries and archives in search for sources. She emphasises a certain rivalry between Czech and Slovak university centres when dispatching and evaluating grantees and their activities and reveals the hidden institutional and generational tensions, especially in the cases of Zdeněk Kristen, Marie Opočenská or Alexander Húščava.

Pavel Koblasa and Jan Kahuda round off the first section with a probe into the difficulties of the Czechoslovak archival administration in Slovakia confronted by the former Hungarian aristocratic elites, whose attitude towards the attempts of the democratic state to “invade” their earlier prerogative domain was (to put it mildly) “unfavorable”.

Second section focuses on the second life of the Chaloupecký’s work, especially his medievalist studies, their critical reception and reinterpretation. In addition to the contemporary up-to-dateness or conditionality of Chaloupecký’s research interests, the gradual exhaustion and interdisciplinary limits of the one-sided conception of the research of the past in the spirit of “historismus” turn up, as well as his reluctance to open up to the impulses of sociology, ethnology, or psychoanalysis. This provoked a critical reaction from his field companions of similar age like Jan Slavík, as well as Marxism-influenced nonconformist newcomer scholars assembled around the Historical Group (*Historická skupina*), namely Závěš Kalandra and Kurt Konrad. Discussion about the “revolutionary” heritage of the Hussites, or the process of Christianization of the early medieval community in the Czech lands, however, motivated social visionaries to focus on the Middle Ages.

Nina Milotová focused on the *Book about Říp*, “at first glance a hardly noticeable work, which has become for decades a major work in the field of” contemplating the symbolic function of the landscape’s horizon, in this case the mountain Říp as a national symbol and a significant element of the Czech historical tradition. The analysis of the non-fictional work contemplates, among other things, the question of historical painting as a seemingly self-evident but significant addition to historical publications and the popularization of history in the public discourse. The evaluation of Chaloupecký’s contribution to the interpretation of the roots of another of the important “sites of memory”, in this case the roots and etymology of the name of the Slovak capital city Bratislava, was made by the Slovak medievalist Miroslav Lysý. Thanks to the competitive interpretations of the Hungarian Slavist Ján Melich and the significance of discoveries of new written sources Lysý documents that even the small contributions in the field of empiricritical research about the beginnings of the Slovak history immediately became a tool of “battle” for the public space, in which also the later Slovak nationalist (so called Ludák’s) Historiography used Chaloupecký’s theses, even when their originator’s ideas were overall condemned.

David Kalhous focuses in his study on similar paradoxes in the interpretation of Czech hagiography, and especially on the limits of Chaloupecký's analysis of the so-called *Legenda Christiani*. Kalhous recapitulates the relationship of interpretive weaknesses in Rudolf Urbánek's seemingly contradictory views and also emphasizes the importance of the academic features of professional and career rivals, and illustrates how Chaloupecký "prescribed for his sources what their authors would have had to mention from their preimages if they were to prove they really knew them".

Jaroslav Bouček recapitulates a similarly intense interpretive duel through notorious and also less known texts, including journalist ones. They document very well the "fencing duel" between Chaloupecký and his contemporary ideological opponent and uncompromising critic Jan Slavík. Bouček proves through the description of different views on the concept of the Revolution, the interpretation of the era of Prince Wenceslaus I and the interpretation of František Palacký's reference, that generational kinship and character affinity of the historian's personality should not be taken as a matter of course for creating analogies when writing any biographical sketch.

Vojtěch Čurda follows-up with an attempt to make reference between the interpretations of the Hussite epoch in the works of Jan Slavík, Kurt Konrad and Závěš Kalandra. Every one of them came out of other noetics, and their "Hussite" contributions had a different updating context and varied in the genre, but according to Čurda they are linked together by a utopian overlap, which later found a positive response in thoughts and work of Robert Kalivoda. The importance of Kalandra's surprising entry into the domain of historiography and his relationship with Jan Slavík was also contemplated by Martin Kindl, who brought together both Chaloupecký's opponents in the interpretation of the oldest Czech hagiography, while emphasizing their indirect, but in their time terminologically innovative and provocative inspiration by cultural-anthropological or ethnological theories, as well as the fact that they were able to reflect and appreciate each other's attempts.

Dalibor Státník concludes the second section with a reminder of the work of the Moravian ethnographer Jan Húsek, who devoted his efforts during the 1920s and 1930s not only to the definition of the ethnographic border between Moravia and Slovakia but also to the issues of culture, national consciousness and the existence of the Ruthenians and East Slavic Greek Catholics in Eastern Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Húsek's engaged diction of the *Národopisná hranice mezi Slováky a Karpatorusy* (*The ethnographic Boundary between the Slovaks and the Carpatho-Rusyns*) corresponds in Státník's thoughts with a general civilization and cultural mission that officials of the Czechoslovak Republic intended to fulfill against the "Czechoslovak East". However - as documented here - they often passively stood by rather than applying focused and conceptual political action.

The third section is devoted to issues of regionalism, both in relation to the milieu of the Chaloupecký's native region, to the village Dětenice, situated on the border between Mladá Boleslav and Jičín, and to the Moravian-Slovak border region, Záhorka and Holíč, the birthplace of Chaloupecký's wife Ludmila, born Groeblová. Thus the final section also has a Czech-Slovak dimension. Hana Kábová asks opening questions in her instructive discussion about the cultural anchoring and significance of regionalist works since 1888, when the Society of Friends of Czech Antiques was founded until 1918. The chapter deals with the insufficient reflection of the importance of regional work in interwar Czechoslovakia in general. Through the analysis of the reception of the purpose of cultural regionalism by inter-war authorities (Bedřich Slavík, Josef Ludvík Fischer, etc.), it calls attention to the not always deliberate competition with national economic policies and fine arts cultural activities, as far as the latter were even at that time perceived (in contrast to the activities of cultural associations) as more effective due to the different evidential (esp. material) value of their output.

Václav Nájemník focuses on the family roots of Zdeněk Nejedlý, the musicologist, historian and later the eminent Czech communist politician's. He traces Nejedlý's family roots in Dětenice and their connections with their former neighbors, the Chaloupecký's family, following the links between the musical activities of Roman and Zdeněk Nejedlý with the important family of Foersters in the nearby village Osenice, the relationship between Roman Nejedlý and Slovakia (including his contacts with the printer Karel Salva) and also Zdeněk Nejedlý's activity in Jabkenice, especially his unsuccessful attempt to transform the local gamekeeper's lodge (the last retreat of the renowned composer Bedřich Smetana) into the "Smetana" memorial site.

Milica Lustigová's chapter contemplates genealogy and roots of the Evangelical tradition in the family of the first Slovak modernist poet Ludmila Groeblová, Chaloupecký's wife. The text reveals both remarkable genealogy and family roots, as well as sources of inspiration for her poems. On the basis of the previously thoroughly unexamined family heritage of the author's father, literary historian Pavel Bunčák, Lustigová illustrates the influence of Groeblová's aunt, the prematurely widowed Slovak writer Mária Holuby, and, from the textological point of view, brings about some new observations on the work of the prematurely muted pioneer of the Slovak modern poetry.

The research collaboration of Eva Bílková, Milan Ducháček, Josef Matoušek and Milena Roudná brings new insights into Václav Chaloupecký's pomological passion, embedded in the family tradition and in the wider background of the Český Ráj (Bohemian Paradise) area. It enriches the historian's bibliography with previously unknown contributions from the field of pomology and shows how the historian participated in the tradition of interpreting Czech pomological terminology and the history of

the field, including the reception of his theses in the pioneering work of the botanist Bohumil Němec.

The chapter of Zdenka Gláserová Lebedová deals with the unclear circumstances of the creation of a cross in the village of Dětenice, which (according to the family tradition) was erected at the proposal of the historian's grandmother as a gift for a grandchild's recovery from diphtheria. The study reconstructs the possible original appearance of the cross, maps the recent revitalization of the artifact, but primarily analyzes the cartographic and topographic data, proving its unclear identification. However it does not refute the claims of Milan Ducháček, but clearly relativises them. The third section concludes with Radka Janků's insight into the history of primary school in Dětenice. Analysing the establishment and everyday functioning of the then new municipal school building, the circulation protocol of the local association library and other public institutions, Janků reveals the wider context of everyday life of the village and its inhabitants, and adds minor corrections to the picture of Chaloupecký's youth, for example his engagement in the "handl" practice, an exchange habit (typical for the linguistically miscellaneous regions) with the goal of helping children to acquire foreign (here German/Czech) language skills. The chapter as also the whole book closes with historian's returns to his birthplace and last years spent there under the pressure of the post-February 1948 communist regime living under humiliating conditions.

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The intention of the research team throughout the whole volume was to revisit, rethink and recontextualise theses presented in a number of earlier works on Czech and Slovak modern and contemporary historiography and attempt to offer at least some new insights. In conclusion, we dare to believe that many of the topics re-presented here, despite their previous and often long and fruitful research traditions, point to new problems and questions, especially on the transnational level of comparative historiography.