

Antonín Kalous

***Medieval Research in the Czech Republic***

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## MEDIEVAL RESEARCH IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Prof. Libuše Hrabová, the *Doktormutter* of a number of medievalists in the Department of History at Palacký University in Olomouc, returned to teaching only after her retirement. Sacked from the department in 1969, she was reintegrated twenty years later in December 1989. Setting aside issues that were the focal points of history in the sixties – the history of the Communist party of Czechoslovakia, the international workers' movement, and the Soviet Union – Hrabová thought she would deal with medieval history for only two or three years to help this discipline recover a position of importance. She has stayed for twenty years and helped medieval studies in Olomouc. Her case clearly shows that the turning point for medieval studies in Czechoslovakia was the political changes of 1989-1990 rather than the year 1993, when the Czechs and Slovaks went their separate ways.

The changes permitted the return of many medievalists to the profession, the publication of books written previously which could not be published, and the opening of new topics that had not been promoted under the communist regime. In this sense, the situation is similar to many Central European historiographies. The year 1993 is also important from another point of view – not only due to the founding of the Medieval Studies department at CEU, but also because of the split of Czechoslovakia, which yet again separated the two historical traditions. As in many other countries of the region, the historiography of the Czech Republic has been concentrating on national history, stressing a re-interpretation of the past which had been used by political regimes and in nationalist history writing. Various myths of the national past have been re-inspected.

The state of the research can be described in terms of topics, disciplines, generations, research centers, edition projects, translations, institutions, etc. In the Czech Republic, historians still tend towards political history since many feel the need to rewrite and re-interpret the past. Research can be differentiated chronologically in two substantial periods: Great Moravia and the Přemyslid state and the period from 1306 to 1526.<sup>1</sup> The first period was the domain of archaeologists for quite a

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<sup>1</sup> This is what František Šmahel and Josef Žemlička are doing. Their contribution was quite helpful in writing this little piece and for much more detail, see František Šmahel and Josef Žemlička, "Die tschechische Mediävistik 1990-2002," in *Tschechische Mittelalterforschung 1990-2002*, ed. František Šmahel, Robert Novotný, and Pavel Soukup (Prague: Filosofia, 2003), 11-66 (hereafter: Šmahel and Žemlička,

long time; research into the Great Moravian Empire was supported as it was seen as the first state of the western Slavs and the Czech or Czechoslovak state was seen as a continuation. Archaeological research on the power centers has been fundamental for Czech archaeology and early medieval research. In the last years Luděk Galuška, Lumír Poláček, and Zdeněk Měřínský have been associated with excavations and interpretation. Discussion among archaeologists and historians has been led, most importantly, by the late Dušan Třeštík.<sup>2</sup>

Třeštík was the leading key scholar in researching the origins of the Czech state;<sup>3</sup> this topic has been a combination of history and archaeology, especially the excavations of early power centers in Prague, Libice, etc., also addressed by Jiří Sláma, Zdeněk Smetánka, Naďa Profantová, and others. This was the beginning of the great period of the Přemyslid dynasty, which has always mesmerized Czech historians. As the only national dynasty, the Přemyslids attracted considerable interest in nationalist historiography from the nineteenth century. The crucial topics in this research have been the early legends and the death of Saint Wenceslas, the founding of the state through Boleslav I and Boleslav II, the early administration of the state, Christianisation,<sup>4</sup> the crisis around the year 1000 (Czech historians contributed to the *Europas Mitte* project and exhibition), the Slavník family and its role, and re-evaluation of the earliest written sources (legends and chronicles). Besides those mentioned earlier, Josef Žemlička, Petr Sommer, Petr Charvát, Anežka Merhautová, and David Kalhous have worked on these topics. Bohemian saints of this period have also been important in research, especially St. Wenceslas, always mentioned with the Czech nation; Polish historians, too, shared in the millennial celebrations in 1997.

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“Die tschechische Mediävistik.” Other contributions in the book were written by Ivan Hlaváček on *Hilfswissenschaften* (pp. 67–95), Zdeňka Hledíková on church history since 1945 (pp. 97–124) and Milena Bartlová on art history (pp. 125–144). For bibliography and further studies not mentioned in the notes here check either the articles referred to or – more importantly – the post-1990 bibliographical database of the Czech historical institute: <http://biblio.hiu.cas.cz> (the names and corresponding studies are easy to find).

<sup>2</sup> Especially his *Vznik Velké Moravy. Moravané, Čechové a střední Evropa v letech 791–871* [The Origin of Great Moravia. Moravians, Bohemians and Central Europe in 791–871] (Prague: Lidové noviny, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Dušan Třeštík, *Počátky Přemyslovců. Vstup Čechů do dějin (530–935)* [The Beginnings of the Přemyslids. The Entry of Bohemians into History (530–935)] (Prague: Lidové noviny, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. participation in the project of Nora Berend, Petr Sommer, Dušan Třeštík, and Josef Žemlička (with additional material on art by Zoë Opačić), “Bohemia and Moravia,” in *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy. Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus'. 900–1200*, ed. Nora Berend (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 214–263, with extensive bibliography.

The eleventh and twelfth centuries are crucial for many Czech historians, who are trying to elucidate the formation of the new state and the genesis of a new social structure. The thirteenth century especially has caused many conflicts among historians and has many problematic sides. The modernisation or “Europeanisation” (as the process is sometimes called) of society and the structural development of the state itself keep being re-evaluated. The century of the last Přemyslids was crucial for founding cities, stone castles, and creating new structures in society, including estates and the formation of the nobility, the administration of the country through royal or court institutions, and the role of royal power itself. In this framework Josef Žemlička and Libor Jan, especially, elaborate mainly the rule of Wenceslas II.<sup>5</sup> The eleventh to thirteenth centuries are the focal point for other historians. Martin Wihoda has been trying to dispel the myths related to the best-known document of the Czech Middle Ages, the golden bull of Sicily,<sup>6</sup> and others relate their research to new interpretations of royal power (Demeter Malaťák, Robert Antonín). A mosaic of archaeological case studies illustrates the development of society and the changes in the thirteenth century. Jan Klápšt’s book is a modern contribution on the medieval colonisation of the Czech lands.<sup>7</sup> There are a number of other topics which cannot be presented here (castles, art, historiography, cities, individual noble families, coinage, architecture, etc.). Apart from them, the new times brought a new interest in church history, which could not be treated before 1989. Due to the nature of the sources, the main attention is focused on the history of the institutionalized church, church structure, and monastic history.<sup>8</sup>

For the later period there are two main points of reference, the reign of Charles IV and the Hussite period. Both of these have always been periods of national pride, much used in nationalist historiography. The interpretation of the Hussite revolution in modern historiography, especially, has been subject to change a number of times, first of all national and nationalist, then in connection with social struggle. During the rule of Marxist historiography it was seen as an unsuccessful class struggle which did not lead to changes in the social order, thus was always called the “Hussite

<sup>5</sup> The book by Libor Jan, *Václav II. a struktury panovnické moci* [Wenceslas II and Structures of Royal Power] (Brno: Matice moravská, 2006) was followed by a strong and sometimes harsh discussion (on the pages of *Český časopis historický*, for example). The two opposing standpoints were presented by Josef Žemlička.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Wihoda, *Zlatá bula sicilská* [The Golden Bull of Sicily] (Prague: Argo, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Jan Klápště, *Proměna českých zemí ve středověku* [Change in the Czech Lands in the Middle Ages] (Prague: Lidové noviny, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Details in Šmahel and Žemlička, “Die tschechische Mediävistik,” 34–49.

revolutionary movement.” The period of the Luxemburg dynasty on the throne of Bohemia (mostly from the perspective of political history) was elaborated before and after 1989 by Jiří Spěvák, František Kavka, and Jaroslav Čechura, in a Moravian context by Jaroslav Mezník, who was allowed to publish only after 1989,<sup>9</sup> and in the latest treatments of the period by Lenka Bobková.<sup>10</sup> Ecclesiastical and spiritual history was not much touched before 1989, even though everyone built on the research of Zdeňka Hledíková, which partially predates the political changes of 1989.<sup>11</sup> Her students and followers (for example, Jan Adámek, Eva Doležalová, Hana Pátková, Jan Hrdina, and Aleš Pořízka) continue to research church administration, various church institutions of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, resources in the Vatican archives, pilgrimages, etc. The work of Martin Nejedlý is very innovative in the Czech situation; he is using French literary sources of the fourteenth century connected to the political, cultural, and spiritual atmosphere of the Luxemburg period.<sup>12</sup>

The crucial point of Czech historiography since the nineteenth century has been the Hussite period. After the Marxist interpretations, the post-1989 changes led to multifaceted interpretations; books could be written about Hussite historiography. The most detailed overviews, with extensive bibliographies, can be found in the works of František Šmahel, who has become the most influential author for the Czech later Middle Ages and an organiser of scholarly life.<sup>13</sup> In recent years, some general works have been published,<sup>14</sup> but the center for the presentation of new research has mostly been the biennial conference called “The Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice,” organised by David R. Holeton and Zdeněk V. David and internationally accessible.<sup>15</sup> Interpretation has changed and many new topics have been opened, especially the idea of holy war (also propagated by Norman Housley), international comparisons with and international contacts of the Hussites, etc. What matters most is a close study of the original texts of Hussite

<sup>9</sup> I would like to name at least Jaroslav Mezník, *Lucemburská Morava 1310–1423* [Luxemburg Moravia 1310–1423] (Prague: Lidové noviny, 1999) and the collection of his studies *Tvář stárnoucího středověku* [The Face of the Ageing Middle Ages] (Brno: Matice moravská, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> *Velké dějiny zemí Koruny české* [The Big History of the Czech Lands], vol. 4a, 4b (Prague: Paseka, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> The latest book is *Arnošt z Pardubic. Arcibiskup, zakladatel a rádce* [Ernst of Pardubice: Archbishop, Founder and Adviser] (Prague: Vyšehrad, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Mainly his *Středověký mýtus o Meluzíně a rodová pověst Lucemburků* [The Medieval Myth of Melusine and the Family Legend of the Luxemburgs] (Prague: Scriptorium, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> The latest edition in German is *Hussitische Revolution*, 3 vols. (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2002; orig. 1993); cf. other books in Czech with collected studies.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., the work of Petr Čornej, *Velké dějiny zemí Koruny české*, vol. 5 (Prague: Paseka, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. [www.brrp.org](http://www.brrp.org).

theologians, including Jan Hus, whose works are still being edited (the center for editions is now in Brno),<sup>16</sup> and Jakoubek of Stříbro.<sup>17</sup>

Czech medieval studies generally ended with the last Hussite period, the time of George of Poděbrady. Even though he was considered a national hero and a “Hussite king” and thus a continuer of the Hussite struggle, he does not get much attention now (to name two who have concentrated on him: Jaroslav Boubín, Petr Čornej). The period of the Jagellonian kings and the rule of Matthias Corvinus in the Czech lands was almost totally forgotten by Czech historians. Josef Macek, however, started research on the Jagellonian period in the early 1950s, although he was not allowed to publish; he then specialised in the Hussites, George of Poděbrady, the German Peasant War, and came back to the Jagellonians. Macek’s book on the Jagellonian age in the Czech lands was unfinished when he died, but five volumes of the intended seven were published posthumously.<sup>18</sup> It has definitely been the most important publication for this period of Czech history, an “analytical synthesis.” Newer interpretations have been published by Josef Válka and Petr Čornej and new research is still being done on Matthias Corvinus and his reign in Moravia and Silesia.<sup>19</sup> This period, however, still remains a desideratum of Czech medieval research; wider cooperation within Central Europe is needed due to the substantial research done by Hungarian and Polish colleagues. Most importantly, the research in this period is rather done by art historians (German projects on the Jagellonians in Central Europe, a Czech project on late Gothic art in Moravia, etc.).<sup>20</sup>

It would be possible to go on with a list of various books published in the field of medieval studies for quite a long time. The situation thus can be described as very

<sup>16</sup> *Magistri Iohannis Hus Opera omnia*, the Latin works now published by Brepols.

<sup>17</sup> Ota Halama and Pavel Soukup, ed., *Jakoubek ze Stříbra. Texty a jejich působení* [Jakoubek of Stříbro: The Texts and their Impact] (Prague: Filosofia, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Josef Macek, *Jagellonský věk v českých zemích* [The Jagellonian Age in the Czech Lands], 4 vols. (Prague: Academia, 1992–1999); idem, *Věra a zbožnost jagellonského věku* [Religion and Piety in the Jagellonian Age] (Prague: Argo, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Josef Válka, *Středověká Morava* [Medieval Moravia] (Brno: Muzejní společnost, 1991); and his collected essays in idem, *Husitství na Moravě. Náboženská snášenlivost. Jan Amos Komenský* [Hussitism in Moravia. Religious Tolerance. John Amos Comenius] (Brno: Maticе moravská, 2005); Petr Čornej and Milena Bartlová, *Velké dějiny země Koruny české* [A Large History of the Czech Crown], vol. 6 (Prague: Paseka, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> E.g., Ivo Hlobil and Eduard Petrů, *Humanism and the Early Renaissance in Moravia*, 2d rev. ed. (Olomouc: Votobia, 1999); *Od gotiky k renesanci. Výtvarná kultura Moravy a Slezska 1400–1550* [From Gothic to Renaissance. The Artistic Culture of Moravia and Silesia 1400–1550], 4 vols. (Brno: Moravská galerie, 1999–2002).

favourable, because the results of research can be published and medieval studies are still part of the curriculum. The early 1990s brought opportunities for scholars who were not able to publish earlier (Josef Macek, František Hoffmann, František Šmahel, Libuše Hrabová, Jaroslav Mezník, Josef Válka, and others). Present-day production is vast and many new topics have been opened for Czech medievalists – some of them already quite traditional in international medieval studies, some of them in the current trends of research. Just to name a few: ritual, residences, courtly culture, religious history (especially monastic history), and many others. Names of these scholars would form a long list; the results of research are usually presented in conferences and published in conference volumes.<sup>21</sup>

Specialised interest in medieval studies in the Czech Republic has a few centers where research is concentrated, but, of course, it is not limited to them. The most important among them is the Center for Medieval Studies in Prague, a meeting point for medievalists, especially young PhD students, who thus have a forum for getting to know each other and for possible cooperation. Not only are regular conferences of doctoral students held in Prague, but also summer schools in medieval studies. In this sense the Center for Medieval Studies, founded in 1998, has great merit. It endeavours to list all the doctoral students of the various disciplines of medieval studies and also brings senior researchers and scholars together. Even though the results are not always very evident, it helps cooperation and coordination in medieval research not only within the structures of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and the Faculty of Philosophy of Charles University (the two responsible institutions), but in the whole Czech Republic.<sup>22</sup> Other centers are Masaryk University in Brno and Palacký University in Olomouc, which have also sent their students to CEU, and the Czech Historical Institute in Rome, which helps all researchers in the Roman libraries and archives, especially the Vatican Secret Archives and the library.

At Masaryk University, two large publication projects are underway, one of them has already been mentioned (Jan Hus), and the other is the continuation of *Codex diplomaticus et epistolaris regni Bohemiae*. Under the auspices of the Center

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<sup>21</sup> E.g., the series of *Colloquia mediaevalia Pragensia*, 10 vols. (1999–2008); *Korunní země v dějinách českého státu* [Crown lands in the History of the Czech State], 3 vols. (2003–2007); *Dvory a rezidence ve středověku* [Courts and Residences in the Middle Ages], 2 vols. (2006–2008); and many others.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. <http://cms.flu.cas.cz> and Petr Sommer and Pavel Soukup, ed., *Centrum mediévistických studií – badatelství, doktorandská výuka, mezinárodní spolupráce 1998–2008* [Center for Medieval Studies – Research, Doctoral Tutoring, International Cooperation 1998–2008] (Prague: Filosofia, 2008).

for Medieval Studies in Prague other former series are also being continued: *Archiv český* [Czech archive] and *Fontes rerum Bohemicarum, series nova*. Another activity of the Center for Medieval Studies is the publication of Czech medieval sources online.<sup>23</sup> An important research group of scholars related to theology has been formed at Palacký University (and connects scholars in Prague and Brno) in the Center for Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance Texts. Their activity is quite wide and the center specialises in the publication of theological and philosophical texts, and translations and studies related to these texts and their authors.<sup>24</sup>

The alumni of the Department of Medieval Studies at the CEU are not very numerous in the Czech Republic, but all of them have returned to the Czech Republic and thus are trying to follow the original purpose of CEU in helping to create wider opportunities and a better environment in academia in their own country. Even more, most of them are staying in academia, acting as researchers and teachers, most importantly in Brno and Olomouc, and participating in many research projects. Olomouc alumni have initiated the new project of a study program of “Older History,” which incorporates medieval and early modern studies as broad interdisciplinary studies concentrating on research at the MA level. The alumni participate in projects of the Center for Medieval Studies, organise their own conferences, and two have been members of the Center for Theoretical Studies in Prague.

The state of medieval studies and medieval research, even though it could be described here only briefly, can be viewed much more optimistically than in the early 1990s. Centers and departments of history specialize in medieval studies and often bring interesting and crucial results. A few problems of Czech research might be at a lower level of internationalisation: the Czech connection, quite understandably, leads mainly to Germany and Poland (after 1990 there was a little caesura in cooperation) and Slovakia, which, however, leaves aside connections with Hungary, for example, or Western European countries. Most of the ties are based on individual links and a few projects (the Center for Medieval Studies, for example, has a joint project on the later crusades with the University of Toulouse). To conclude, I must repeat that the situation of medieval studies cannot be compared with that of twenty years ago and CEU, even though it was not much wanted by some Czech politicians, helped create a more differentiated scholarly environment in the current state of medieval research.

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. <http://147.231.53.91/src/index.php>.

<sup>24</sup> See <http://www.centrum-texty.upol.cz>.