

THE PROBLEMATIC NATURE OF A CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE CZECHS

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The forcible deportation of the Germans from the Sudeten lands ended an uninterrupted 1,500-year-old cultural period, one of whose basic attributes had been that Czechs and Germans had lived with and next to each other. If, on the one hand, the culture of the Czechs from the beginning bore the mark of the Occident in general and Germany in particular, it had, on the other hand, so many earmarks of Slavic character that it must be regarded as a Slavic and genuinely Czech culture. The way in which the Czechs were able to preserve their language against the preponderant strength and spread of the Germans can as a cultural manifestation not be valued highly enough. The political community with the Austrian Alpine lands, which lasted for four centuries, made the Czechs receptive for the culture radiated from Vienna which paid homage to individuality and was permeated by cosmopolitanism. Especially the most important outward signs of Czech character, folk art and national costume, threatened to disappear completely from all but a few areas in the mid-19th century, when at the end of the century, with the Svěráz, there began the systematic

cultivation of national costumes and folk art, as well as the recovery of what had been forgotten. It is obvious that the Czechs endeavored from time to time to partake of the attainments of the Western cultural sphere without German mediation, and also to establish intellectual bridges toward the Slavic East, and this left behind clear traces in their culture and engaged them in the main stream of world activity.

Through an evaluation and analysis of the culture of the Czechs four different types and paths of cultural volition and cultural expression can be ascertained. Two essential cultural expressions are the preservation of Slavic character and the struggle in behalf of their own language; the efforts to come into contact with other cultures beyond the German environment can be regarded as the third cultural expression. The fourth cultural expression, the cultural volition deriving from the Czech-German interrelationship, bestowed upon the Czechs the greatest achievements, whose inner essence represented a Slavic-German intellectual fusion. There thus exists a schism between cultural expression and political attitude, which the democracy of the First Republic was unable to overcome, and which is probably one of the main reasons why up to now no Czech has written a cultural history of his own people.

In writing a cultural history of the Czechs one encounters phenomena of the Bohemian lands whose prerequisites, developmental stages, or originators reveal Czech, German, or other elements and have correspondingly different characteristics. In some cases an unequivocal answer can be found not at all, or only to a limited degree, and in others the components can hardly be eliminated, or not at all. In other words, in the recording and evaluation of some phenomena it is necessary to be satisfied with outlining and paraphrasing. Herein lies the problematical nature of a cultural history of the Czechs.

In a cultural history of the Czechs the Emperor Charles IV cannot be omitted. As Bohemian king and as a descendant of a Czech dynasty on his mother's side, he influenced Czech culture creatively, although he himself was never anything other than a German ruler. The painting of the 14th century must likewise be depicted, including, namely, the elements outside the purely Czech cultural area (South Bohemian art, Theoderich). — Since in addition to King Wenceslas IV and his wife, other Germans also took part in kindling the Hussite movement, a cultural history of the Czechs cannot disregard this German participation; the problem whether the Hussite movement proceeded from religious or from anti-German, national impulses would thereby be clarified. — The extent to which the activity of the Czechs outside of the Bohemian lands should be valued represents a problem. A positive solution can be found for the 17th and 18th centuries, and a uniform account should also be possible for the first half of the 20th century, but it is doubtful whether the activity since 1945 still reveals so many common characteristics as to permit granting it the attribute of a

uniform culture of the Czech emigration. The life and activity of the Slovaks Ján Kollár and Pavel Josef Šafařík shows the problematical nature of the Slovak-Czech cultural community at the beginning of the 19th century, which makes it on the whole impossible to classify these two great intellectual figures under Slovak or under Czech culture; their place in the cultural history of the two peoples should be all the more prominent.