

Eneae Silvii Historia Bohemica - Enea Silvio Historie česká. A Latin-Czech edition.
Eds. Dana Martínková, Alena Hadravová and Jiří Matl. Czech and English
preface by František Šmahel.

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The chronicle „Historia Bohemica“, by the Italian humanist Enea Silvio Piccolomini (born 1405; from 1458 to 1464 Pope Pius II), was for almost two centuries among the most well-known texts on Bohemian history in Western Europe, serving as a fundamental source for the understanding of heretical Bohemia and the Bohemians in Catholic Europe. In fifteenth-century Europe, the Kingdom of Bohemia was perceived as a hotbed of heresy, riot and revolt. Bohemia had never before been such a focal point of European affairs, and never before had it cost Europe so much. Silvio's „Historia Bohemica“ proceeded out of this atmosphere, and its spread was facilitated by the prestige of its papal author.

Surprisingly, until now, a modern edition of this in many ways remarkable work has not been published. Josef Emler's edition, with a poor-quality Old Czech translation made by Jan Húska in 1487, part of the series „Fontes Rerum Bohemiarum“, was left unfinished and most of the copies were destroyed. In the 1980s, Rostislav Nový had planned a publication of the introduction, in the Latin original with a Czech translation, but his intentions were unfortunately not realized. And so this famous, much discussed, and eagerly awaited work appears only now as the first volume of a new series of editions, „Fontes rerum Regni Bohemiae“.

We have before us a work compiled by a team of experienced specialists. Lacking Silvio's holograph, the editors relied on two manuscripts from the Vatican Library (both dating from 1458, shortly after the work was completed), as well as three fifteenth-century manuscripts deposited in Vyšší Brod (Hohenfurt), Olomouc (Olmütz) and Třeboň (Wittingau) and two old printed editions (the oldest a 1475 Rome edition; the other a humanist edition from Cologne in 1532). The editors borrowed the breakdown of the work into individual chapters from the Cologne edition. The annotations and critical apparatus accompanying the Latin text fulfill their demanding tasks, and an excellent preface by František Šmahel is provided in both Czech and English. Regrettably, a full utilization of this otherwise exemplary edition is limited due to the lack of a historical commentary, especially with regard to Silvio's loose treatment of the historical facts.

How did Silvio learn about Bohemia? Among his close friends was the Cheb (Eger) German imperial official Kaspar Schlick, the Bohemian humanist Prokop of

Rabstein (Procopius Rabensteinus), his fellow notaries František of Bránice and Václav of Bochoř (Wenceslaus von Buchau), the Prague Old Town Chancellor Jan Tůšek, as well as the university professors Jan Ondřejův (Johannes Andreae), known as Šindel, or Jan Papoušek (Joannes Pappus) from Soběslav. Of critical importance, however, was Silvio's personal experience in Bohemia. He entered the country for the first time in July 1451, as a member of King Frederick III's delegation to the Bohemian Landtag. He passed the night in the south Bohemian town of Tábor, a „sanctuary for heretics“, and he wrote down his experiences, together with other observations from his diplomatic mission, in the form of an extensive letter to the Spanish cardinal Juan Carvajal, dated 21 August 1451. At the Landtag in Benešov (Beneschau), where he stayed four days, Silvio observed at close quarters the leaders of the Bohemian Catholic and Calixtine aristocracy, representatives of more than ten towns and above all, the regent George of Poděbrady.

The negotiations took place in a charged atmosphere, as the Austrian delegation rejected the request by the Bohemians that they take away Ladislav Posthumous, on account of his youth, under their care. Silvio praised his own role in „soothing the wild minds“, but he was evidently not very successful in this role as mediator. Although he was reluctant to share breakfast at Tábor with men „of monstrous impiety“, in the end he decided to accept an invitation to converse with Taborite theologians on his journey back to Vienna. These theologians included the „evil old man“ Mikuláš Biskupec (Nicolaus Pilgramensis), the „old servant of the devil“ Václav Koranda (Wenceslaus Coranda) and the Polish Wycliffite Ondřej (Andreas) Galka. Once the delegation left Tábor in the direction of Soběslav, Silvio described his experience as having been „among barbarians beyond the icy sea, among cannibals, and among the monstrous nations of India and Libya“. Such characterization obviously cannot be taken literally, but it does express the seriousness with which Silvio came to regard the Bohemian issue. This is evident from the dedication of his „*Historia Bohemica*“ to Alfonso, King of Aragon: „There is no kingdom in which, in our time, so many changes have occurred, so many wars, defeats and miracles, as the Bohemian Lands have shown us“.

Silvio wrote his „*Historia*“ during a visit to the Viterbo spa in June and July 1458, shortly before his election to the Roman See, and it was meant to be a counterpart to his „*History of Austria*“ (*Historia Australis*). We know, however, that he had already observed Bohemian affairs and that he had been preparing his description of Bohemian history for some time. His treatise „*On the Council of Basel*“ (*De concilio Basiliensi*), among others, was closer to reality than his later exposition in „*Historia Bohemica*“.

Bohemian heresy, according to Silvio, was rooted in national tensions. The Germans at that time had too much power in Bohemia and it was just a question of time as to when this situation would become intolerable. Faith then became a justification for action against German power. Germans were connected with Catholicism, and therefore an all out campaign was launched against them. Although acknowledging that this movement relied partly on Wycliffe's teachings and other radical doctrines, Silvio overlooked the influence of Waldensian teachings in Bohemia. He stressed the national nature of the movement headed at Prague and sharply condemned the

Taborite sectarians, while searching for a solution of the crisis in the one person who could „unite the community“, George of Poděbrady, the most powerful leader among the Calixtines, who had, moreover, wartime allies in the orthodox camp.

Political events moved in other directions, however. Silvio as Pope Pius II broke off his relations with George of Poděbrady in 1462. Pius II dissolved the Compactata „before the world“; after the project of the Peaceful Union of European leaders, with which the King of Bohemia hampered Pius' escapades against the Turks, the pope summoned George of Poděbrady to his court in Rome. Two months later, Pope Pius was no longer among the living and the question of the „premature“ Bohemian reformation had to be resolved by his successor, Paul II.

Enea Silvio's chronicle itself is a very incongruous work. For the centuries preceding the Hussite period, „*Historia Bohemica*“ is no more than a brief compilation. Silvio's main source for this period was the chronicle of Přebík Pulkava of Radenín, the most widespread late medieval historical text of Bohemian origin (40 manuscripts in Latin, Czech and German currently exist). Silvio sometimes polemicized against this chronicle, but he preserved its mistakes and questionable accounts.

On the other hand, the account of events from the 1420s and 1430s can be considered as an individual's perception of Hussitism from the Catholic point of view. This part of the „*Historia*“ reflects to a considerable extent how the Hussite heresy was perceived by highly educated humanist Catholics. Silvio's chronicle was influenced, as Howard Kaminsky perceptively remarked, „by the interpretation of revolution by its emigrants and apostates“.

The most important problem is, however, to determine the sources which the author had at his disposal. Without a detailed analysis it is not possible to make much progress. Many remarkable observations can be found in Silvio's chronicle. Let us mention a few of them: it is surprising, for instance, to note the accuracy with which he describes the conditions laid down by the Taborites to the moderate Hussites before the Battle of Lipany. He also provides an interesting account of how the Bohemian noblemen in Brno (Brünn) in December 1419, „joyfully called for a new king with their hands held up to the sky“. Another suggestive detail provided by Silvio concerns the 3050 people who died in the upper part of the New Town of Prague during the plague epidemic in 1380. Besides the ethnic difference between Czechs and Germans, he saw the frustration of intellectuals, who felt slighted when the majority of lucrative church prebends were filled by people of middling and substandard skills, as a source of the Hussite eruption. Silvio's conception of contemporary anti-Semitism is worth mentioning as well: he searched for its roots in economic rather than religious difference. On the other hand, Enea Silvio made many mistakes and errors as well, which is why František Šmahel, in the preface, added a malicious comment on the passages concerning Hussitism: read with interest, but don't believe anything.

Finally, it should be noted that the concluding section, encompassing the period in which Silvio observed and judged the Bohemian political scene both from a distance and from close up, is a more reliable source than „the father of Czech historians“, František Palacký, imagined, in spite of the clear tendentiousness of Silvio's perspective. During this period, particularly after the death of King Albrecht II of

Habsburg in 1439, events in Hungary, Austria and the Bohemian Lands became interconnected as never before, so that since that time it has not been possible to describe Bohemian affairs in isolation.

As if he could foresee the future battles over the vacant Neapolitan throne, Silvio, after finishing his study of contemporary Bohemian and Hungarian history, ended his „*Historia Bohemica*“ with the following precept: „We are convinced that kingdoms are gained with weapons, not with laws. The End.“ This humanist evaluation was far removed from the approach of medieval chroniclers and annalists. And it was perhaps this conclusion that led Silvio as Pope Pius II to proclaim a crusade in the 1460s, in order to bring Bohemian heretics to their knees by military means.

We must continue to hope for a critical edition of Enea Silvio's „*Historia Bohemica*“ with a full historical commentary, but we already have at our disposal a very valuable source for fifteenth-century Central European history to fill a great gap that has hitherto existed.