

THE SUDETEN LANDS AND THE GERMAN WEST IN THE MODERN ERA

Adam Wandruszka

To a greater degree than other European regions, the fate of the Sudeten lands has in the modern era been determined by military decisions: the Battle of Mohács (1526), the Battle of the White Mountain (1620), the Silesian Wars and the Seven Years' War (1740—45, 1756—63), Königgrätz (1866), and the two World Wars. Even where the decisions were reached on Bohemian battlefields, the lands of the Crown of Wenceslas were much more the object than the subject of the contest, and even in the Bohemian uprising of 1618—20 the decision was finally brought about by foreign armies and generals.

From the beginning the relations to the German West were very close.

Ferdinand I, elected King of Bohemia in 1526 after Mohács, was on January 5, 1531, while his brother, the Emperor Charles V, was still alive, elected Roman king in the Cathedral of Cologne, and from then on until the end of the Holy Roman Empire (1806), the „Roman crown was placed on top of the Bohemian“ each time. Both parties in the great religious-political struggles — sovereign and estates, Catholics and Protestants — found backing and supporters among West German and West European fellow-believers and compeers, especially since the greater nobility of Bohemia, both German and Czech, felt that it was on entirely equal terms with the nobility of the German Empire and that it had manifold ties with it. In the reorganization and re-Catholicizing of the country the victorious Counterreformatory absolutism of the Hapsburgs made use of people brought in from abroad; next to Spaniards and Italians, predominantly men from the German West (priests and monks, but also, in the new formation of the Bohemian nobility after 1620, officials and nobility). As an example of the later period Prince Kaunitz-Rietberg should above all be mentioned; on his father's side he was descended from Bohemian, and on his mother's side from Westphalian, nobility. After the wars between Frederick the Great and Maria Theresa, the Sudeten area, which had for the most part been situated up to then in west-east tension, was also placed in north-south tension. In the Age of the Enlightenment, Bohemia became „the classical land of the Enlightenment in Austria“ (Eduard Winter), while in the Napoleonic era the world-famous Bohemian spas (which Goethe at that time also visited almost every year) became the meeting-place for Prussian and Austrian statesmen, soldiers and diplomats, where the great coalition against Napoleon was welded together. Although the lands of the Crown of Wenceslas remained in the German Confederation in 1815, and although the relations were intensified even more in the Age of Industrialization, František Palacký's famous letter declining the invitation to the National Assembly in Frankfurt must be evaluated — at least for the Czech part of the population — as the return of the Bohemian electoral voice to the Reich, and was thus a prelude to the separation by force in 1866.