
Jan Hus as a Threat to the German Future in Central Europe: The Bohemian Reformer in the Controversy Between Constantin Höfler and František Palacký

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Introduction

In the second half of the nineteenth century it became increasingly clear in Bohemia that the political and cultural status quo of the German and Czech nations in the lands of the Crown of St. Wenceslas did not sit well with their aspirations. The outcome of the revolution of 1848 was, in a sense, unsatisfactory to both sides, as the response to it from the Habsburg rulers was a return to an absolutist centrism. In effect, the measures caused a reflection on both sides, albeit in very conflicting and opposing directions, to the future of the cohabitation of the two nations in Bohemia. Some speak about the beginning of the end of the “Bohemian spirit” of a multicultural kind, admired by Goethe. From that moment a parallelism appeared in the developments of the German and Czech communities as each organized itself into separate organizations and movements.¹

Communication between the two camps became increasingly difficult as society split into national units that guarded only their own interests more and more. Clichés were used to defend their own existence and to attack the other: Germans are violent, trying to suppress every potential opponent; Czechs are fundamentally democratic and peace loving. Or Germans bear the heavy responsibility of maintaining the *Imperium Romanum*, the stability of Europe, whereas Czechs are immature children, swept away by every changing mood or wind. Discussions in one of the communities itself were often decided by the argument that a specific fact assured the nation’s prosperity and, therefore, could not be challenged.² This conflictual situation was the background behind a bitter dispute between two acknowledged historiographers of German and of Czech descent: Constantin Höfler and František Palacký. The subject of the controversy was Jan Hus.

¹ So F. Boldt, *Kultur versus Staatlichkeit* (Prague, 1996) 280 ff. For other introductions to the Bohemian 19th century see also J. Kořalka, *Češi v Habsburské říši a v Evropě 1815-1914* (Prague, 1996); J. Křen, *Konfliktní společenství, Češi a Němci 1780-1918* (Prague, 1990); H. Mommsen e.a., *Ungleiche Nachbarn, Demokratische und nationale Emanzipation bei Deutschen, Tschechen und Slowaken (1815-1914)* (Essen 1993); F. Prinz, *Geschichte Böhmens 1848-1948* (München 1988).

² This argument recurs frequently in the press of the time. To mention just one case: When, in 1886, Jan Gebauer and Tomáš G. Masaryk, doubted the veracity of the Green Mountain and Queens’ Court Manuscripts, pointed at Václav Hanka as their forgerer, they were fiercely attacked by Julius Grégr in his *Národní listy* who, in one of his articles, accused them of “a lack of Czech feeling.” J. Grégr, *Na obranu Rukopisů královédvorského a zelenohorského*, (Prague, 1886) 29-31.

I Constantin Höfler on Jan Hus

The controversy started in 1864 when Höfler published a study on Jan Hus and the drama at the Prague University in 1409. Karl Adolf Konstantin Höfler³ was not a Bohemian German (*Deutschböhme*) but was born in Memmingen in the Kingdom of Bavaria in 1811. After his studies in Munich, Göttingen, Florence and Rome he became Professor of History at the University of Munich in 1841. In the period that followed, he worked on editions of sources of Bavarian and German history and published two volumes on the popes of German descent. His Bohemian engagement started in 1851 when he was given a chair at the University in Prague by the Minister of Education, Count Leo Thun. Thun, a member of a prominent Bohemian aristocratic family, was an influential politician close to the Imperial Court in Vienna. He was also well respected by representatives of the Czech revival movement like Václav Hanka and František Palacký for his efforts supporting, for example, the National Museum.

During the first years of his engagement in Prague, relations between Höfler and Palacký were quite good. The two had met during an earlier visit by Höfler, after which Palacký was pleased by Höfler's interest in the Hussite period, despite their differences of opinion about it.⁴ However, things were to change. As he had done during his time in Bavaria, Höfler began to publish editions of sources of Bohemian history which were criticised by Palacký, among others, for their errors and imprecise formulations. Moreover, Höfler became more and more a representative of a nationalist interpretation of history, understanding it in solely political terms. In 1862 Höfler became one of the founding members of the *Verein für Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen*.⁵ The main aim of the *Verein* was to defend the political rights of the Bohemian Germans against attacks from the Czech side by using history as an argument. As a result, it became a platform for German-Bohemian history, publishing its *Mittheilungen* which regularly strongly rejected Czech views on Bohemian history.

Höfler was rewarded several times for his undeniable efforts. In 1865 he became a member of the Bohemian Diet, in 1872 a member of the Austrian House of Lords and was raised to the hereditary nobility. Until 1872 he was a leading member of the German-Bohemian Party, but retired when, in his opinion, it became opposed to Roman Catholicism. He retired in 1882 and lived in Prague until his death in 1897.

In 1864 Höfler published a study on Jan Hus and the drama at the Prague University in 1409.⁶ It was not his first publication on Bohemian or Hussite history. In 1862 he had edited the *Concilia Pragensia*,⁷ with a very critical introduction to the

³ For Höfler see F. Kutnár, J. Marek, *Přehledné dějiny českého a slovenského dějepisectví* (Prague, 1997) 350 ff.; Patricius Schlager "Konstantin von Höfler," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 7 (1910) <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07382a.htm>>.

⁴ J. Kořalka, *František Palacký* (Prague, 1998) 471.

⁵ K. Oberdorffer, "Der Verein für Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen 1862-1938," *Bohemia* 3 (1962) 9-29.

⁶ *Magister Johannes Hus und der Abzug der Deutschen Professoren und Studenten aus Prag 1409* (Prague, 1864).

⁷ *Concilia Pragensia 1353-1413. Prager Synodal-Beschlüsse* (Prague, 1862 / Vienna, 1972²).

work and movement of Milicius de Chremsir and, more important, from 1856 on the *Geschichtsschreiber der husitischen Bewegung in Böhmen*.⁸

Höfler began his study on Hus with an analysis of the role of the Germans in Bohemia from the early Middle Ages on. In this part he saw two main contributions of the Germans to Bohemia and its inhabitants. The Germans were responsible for the Christianisation of the country and, because of their presence, Bohemia became an integral part of the Holy Roman Empire. Thus German influence laid the foundation for the dynasty of Bohemia and its later role in the Empire.

In the second part he discussed the expulsion of the German scholars, both professors and students, from Prague in 1409 which was the result of tensions between Czechs and Germans at the university.⁹ Höfler saw again the university as a sign of the Christianisation and cultivation of Bohemia under the influence of Germans and the Empire. The period in which the university was at its zenith ended, according to Höfler, in 1409, an event he called “the catastrophe.” Here he suggested that Wenceslas IV was forced or misled by Jan Hus to formulate the Kutná Hora Decree. The use of Wyclifism in the debate at the university was only a trick to strengthen the influence of the Czechs. Hus’s attitude in this respect was not that of a moral preacher or a reformer, Höfler wrote.¹⁰ Hus does not deserve any respect for what he did, because in his political steps the end justified the means. What the fanatic party of Hus’s friends called the liberation of Bohemia was, in fact, nothing other than a twist of the natural course of the Bohemian history, Höfler said. Moreover, the attack on the Germans at the university was not only a move to get control of, but was the beginning of a general attack on the Germans in Bohemia as such.¹¹ Hus and Jerome of Prague started to change the balance of power at the city council of Prague as well, Höfler stated. About 20,000 Germans left the city after the measures of Wenceslas, effectively emptying the university. What had been carefully built up under the patronage of Germans, was now being quickly ruined by Hus and his followers. In its golden period the university had been a source of economic and cultural growth, but now it experienced a rapid decline.¹²

In the third and last part of his study Höfler concentrated on Hus’ role after the expulsion of the Germans and on the effect of the victory of the Hussites. Höfler referred to Petr Chelčický when he said that Hussitism ruined scholarly life in Bohemia and turned the people into beasts.¹³ Hus was responsible for the desperate situation of the country in the eyes of the world, but did not want to accept any responsibility. Instead, he accused the clergy of holding responsibility for these problems. Bohemia was isolated and so was Hus himself. The result of the unjust

⁸ *Die Geschichtsschreiber*, 3 vv. (Vienna, 1856-1866).

⁹ Until 1409, the four so-called *nationes* (Bohemian, Bavarian, Saxon and Polish) had all one vote in the decision making process of the University of Prague. By the Decree of Kutná Hora of that year, Wenceslas IV changed the balance at the University of Prague in favour of the Czech *natio*, by granting it three votes and one vote to the other three *nationes*. As a result, the non-Czech *nationes* left the university.

¹⁰ *Magister Jan Hus*, 224.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 232.

¹² *Ibid*, 251.

¹³ *Ibid*, 313.

Kutná Hora Decree of 1409, made under pressure from Hus and his party, led to the ruin of the Kingdom as a whole.¹⁴

Höfler's conclusions were clear and simple. Hus attacked not primarily the Roman Church but the German people in the country as a whole, thus turning its face to the East, to the space occupied by a Slavic population. The people of the East, however, were not specifically successful in their struggle. Many of them were soon taken by the Ottomans and, even if the Czechs could withstand five crusades against them, they deteriorated internally and morally. The Christian principle of common respect, to live next to each other as a sign of freedom, was broken by the Hussites, Höfler said.¹⁵ In the fifteenth century the University of Prague had nothing to be proud of in comparison to the universities of Vienna and of Leipzig. And, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the German speaking parts of the Empire saw growth and progress, whereas the Slavonic area was disappearing from the political map.¹⁶

II Palacký's reaction to Höfler

a. Palacký's view in the *Geschichte von Böhmen*

Höfler's main adversary on the Czech side, František Palacký, published a reaction on Höfler's study about the events of 1409 a few years later, in 1868. Palacký had written about the Hussite period extensively in his *Geschichte von Böhmen*¹⁷ and its Czech companion, the *Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a na Moravě*, for which he was later called the "Father of the Nation". Volume III/1 of the *Geschichte* had caused some controversy with the authorities in Vienna. Palacký finished this part, which discusses the period of Wenceslas IV, in several stages between August 1843 and August 1844,¹⁸ and it was finally published in March 1845. Palacký had to send his draft text to the censor in Vienna, which was the usual procedure at the time. Extensive discussions were held in the imperial censor's office, as the draft brought a very different view on Hus and the beginnings of the Bohemian Reformation than the official one which simply stated that Jan Hus had been rightly burned as a heretic, since he had misled a part of the Bohemian church into error. He had doubted the authority of the Church and of the pope, resulting in the great confusion of the Bohemian church till 1620, when finally the holy truth returned to the kingdom of Bohemia.¹⁹

This was not Palacký's understanding of the person of Hus and the subsequent period. Earlier, in the previous volumes of the *Geschichte*, he had given some indications that his views on Bohemian history might differ from the official opinion,

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 320.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 323.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 325.

¹⁷ Because of its significance in the evolution of the debate, I have used the original German edition of the text for this first section rather the revised and expanded Czech edition. There is no evidence that Höfler was able to make extensive use of documents written in the Czech language.

¹⁸ Kořalka, *Palacký*, 220-226. See for the discussion on the development of Palacký's understanding of the Hussite movement also Petr Čornej, "Ke genezi Palackého pojetí husitství," in: F. Šmahel, E. Doležalová edd., *František Palacký 1798 / 1998, dějiny a dnešek* (Prague, 1999) 123-137.

¹⁹ On Palacký and the censor see K. Köpl, "Palacký und die Censur," in: *Památník na oslavu stých narozenin Františka Palackého* (Prague, 1898) 646-688.

which was dominated by the Roman Catholic Church. In Book VI, c. 3 (part of volume III/1), Palacký introduced the main issues at stake. The main question of the early fifteenth century was, he wrote, whether the church of that time still stood in the tradition of the Church of the New Testament or whether it had left the teaching of Christ.²⁰ Or, to put the question more bluntly, was the Hussite movement a part of the true Christian church or was it a deviation? There were two possible answers, said Palacký. Some said that the church could not err and if there were errors they were only due to particular individuals. Others considered only the New Testament writings as decisive and that all other later elements and customs were “mere” human inventions, which could sometimes be rejected because of their obvious contradiction to Christ’s teaching. Palacký saw in these two alternatives the later opposition of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism and, in his formulations, his sympathies were quite clear.²¹

In the same volume Palacký discussed the struggle at the university over the distribution of votes and influence which ended in the decree of Kutná Hora in 1409. Palacký saw the university’s loss of its privileged place among German universities as a great misfortune but a necessary step in the development of the Hussite movement.²²

The third part of the volume that proved to be problematic concerned the last phase in the life of Jan Hus. Palacký recorded the events in Constance in a very clear and open way, placing Hus in the light of freedom of conscience and of the right to personal conviction, even if that would mean execution because for these principles. All three parts received extensive comments from the Viennese censor who feared that Palacký’s study might confuse the reader because it did not defend the Roman Catholic truth from doubt. In Palacký’s vision, according to the censor, Jan Hus was portrayed as being too much the victim of his prejudiced opponents; his refusal to compromise was not shown to be the incompetence of a Prague heretic, but the courageous act of a reformer.²³ On the political side Palacký had a strong inclination to Czechism, i.e. to an interpretation of Hussite history unfavourable to the Bohemian Germans.²⁴ At a certain moment it seemed that

²⁰ “Der inhaltschwere Streit, der diese Epoche bezeichnet, drehte sich im Allgemeinen um die Frage: ob das Christenthum, wie es in den damaligen Zeiten sich in der abendländischen Kirche gestaltete, dem Sinnen seines göttlichen Stifters und der ersten Verkündigers un Lehrer desselben entsprach?” *Geschichte Böhmens* (Prague, 1845) 156.

²¹ “Man sieht, dass es sich hier um die Gegensätze des Katholicismus und Protestantismus handelte, welche seit Jahrhunderten sich geltend machen und auch heute noch nicht ausgeglichen sind; also um einen Zwiespalt in der Christenheit, der auf einem tiefern Grunde ruht und eine ausgedehntere Bedeutung hat, als sich mit leichtem Blick erfassen lässt.” *Geschichte*, 156.

²² *Geschichte*, 236-238. “Aber die unmittelbarste und grösste Bedeutung erhielt das Ereigniss für die fernere Entwicklung der kirchenreformatorischen Ideen in Böhmen. Mit der Entfernung der deutschen Professoren und Studenten aus Prag war der Hauptdamm durchbrochen, der ihren Strom bis dahin aufgehalten hatte; nun war ihr Sieg entschieden.” *Geschichte*, p. 238.

²³ “(..) dass Huss immer doch als der, wenigstens *durch die Form* des Conciliargerichtes *Verletzte*, *Beeinträchtigte* und dadurch *Leidende* geschildert wird, für welchen das *Rechtgefühl* der Leser mehr oder weniger in Anspruch genommen un somit *Partei für Hus* gemacht wird.” The Vienna censor quoted in Köpl, 672 (italics in the original).

²⁴ Köpl, 670.

Palacký's work would not be published at all, but after some changes the censor agreed to its printing.²⁵

We should be aware of the fact that Palacký's main work was first published in German; the first Czech edition appeared between 1848 and 1867, in a version clearly different from the German one. The introduction, in particular, had been changed and the, now the famous passage, about the "continual association and conflict of Slavdom with Romandom and Germandom" occurred.²⁶ The text was also altered in other parts,²⁷ making it clearly a manifesto of Palacký's concept of the history of the Czech nation, of which Jan Hus was the climax and symbol. Compared to the Czech version the German version kept more distance from a nationalist interpretation of Czech history. However, its main significance might have been that it did not repeat the official judgment and biased position towards Hus, thus rehabilitating him as a person who had to be taken seriously.

b. Palacký's answer to Höfler

Palacký's direct answer to Höfler was published a few years after Höfler's book and was entitled *Die Geschichte des Hussitentums und Prof. Constantin Höfler*. Interestingly, it was printed at the same publishing house as Höfler's book on Hus. Palacký placed the main questions as he saw them in the dispute with Höfler and other German Bohemian writers in the introduction to his work. First, he asked whether or not the Hussite movement had a moral significance and justification. Then, as the second question he asked what role was played by the polarity of the national elements, especially those of the German and the Slavonic or Czech spirit. Höfler had tried to damn the movement from both the moral and national point of view, but violated the principles of truth, neutrality and justice.²⁸

The book has two main parts, of which the first is a critical discussion of Höfler's editorial work in the context of the *Fontes Rerum Austriacarum*. It contains long lists of errors in the edited texts and criticises the concept of the edition and the selection itself. The second part is more interesting for our discussion since, here, Palacký reviewed Höfler's ideas and concept concerning Hussite history as such. He repeated one of his central arguments from the *Geschichte*, namely that the main difference between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism is about the understanding of authority. In the Roman Catholic Church the principle of the authority of the pope and the hierarchy govern, Palacký said, whereas in Protestantism the principle of reason was fundamental.²⁹ This very conflict was

²⁵ Kořalka, *Palacký* 227

²⁶ *Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a na Moravě*, I, (Prague, 1939) 19, here quoted in the translation of J.F. Žáček, *Palacký, The Historian as Scholar and Nationalist*, (The Hague-Paris, 1970) 84.

²⁷ E.g. in the part on Hus's process, where Palacký describes the last attempt of the council of Constance for a compromise with Hus on the eve of his execution. In the German edition Palacký writes about the visit of Jan of Chlumec and others to Hus in the evening of 5 July 1415 and continues without comments on the events of 6 July 1415. The Czech edition at this point gives a laudatory statement about Hus as the founder of Protestantism, the representative of spiritual freedom, and the one who gave new shape to the principle of the right to personal conscience in matters of faith, and who's death marked the start of a new era in the history of Christianity. *Dějiny*, III:122.

²⁸ F. Palacký, *Die Geschichte des Hussitentums und Prof. Constantin Höfler*, (Prague, 1868) 3.

²⁹ *Ibid* 63.

already present in the Hussite controversy with the Roman Church. Nevertheless, things are never just black or white, according to Palacký, but it is rather a matter of emphasis. Reason also has its place in the Roman Catholic tradition just as Protestants also have their form of hierarchical authority. In this, Roman Catholicism has taken adopted some of the features of their opponents in their conflict with Protestantism. Palacký was convinced that neither one of the traditions or principles can claim the absolute truth but, rather, connection, harmony and possible interaction can engender salvation. Tolerance, not war, must be the solution for these two traditions. As far as Palacký personally is concerned, he saw in the *Unitas Fratrum* the best form of Christianity, since it was basically not interested in doctrinal matters, but rather in the perfection of the practical Christian life.³⁰

Palacký used this model of a peaceful, practical and conciliatory approach to the deep questions of Christian life as a antithesis to the attitude of Höfler. In the following chapter he criticised him more broadly as an historian and critic of Hussitism. He accused him of simplifying the message and attitude of Hus, depicting him not only as an heretic, but also as a criminal. That Hus was only using religious and theological arguments to fight his nationalist war was, according to Palacký, Höfler's main message. In the eyes of many German scholars the Hussites were, just as are the Czechs or the Slavs in general, an inferior race, that could never compete with the German race, said Palacký. Therefore, Höfler was misleading when he stated that he simply wanted to understand and interpret Hus and his followers in a scientific way. His final statement is here that Höfler wanted to damage and devalue the Czech-Slavonic element as much as possible on one hand and to magnify the German element as much as possible on the other. In this attempt, the defence of the Roman Catholic Church and tradition only took second place, Palacký accused Höfler.³¹

Palacký then came to the most famous part of his book in which he compared the German nation with its Czech counterpart. To make a kind of differentiation Palacký used the norm of the foundations of society in order to distinguish how different people use and evaluate them. Law, property and the use of force are the guiding principles. Some nations are peaceful, other make war, some – like the old Romans, the Germans, Huns, Avars, Mongols and Tatars, Turks and Magyars – are *Räubervölker*, taking whatever they can get by force; others are not conquering, like the Jews, the Greeks and, especially, the Slavs.³² The Roman Catholic Church adopted the principle that might makes right in its dogmatic teaching. The most specific characteristic of the Slavonic people is freedom, in contradiction to the German *Knechtsschaft* and *Herrschaft*. In real Slavonic societies, like in the Serbia of his day, everyone was born equal, with the same rights, regardless property, was Palacký's analysis. Freedom is the highest goal for the Slavs and contains therefore, at the same time, its weakness. Slavs avoided building strong national structures or

³⁰ *Ibid* 66.

³¹ *Ibid* 73.

³² *Ibid* 76. These polemic remarks would have a continuation after a strong reaction in the *Mittheilungen* of the *Verein für Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen*. Palacký then changed *Räubervölker* in the more precise *Raubvölker*, quoting from Tacitus' *Germania* for support. See F. Palacký, *Zur böhmischen Geschichtsschreibung*, (Prague, 1871) 203-216. For an evaluation of Palacký's relation to G.W.F. Hegel see K. Štefek, Palacký and Hegel, in: F. Šmahel, E. Doležalová, *František Palacký 1798 / 1998, dějiny a dnešek*, (Prague, 1999) 43-51.

institutions as they refused to be subject to authority. As such, they were an easy victim of the surrounding aggressive nations like the Turks or Germans, Palacký added. As a result, Slavs had to adopt methods of power and violence learned from these nations in order to survive.

Palacký claimed that Höfler had a different idea of the differences between Germans and Slavs, seeing the Germans as the civilized people bringing education and law to the barbarian Slavs.³³ Palacký refuted this concept, arguing that the Slavs had their own highly developed culture before elements of German law were adopted. As proof, Palacký referred to examples such as Libuše's judgment and the Green Mountain Manuscript (which he still regarded a witness from the ninth century, but soon after was generally rejected as a hoax). For Palacký, it is a great irony that legal practise and customs which were common property for the Slavs long ago, were later seen as barbaric but, today, belong to the pride of the civilized nations of the Occident. The Slavic peoples are still seen as barbaric, since many think they are retrograde in their practices of law and justice compared to the nations of Western Europe, Palacký bitterly concluded.³⁴

The next part of Palacký's answer to Höfler discussed Hus's rôle in the events of 1409 when, by the decree of King Wenceslas, the balance in the administration of the university was changed in favour of the Bohemian *natio*. Palacký pointed out that Wenceslas did not have a good relationship with Hus at all, like Höfler suggested in his study. On the contrary, Wenceslas's action was motivated by the stubbornness of the other nations in finding a solution for the complicated situation. When he issued his Decree, all parties were surprised by it, is Palacký's understanding.³⁵ Then he criticized Höfler's opinion on Hus's anti-German and nationalist motivations. He admitted that there were two or three occasions when there was animosity on Hus's side against the Germans, but these were connected with attempts to close down and even demolish the Bethlehem Chapel. Otherwise, in his writings intended for the Bohemian people, there were no nationalistic expressions against the Germans. On the contrary, he repeated his opinion that "a good German is better than an evil Czech" several times, Palacký added.³⁶ Höfler, he concluded, had used just the sources and texts that were convenient for his biased opinion, omitting all other witnesses that could have corrected this. "C'est ainsi qu'on fait l'histoire!", Palacký expressed his despair.

In his book, Palacký went on to criticise many of Höfler ideas found in his other writings. One of the main features of Höfler's studies was, he said, to denigrate the Czechs as much as possible and by any means. In his final remarks he summarized this criticism. As for himself, Palacký said, he primarily tried to find the historical truth and, therefore, he tried to clean Czech history from stains with which it had been smeared by biased historians like Höfler. His main aim was to defend Czech nationality, which had been the victim of so many attacks, especially from the side of the Germans, he wrote.³⁷ In contradiction to Höfler, he went on suggesting that

³³ *Ibid.* 82.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 89.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 95.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 96.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 157.

many historians found in the history of Hussitism a deep moral aspect, since it was here for the first time that a people had risen up not because of material profit, but for the sake of the spirit and its freedom. The Hussite wars and the crusades against Bohemia had shown the world the unwillingness of the Roman hierarchy to allow a limitation of its authority.³⁸ Bohemia was the first country in modern Europe that secularized its government, Palacký stated.

Finally, Palacký discussed the question of the nationalistic nature of Hussitism and of Höfler's analysis of it. In his words, from the time that Bohemia first existed as a state, there has always been a need for the Czechs in Bohemia to sustain and defend their national identity. In Hussitism a national element was certainly present, but certainly not to the extent that Höfler had found, said Palacký. He accused Höfler of identifying Hussitism with nationalistic motives and finding the religious motifs only secondary.³⁹

An interesting passage then follows in the text in which Palacký comments on the political and social situation of the 1860s. The Czech nation was endangered by the so-called European reaction from Rome, Madrid and Vienna. Much of the glory of this reaction has gone, but it is very interested in history, and that is why Constantin Höfler received his assignment to write an history of Bohemia. Höfler, said Palacký, was given his position at the university to deprive the Czechs of their history. This is not Höfler's attitude towards another nation alone, but the same feature is very to be found generally in German historiography and politics. The tone of German representatives towards the Slavs in general and the Czechs in particular is very sharp and seems inevitably to lead to a new and major confrontation, Palacký warned. According to him a new Thirty Years War is about to begin.⁴⁰ The only thing to do in this situation is to "move Christianity more from the head and mouth to the heart," and to strengthen the awareness of brotherhood of all people. For the Czechs, a defensive attitude is the only answer, which, however, rejects any evil. They must practise more the art of peace than that of war; but if war is inevitable, fair and honourable weapons must be used in order not to become identical with the enemy, Palacký concluded his deliberations.⁴¹

III The Sharp Tone of the Bohemian Germans

Palacký's pessimistic words about a new war were prophetic in one way or another. He rightly felt that strong nationalist feelings contained enough aggression and bravado to begin a devastating chain of violence. One does not necessarily

³⁸ *Ibid.* 159.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁴⁰ "Ich hoffe, das grosse Volk der Deutschen besitzt in seinem Schoosse der besonnenen und rechtlichen Männer noch genug, um den mörderischen Anschlägen dieser gewissenlosen Faction noch bei Zeiten steuern zu können. Die aufgeklärten Männer Deutschlands werden sich der Erkenntniss nicht verschliessen, dass nach Gottes Ratschlüssen die Oeconomie des Weltalls Uniformität weder will noch verträgt (..); und da sie wissen, dass zu einem Ausrottungskriege unseerseits weder Angriff noch Provocation zu besorgen ist, so werden sie den vermeintlich leicht durchführbaren Frevel auch ihrerseits hintanzuhalten wissen, damit nicht in Folge eines mächtigen, in jüngster Zeit aus jahrhundertelangem Schlummer erwachten Geistes, eine allgemeine Conflagration, ein neuer dreissigjähriger Krieg herbeigeführt werde, dessen Opfer, neben uns, auch unsere Gegner werden müssten." *Ibid.* 163.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 164.

have to read Palacký's detailed analysis and comments on Höfler's texts to see how biased and unfair the latter was in his study of Jan Hus. Höfler had used virtually all opportunities to portray Hus as an immoral and demagogic leader. His condemnation of the Bohemian reformer is lacking in historical perspective, suggesting that it is still necessary to justify his execution. Inevitably the question arises – and apparently Palacký felt the same question behind Höfler's words – about the aim of Höfler in his study. The Czech historian concluded that his colleague's words were addressed to contemporary Czechs. In Hus, Höfler was condemning the Czech nation of the second half of the 19th century. When Hus was described as a person without moral integrity, the Czechs were also being accused of that. To Palacký, Höfler lacked academic objectivity, since he had only one goal: to destroy politically the Czech population of Bohemia. From that, Palacký feared it would be only one small step to physical liquidation.

In the controversy on Hus, Palacký was Höfler's main critic. However, as we have seen, Palacký's views when compared to those of Höfler, are rather moderate and far less polemical. In the mid-1860s Palacký belonged to the senior generation, who had grown up with the perception of the Habsburg Empire as the best option for the Czechs in Bohemia. Surely, Bohemia had to be granted more political rights and the Empire needed to be federalized but, should the Empire not have existed, it would have had to have been invented. After 1848 a new generation of Czech patriots and nationalists emerged, demanding a more aggressive approach toward the authorities. Many from this younger generation were ready to use a much stronger vocabulary for their aspirations than Palacký had been advocating.⁴² In terms of strong and demagogic language, Höfler might have found his counterparts in these circles instead, but on the academic level only Palacký had enough erudition to meet and to beat him.

This leaves us with the question of whether there were other circumstances that could explain the sharp, emotional and biased tone of the historiographic representatives of the Bohemian Germans. Höfler was certainly not the only historian of German origin in Bohemia who wrote in this way. A good example of the same kind of thing, though more popularized, is the book by Ludwig Schlesinger, *Geschichte Böhmens*, first published in Prague in 1869. The assignment to write the book was given by the aforementioned *Verein für Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen*. Schlesinger understood his task as an opportunity to defend the existence of the Bohemian Germans. In a short introduction to the book he described the position of his nation being discriminated against and endangered by both the Czechs and the official historiography.⁴³ The section of the book on Jan Hus

⁴² See for this e.g. J. Staif, "Česká národní společnost a její politické elity v letech 1848-1911," in: P. Vošáhliková, M. Řepa, *Bratři Grégrové a česká společnost v druhé polovině 19. století* (Prague, 1997) 9-28.

⁴³ "Denn mit der Vernachlässigung der kulturgeschichtlichen Momente verbindet sich daselbst zugleich die vollständige Unterdrückung der Geschichte des deutsch-böhmischen Stammes. Es bleibe hier ganz unerörtert, in wiefern und wie stark dabei das nationale Parteigetriebe mit im Spiele wirkt. Nur das sei erwähnt, dass die Deutsch-böhmen, der Rührigkeit der slawischen Geschichtschreibung und der officiellen tschechischen Landeshistoriographie gegenüber, bis zur Gründung des genannten Vereines mit wenigen rühmlichen Ausnahmen sich selbst nur in geringem Masse um ihre Geschichte und deren Bearbeitung gekümmert haben." Ludwig, Schlesinger, *Geschichte Böhmens* (Prague, 1869) iii-iv.

presents the Bohemian reformer and the subsequent reformation movement as a nationalist one, using religious arguments only as camouflage⁴⁴ – here, we hear an echo of Höfler. The Germans, who had come peacefully into the country to bring Christianity and civilization to the Czechs, were expelled by the violence of the fanatic Czech Hussites. However, despite the defeat and oppression of the Germans by the Czechs, the spiritual strength in the German nation gave the impulse to a new growth of German culture in Bohemia two hundred years later, Schlesinger said. This was the noble national awareness to which the grand German nation is entitled, he added.⁴⁵ To him the Bohemian Germans were, while a part of “one of the most important cultural nations in the world,” an “outpost against the Slavic peoples.”⁴⁶

What was the reason for this boasting, for the energetic activities on the part of the Bohemian Germans to organise themselves, to underline their significance and identity? The answer that easily comes to mind is that it was a reaction to the Czech Awakening in which Palacký played one of the key roles. The Czechs, as the majority in Bohemia, had also started to organise themselves in political and social organizations. On the field of historiography several new projects and journals had emerged, which concentrated on the history of the Czechs from the earliest times on. This emancipatory movement might have contributed to the German need for formulating and defending their own role in the history of Bohemia. In this way Höfler, Schlesinger and others were essentially reacting to Czech emancipation.

However, this explanation does not clarify the question of why the tone of the German reaction was of the sharpness that we find it in Höfler and Schlesinger. Why did they have the need to condemn Hus with a passionate overkill when the official teaching for almost 250 years had been that Jan Hus was a heretic? Why did the Germans have the need to defend their identity by denouncing Hus when they were still the governing party in the country?

Both Höfler and Schlesinger point out that it is only by uniting behind one, common (German), idea that prosperity could be guaranteed for the entire country and all its inhabitants. Internal diversity and uncertainty leads inevitably to chaos, decay and the loss of cultural or historical values. Their strong words seem to indicate that they were not only nor, perhaps, even primarily speaking to the Czechs but to their own fellow Germans. Höfler’s audience might not have been the Czechs, but the Germans of Bohemia or even those outside the country. The situation might be better understood if we take into account the specific historical circumstances of the Bohemian Germans in the 1860s, their discussions and dilemmas. For this we have to take a perspective on Bohemian affairs from a different angle, namely from that of both Berlin and Vienna.

⁴⁴ “Die nationalreligiöse Revolution Böhmens im XV. Jahrhunderts gehört nur theilweise zu jenen Bewegungen, welche unaufschiebbare, von den betreffenden Machthabern nicht gutwillig zugestandene Forderungen der Zeit mit Gewalt zu erzwingen suchen, sie ist mehr das Produkt eines mit religiösem Fanatismus verquicken Nationalhasses, und hatte nichts Anderes als entsetzliche Verwüstung, im Gefolge.” Schlesinger, *Geschichte Böhmens*, first published in Prague in 1869 298.

⁴⁵ Schlesinger, *Geschichte Böhmens* 437.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 438.

IV The Bohemian Germans Between Austria and Prussia: the Year 1866

The Bohemian Germans – and with them the Czech population – did not have an existential uncertainty about their status and future in the geographical and political context until about 1848. Until that year Bohemia was not only a part of the Habsburg Empire but, as such, also a part of the so-called *Deutsche Bund*, a confederation of the German-speaking areas in Central Europe. The leader of this Bund was Austria, a role which was not challenged until the revolution of 1848. One of the main issues at stake in this revolution was the question of the *Grossdeutsche* or *Kleindeutsche* solution for the question of the political future of the German nation in Europe. Austria was in favour of the *Grossdeutsche* solution, a kind of very loose confederation between the several German states. Prussia, on the other hand, favoured the *Kleindeutsche* solution which was an attempt to bring together or, even, unify Germans living outside Austria. The suppression of the revolution of 1848 meant a return to the conservative perspective, advocated by Austria.⁴⁷

For the time being, things were returned to the former track, but only for a relatively short while as tensions between Prussia and Austria were steadily increasing. One of the decisive moments was the appointment of Otto von Bismarck as Prussian Prime Minister in September 1862.⁴⁸ Under his reign the role of Prussia vis-à-vis Austria became stronger and stronger, with the effect of a growing confrontation with the Habsburgs. In these developments, the year 1866 – that is two years after the publication of Höfler's study on Hus and two years before Palacký published his reaction to it – plays a key significance.

In 1866 the conflict between Austria and Prussia over Schleswig-Holstein resulted an open military confrontation. Prussia saw this as its chance to settle to its advantage not only this specific conflict but the entire competition with Austria. It made bilateral agreements with France, Italy (recently united) and Russia over its aims concerning a war against Austria. The decisive battle between Prussia and Austria took place at Hradec Králové on 3 July 1866 where the well-trained and well-equipped Prussian army soundly defeated the Austrians. Negotiations then started and, in August, a Peace Treaty was signed in Prague. The Austrian Emperor had to agree to many propositions made by Bismarck, which would definitively change the situation in the confederation of the *Deutsche Bund*. In fact, the peace agreement brought an end to the *Deutsche Bund*, although not before 1870. The Prussian victory did not clarify the question as to the future of the German nation in Central Europe. On the contrary, there was substantial uncertainty between 1866 and 1870 when Prussia united Germany by bringing Bavaria into the new state structure as well.

The years around 1866 were a period of particular uncertainty for the Germans in Bohemia not only because of the continuing emancipation of the Czech population but also because the political structure of the Habsburg Empire was at stake and, with it, the position of the Bohemian Germans. They suddenly discovered that in Bohemia itself they were a minority that had to defend itself against the Czech majority. Until then Vienna, whose leadership over the German nation was

⁴⁷ See for this R.A. Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire 1526-1918*, (London, 1974) 243 ff. or H. Lutz, *Zwischen Habsburg und Preussen, Deutschland 1815-1866* (Berlin, 1998).

⁴⁸ Lutz, *Zwischen Habsburg und Preussen* 434.

acknowledged both in the Empire and beyond in the German states until 1848, had guaranteed their existence. But the years around 1866 had made it clear that the Empire had lost its momentum and could no longer survive in its present form.

Among the German population of Bohemia these developments evoked a sudden need for self organization and emancipation. Not only was the *Verein für Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen* founded but many other structures were established to express the needs and positions of a population whose self-experience was now that of a minority. The creation of a sense of unity was one means to strengthen the existence of the Bohemian Germans which found itself to be surrounded by the Czechs.

The history of Bohemia, and with it the reformer Jan Hus, was primarily judged by its political significance and consequences. Palacký was surely right, when he criticized Höfler of a political understanding of Hus at the cost of the more historical and religious one, although similar interpretations would soon emerge on the Czech side as well. Constantin Höfler saw Hus as a disturbance to German unity and, in part, responsible for Bohemia drifting away from where it belonged: the German space. This German space contained not only the Germans of the Habsburg Empire, but those in the other German states as well.

It seems that Höfler's judgement on Hus was not only an answer to Czech aspirations, but – at least of equal importance – a reflection of his position on the inner-German controversy. He expressed his apprehension that the Habsburg Germans would not be connected in the framework of some political structure to the Germans in Prussia and the Middle-German states. In this vision the existence of the Habsburg Germans would be threatened if the Prussian concept of a unified Germany (which including only the Germans outside the Empire) were to be realized, as the Germans within the Empire would be surrounded by Slavonic nations striving for an independent identity and a recognition of their political significance and influence or even their autonomy. His polemical writing about Hus was, therefore, not primarily addressed to the Czechs, but also to his German kinsmen in Bohemia and beyond. He wanted, primarily, to warn the Germans by giving them the example of Hus's time and events. The side effect of this was that he provoked the Czechs as well, which was clear from Palacký's reaction, although Palacký's reaction focuses the question with a particular academic precision. From this it follows that it would be interesting and profitable to analyse the effect of the Habsburg defeat of 1866 on Czech historiography.

In the study of Höfler, Jan Hus became an argument in the inner-German debates on the so-called German question and the future of Germans in this part of Europe. The events surrounding Hus had to convince his fellow-Germans to stick together and to support the Empire in its role in the region. Thus, Höfler used Hus to rally support for the Habsburg role in Central Europe.