

Inventing Rituals to Commemorate Jan Hus Between 1865 and 1965

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Introduction

After the Battle of the White Mountain and the beginning of re-Catholicisation the public commemoration of Jan Hus disappeared from Bohemia. The abundance of models and ways how to remember Hus both in the liturgy and outside of it could find continuation only other non-Roman Catholic traditions – mainly in Northern Europe.¹ As the Utraquist community as a tradition within the wider community of Roman Catholicism was forced to merge with the mainline papal church, the understanding of a “pre-Protestant” Hus was erased from religious life and practice. The commemoration of Hus was now in the hands of primarily Lutheran theologians like Matthias Flacius, who incorporated him into the Lutheran story of the reformation of the church.² Outside of Bohemia Hus became a Protestant.

Hus did not disappear from the historical awareness of the intellectual elite in Bohemia. The general understanding of Hus in Bohemia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries became one of a man of integrity and a good priest, who was misled by the heretical theology of John Wyclif.³ In the works of Václav Hájek of Libočany and Jan František Beckovský we find a Hus who had worthy intentions in his ideas on the reform of the church and was a true Bohemian patriot in his defence of the university for example, but due to the study of Wyclif’s writings he was radicalised and incorporated heretical elements into his theology.⁴

¹ See, for example, David HOLETON and Hana Vlhová-Wörner, “The Second Life of Jan Hus: Liturgy, Commemoration, and Music,” in František Šmahel in cooperation with Ota Pavlíček (eds.), *A Companion to Jan Hus* (Leiden-Boston, 2015) 289–324.

² Matthias Flacius Illyricus, *Catalogvs Testium ueritatis, qui ante nostram aetatem Pontifici Romano, eiusque erroribus reclararunt, iam denuo longe quam antea, & emendatior & auctior editus* (Basel, 1562) 494.

³ See Petr Čornej, “Hájkův obraz husitské epochy [Hájek’s image of the Hussite era],” in Jan Linka (ed.), *Na okraj kroniky české* [On the margins of the Czech chronicle] (Prague, 2015) 83–109.

⁴ Jan František Beckovský, *Poselkyně starých příběhův českých aneb kronika česká* [Messenger of Old Czech stories or Czech chronicle] (Prague, 1700) 625 ff.

A similar approach was taken by representatives of the Enlightenment generation in Bohemia. In 1774 the Piarist historian Nikolaus Adaukt Voigt (1733–1787) published his *Abbildungen böhmischer und mährischer Gelehrten und Künstler*,⁵ which included short biographies of leading figures from Bohemian history. Hus, Jerome and some other personalities of the later Bohemian Reformation like Jan Augusta have their place in this collection of Bohemia's elite. Voigt opened his chapter on Hus by stating that he should be despised by every good Bohemian patriot because of the confusion his heresy had brought upon the land.⁶ Nevertheless, Hus has to be included in a representative presentation of Bohemia's intellectual tradition, as he was an influential and genuine thinker and priest. Interestingly, at the end of his description of Hus's life, Voigt refused the Lutheran claim on Hus as a part of the Reformation, since Hus observed the Roman rite.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Hus was an acknowledged part of Bohemian history. He was not erased from the historical memory of the intellectual elite, but had a fixed place in the gallery of the tradition, all be it that it was placed in the part of personalities who contained certain ambivalences. The radical aspects in Hus's work and life and even more the radical nature of the revolution in the period after his death were a reason for the Enlightened historiographers to distance themselves from the dangers of actions which are not based on analytical reason.

It was in the work of František Palacký that he attained the central place in the national Czech history.⁷ In Palacký's concept concerning the struggle of the Czech nation for survival and resurrection against domination and authoritarianism of the German, Roman Catholic political and cultural traditions, Hus and the Hussite period including the radical dimensions of it became the personification of the national community. Hus's story became the story of the Czech nation.⁸

The popularisation of Hus as the symbol of the nation occurred in the same time as Palacký was publishing his scholarly work. Curiously enough, it was a German speaking inhabitant of Prague who, more significantly than any other writer, contributed to the dissemination of Hus as the centre of Czech history.

⁵ Published in Prague 1774. The Latin edition of the collection is *Effigies Virorum Eruditorum atque Artificum Bohemiae et Moraviae* (Pragae, 1775).

⁶ Nikolaus Adaukt Voigt, *Abbildungen böhmischer und mährischer Gelehrten und Künstler, nebst kurzen Nachrichten von ihren Leben und Werken* (Prague, 1773) I: 61 ff.

⁷ Most prominently in his *Dějiny českého národu v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku* (Prague, 1848–1865).

⁸ On Palacký's role in Czech nationalism see Joseph Frederick Zacek, *Palacký: The Historian as Scholar and Nationalist* (The Hague, 1970); Monika Baár, "Heretics into National Heroes: Jules Michelet's Joan of Arc and František Palacký's John Hus," in Stefan Berger, Chris Lorenz (eds.), *Nationalizing the Past, Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe* (New York, 2010) 128–148.

Karl Herloßsohn (1802 Prague – 1849 Leipzig)⁹ was a very productive novelist (his collected works in German count twenty-eight volumes), who wrote a number of historical novels. Two of them, *Der letzte Taborit oder Böhmen im 15. Jahrhundert* (1834), *Böhmen von 1414 bis 1424* (2 volumes, 1841) and several novels on Wallenstein (between 1844 and 1847) were translated into Czech and were re-printed several times until the end of the nineteenth century. Herloßsohn can be seen as the predecessor of Alois Jirásek (1851–1930), who with his historical novels on the period of the Bohemian Reformation and after (e.g. *Doba temna* [The Age Darkness], 1914) formed the historical consciousness of the generation of the founders of the Czechoslovak Republic.

The next phase of the remembrance of Hus in modern history concerned giving shape to rituals or ceremonies for celebrating anniversaries connected to Jan Hus. Herloßsohn and Palacký had prepared the ground for a tradition to be built and, in fact, several oratorios, operas and dramas did find their way to the theatres and concert halls.¹⁰ The question we pose here, is how did the inhabitants of Bohemia give shape to remembrance when there was no longer a tradition of remembrance? We will now turn our focus to the question: what happened in the streets?

By the 1860s nationalist movements in Central Europe had developed models for public remembrance of historical events. The most well-known example at that time would have been the so-called Wartburgfest, which went back to 1817. In that year about 500 people participated in a pilgrimage to the place where Martin Luther had been hiding while translating the Bible into the German language. The aim of the event was not just to remember an important part of German history, but much more to formulate the political aims of the German nationalist movement and to give a boost to the self-confidence of a new generation of defenders of the nation.¹¹ The gathering of 1817 was witnessed by leading personalities of the Czech and Slovak nationalist movements like Jan Kollár.¹² Moreover, in this phase of romantic nationalism models and experiences of how to give shape to the nationalist

⁹ On Herloßsohn see Zuzana Urvalková, “Unser Herloß: Zur Rezeption von Karl Herloßsohn in den böhmischen Ländern,” in Steffen Höhne (ed.), *Prozesse kultureller Integration und Desintegration. Deutsche, Tschechen, Böhmen im 19. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2005) 211–218.

¹⁰ See Peter Morée, “Nový tak národ lvů povstane z hrobů dědů zpráchnivělých! Česká reformace v operě a oratoriích [The new nation of lions will emerge from the graves of the grandfathers],” in Petr Hlaváček et al., *O Felix Bohemia! Studie k dějinám české reformace* (Prague, 2013) 316–330.

¹¹ See Klaus Malettke, “Zur politischen Bedeutung des Wartburgfestes im Frühliberalismus,” in Klaus Malettke (ed.), *175 Jahre Wartburgfest, 18. Oktober 1817 – 18. Oktober 1992* (Heidelberg, 1992) 9–30; Etienne François, “Die Wartburg,” in Etienne François, Hagen Schulze (eds.), *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte* (Munich, 2001) II: 154–170.

¹² His record of the event was published in Matthias Murko, *Deutsche Einflüsse auf die Anfänge der böhmischen Romantik, mit einem Anhang: Kollár in Jena und beim Wartburgfest* (Graz, 1897) 328–335.

aspirations were shared by leaders of the several Central European movements regularly meeting in some sort of “nationalist internationale.”¹³

For our purpose of exploring models of popular commemoration of Jan Hus, newspapers of the time are useful sources, as they report on what was happening “on the streets.” Nevertheless, we have to be aware of the specific character of this source. Much stronger and more outspoken than today’s newspapers, they were vehicles of certain political views and interests. With this in mind, they give an interesting insight in the making of rituals for the commemoration of Jan Hus, especially the nineteenth century.

1868: A National Pilgrimage to the Site of Martyrdom

First let us take a closer look at the year 1868, which was a busy year for life in Prague. Franz Josef II had visited Prague, the corner stone of the National Theater on the bank of the River Vltava (Moldau) had been laid by František Palacký, the preliminary Theater witnessed the premiere of Karel Šebor’s opera *Nevěsta husitská* [The Hussite Bride], which in the next decade became the second most successful production of the opera house.¹⁴

Šebor’s opera about the battle of Lipany reflected the dilemma of the moment concerning the Hus remembrance. The symbol of the nation – Jan Hus – had been burned at the stake in Constance because of his heresy and, therefore, had a controversial reputation for the majority of Catholics in Bohemia and Moravia. How could Hus, in the radicalized concept of Palacký, become the figure to unite all Czechs? How could the modern Czech nation develop a concept of its past and a tradition of remembrance if it were to be based on a man and on developments that divided the society of Bohemia and Moravia on the religious level? Šebor’s answer was: the religious differences are being bridged by kinship. In his opera, a couple falls in love. He is an Utraquist soldier, she the daughter of a good catholic father. When she follows him into battle, both are killed. Then it is revealed that they are both children of the same father, who now weeps bitterly over the division and loss of his children during the religious conflict.

In this concept all belong together in spite of the visible, but yet insignificant (in Šebor’s opinion) boundaries of religion. We have to develop an image of the past that brings us together and makes us strong as a nation. From the narrative of religion we have to move to a narrative of nation. It is exactly this concept which was increasingly used in the years 1868 and 1869, when Jan Hus was celebrated publicly for the first time in modern history as a symbol of the national community.

The Olomoucké noviny wrote:

¹³ See Joep Leerssen, “Viral nationalism: romantic intellectuals on the move in nineteenth-century Europe,” *Nations and Nationalism* 17/2 (2011) 257–271.

¹⁴ Peter Morée, “Nový tak národ lvů,” 318 ff.

After many hundreds of years it is the first time that it is possible for us to again festively profess to a man, who the whole civilized Europe ranks to the most excellent phenomena on the horizon of the spiritual power, full of pursuit for spiritual edification and moral purity, for progress and sovereignty.¹⁵

The times when affairs in Bohemia were structured according to religion, are gone, now it is about the nation and the national, against foreign elements, the newspaper continued. "Therefore in Hus we celebrate a national martyr, who was executed by the evil and hatred of foreigners, which is still raging against us and if it could, it would burn our whole nation on its own territory." Earlier, in the 1860s, a citizen of the town of Constance had initiated the erection of a monument on the site of Hus' death on the banks of the Rhine. Among the nationalist intellectuals and politicians the news about this new place of remembrance provoked the idea of organizing a visit to Constance. But for remembrance you need a concept; what are you going to remember? According to one periodical, Hus was to be remembered because of his struggle for the truth and freedom. Hus deployed resistance against the despotism of the pope and the emperor; therefore Czechs need to remember the "pride of the nation" in a proper and worthy way. Hus died for truth, and the rights and freedoms of the Czechs and of the world. "Let us show to Europe that Hus's spirit is still ours, that we are not and do not want to be allies with black (clerical) powers. Therefore let our slogan be: To Constance!"¹⁶

The journey to Constance was named "the Czech pilgrimage to Constance". Here we find a piece of an answer to the question of how to shape the new remembrance. The 1860s were a time of large meetings in the name of religious symbols (Cyril and Methodius in 1863 and 1869) or of political ideals (the so-called *Tábory lidu* [people's camps]). The concept of how to remember the symbol of the nation was borrowed from the religious realm: a pilgrimage to the tomb or a holy place connected to the martyr for the renewal of certain spiritual values.

The pilgrims left Prague by train on 4 July, and travelled through Beroun, Hořovice, Pilsen and Domažlice. In those places the fellowship made a stop to participate in local celebrations organized on the occasion of their visit on the way to their sacred destination. Among the approximately 250 passengers (some sources speak about 300) there were thirty women, brave like "the Hussite women".¹⁷ The journey could be undertaken by anyone, who was able and willing to pay twenty-five Austrian gulden for a return ticket.¹⁸

¹⁵ *Olomoucké noviny*, 8. 7. 1868, "Pout do Kostnice k mohyle Husově."

¹⁶ *Svoboda*, 25. 6. 1868, "Památce Jana Husi," 354–355.

¹⁷ *Svoboda*, 11. 7. 1868, "Pout do Kostnice," 410.

¹⁸ *Svoboda*, 10.6. 1868, "Do Kostnice," 347.

From Augsburg where, despite some allegedly negative articles in the local press, the train was also hailed, the train went on to Lindau. From there they travelled to Constance by boat, where to their great surprise, they were welcomed by a brass band playing *Kde domov můj* under flags with the Bohemian lion and the Hussite chalice. In order to reassure the inhabitants of Constance of their good intentions, the pilgrims had written a declaration about the significance and the aims of the journey: they came to visit the place where Jan Hus, “our great forefather”, died, because they wanted to remember the “martyr for truth and freedom of conscience” at the place where he “let his noble spirit go” and to “pray for God’s blessing for his seed, the principles of love, and brotherhood.” “The enthusiasm for light and truth, which Hus raised in his own fatherland, the remembrance of his teaching of humanity and general love towards mankind, which he spread among his countrymen, put the obligation on our shoulders to visit the place which is sanctified by his ashes, so our souls will be elevated by the sight of it and be confirmed in faithfulness and trust in the eternal truth.”¹⁹

The manifesto stressed that the Czechs did not come to disturb the peace in the town of Constance, but instead it underlined the values which the Czech pilgrims had in common with the Constanceans. It was Hus’s alleged humanist values which brought his countrymen to the town on the Bodensee, not controversial nationalist ideas about the wrongdoings and oppression committed by Germans to Czechs. Hus and the Bohemian Reformation represented peace and solidarity between nations, freedom and education.

After a march through Constance the company went to the memorial stone on the sight of the execution of Hus. Several speeches were given, both in Czech and in German, and the protestant pastor Bedřich Fleischer led in prayer. According to the *Augsburger Zeitung*, the speeches also lacked the sharp tone of nationalist manifestations in Bohemia and did not speak about alleged tyranny and discrimination. Especially Josef Václav Frič, a Czech writer and activist who lived in forced emigration, in his German speech paid attention to the will of the Czechs to live in harmony with the German speaking population of Bohemia. The *Zeitung* was nevertheless sceptical about the honesty of the aims and true motifs of the Czechs.²⁰

¹⁹ *Svoboda*, 11. 7. 1868, “Pouť do Kostnice,” 410.

²⁰ *Wochenausgabe der Augsburger Allgemeinen Zeitung*, Nr. 28, II. Jahrgang, 10. 7. 1868, 443: Die deutsche Rede war ein sorgfältig vorbereiteter Rechtfertigungsversuch, in welchem über Sprachenzwang, Excesse und Anderes ziemlich leicht hinweggegangen, übrigens die österreichische Tyrannei beklagt und versichert wurde, dass nichts den H.H. Tschechen erwünschter sei, als mit ihren deutsch-böhmischen Brüdern in Eintracht leben zu können. Die ganze Sache machte, in Folge der verschiedenen Costüme, einen recht bunten, malerischen Effect, und die ganze Stadt stand auf einen halben Tag unter dem Eindruck des Besuchs aus Böhmen, äußerlich wie moralisch. Es wurden auch, abgesehen von der erwähnten Rede, große Anstrengungen gemacht, im persönlichen Verkehr die Einwohner der tschechischen Sache günstiger zu stimmen; von der leicht erweckten menschlichen Theilnahme abgesehen, kann natürlich von einem Erfolg keine Rede sein.

The question which the leaders of the Czech nationalist movement were facing in the 1860s, was how to popularise the content of Czech nationalism by creating rituals that would express the unity, determination and dynamic character of their concept of national identity. The format which they applied for this aim, they borrowed from the religious world of ceremonies because of their persuasive nature and longstanding tradition. To invent new rituals would not only be difficult, but would also ultimately undermine the authority of the movement.

By borrowing not only models, but also vocabulary from the religious world, Czech nationalism claimed to have certain religious features. The martyr Jan Hus did not die for the faith of the church, but for the faith of the nation. Nationalism acted as an ersatz religion, with the consequence that religion as the main content of Hus's work and life had to be disregarded.²¹ A very similar pattern was applied in the next year, with the first large celebration of Hus in Prague and Husinec.

1869: A National Worship Service at the Site of Nativity

The first opportunity to celebrate Jan Hus at home in Bohemia was the year 1869—500 years after his alleged birth date of 6 July 1369.²² The main celebrations of the anniversary took place several months later, in September, most likely because in July a national commemoration of SS. Cyril and Methodius took place. 6 July was marked in some Prague theatres, where, for example, Kajetán Tyl's play Jan Hus was performed.²³

Also on 6 July a celebration took place at Pankrác. According to popular conviction, a statue of Jan Nepomuk at the local Church of St. Pancras, just outside of the city gate at Vyšehrad was, in fact, a statue of Jan Hus. This statue "which was, in the course of the and Jesuit influence, modified into a statue of Jan Nepomucenus by adding some stars and a cross to it. This cover-up was in vain, because the inhabitants of Pankrác and the general public kept well in mind that the statue was dedicated to the memory of Mistr Jan Hus, who was burned in the flames of Constance for the truth and the true words of God."²⁴

The issue of the statue was the reason why the Pankrác authorities were asked for permission to organize a celebration of the birth of Jan Hus. Reports

²¹ More on the phenomenon of nationalism substituting religion in Anthony Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford, 2003).

²² See Petr Pabian, "Czech Protestants and national identity: commemorating Jan Hus in 1869," *BRRP* 7 (2009) 221–228.

²³ See announcements in *Národní listy* of 6. 7. 1869.

²⁴ *Národní listy*, 6. 7. 1869, Hus Celebration in Pankrác. Also the periodicals *Bohemia* of 6. 7. 1869, *Moravská Orlice* of 8. 7. 1869, *Politik* of 6. 7. 1869 and *Pražský denník* of 6. 7. 1869 reported about the commemoration.

speak of about 8.000 to 10.000 participants in the event, who gathered at the Vyšehrad gate and went in a long file under a Hussite flag (black with a red chalice) to a nearby pub, on the way passing houses decorated with images of Hus's life and suffering. The organizers had put a provisional Hus statue in the garden of the inn, which became the centre of the remembrance festivities. Members of the "Czech Theatre" sang the hymn *Hospodine, pomiluj ni* and, after a speech, the choral *Ktož jsu Boží bojovníci*.

A Pankrác inhabitant with the name of František Chotouš (most likely the main organizer) spoke about the significance of Hus for the nation. He stressed Hus' role in the defence of truth and freedom. "The spirit of Truth and Freedom emerged from the Constance pyre like a victorious Phoenix, marching ahead unstoppable with, on its right a sword that slays tyrants and, on its left a torch throwing light into the darkness, where the corrupt and greedy black-dressed feel at home."²⁵ The nation remembers and venerates its noble martyr as the messenger of true Christian teaching.

When the crowd returned to the city, the Vyšehrad Gate had been closed early, and police prevented the participants of the manifestation from entering the city. In the centre of Prague another, smaller, celebration had taken place at Bethlehem Square, where on a house (then mistakenly believed to be the site of the Bethlehem Chapel), a plaque was revealed about the preacher of the Chapel. Also a provisional statue was shown to the crowd of about 4000 people.

The spontaneous celebration in Pankrác was a great success in numbers, but as such served as a prelude to the main celebration, which took place in September 1869 in Husinec, Hus's alleged birthplace, which was organized by the political elite of the time. The aims were ambitious: it had to be international and representative for a significant part of Bohemian society. Again the commemoration took the form of a pilgrimage, now to the place of Hus's nativity, but the numbers of participants was much larger than those pilgrims who had travelled to Constance.

The starting point of the festivities for Hus's birth was Prague's Bethlehem Square. On the evening of 4 September 1869, a crowd of several thousand people gathered and witnessed the unveiling of a short text on the house where Hus allegedly had lived as preacher of the Bethlehem Chapel (today the little monument is in the small museum of the reconstructed Bethlehem Chapel). Reports speak about the houses on the square being decorated in Hussite colours and motives.²⁶ On the occasion novelist and political activist Karel Sabina gave the main speech, in which he stressed the historical moment. For the first time since *Bílá hora* Hus can be commemorated, he stated, in the presence of substantial delegations of friendly nations like the Slovaks, Russians, Serbs and Bulgarians. A panslavist tone would accompany the

²⁵ *Národní listy*, 6. 7. 1869.

²⁶ E.g. *Národní listy* of 5. 9. 1869, *Politik* of 5. 9. 1869 or *Pražský denník* of 5 and 6. 9. 1869.

festivities in both Prague and Husinec. The newspaper *Národní listy* printed long lists of telegrams from many personalities and groups from Slav nations. According to Sabina, Hus was uniting the Slav nations and reconciling and superseding the religious differences in the wider national community. Sabina explicitly stated that to celebrate and create unity, it is not required to analyse the religious background and arguments of Hus. "We do not focus on the question whether he was a reformer in dogmas, if he reformed some articles of faith or not, what does it matter? He reformed thinking, the human heart and soul, and therefore the Czech nation rebuked those who were against him. We are not interested in what he did with Rome, nor with this nor that cardinal, but more important is what he did with us, that he taught us to think and act independently. That was his great reformation."²⁷ Hus gave the nation life, even before other nations experienced a similar development with their reformers. Hus gave the nation sovereignty and put its fate in its own hands. We should not return to the religious fights of the fifteenth century, but study "the new canon law" of the nation.

After the revealing of the plaque and the hymn *Hospodine pomiluj ny* the Protestant pastor Bedřich Fleischer spoke. He put Hus in a contemporary context in which Hus was a messenger of light, truth and freedom. The nation received the notion and experience of freedom from Hus, which in the current circumstances meant a better position of the Czech and Slav nations in the Habsburg Empire, supported by a constitution. As a pastor he admitted that Hus was both a martyr for the faith as well as for the nation. The Hussite movement and the Czech national movement belonged together, because Hus is the embodiment of both, Fleischer said.

It is interesting that Fleischer did not construct a contradiction between the tradition of Cyril and Methodius and that of Hus, but underlined the similarities. Like the so-called apostles of the Slavs, Hus was also an advocate of the liturgy in Czech. Here, Fleischer followed the interpretation of his protestant colleague Heřman z Tardy in a book published some years earlier.²⁸

After the official end of the celebration the crowd stayed at the square in an act of remembrance. Candles were lit and several provisional statues of Hus, Žižka, George of Poděbrady, Jerome, Rokycana, Comenius and Palacký (the last two were of a large size, the reports say) were installed. The ceremony turned more or less spontaneously into a vigil.

In the morning of 5 September a special train left Smíchov at ten thirty, heading for South Bohemia.²⁹ At every station along the way (except for Karlštejn) the train was received enthusiastically with slogans, songs and

²⁷ *Národní listy*, 5. 9. 1869.

²⁸ J. Janata, Václav Šubert and Heřman z Tardy, *Památka roku slavnostního 1863 tisícileté památky obracení národu českého na Moravě, Slovensku a v Čechách skrze Cyrila a Metoděje na křesťanství* (Prague, 1864).

²⁹ Very detailed reports can be found in *Národní listy* of 8 and 9 September 1869. Also other periodicals wrote about the event (e.g. *Pražský denník* of 6. 7. 1869 or *Květy* of 30. 9. 1869).

gifts. Finally in the evening it reached its destination (Protivín for the academic participants or Vodňany more for the political participants).

The next morning the pilgrims travelled on wagons to Husinec, where they arrived at about ten o'clock. In Husinec all the houses were decorated with banners and slogans. The house Hus allegedly had lived in had the text: "Your old home welcomes fresh guests!" After the official procession organised along lines of local adherence and organisation had reached Hus's house, the crowd was welcome by the mayor of Husinec. It was not for the first time, he said, that we celebrate Hus in Husinec, but now it has a worldwide significance. The aim of this commemoration was to celebrate the freedom of the spirit, the freedom of thought.

The main speech of the commemoration in Husinec was given by the politician Karel Sladkovský. He spoke at length about the main events of Hus's life and of the later key moments of the Bohemian Reformation. In his view the finest hour of the Bohemian Reformation was the Compactata, because the Czechs forced the Roman Church to acknowledge that she had been wrong in condemning the Hussites. This gave witness to the strength of the Bohemian Reformation, because during other confrontations with the Roman Catholic Church in the later centuries, such a step never occurred again, he said.

Sladkovský criticised those in church and society, who were refusing Hus as a common ground for the national cause. "Relent now and stop blaming Jan Hus, because the judgment of history has decided finally and irrevocably and her verdict sounds irreversibly: 'Master Jan Hus is not a heretic, but he is a martyr, mostly a martyr of truth, in all a martyr of his conviction, he is liberator of his nation from the shackles of its spiritual serfdom, he is one of the most important and noble combatants for general human freedom.'"³⁰

The modern nation should return to Hus, because he was the source of Czech national pride and of the respect the Czechs received from other nations. Therefore the Czechs have to reject the condemnation of Hus, because he did nothing else than be with his people. Hus was not only significant for the Czechs, but his work of emancipation and salvation concerned the other Slav nations as well. "We know that you are our greatest pride, the decoration of all Slavdom and a bright star of all humankind. Enter into the temple of our honorees and take your place in their first row!" Hus must be reclaimed from those who condemned him in the past or who are condemning him today. The crowd reacted enthusiastically to Sladkovský. "Hus is not a heretic, he is a martyr" they shouted.

Then a medallion was revealed on the alleged birth place of Hus, which said "In this house Master Jan Hus saw the light of the world on 6 June 1369". Several foreign guests spoke in the second part of the ceremony. The Russian Michail Andrejevich Buchtejev stated that the history of the Slav nations is about defenders of the truth. This truth brings the Slavs together, of which the enemies of truth and humanity are afraid. "Praise be to the most western

³⁰ *Narodní listy*, 6. 9. 1869.

Slav fighter, Master Jan Hus!" The Serbian Vladan Djordjevich spoke about Hus as a patriot: pushed the Czech language, like Cyril and Methodius. Hus denied that Christ as the head of the church had a representative on earth. Consequently, from his standpoint, Hus derived that there can be only one church, no Eastern and Western. Hus was a national champion, but to the same extent he was a religious reformer. According to Djordjevich the national idea can only succeed if all religious differences are abolished. He called for a federation of Slav nations, regardless of their religious beliefs.

Most of the foreign guests also joined a festive banquet at the Žofin venue on Slovanský Island in the Vltava in Prague on 7 September, where the senior leaders of the national movement like František Palacký and František Rieger were present.³¹ At its opening Palacký gave a short speech in which he described Jan Hus as one of the most noble and sublime martyrs of the martyr nation of the Czechs. He appealed to the Habsburg Emperor to restore the glory of the Bohemian Crown to the heights of fifteenth century Reformation times. According to the reports, the statement of František Rieger was met with great enthusiasm. He predicted that in the near future the nation would have to defend its existence and its programme. In his estimation the national movement had great leaders and saw a strong unity, as in the time of the Hussite wars when the Czechs, thanks to their concord, were able to defeat stronger enemies. The current situation of decisiveness of the nation was the opposite of the Thirty Years' War, which the Czech nation lost due to the passivity of the population. But the nation has to be prepared for a martyrdom in the footsteps of Hus.³²

Národní listy, the main news medium of the organising committee, evaluated the results of the efforts soon after the celebrations.³³ According to the newspaper 50,000 people participated in the festivities in Husinec, sixty foreign guests mainly from Slav nations joined the activities, and many telegrams had been sent in congratulation (317 from Bohemia, 40 from Moravia and Silesia, 42 from other parts of the Empire, 39 from foreign countries).

The commemoration of 1869 had several important features, which continued and intensified the tendencies of the previous celebrations of Hus. The concept of a Hus who could unite a religiously divided nation became the key for Hus as the symbol of the national movement. It was Karel Sladkovský and Karel Sabina, two radical activists, who explicitly said that the nation should not be interested in Hus's religious or theological questions and standpoints. Hus was to be national, not religious.

To this invention of an a-religious Hus one particular feature was added. The celebration of 1869 was not only a Czech event, but had to connect the Czech national cause to those of the other Slav nations. Hus was

³¹ On the menu was lobster soup, salmon, *svíčková*, *paté* with truffles, beef rib with peas, roe, chicken, hedgehog, ice-cream, fruit, etc. (*Národní listy* 9. 9. 1869)

³² Speeches can be found in *Národní listy* of 9. 9. and 10. 9. 1869.

³³ *Národní listy*, 11. 9. 1869.

a part of the story of the Slav struggle for identity. Guests from Russia, Serbia and Bulgaria made it tangible that “the most western” Slav nation of the Czechs had experienced the glory of the Hussite era and the dark of the oppression of it as part of a Slav history in Bohemia.

Due to the emphasis on the “Slavness” of the story of Jan Hus, the commemoration in Husinec and Prague had an international presence. Besides Russians, Bulgarians and Serbs, also representatives of Western nations were present, especially from the United States and from England. Their participation had to show that because of Jan Hus and his heroic martyrdom the Czech nation was a respected nation in the community of nations, which had built their political systems on the basis of a concept of the Reformation. Jan Hus was proof of the modernity and maturity of the Czech nation.

1915: The unaccomplished translation of the national martyr

The commemorations of 1868 and 1869 were a great success to the leaders of the Czech national movement as represented in both its Staročeské wing (Rieger, Palacký) as well as its Mladočeská counterpart (Sladkovský, Sabina). The event turned out to be the foundation of the concepts of the celebration of 1915, which never took place. The national commemoration of 1915 was meant to be not only a repetition of a celebration of an internationally admired Jan Hus and Czech nation, but also was intended to create a new centre of worship for the national saint. A new statue on the Old Town Square in Prague was to become the new location of the veneration of the national martyr – Jan Hus.

The story of the commemoration of 1915 was closely connected to the statue which, since 1915, is on the Old Town Square.³⁴ Its genesis goes back to the accomplishment of the National Museum on Wenceslas Square in 1889, which carries many names of important representatives from the nationalist discourse on Czech history. Originally, Jan Hus was not included, which raised a sharp debate over his place in the historical memory of the modern Czech nation. The result of the debate was the establishment of a Committee for the Erection of a statue for Master Jan Hus, which was to prepare and implement steps leading to the construction of a Hus memorial.

First the committee had to decide on the location of the statue. In the discussions about the particular place the decisive argument appeared to be the stature and concept of the statue. The more national the statue was intended to be, the more important the square where it should be erected. Bethlehem Square would give room for a religious Hus, but the Old Town Square would stress the significance of Hus for the wider nation.

³⁴ See for details on the genesis of the memorial on the Old Town Square: Stanislav Forman, *Dějiny spolku pro vystavení pomníku Mistra Jana Husi v Praze* (Praha, 1903) and Jan Galandauer, *Pomník Mistra Jana Husa, český symbol ze žuly a bronzu* (Prague, 2008).

The second issue for the commission was the formulation of the assignment for the public contest inviting Czech sculptors to submit a model for the new memorial. Here the developments of the late 1860s proved to be of help. The commission took into consideration of the sensitivity of the Roman Catholic Church towards Hus and decided that Hus as the symbol of the Czech nation should not be a personality representing religious concepts, but a representative of moral values, which inspired the Czech nation on its journey through history.

The new statue, next to the column of the Blessed Virgin Mary already located on the square, was to be officially revealed on 6 July 1915 during a grand commemoration of the martyrdom of Jan Hus. Already in 1903 a celebration had been held at the site of the future statue, to mark the beginning of the construction work.³⁵ The significance of the statue lay in the fact that the martyr Hus was coming home to Prague.

The 1915 commemoration was designed to celebrate the fact that finally Hus could be remembered at home, in the heart of his country, with a large representation of foreign guests. The intention was to remind the world that “the sacrifice which we offered on the altar of education and enlightenment of the people, starting the first large corrective movement in the realm of spiritual life in medieval Europe”, struggling for freedom of conscience, “until we bled to death for our conviction in the fight against all – for the progress of all”³⁶ But instead a new catastrophe had come to the history of Europe – a world war of all against all. The celebrations of the 500th anniversary of Hus’s death had to be cancelled, though the statue was ready on 27 June.

Instead of a large celebration at the statue of Hus, only smaller meetings at the Old Town Hall (6 July), in the Smetana Hall of the Obecní dům [Municipal House] (4 July) and in the protestant St. Clement’s Church (6 July) could take place. Also the Czech section of the Karlo-Ferdinand University organized a commemorative meeting, where Václav Novotný, who was working on his *opus magnum* about Hus, gave the main lecture. He used the concept of the Bohemian Enlightenment thinkers, as he presented a Hus who broke the chains of medieval thinking and culture by refusing its strict ideas on authority. Hus had opened the way to modern progress.³⁷

Instead of a grand, international celebration of the homecoming of Jan Hus and the acceptance of the Czech nation in the family of free European nations, the Old Town Square remained empty on 6 July 1915. In 1925, now in the framework of the independent Czechoslovak Republic, the cancelled

³⁵ Cynthia Paces, “Rotating Spheres: gendered commemorative practice at the 1903 Jan Hus Memorial Festival in Prague,” in *Nationalities Papers* (28. 3. 2000) 523–539. See *idem*, “Religious Heroes for a Secular State: Commemorating Jan Hus and Saint Wenceslas in 1920s Czechoslovakia,” in Nancy Wingfield, Maria Bucur (eds.), *Staging the Past: Commemorations in the Habsburg Lands* (West Lafayette, 2001) 199–225.

³⁶ *Národní listy*, 27. 6. 1915.

³⁷ *Národní listy*, 6. 7. 1915. Details can also be found in *Národní politika* of 6. 7., and 11 July 1915.

celebration of 1915 could take place. This time it was not political parties or an initiative of citizens who organised a celebration, but the commemoration became a matter of state. Consequently, the commemoration caused a diplomatic conflict between Czechoslovakia and the Vatican, as in the context of the celebration, 6 July was proclaimed a national holiday. Also President Masaryk raised the Hussite flag on Prague Castle. In reaction to these developments the Vatican protested loudly. Its nuncio Francesco Marmaggi left Prague and did not return until 1927, when both sides agreed on the so-called *Modus vivendi*, a form of concordat between Czechoslovakia and the Vatican.³⁸

1965: the martyr without his faithful

The tragedy of the commemoration of 1915 which conceptually aimed to be a culmination of the public commemoration of Hus since the second half of the nineteenth century, was that it had to be cancelled because of the international political situation. At a *moment suprême* in its modern history, at the moment that the political representation found a way to express the ambition of the nation in the wider context of the modern world, the nation found itself at war as a part of the Habsburg Empire. A commemoration which stood at least in tension to the political order and the powers of the time was easily seen as potentially subversive. For the Czech nationalist movement, of either the radical or the moderate wing, Hus was an instrument in their political struggle for relevance and influence.

This basic feature of the commemoration culture disappeared after the collapse of the Habsburg Empire. Hus was no longer a symbol in the critical relation to the state authorities, but became the symbol of the new state. Since 1925, when 6 July was declared a state holiday, the celebration of Hus anniversaries became (or were intended to be) a confirmation of the authority of the state. This change of function of the Hus commemoration altered profoundly the shape and content of the public anniversary.

This we can observe in the Hus remembrance after the Second World War. Moreover, during the communist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia, Hus and the Hussite Movement were incorporated into the ideological propaganda of the regime. Hus was transformed into a revolutionary, whose true message was not religious, but social, and who would have great sympathy for the communist party. All revolutionaries around the world could find inspiration for their struggle in Hus's struggle.³⁹

³⁸ Marek Šmíd, "Marmaggiho aféra, Největší diplomatická roztržka mezi ČSR a Svatým stolicem v meziválečném období [The Marmaggi affair: the greatest diplomatic quarrel between the Czechoslovak Republic and the Holy See during the Interwar period]," *Církevní dějiny* 7/14 (2014) 40–49.

³⁹ See Peter Morée, "Not Preaching from the Pulpit, but Marching in the Streets': The communist use of Jan Hus," *BRRP* 6 (2007) 283–296. The ideological view can best be found in

The Hus of the public imagination became the Hus of the 1954 film of Otakar Vávra⁴⁰ in which he refused the type of Christianity that was a part of the capitalist world and, instead, advocated a way of life based on social justice and solidarity with the peasants and the working class. The public memory of Hus was not supposed to present an alternative image, but was thoroughly orchestrated in order to legitimise the Hus of the communist regime.

The anniversary of 1965 was not intended to be large. No public meetings on the Old Town Square or at the Bethlehem Chapel were planned, but the content of the commemoration aimed rather at a limited involvement of the people. Two exhibitions were held in the Bethlehem Chapel and in the University Library at the Klementinum. The main state organised celebration took place in Husinec around 6 July. The member churches of the Ecumenical Council of Church were allowed to organise an ecumenical commemoration in the Bethlehem Chapel, in which several international guests participated (among them the general secretary of the World Council of Churches Willem Visser 't Hooft). In August the Academy of Science held a conference which was attended by the elite of the research on the Bohemian Reformation at the time (e.g. Paul De Vooght, František M. Bartoš, Otakar Odložilík, Ferdinand Seibt, Amedeo Molnár, Robert Kalivoda, František Graus and Milan Machovec).⁴¹ In September, the Protestant Theological Comenius Faculty also organised a conference.

The communist regime did not use the opportunity of the 550th anniversary of Hus's death for massive meetings, but allowed a limited, but rather isolated, space for an academic and a religious commemoration of Hus. One of the reasons for this rather low profile concept might have been that the regime did not feel confident enough to return to the propaganda of the Stalinist years.

Conclusion

The commemoration of Jan Hus from the 1860s onwards is a good example of how a tradition is invented⁴² and maintained. The nationalist movement of the time faced the question of how to create a commemoration of Jan

Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Komunisté dědici velikých tradic českého národa* [Communists as inheritors of the great tradition of the Czech nation] (Prague, 1946) or in Josef Macek, *Jan Hus* (Prague, 1961).

⁴⁰ On the concept of the film and its reception see Petr Čornej, "Husitská trilogie a její dobový ohlas [Hussite trilogy and its contemporary reception]," in idem, *Světla a stíny husitství (Události, osobnosti, texty, tradice)* [The lights and shadows of Hussitism (Events, figures, texts, tradition)] (Praha 2011) 374–393.

⁴¹ *Kostnické jiskry*, L, 30, 8.9. 1965, *Český zápas*, 48, 27–28, 1. 7. 1965.

⁴² The term comes from Eric Hobsbawm's book *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

Hus in a situation where there was no tradition. What the leaders of the movement did, fits strongly in nineteenth century patterns of nationalism. They “borrowed” a model of remembrance from a sphere with which they were familiar and filled it with a different content. The nationalist movement made use of religious forms such as pilgrimages and remembrance ceremonies in order to celebrate and legitimise its own claims on the past and the present.

The attempt was successful, as the celebrations were visited by large numbers of people and they made Jan Hus into a significant part of the experienced Czech national identity. In the cause of this the notion of the nation obtained a religious meaning. Even if the Hus of the celebrations of 1869 was not supposed to be a religious leader, his image became one of a martyr, who died for the nation. His story gave life to the modern Czech nation and the story of Hus became the story of the resurrection of the Czech nation.

The celebrations discussed in this paper were in some respect successful, in some rather problematical. They were successful in creating a new Hus, free from confessional religion, and able to unite the nation. Nevertheless, this focus created a blind spot in the awareness of the risks of a national Hus. At the time, no one reflected this national Hus as a part of the narrative which paved the way to nationalist conflict, of which the First World War was a tragic result. Also in the period after the First World War this image of Hus fuelled the continuing nationalist conflict with the Czech Catholic tradition and with the German speaking minority.

The invention of the national Hus led to the elimination of Hus’s religious identity. This was effective as long as the nation in this concept did not experience full freedom or was subjected to oppression. The nationalist Hus was relevant as long as he justified the nationalist criticism or even rejection of the Habsburg Empire. The revolutionary Hus was essentially not more than a variation on the same theme and lost his validity a long time ago. Consequently, the public Hus of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been fading away, leaving certain why he ought to be remembered. The last attempt to formulate an answer to that question was the Hus film of Jiří Svoboda of 2015, which is nothing more than a summing up previous Hus images, without opening new perspectives on the relevance of Jan Hus for modern society.

In the academic field there is a lot of new interest in Jan Hus and the Bohemian Reformation, which is aimed at developing a comprehensive view of the period and the actors. The Hus (and his friends and followers) who belong to church and theology seem to be back. Nevertheless, academic research sometimes tends to create a museum, showing context, content and consequences. Philosophers and theologians especially should undertake the effort to relate Hus’s message to the issues of the modern world. A Hus remembrance can only be relevant and significant if it also contains a critical reflection about our own time.

