MOUNTAIN MEN ON IRON HORSES: NATIONAL SPACE IN THE REPRESENTATIONS OF NEW RAILWAY LINES IN INTERWAR CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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When Czechoslovakia was founded in October 1918, only a single main line connected Slovakia with the Bohemian Lands: the privately-owned railway between Slovak Košice (Kassa, Kaschau) and Silesian Bohumín (Oderberg). In order to address this problem and firmly link both parts of the country, the government launched a major construction program of fifteen new lines that transformed the railway network of Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia. The article focuses on the ceremonies that accompanied the opening of new construction projects and completed lines. It examines the projects as discursive events that shaped not only the Czechoslovak public’s view of the railway network, but also of their country’s territory and landscape. Outwardly, the ceremonies celebrated the new railway lines as expressions of the unity of the Czechoslovak nation. At the same time, the discourse created a geographical hierarchy by depicting Slovakia and Ruthenia as objects of a Czech civilizing mission. The article suggests that this Czech paternalism indicates the limits to Czechoslovak national unity in the interwar period.

LOCATING THE NATION IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD: DEBATES ON THE GLOBAL POSITION OF INTERWAR CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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The interwar period is often thought of as a time of ‘deglobalization’, a conception that refers mainly to the process of economic disentanglement that occurred at the time. This does not always reflect reality, however: like other newly founded Central European states in the 1920s and 1930s, the Czechoslovak republic needed to initiate and pursue international contacts in a variety fields such as diplomacy, economy or academic research, both in a European context and beyond. This article makes a plea to link Czechoslovak history into wider global history, connecting Central European regions with the world outside Europe. With a focus on contemporary public discussions about potential markets in Asia and on the importance of the topic of Oriental Studies in Prague, but also on the country’s emigration problem and the search for Czechoslovak colonies, this article argues that discussions at the time on the risks, opportunities and necessity for a global outreach often identified non-European regions as having the potential to solve some of the central political, social, and economic issues of the interwar period, thereby negotiating Czechoslovakia’s place on a global map.