

Morava, Georg J.: *Franz Palacký. Eine frühe Vision von Mitteleuropa.*

Österreichischer Bundesverlag, Wien 1990, 244 S.

In this elegant companion-piece to his earlier study, *Der k.k. Dissident Karel Havlíček*, Georg Morava takes up the life and work of arguably the greatest Czech historian of the modern era and a dominant figure in the nationalist movement of the nineteenth century, František Palacký. This "Father of the Nation" could not entirely be ignored by the recently-overthrown totalitarian regime; but, at least officially, Palacký's place in the modern history of the Czech nation was interpreted according to the prevailing winds of Marxist-Leninist ideology. Though scholars in the West were free from these problems, and though much useful work concerning Palacký's career was accomplished under trying conditions inside Czechoslovakia, Morava clearly feels that the time has come to restate the essence of Palacký as historian and nationalist politician.

The Palacký who emerges from this biography is a major, positive figure in both these areas. His historical work, rooted in Hegelian idealism and not untouched by Herder's influences, was nevertheless based on such a wide-ranging knowledge of the sources, and such an effective critical evaluation of them, that even his opponents could not but concede that his *Geschichte von Böhmen* and its Czech version, *Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a na Moravě*, were truly great achievements. His interpretation of the meaning of Czech history had a great influence on the nationalist ideology, even while provoking critical discussion among generations of Czech historians. But Palacký's influence on the Czech national movement was not limited to his historical work alone, as Morava shows. For an entire generation he was one of the most influential political leaders among the Czechs: His contacts with the nobility of the Kingdom of Bohemia helped influence political discussion during the *Vormärz*, but it was his letter to the Committee of Fifty at the Frankfurt *Vorparlament* in April 1848 which catapulted him, and the Czech question, to prominence. His was one of the decisive voices shaping the Kremsier constitution, and it sounded again through the 1860s in a futile attempt to ward off the approaching dualism eventually enshrined in the *Ausgleich* of 1867. These aspects of Palacký's career, supplemented with glimpses of his personal life, his relationship to his wife Therese, his daughter, and his influential son-in-law František L. Rieger, are well presented and illuminated with extracts from his public writings, some personal letters and reminiscences, and comments by contemporaries. The story is told clearly, and apparently with a general audience in mind, for the author avoids any ponderous scholarly apparatus, and the note on sources at the end of the book is intended mainly to list sources for Palacký's own published and unpublished works and papers.

If this biography is aimed at a general audience, it also expects that audience to be very well-informed about Central European history. Many events and personalities are mentioned as they touched Palacký's life, but without being more than sketchily placed in a wider context. This is also true of the treatment of Palacký himself. His public *persona*, his historical and political careers, are well-described; but there is very little attempt to analyze any of them more fully. Palacký's "Vision of Central Europe" is presented from his famous letter to Frankfurt (quoted in full) and then the Kremsier

draft and other political essays (not neglecting his “Idea státu rakouského” of 1865, with its warning that “we were here before Austria, and we shall be here when she is gone”); but there is little discussion of the possibilities of realizing such a vision, nor of contemporaries’ reactions, nor even of other, competing visions of Central Europe. Even Palacký’s bones are simply laid to rest next to his beloved Therese without any final evaluation of his life and career.

This biography of Palacký’s, then, does not present anything new in information or interpretation – at least to a scholarly audience. What it does do very effectively is to summarize the career and work of a crucially important figure in nineteenth century Czech and European history in a form that is accessible, clear, and well-produced. Especially now, when so much of the past of Central Europe has to be reclaimed from more than a generation of political distortion, this is no mean accomplishment.