

SUMMARIES

THE SOCIETY FOR HISTORY OF THE GERMANS IN BOHEMIA, 1862 — 1938

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On May 2, 1862, students from North Bohemian artisan circles founded in Prague a society in order to supplement the Czech historiography of František Palacký with respect to the Germans in Bohemia and to strengthen the historical consciousness of the German Bohemians. In the first years the scientific direction was in the hands of Professor Konstantin Höfler, historian at the University of Prague, who came from Bavaria. With great energy the young historians first began with the edition of works on municipal history, among them chronicles and registers. With its popular didactic tendencies this cultivation of history was in keeping with the liberal movement in Austria. Dr. Ludwig Schlesinger (born in 1838) was active as a researcher and writer on history within the „Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen" (Communications of the Society for History of the Germans in Bohemia), which he directed, and on the board of the society, as well as a leading liberal politician until his death (1899). The controversy with Palacký around 1870 and the national division of the University of Prague in 1882 deepened the gulf between the historians of the two peoples.

In the period of the decline of the liberal movement and the intensification in the national differences of Bohemia, the board of the Society withdrew strictly to scientific research, and with the abandoning of projects of popular education, reduced the close ties to the German-Bohemian districts. In addition to the registers of German towns and monasteries there were publications on the history of industry, art, and music, but also literature that territorially or biographically related to the German nationality in the land.

Under the influence of August Sauer, Professor of Recent German Literature, the „Gesellschaft zur Förderung deutscher Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur" (Society for the Promotion of German Science, Art and Literature) (known in Bohemia as the „Society for Promotion"), founded in Prague in 1891, undertook comprehensive scientific tasks as well as those of cultivation of culture for the German nationality, and published the periodical

„Deutsche Arbeit“ (German Work) from 1901 on, with the Society for History contributing frequently. A. Sauer also led the struggle on behalf of the preservation of the German universities in Prague.

With the entrance around 1913 of representatives of the generation of the thirty-year-olds the board was rejuvenated. After 1919, within the newly-founded Czechoslovak Republic, it then quickly established contact with the „Verband für Heimatforschung und Heimatbildung“ (Association for Research and Education of the Homeland), founded in Aussig in 1922, and its historical societies in the individual regions of all the Bohemian lands. The conducting of joint working meetings of researchers and the establishment of an „Archival Section“ (1925) within the Society, which was devoted to the expert care and scientific utilization of the non-state German archives of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, gave the Prague Historical Society back its former importance as a steering institute for German provincial history. This was aided by the collections installed as study libraries in Prague (Kleinseite), and directed students to the society.

Newly appointed professors, several from the Austrian „Institut für Geschichtsforschung“ (Institute for Historical Research) in Vienna strengthened the scientific weight of the research, especially for legal and municipal history, settlement and general regional history. After 1922 such docents as Wilhelm Wostry (born in 1877), who were returning prisoners of war, were added, as well as such new personnel as W. Weizsäcker and Ernst Schwarz.

Next to the „Communications“, the yearbooks and jubilee volumes for some of the leading professors (W. Wostry, H. Hirsch, Th. Mayer) demonstrated the range of the research program. The celebrations on the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the Society showed the manifold recognition of its scientific position, which also found expression in the two-volume omnibus volume „Das Sudetendeutschtum, sein Wesen und Werden im Wandel der Jahrhunderte“ (The Sudeten German Nationality, its Essence and Development in the Course of the Centuries) and the publication of a second periodical „Zeitschrift für sudetendeutsche Geschichte“ (Journal for Sudeten German History). Herein and at the International Congress of Historians in Zürich in 1938 a conciliatory collaboration with the Czechs appeared to be at hand. The Historical Society was able to preserve its independent existence after 1939, but was then expropriated in 1945, and in the summer three of the older members of the board died a violent death; the library was assigned to the Prague Municipal Archives. The surviving members of the board gathered together the expelled historians in the Historical Commission of the Sudeten Lands, founded in 1953 in Heidelberg, and established in 1956 the Collegium Carolinum, Research Office for the Bohemian Lands.