Writing and Displaying Nations:

Constructing Narratives of National Art in Bohemia and Austria-Hungary

MARTA FILIPOVÁ

In the nineteenth century, Bohemia, as a part of Austria-Hungary, enjoyed lively interaction between the two main ethnic groups, Germans and Czechs, at various levels of politics and culture. Discussions of what constituted the national art and culture of each ethnic group were particularly important as they provided opportunities to demonstrate the group's claims regarding its past and present. This text focuses on two key aspects of the conscious creation and re-creation of narratives about Czech and German national heritage and culture in Bohemia; it examines art-historical writing by both Czech and German authors and it investigates tangible displays of art and cultural heritage at regional and national exhibitions. Both of these areas helped to form the Czech national culture, as well as Czech art history, as they were very much influenced by their opposition to the foundations of German heritage in Bohemia.

In the nineteenth century, the task of constructing the notion of national art and heritage preoccupied scholars and writers, as well as politicians and local patriots in all regions of Central and Eastern Europe. As in the Baltic region, the Habsburg empire, consisting of a number of kingdoms and countries, contained a large ethnic mixture and long-standing competition over local culture.

This text focuses on the geographical area of Bohemia, which was a part of this large empire and which underwent important developments in national self-awareness in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Looking at the political, ethnic and cultural changes that took place here, I will explore the encounters between Germans and Czechs who lived on this territory, which took a number of forms: from verbal disputes over art-historical matters to rather ostentatious displays of what was regarded as the national art and culture of each ethnic group. I will therefore focus on the narratives that were created about national heritage and culture in this specific context, and I will look at the forms they took in both art-historical writing and in tangible displays of art

and cultural heritage. This examination will explore the formation of art history in Bohemia, which was in many ways based and constructed on the opposition to elementary aspects of German heritage in Bohemia. As such, the focus of this text will be on the formation of 'Czech' national identity in the various expressions of visual culture. I will approach the question of German heritage as an essential and constructive element for the idea of a Czech nation and its heritage.

Introduction: Geographies, history and politics

The Austro-Hungarian Empire was created by the Compromise of 1867, in which the Hungarian Kingdom was granted sovereignty and a dual monarchy was created. The empire was a conglomeration of a number of historical kingdoms, ethnicities and language groups that took up most of Central Europe and, apart from the Austrian and Hungarian regions, it included the lands of Galicia, Bohemia, Slovakia (or Upper Hungary), Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Bukovina and Transylvania. Such a large ethnic, religious and cultural mixture naturally created a breeding ground for conflict between the various groups, which often competed over national recognition, political or economic power, and territory. The empire was dissolved after World War I, when new states, often based on the principle of the homogeneous nation, were created in 1918.

The lands of the Bohemian crown, which are now part of the Czech Republic, had been ruled by the Habsburgs for a number of centuries, following the 1526 Battle of Mohács with the Ottoman Empire, which was victorious in the conflict. As a result, the Central European territory of today's Hungary was redistributed between the Ottomans, Austria and Transylvania, with Bohemia falling under the Habsburg rule. After the Compromise of 1867, Bohemia remained under Austrian administration and this redistribution of powers, in which the Czechs of Bohemia were not given the privileges they desired, only intensified the Czech nationalistic sentiments which had been growing during this time.

Therefore, as in most of Europe, the revival of Czech national identity fully developed throughout the long nineteenth century.[1] From early on in the century, the Czech national revival used linguistic affinities with other Slavic groups as a tool that had the potential to integrate the small Czech nation into the larger community of Slavic nations. However, the search for Pan-Slavic connections was gradually replaced by attempts to build up an independent Czech identity that would be free of potential subordination to one of the more powerful Slavic cultures, such as Russia or Poland. Even before 1848 possible alternatives were explored and the political programme of 'Austro-Slavism' was initiated by the Czechs; it sought closer

1 Cf. for example Die Kunsthistoriographien in Ostmitteleuropa und der nationale Diskurs. Eds. R. Born, A. Janatková, A. Labuda. Berlin: Mann, 2004; D. Crowley, National Style and Nation-State: Design in Poland from the Vernacular Revival to the International Style. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992; Internationalism and the Arts in Britain and Europe at the *Fin de Siècle*. Ed. G. E. Brockington. (Cultural Interactions 4.) Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009; Art, Culture and National Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Europe. Eds. M. Facos, S. L. Hirsch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

co-operation between the Slavic peoples within the Habsburg monarchy. The occurrence of national sentiments in politics and culture, therefore, first focused on the fight for the recognition of the distinctiveness of the Czechs as a national group *within* the empire, and not as an independent political entity.

Apart from the political demands for greater autonomy, the Czech national revival of the nineteenth century was very much focused on the establishment of cultural and educational institutions which would endorse the idea of a Czech identity. The Czech university in Prague, created by the split of the Charles-Ferdinand University into Czech and German parts (1882), the National Theatre (1881; fig. 1), museums, libraries, Czech-language newspapers and journals, patriotic clubs, societies and organisations promoting Czech culture, heritage and sport are just a few examples of the kinds of institutions that played a significant role in defining and promoting national identity during this period in the capital of Prague, as well as in smaller centres in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia.

It was, however, not until 1918 and the collapse of the empire that the Czechs were able to create an independent state together with the Slovaks, who occupied the territories east of Moravia and had been under Hungarian administration in the Habsburg empire. This postwar union, as will be discussed later, was far from an agreement between equal partners, and it contained some ethnic and nationalistic issues similar to those that existed in Bohemia prior to World War I, which involved the Czechs and Germans.

Given the shared geopolitical circumstances, the historical and cultural ties between the Germans and Czechs had always been very close, and there was a considerable German minority in the Czech lands until the post-World-War-II radical expulsion of ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia. Until then, around thirty per cent of the population of what is now the Czech Republic claimed German ethnicity, most of them concentrated in the border regions of Bohemia in the north, west and south. In addition, Prague, the historical capital of Bohemia, had always had a very active German community with political, economic and cultural ambitions.

In the intensifying environment of Czech nationalism, the German minority became more radicalised, too. During the nineteenth century, when the two ethnic groups were in the same administrative unit of Austria, German demands for creating a separate German nation-state, which would include the border regions of Bohemia, grew ever stronger. This had an immense impact on the domestic political environment, as well as on the need to create a unified sense of national identity that would include both Germans and Czechs and would mobilise people's national sentiments. Such a mobilisation took place in a number of ways, including in the cultural and intellectual life.[2]

2 M. Marek, Kunst und Identitätspolitik. Architektur und Bildkünste im Prozess der tschechischen Nationsbildung. Cologne: Böhlau, 2004.

Art history and the national conflict

In order to consider this issue further, I will focus on a number of specific episodes that illustrate the kinds of conflict that took place in the sphere of visual culture. Their shared feature is the attempt to create a narrative of a homogeneous and distinctive heritage of a particular ethnicity. The first episode consists of the early attempts to construct a vision of national identity by scholars in the second half of the nineteenth century. At the centre of such conflicts were the attempts by Czech and German art historians to lay claim to the art and culture of Bohemia, emphasising their Czech or German character.

Czech art history as an intellectual discipline was formed at institutions of higher education in Prague, especially at the Charles-Ferdinand University, the School of Decorative Arts and the Academy of Fine Arts. The university, divided into Czech and German sections, was seen as a particularly important place where Czech scholarship was recognised and given independence, and where 'the process of national awakening in the field of scholarship' was completed.[3] The split in the university is sometimes also seen as marking the end of the dilettantism and improvisation that had characterised much of Czech scholarship until then.[4]

The division led to an increase in the number of staff members in most of the departments of the Czech part of the university and to the independent development of the respective disciplines. In art history, however, there was a continued shortage of qualified scholars. Although the first professor of art history, Jan Erazim Vocel (1803–1871), was appointed in 1850, after his death the position was not filled until 1874, when the German scholar Alfred Woltmann (1841–1880) was appointed.[5] Together with Bernhard Grueber (1806/1807–1882), Anton Springer (1825–1891) and Josef Neuwirth (1855–1934), Woltmann was one of the most important German art historians in Bohemia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and he contributed to many debates about the nature of German and, subsequently, Czech art in Bohemia. The Czech part of the university thus did not have a permanent professorship in art history until Karel Chytil (1857–1934) and Bohumil Jaroslav Matějka (1867–1909) were appointed in 1897.

At the same time, however, the German part of the university became rather isolated amid the growing awareness of nationalism in Prague. The German lecturers did not generally learn Czech, and the two language groups did not communicate with each other.[6] This growing alienation of the two sections at the univer-

3 M. Marek, Universität als 'Monument' und Politikum. Die Repräsentationsbauten der Prager Universitäten 1900–1935 und der politische Konflikt zwischen 'konservativer' und 'moderner' Architektur. Munich: Oldenbourg, 2001; F. Kutnar, Podmínky rozvoje českého dějepisectví [The conditions for the development of Czech historiography]. – Přehledné dějiny českého a slovenského dějepisectví. Od počátků národní kultury až do sklonku třicátých let 20. století [A comprehensive history of the Czech and Slovak historiography: From the beginning of the national culture until the end of the 1930s]. Eds. F. Kutnar, J. Marek. (Česká historie 3.) Prague: Lidové noviny, 1997, p. 378.

4 F. Kutnar, Podmínky rozvoje českého dějepisectví, p. 378.

5 Historie ústavu dějin umění [History of the Institute of Art History]. – Ústav pro dějiny umění FF UK [Institute of Art History, Faculty of Arts, Charles University], 2014, http://udu2.ff.cuni.cz/node/155 (accessed 5 March 2014).

6 J. Pešek, Německá univerzita v Praze 1882–1918 [The German university in Prague, 1882–1918]. – Dějiny Univerzity Karlovy. Vol. 3, 1802–1918. Ed. J. Havránek. Prague: Karolinum, 1997, p. 305.

sity reflected and contributed to the increasingly divided nature of Prague culture, in which the two separate linguistic and ethnic groups had their own theatre performances, concerts and exhibitions. Instead of cooperating with their Czech counterparts in Prague, the staff at the German part of the university preferred to maintain contacts with other universities in Austria-Hungary and Germany, mainly by moving quite extensively between institutions in the two countries.[7]

The initial attempts to define and establish the notion of Czech art were therefore closely related to the institutional circumstances under which the discipline of art history was founded. The attitude of Czech art historians towards the question of 'national' art can be seen in their responses to publications on art in Bohemia by German authors, and in their calls for the creation of a genuinely Czech history of Czech art. The catalyst for the emergence of a 'Czech' history of art was the work of the German scholars mentioned above. One of them, Alfred Woltmann, serves as a pertinent example of the nationalistic approach to German heritage in Bohemia on the part of both German and Czech scholars.

Woltmann was a graduate of Humboldt University in Berlin. He took up the post of professor of art history in Prague at the Academy of Fine Arts and at the Charles-Ferdinand University in 1874. His main scholarly focus was the art and architecture of the Middle Ages and early renaissance, which he considered to be German. For the Czechs, he became infamous for a lecture he gave in Prague in 1876, titled 'German art in Prague'.[8] Here, he argued for the German origin of almost all significant artworks in the city, or at least for a high degree of their dependence on German culture. Woltmann's lecture prompted open protests: Czech students demonstrated in the streets against his presence at the university, and the Czech press was full of harsh comments and published articles in defence of Czech art.[9]

The lecture provided a survey of art from early romanesque (Byzantine) times to the present. The author focused mainly on architecture, for him the most visible historical record and the best support for his argument of the German origins of artworks in Prague. Woltmann claimed that all artistic work of any value in Prague had been executed by German artists or was directly derived from German models. If any other influences appeared, he argued, they came to the city through Germany, because of the historical, religious and political dependence of Bohemia on Germany. Thus for him, 'in terms of the history of art, Bohemia was a German province'.[10] In the fourteenth century, Woltmann held, Emperor Charles IV, for instance, tried in numerous ways to give the visual arts of Prague an international stamp, but only German art managed to establish itself: 'The art in Bohemia, which was German through and through, reinvigorated itself through a renewed reliance on Germany.'[11]

7 J. Pešek, Německá univerzita..., p. 307.
8 A. Woltmann, Deutsche Kunst in Prag (Ein Vortrag gehalten zu Prag am 25 November 1876). Leipzig: Seemann, 1878.
9 For a full discussion of the lecture and its impact, see J. Vybíral, What Is 'Czech' in Art in Bohemia? Alfred Woltmann and Defensive Mechanisms of Czech Artistic Historiography. – Kunstchronik 2006, vol. 59 (1), pp. 1–7.
10 A. Woltmann, Deutsche Kunst in Prag, p. 10.
11 A. Woltmann, Deutsche Kunst in Prag, p. 25.

By including the art of Bohemia within the German sphere of influence, Woltmann created a cultural and ethnic geography of art. The territorial extent of German culture and ethnicity, which corresponded with the frontiers of the Holy Roman Empire and included the Czech-speaking lands, provided Woltmann with imagined boundaries for the occurrence of 'German art'. He specified the geographical and cultural place of Bohemia in his remarks, which were included, for example, in the section on renaissance art in Germany in the second volume of the *History of Painting*, in which he identified eastern Germany with Bohemia and Poland.[12]

Such a view corresponded with the contemporary German quest for the imperial destiny of the recently unified German nation-state. This linkage was based on the notions of cultural, historical and linguistic heritage, rather than on the contemporary political realities. Bohemia was thus seen as a cultural province of the German empire and fell into the discourse of the German national reconstruction. Like the Czechs, as will be discussed later, German art historians were equally involved in the strengthening of the German national identity, which aimed at the promotion of a sense of continuous traditions and artistic expressions of an ethnically homogeneous people.[13] Woltmann's search for the ethnic roots of the Germanic culture thus indicated that his approach was rooted in nationalism and an aesthetically oriented art history.[14]

Part of Woltmann's argument, developed in his later writing, was the fact that the most established medieval artists and architects had German names (or their names had German spellings) and hence German identity. Peter Parler (or Petr Parléř in Czech; 1330/1333–1399), the architect of a number of gothic buildings in and outside Prague, and Master Dietrich (known to the Czechs as Mistr Theodorik, i.e. Master Theoderic; mentioned in sources between 1359 and 1368), a panel painter commissioned by Charles IV in the fourteenth century to decorate a chapel at the Karlštejn (Karlstein) castle, were two examples that Woltmann used to prove his point (fig. 2 and 3). In general, he considered Bohemia to be a part of eastern Germany, Prague to be 'strongly German' under Charles IV, and the painting schools active there a part of German art history.

A number of Czech historians and art historians strongly disputed such claims and tried to present their own theses about the origins of art in Bohemia. The historian Josef Kalousek (1838–1915) sought to correct what he considered the mistakes and assumptions presented by Woltmann, while lamenting the non-existence of a 'faultless' Czech history of Czech art.[15] Similarly to Woltmann, however, he defined the Czech national identity of medieval artists in Bohemia on the basis of their

12 A. Woltmann, K. Woermann, History of Painting. Vol. 2, The Painting of the Renascence. Trans. C. Bell. London: Kegan Paul, 1887, p. 118. (Orig. Geschichte der Malerei. Vol. 2, Die Malerei der Renaissance. Leipzig: Seemann, 1882.)

13 See H. Locher, The Idea of Cultural Heritage and the Canon of Art; W. Speitkamp, Heritage Preservation, Nationalism and the Reconstruction of Historical Monuments in Germany during the Long Nineteenth Century, both in this volume.

14 Alfred Woltmann. – P. Betthausen, P. H. Feist, C. Fork, Metzler Kunsthistoriker Lexikon. Zweihundert Portäts deutschsprachiger Autoren aus vier Jahrhunderten. Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler, 1999, pp. 490–493.

15 J. Kalousek, O historii výtvarného umění v Čechách [On the history of the visual arts in Bohemia]. – Osvěta 1877, vol. 7 (5), pp. 321–342.

Czech names. He found a majority of Czech-sounding names in guild documentation, which led him to the conclusion that the individuals concerned were of Czech origin.

Medieval Bohemia disputed

Josef Kalousek was one of many outspoken critics of the art history written from the German point of view. He highlighted small mistakes or omissions on the part of the German authors to demonstrate their inadequacy, often in a sarcastic tone. Yet an important by-product of his and his colleagues' nationalistic critiques was a number of articles lamenting the lack of existence of Czech art history, in which they contemplated how Czech art should be written.[16] Kalousek and the architect Antonín Baum (1830–1886), in particular, outlined the main methods, approaches and themes that should be studied by Czechs in order to build up a proper picture of the Czech history of art and of the Czech nation, as they saw it.

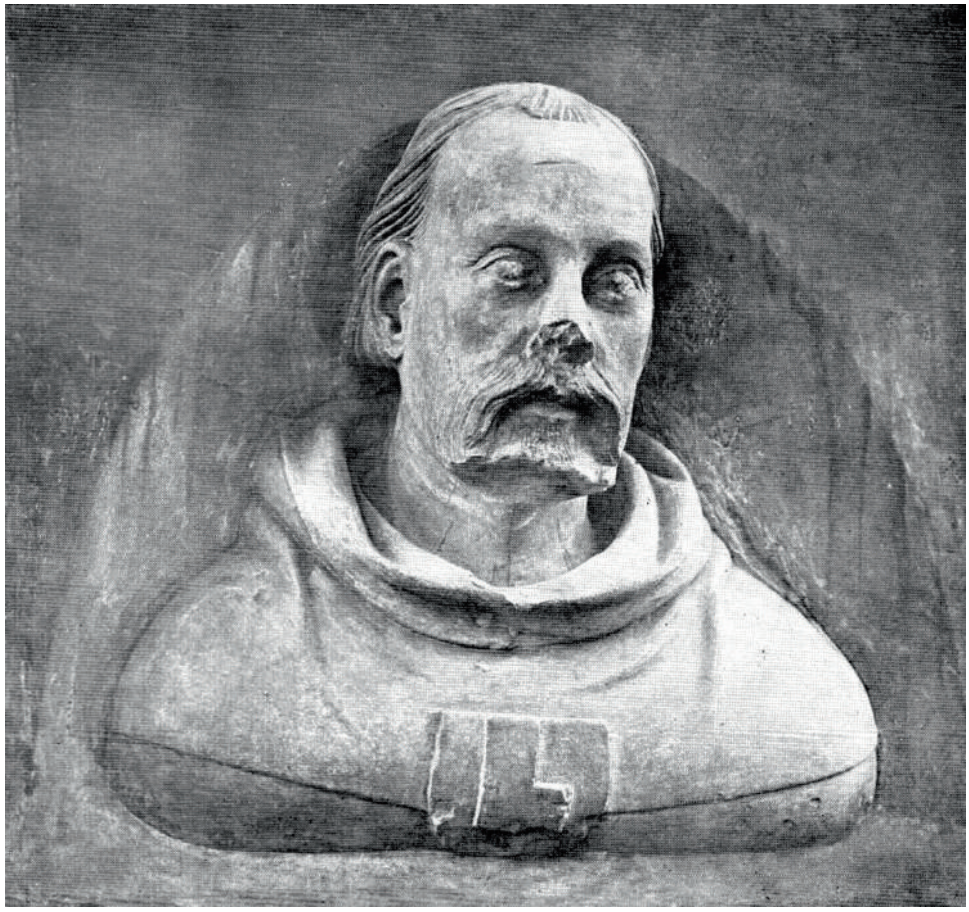
The direct attacks on the claims of Woltmann and other German scholars based in Bohemia focused on their denial of the 'Czech' character of medieval Bohemia. This was of particular importance given that many Czechs identified strongly with the medieval Kingdom of Bohemia, with all of its cultural achievements, and emphasised its 'Czechness'. In this sense, for art historians of this period, art also represented a form of tradition that transmitted a collective memory, ideas and symbols from the past to the present. By reminding the people of their great past and great artistic heritage, scholars were encouraging a sense of national identity in the present and future. Importantly, too, an inseparable part of the same national myth- and tradition-making was a projection of contemporary values and identity systems onto the past. References to the 'Czech' nation, state, homeland or art in different historical contexts was commonplace in the nationalistic lexicon of Czech historians, aestheticians and art historians.

Especially in the time of the formation or recovery of nations in the nineteenth century, the need for their own artistic, not to mention philosophical and material, life was pressing. In the case of medieval art, the high quality of painting was emphasised because it was understood as a materialisation of the elevated cultural level of the people who had lived in Bohemia in the distant past. Whether they were considered Czech or German was another issue.

To the Czechs the medieval Kingdom of Bohemia represented – in sharp contrast to Woltmann's view – the peak of the development of genuinely 'Czech' culture and art. The independent kingdom, with its own Czech language, territory and culture, was seen as an idealised precursor of the future independent state of the Czechs. Indeed, when Woltmann argued that the medieval art of Bohemia was essentially German, this challenged the vision of the historical Czech nation that Czech scholars held. The latter thus focused on arguing for the local 'Slavic' origin

16 A. Baum, Jak se píše historie umění českého [How Czech history of art is written]. – Památky archaeologické a místopisné 1871–1873, vol. 9. Prague, 1874, cols. 241–248, 365–382.

1. Czech National Theatre, Prague. Architect Josef Zítek (1868–1883).
Reproduction from Československé umění [Czechoslovak art]. Ed. Z. Wirth. Prague: Vesmír, 1926, tab. 124.

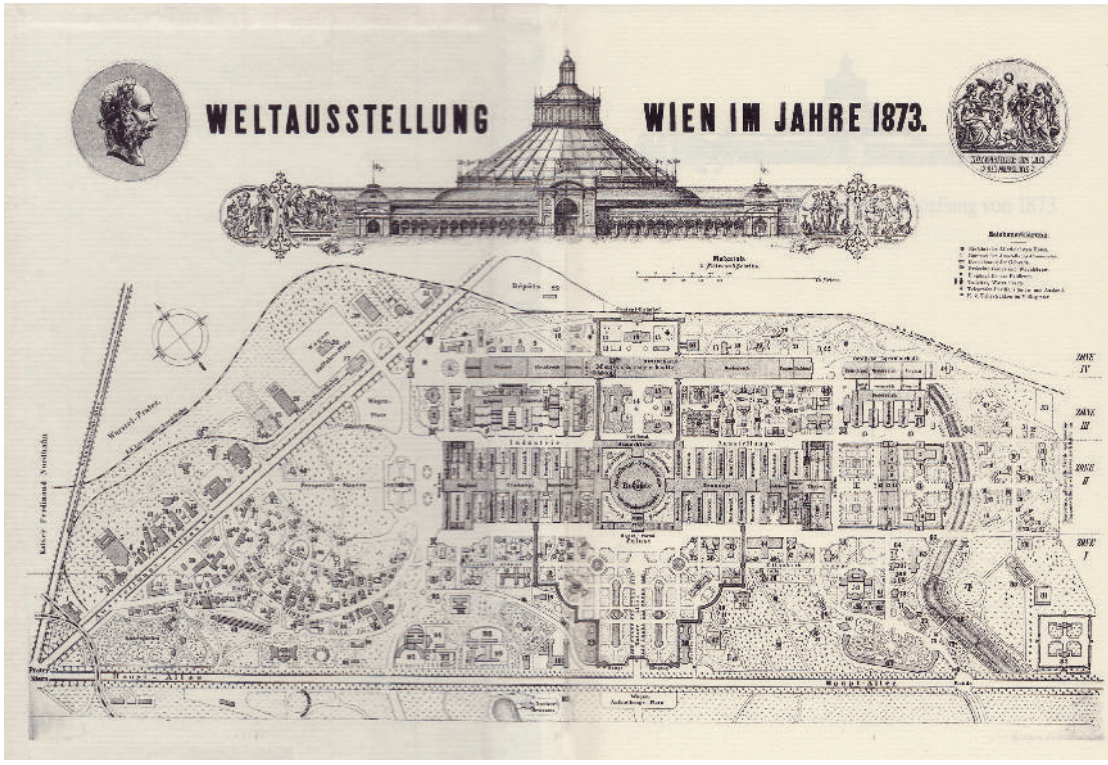


2. Peter Parler, sculpted self-portrait (1370s). St Vitus cathedral, Prague.
Reproduction from Československé umění, tab. 28.

3.

St Stephen by Master Dietrich (Theoderic), tempera on wood (mid-14th century).
Reproduction from Československé umění, tab. 35.

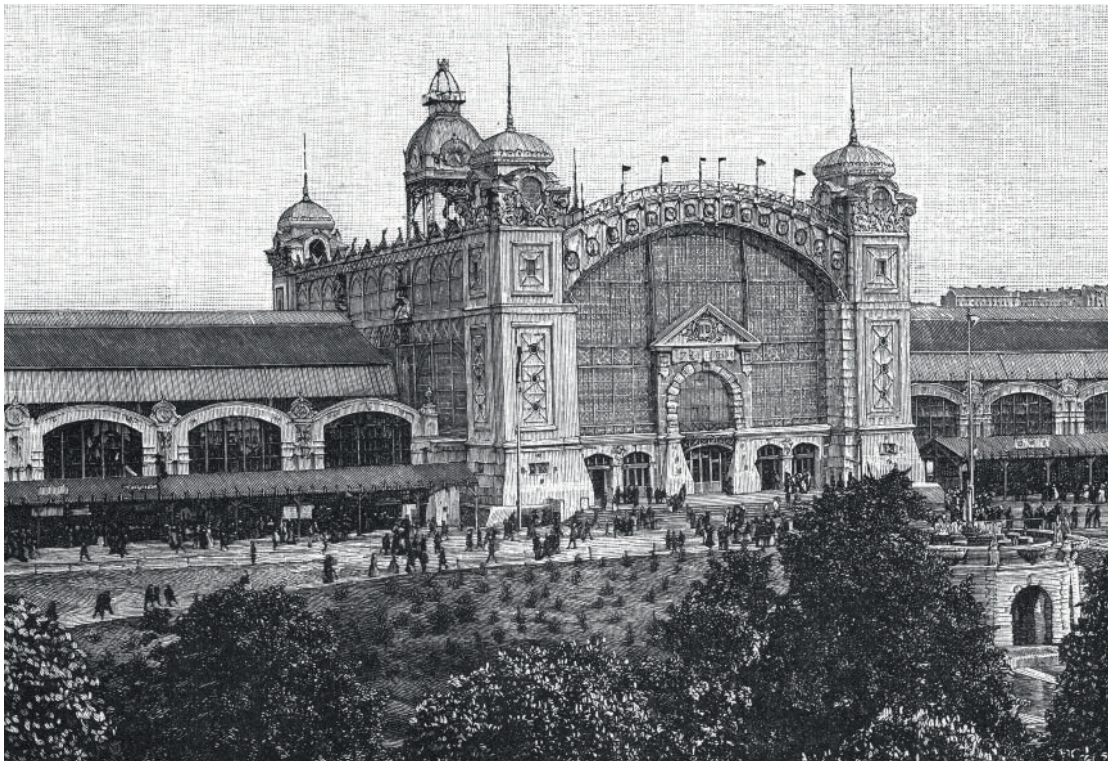
4. The Powder Tower in Prague, partly built by Matyáš (Matthias) Rejsek (1477–1483).
Photo by Marta Filipová.



5.

Ground plan of the Weltausstellung of 1873 in Vienna.
Reproduction from J. Pemsel, Die Wiener Weltausstellung von 1873. Das gründerzeitliche Wien am Wendepunkt. Vienna, Cologne: Böhlau, 1989, page not numbered.

6.



The Palace of Industries at the Jubilee Exhibition of 1891 in Prague.
Reproduction from Jubilejní výstava zemská Království českého v Praze 1891 [The Jubilee Exhibition of the Kingdom of Bohemia in Prague, 1891]. Prague: F. Šimáček, 1894, p. 60.

7. Czech village house at the Prague Jubilee Exhibition (1891).
Reproduction from Jubilejní výstava zemská Království českého v Praze 1891, p. 121.

8.

The Wallachian farm at the Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition in Prague (1895).
Photo by František Krátký.
Reproduction from Národopisná výstava českoslovanská v Praze 1895 [The Czechoslavic ethnographic exhibition in Prague]. Eds. E. Kovář et al. Prague: Otta, 1896, image no. 9.

of the artworks, using two main points: firstly, they emphasised the Czech ethnicity of the artists and architects concerned, or at least their long connection with the Czech territories, and secondly, they looked for typically 'Czech' or 'Slavic' formal features in the works of art.

The search for typical attributes proved to be an important and popular tool for contemporary scholars of both German and Czech backgrounds. While Woltmann acknowledged the existence of a Czech school of painting in the fourteenth century, he saw it as 'pervaded by a spirit of sacerdotal austerity and solemnity which elsewhere disappears in this century, combined with courtly pomp and splendour, of a cast, it is true, somewhat heavy and dull'.[17] In other words, for him, it was belated, derivative and uninteresting.

This perspective can be contrasted with the 'Czech' point of view of, for example, the work of historian Karel Vladislav Zap (1812–1871). Examining the work of Master Theoderic of Prague (whom Woltmann called Dietrich and saw as a representative of the German spirit), Zap emphasised the Slavic 'softness' and 'soulful, warm expression' of the paintings.[18] In contrast, he argued, German painters followed German paradigms of representation with 'caricature-like bodies with all limbs, faces and parts sharp and angular, robes looking like crumpled paper and stiff presentation in painting'.[19] Similarly, his younger colleague Karel Boromejský Mádl (1859–1932) identified the basic traits of Czech medieval architecture, which he saw represented in the late gothic work of Matyáš Rejsek (German Matthias Rejsek, 1445?–1506; fig. 4) and Beneš of Louny (Benedikt Rejt or Ried, 1454–1534/1536), as 'softness' and 'tenderness', together with a 'rich playfulness' and preference for richly interwoven vaulting.[20]

The dichotomies that the Czechs used to distinguish the 'soft' Czech art from the 'angular' German art were rooted in cultural stereotypes which, ironically, were shaped by the theories of Johann Gottfried von Herder, in particular his distinction between the supposedly warlike Germans and the peaceful Slavs.[21] For Herder, the tendency towards expansionism amongst the Germans was evident in the long-term lack of permanent settlements in a particular location, and a lack of arts and sciences there. The Slavs, on the other hand, 'were never an enterprising people of warriors or adventurers like the Germans.... They were charitable, hospitable to excess, lovers of free country ways, yet submissive and obedient, averse to pillage and robbery.'[22] Czech art historians of the late nineteenth century relied on these stereotypes as the basis for describing the nature of Czech art. They emphasised, for example, its 'lyricism' and 'poeticism', derived from the peaceful and domestic character of the people. The Germans were then assigned a more antagonistic character,

17 A. Woltmann, K. Woermann, History of Painting, p. 411.
18 Čechy [Bohemia]. – Slovník naučný [A comprehensive encyclopaedia]. Ed. F. L. Rieger. Prague: Knihkupectví I. L. Kobra, 1886, p. 453.
19 Čechy, p. 453.
20 K. B. Mádl, Matyáš Rejsek a Beneš z Loun. Listy z české gotiky [Matyáš Rejsek and Beneš of Louny: Extracts from Czech gothic]. – Světozor 29 July 1881, vol. 15 (35), p. 415. The paper was published through issues no. 31–35.
21 J. G. von Herder, Germans and Slavs [1784–1791]. – Nationalism: Its Meaning and History. Ed. H. Kohn. Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1965, p. 103.
22 J. G. von Herder, Germans and Slavs, p. 107.

which was also projected onto the visual arts and identified with the use of sharp, angular forms and stiff presentation.

The stress on the typical Czech features of the Czech artworks in early art-historical texts written by Czechs was aimed at fostering the sense of national unity in a more general audience, and at demonstrating the historical continuity of art in the Czech lands. The Germans were motivated by different objectives, as their loyalties were split between those to the German *Reich*, on the one hand, and those to Austria-Hungary, on the other. Especially after the foundation of the Second Empire in 1871, it was necessary for the Germans to strengthen the internal unity of the newly unified states and restore the sense of historical greatness of the nation. Bohemia was seen as an extension of the Holy Roman Empire, which was understood as German in essence. Linguistic and cultural similarities were more important than any current political affiliation.[23] Additionally, in a more general sense, German historiography emphasised ethnic unity, and it was thus required to evoke a feeling of association with the German nation in all the nearly three million Germans living in Bohemia and Moravia at the time.

Nations on display

Seeing the essential character of a nation reflected in its artistic traditions, but also in its religion and philosophy, was a practice that was shared at the time by both ethnic groups in Bohemia. Art and artistic styles documented the life of a nation and reflected its spiritual, ethical and material aspects in the eyes of historians of art and culture. Together with other intellectuals, they looked for opportunities to inform others about these aspects. An occasion to showcase such a narrative of national culture to a wider public arose in the 1890s and early 1900s in the context of the large regional and national exhibitions that took place in Prague and northern Bohemia.

As a phenomenon, regional, national and international exhibitions and world fairs became important events in Europe and the United States, as well as in Asia, Australia and South America, because they presented the 'best of' the trade, culture or overseas possessions of a particular nation. From the 1850s onwards, almost every capital or politically and economically important city had, at some point, the ambition of hosting a carefully orchestrated exhibition that would showcase the greatest achievements and inventions to date and secure its status as a world city.[24]

The enthusiasm for exhibitions, however, extended beyond the largest cities and capitals, and the attempt to achieve recognition through exhibition-type practices was not limited to the wealthiest nations.[25] Fairs and exhibitions frequently

23 S. Berger, Search for Normality: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Germany since 1800. New York: Berghahn, 1997, p. 26.
24 P. Greenhalgh, Ephemeral Vistas: The *Expositions Universelles*, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851–1939. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988.
25 A. C. T. Geppert, Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siècle Europe. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 3–4.

took place on what can be seen as the political and geographical margins. A number of nations in the making found additional uses for exhibitions, and these often included turning them into sites of resistance against the dominant power. Minority or regional interest groups often challenged state imperatives in order to promote new or reinvented identities, with rival agencies trying to claim exhibitions for their own purposes. Many regional and national exhibitions may be seen as tools for reinforcing an imagined community through a carefully crafted narrative of its past, present and future that contradicted officially sanctioned accounts promoted by central political authorities.

Often it was through exhibitions that a visible sense of shared identity was proclaimed. Exhibitions in Central and Eastern Europe clearly demonstrated this phenomenon, because they coincided with the period of increasing national awareness amongst various ethnic groups of the region, which took place against the background of the industrial transformation. Various interest groups, including the Hungarians, Romanians, and Bohemian Czechs and Germans, started using exhibitions to achieve their goals of national recognition and to showcase their technical and industrial advances to themselves and to others.

Major events in the region had already taken place in Vienna in the first half of the nineteenth century: for example, in 1835 an industrial and trade exhibition established a tradition of national fairs in the capital. The first seriously ambitious event was, however, the *Weltausstellung*, held in 1873 (fig. 5). Although it was unsuccessful in terms of the number of visitors, for reasons ascribed to a cholera epidemic in Vienna and an economic crisis, it set an example for future exhibitions around Austria-Hungary, including those in Budapest (1896), Prague (1891 and 1895) and Lviv (1894). The latter in many ways reacted to or challenged the narrative promoted by the *Weltausstellung*, which aimed to promote the strong position of the empire within Europe in economic, political and cultural terms. The different pavilions contained displays of industries and technology, agriculture, science, the arts, national domestic industries (arts and crafts), and the 'exotic': the British colonial, Japanese, Chinese, Persian and Egyptian sections. Austria-Hungary also displayed its new political identity as a bridge between East and West, redefined after it had been forced by Prussia to give up control of Germany in the 1860s.[26]

The empire was presented at the 1873 *Weltausstellung* as a peaceful union of all the nations and groups it embraced. While the Romanians, Hungarians, Slovaks and Moravians were exhibited as peasants in displays of rural architecture and life, Vienna was shown as a modern site of progress. In this regard, the positioning of the capital was not dissimilar from the colonial approaches to indigenous peoples at international exhibitions in London, Paris and the United States. The spectacle of the happy union, however, had sharp edges: the Czechs, for instance, refused to take an official part in the event, because they were denied a separate exhibition space.

26 M. Rampley, Peasants in Vienna: Ethnographic Display and the 1873 World's Fair. – Austrian History Yearbook 2011, vol. 42, pp. 110–132.

The Czechs discovered the political, ideological and cultural potential of exhibitions towards the end of the nineteenth century. Following the *Weltausstellung*, and to a large extent inspired by the *exposition universelle* in Paris in 1889, two large-scale events in Prague became loud proclamations of Czech nationalism. The first one, the Jubilee Exhibition (*Jubilejní zemská výstava*) of 1891, took place after several gains in recognition for the Czechs, for instance the equalisation of the use of Czech with German in public offices (1880) and the aforementioned Prague university split.

The Jubilee Exhibition commemorated one hundred years since the coronation of Leopold II as king of Bohemia (1791) and was held in the Royal Game Preserve (fig. 6). Today, it is a part of Stromovka Park, where the grounds continue to function as exhibition space. The exhibition involved the construction of a number of pavilions, commissions of artworks and cultural events, which were to display the state of industry, agriculture and culture in Bohemia and Moravia. It presented diverse industries alongside examples of high art and folk culture.

Even though the primary aims were economic and educational, the final concept and content of the exhibition were largely influenced by the contemporary nationalistic and political debates, which lay behind most large exhibitions of the time. Originally, the event was intended to bring together *all* of the ethnic groups living in the Czech lands of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia; therefore, it aimed to include Bohemian Germans too. But, as happened so often at this time, the delicate politics of nationalism surfaced in many organisational issues. From the onset, the Czech and German initiators, who consisted mainly of local industrialists, politicians and aristocrats, quarrelled over the division of duties, the dates of the exhibition and its financial support. Finally, the failed compromise of 1890, in which the Viennese government attempted to find a solution to the increasing national conflict in Bohemia, led to a polarisation of the two communities. As a result, in November 1890 the Germans refused to participate in the joint exhibition, and this was welcomed by the Czech organisers. The entire event could now become a celebration of Czech arts, industries and national identity and, as a result, the impact of the six-month-long event on the nation's self-awareness was immense.[27]

The promotion and praise of authentic Czechness was evident on every corner. The 'purely Czech' style was identified most prominently in the display of folk art and culture in the 'Czech village house' (fig. 7). This exhibit, as was common for Czech ethnography of the time, presented the country folk as curious, bizarre and primitive, but also as retaining the original forms of Czech cultural and artistic life. Leading ethnographers of the time, such as Čeněk Zíbrt (1864–1932) and Emanuel Kovář (1861–1898), had for some time promoted romanticised research into folk culture, which they identified with national heritage. They studied the 'national' culture of the countryside in its regional diversity, which was meant to show its richness, the maturity of the nation in the process of emancipation, the ability of

27 C. Albrecht, Pride in Production: The Jubilee Exhibition of 1891 and Economic Competition between Czechs and Germans in Bohemia. – Austrian History Yearbook 1993, vol. 24, pp. 101–118; A. Janatková, Modernisierung und Metropole: Architektur und Repräsentation auf den Landesausstellungen in Prag 1891 und Brünn 1928. Stuttgart: Steiner, 2008.

folk culture to compete with (or even supersede) Germanic culture and to demonstrate its genuine Czech character.

The Czech village house closely followed this trend. In a way similar to other ethnographic and colonial exhibits abroad, it was designed as a fusion and an imitation of real village buildings, and was inspired by architecture in various locations across Bohemia and Moravia. It was also equipped with figures that represented the diverse types of the people, and attempted to portray their facial features, body postures and their 'peculiar costumes'.[28] Viewed by predominantly urban middle class visitors and placed next to industrial products and high art, the exhibited customs and traditions had been taken out of their natural context and brought into the modern urban setting of the Jubilee Exhibition grounds. The peasants were presented as bearers of authentic national heritage but, at the same time, their visual and material culture was presented as archaic and primitive.

Exhibitions like these can therefore be understood as illusions, in which the local bourgeoisie could associate the peasant and folk art with its own origins. While the Czechs did not possess any colonies, they could, nevertheless, find their own exotic 'other' in these remote regions of the countryside. At the same time, it was precisely in this 'other' that they could identify a preserved Czech national style and remnants of a romanticised primitive way of life. The peasant could be viewed by the bourgeoisie as a remnant of their own origins and as a symbol of their increasingly cultured civilisation. As in exhibitions in Western Europe, for Czechs in Prague 'progress and civilisation were the key concepts behind the large-scale representation of middle-class Selves and savage Others'.[29] However, because of the key position that peasants had in the process of Czech nation-building, the discourse of Orientalism, so often applied to the treatment of 'exotic' others at exhibitions elsewhere in Europe, cannot be applied in the Czech (Moravian and Slovak) context.[30]

The uniqueness and authenticity of folk art and culture were once again displayed at a large, purely ethnographic exhibition which, too, built on showcasing peasants as a specific stratum of the nation that preserved the original Czech traditions and heritage. The Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition (*Národopisná výstava českoslovanská*) of 1895 in Prague introduced various regional cultures of Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia, and presented folk art both as a static display in the cabinets of the Ethnographic Palace and as living exhibits in the Exhibition Village (fig. 8). The main aim of the Ethnographic Exhibition – according to the organisers, who included the director of the National Theatre, František Adolf Šubert (also Schubert, 1849–1915), town representatives, bourgeoisie, nobility and scholars – was to explore 'the entire original life of the Czech people and preserve its image', to show the genuine and historical national culture independent of German influences,

28 F. V. Vykoukal, Lidové umění [Folk art]. – Jubilejní výstava zemská Království českého v Praze 1891. Prague: Šimáček, 1894, p. 742.
29 R. Corbey, Ethnographic Showcases, 1870–1930. – Cultural Anthropology 1993, vol. 8 (3), p. 341.
30 E.g. E. W. Said, Orientalism. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978; H. K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture. London: Routledge, 1994.

and educate the Czechs and the 'world about the nation's originality, character and strengths'.[31]

The 1895 exhibition became a national and international success, and served as significant inspiration for other Slavic and non-Slavic ethnic groups of Central Europe who were undergoing a renaissance of their national consciousness at the time. This included the Latvians, who organised the significant Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition (*Latviešu etnogrāfiskā izstāde*) in Riga in 1896. The 1895 exhibition in Prague was also visited by many foreign journalists and scholars from other Slavic groups, including Poles, Serbs, Slovenes, Bulgarians and Sorbs, as the event was promoted by the Czechs as pointing out similarities and overlaps between the Slavic cultures. Yet, they did not intend to recreate the now obsolete idea of Pan-Slavism, promoted mainly around mid-century. The fear of the possible subordination of smaller ethnic groups to a more powerful entity, mainly Russia, led to the attempt to establish closer relations among the Slavic peoples *within* the empire.

This ideology was also reflected in the Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition's title; the adjective 'Czechoslavic' was created to proclaim the unity of all Czech and Slavic inhabitants in opposition to the term *Deutschböhmen* in the region.[32] As a Czechoslavic event, the Exhibition was to become 'a manifestation of the entire Czechoslavic nation, without differences … not considering the dividing regional frontiers and not considering the Germans'.[33]

The Germans, excluded from both the Czech exhibitions of 1891 and 1895, soon started organising their own events in the north and north-west regions of Bohemia, in cities with German majorities, such as Ústí nad Labem (Aussig), Teplice (Teplitz) and Liberec (Reichenberg). The primary function of the earliest German fairs, in the 1870s, was to encourage local industries and education, and to promote regional tourism. It was only following the success of the Czech exhibitions in Prague, and in the wake of political events in Austria and Bohemia in the late nineteenth century, that German cultural and political nationalism became much more prominent in the exhibitions organised by German councils, entrepreneurs and interest groups. Because of the Badeni crisis (after the Austrian Prime Minister Count Kasimir Felix Badeni) of 1897 over the use of both Czech and German as administrative languages in Bohemia, the political demands of both ethnicities radicalised. As a reflection of this, German exhibitions quickly adopted a nationalistic tone which was reflected in their titles: all started including a reference to 'German' (*Deutsch*) or 'German Bohemian' (*Deutsch-böhmisch*).[34]

The notable exhibition organised in Liberec in 1906 offers a pertinent example of these increasing nationalistic efforts of the Bohemian Germans and of the ways the idea of German heritage was sustained through exhibitions (fig. 9). Beginning

31 Národopisná výstava československá v Praze 1895 [The Czechoslavic ethnographic exhibition in Prague]. Ed. E. Kovář et al. Prague: Otto, 1895, p. 532.
32 J. Pargač et al., Mýtus českého národa, aneb Národopisná výstava československá 1895 [The myth of the Czech nation, or the Czechoslavic ethnographic exhibition of 1895]. Prague: Littera Bohemica, 1996, p. 12.
33 Národopisná výstava…, p. 42.
34 T. Okurka, 'Witness to the Momentous Significance of German Labour in Bohemia': Exhibitions in the German-Speaking Regions of Bohemia before the First World War. – Cultures of Exhibitions: Great Exhibitions in the Margins. Ed. M. Filipova. Aldershot, Burlington: Ashgate [forthcoming in 2015].

at the end of the nineteenth century, many Germans left Prague, which had become a predominantly Czech city and a city of liberal German politicians, and moved to the north. With a high concentration of German nationalists, the town of Liberec tried to – although unsuccessfully – take on the role of unofficial capital of the Bohemian Germans.

In 1906 Liberec organised the German-Bohemian Exhibition (*Deutschböhmische Ausstellung Reichenberg*), which was a good opportunity 'to show the significance of German work in Bohemia, thus confirming the legitimacy of the political and national claims of Germans in Bohemia'.[35] With over 1,500 exhibitors in the sections of local industries, crafts, the industrial arts, agriculture, fine art, education, health care, social services, the military and cultural history, German unity and economic dominance in Bohemia was emphasised. Czech exhibitors were not invited, unless they were involved in joint enterprises.

The exhibition, therefore, more than anything else became a political statement, calling all Germans of Bohemia to showcase the high level of their economy and culture, thus legitimising their political and territorial demands. This escalation of nationalistic efforts would eventually lead to the more extreme claims in the 1930s by Germany in respect to the Sudeten territories and the German ethnic inhabitants.

Conclusion

The escalation of national conflicts between the two ethnic groups in the nineteenth century took place not only on the political and academic stage, but also in exhibitions. Yet, whether these early exhibitions were organised by Bohemian Germans, Bohemian Czechs or Galician Poles, they were all driven by the project of creating a sense of common cultural identity of the specific ethnic group or state and, at the same time, were attempts to show clearly how the group on display differed from its neighbours.

The emphasis on the German or Czech character of local culture and heritage in Bohemia, both historical and contemporary, in these various contexts reveals the lively cultural interactions and exchanges that took place in Bohemia in the nineteenth century between the two ethnic groups. Both Czechs and Germans often expressed strong views of the opposing culture, its validity, its representatives and its created narratives, which were construed on the basis of a belief in the difference and uniqueness of the respective culture. While German authors, for example, denied or dismissed any significant Czech involvement in medieval art and architecture in Bohemia, their Czech counterparts emphasised specific Slavic features of the art of this period. Similarly, national culture became the subject of regional and national displays for both Czechs and Germans, creating a sense of the rich past and present of the individual ethnic groups.

35 Die Deutschböhmische Ausstellung. Reichenberg 1906. Industrie-, Gewerbe-, Kunst- und Landwirtschafts-Ausstellung der Deutschen Böhmens. Ed. E. Arnold. Reichenberg: Stiepel, 1909, pp. 44–45.

Regardless of which group created these narratives, the overall goal was the same: to point to the existence, or absence, of national culture in the distant past, as well as in the present. As a result, these idealised and artificial narratives laid the foundations for how both groups interpreted and understood their own national heritage and the culture of the other group throughout the long nineteenth century.