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The monarchy of the estates

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One of the most remarkable Late Gothic works of art in Bohemia is the Vladislav Hall of Prague Castle; 62 metres long, 16 metres wide and 13 metres high, this vast hall with its magnificent lierne vaulting was accessible to mounted noblemen via the Horse Steps.[1] The hall is one of the most monumental examples of Gothic architecture in Central and Eastern Europe.[2] It took its name from the King of Bohemia and Hungary, Vladislav Jagiellon (1471–1516). This period of Czech history was interpreted by earlier historians as a time of anarchy and turmoil (1471–1526), and both King Vladislav and his son Ludvík (Louis) who reigned 1516–1526, were stigmatized as weak and incompetent rulers who failed to bring prosperity to the country. Art historians, however, fundamentally disagree with this view and conclusively show that this was a glorious period of Late Gothic art.[3] The result is a dilemma: how can one explain the emergence of this illustrious art at a time of declining royal power? Whence did this art spring? What made it possible to produce the idea of the Vladislav Hall, a concept quite out of keeping with the modest hopes of a weak and hopelessly insolvent king? Who was behind this and other great works of Late Gothic art? Who was the patron?

The estates

These questions can be understood if we consider the significance of the estates monarchy in the Jagiellon era. Until recently the contribution of the estates to Czech statehood and culture has been played down. From the time of František Palacký onwards the estates were regarded as a destructive, anarchic element which weakened the power of the Czech monarchy.[4] Yet

if we turn aside from the glorification of centralized power, we find many positive features in the rise of the estates at the end of the fifteenth century. This development drew on earlier traditions and contributed to both social and cultural advance.

In the Kingdom of Bohemia the nobles had been trying to get a share of power ever since the end of the thirteenth century.[5] As the fourteenth century drew to a close, King Wenceslas IV was forced to hand over considerable power to the higher and lower aristocracy, lords and knights. They played a notable role during the Hussite revolution of 1419–1437. The burghers then began to play an active part in politics, and by the end of the fifteenth century they were recognized as the third estate, an independent entity. Under Jagiellon rule the three estates, three political forces, were the most significant factors in the Czech state, the Kingdom of Bohemia. The part played by the third estate during the Hussite revolution earned that phenomenon the designation of a 'revolution of the estates'.[6] The renowned German historian Karl Bosl declared that in the fifteenth century Bohemia was a model for the evolution of the estates, the country which saw their most mature form.[7]

Detailed study of the structure of the estates in Bohemia reveals that conditions here differed greatly from those elsewhere in Europe. The Hussite revolution had broken the secular power of the Church; the prelates had no place in political life and were no longer powerful in the estates, where the lords had acquired greater influence.[8] In Moravia the burghers did not achieve political influence until the end of the Jagiellon era, and even then had far less power than their neighbours in Bohemia.

The situation of the estates in Bohemia, where there were no church dignitaries and the third estate (the burghers) enjoyed considerable power, differed from conditions not only in Moravia but in particular in Poland and Hungary, where the burghers had not yet achieved independent political identity and where, on the contrary, the prelates were among the principal supporters and partners of the ruler, along with the high aristocracy.[9] The structure of the estates in Saxony, Bavaria,[10] and the Austrian territories followed the traditional model, with the Church hierarchy well to the fore, again very different from their structure in Bohemia. Bearing in mind that England was only just recovering from the Hundred Years War, and that from the time of Louis XI the French kings had consistently pushed Parliament into the background, it is possible to compare the political influence of the estates in Bohemia only with some regions of Renaissance Italy, or with the Netherlands.[11] Even there, however, the Church was omnipresent in the apparatus of power. At the end of the fifteenth century the estates in Bohemia were indeed a unique and unusual phenomenon.[12]

It was the Czech Reformation that created the unusual conditions of political life in the country. During the long interregnum from 1437 to 1453 the thirty-two towns with a Royal Charter became powerful enough to withstand pressure from both the higher and the lower aristocracy.[13] While the Hussite King Jiří of Poděbrady (1458–1471) reduced the power of the burghers and the third estate,[14] they came into their own again during the reign of Vladislav. To the amazement of foreign observers, those who assembled at Kutná Hora in May 1471 to call the fifteen-year-old Vladislav, son of the Polish King Casimir, to ascend the throne of Bohemia, included simple tradesmen and craftsmen as well as nobles. Elected king, Vladislav II Jagiellon (1471–1516) had to take the oath that he would rule over 'twopartite people', i.e. the Utraquists and the Catholics, according to the terms of the Compactata agreement between the Czech Hussites and the Council of Basle.[15]

Vladislav's reign began in violence. The King of Hungary, Matthias Corvinus, instigated by radical elements in the Church, had declared himself King of Bohemia (1469); his armies controlled Moravia, Silesia and Lusatia, and were attacking Bohemia.[16] Vladislav was a Catholic, too, but the Roman Curia did not want to recognize him as king because he stood by the Compactata which successive popes had repudiated. The Prague king was not one of those virulent heretic-hunters. Instead, he preferred to seek an understanding with the Czech Utraquists who were already well organized in Bohemia. During the war with Corvinus, Vladislav continually made concessions to him and the estates of Bohemia, trying to find a compromise, a way to peace. In 1479 he made his peace with Corvinus in Olomouc, but his rule covered only Bohemia; Corvinus kept his title of King of Bohemia, and retained control over the lesser Czech Lands, Moravia, Silesia and Lusatia.

As King Vladislav came to the throne, it was necessary to define quite clearly the power mechanism controlled by the estates of Bohemia. Following the Peace of Olomouc in 1479, the Royal Council became a powerful entity; consisting of about thirty members, this body lived at the court and was governed not only by the king, but also by a committee of the estates. The Diet even agreed that each region was to send successively noblemen to be members of the Royal Council, without the king's knowledge.[17] This institution became the supreme governing body, regularly meeting to discuss all urgent questions be they political, ecclesiastical, military, diplomatic or financial. With the King's consent they ordered the Royal Chancellery to issue the relevant documents, decrees and ordinances. The Royal Council even expressed its views on royal marriages, and prevented the King from marrying the daughter of the Margrave of

Brandenburg Achilles Count Albrecht. The bride, Barbara Hlohovská [of Glogau], was robbed of her Silesian homeland by King Matthias Corvinus. The estates refused to allow a dowryless princess to ascend the throne of Bohemia. And so, although Vladislav had been officially married, the wedding ceremony never took place, and although Barbara Hlohovská called herself Queen of Bohemia, she never met her royal husband, and never crossed into Bohemia.[18] Such was the power of the Royal Council, the executive organ of the estates in Bohemia.

The regular mechanism of executive power in Bohemia became the Diet.[19] Officially convoked only with the King's consent, this body often met without his knowledge, and informed him of its activities only afterwards—especially after 1490 when Vladislav was elected to the Hungarian throne and made Buda his residence. There were three divisions ('curias'): the nobles, the knights and the burghers; they met separately, and then met together to pass common resolutions. Thus at least four times a year between 150 to 200 men met to decide on such matters as taxes, defence of the kingdom, dealings with the Emperor, with neighbouring rulers, the currency, and all questions that had to be decided by law. There were 190 meetings of the Diet between 1471 and 1526, convoking thousands of nobles and burghers, active participants in the political life of the kingdom — in effect, legislators. The resolutions of the Diet had the character of law, and were inscribed in special books, the so-called Land Register.[20]

It was not rare for the assembly meetings to be chaotic, never-ending, and members to be criticized for their empty speeches and useless discussions. Thus the weaknesses of later democratic parliaments may be perceived. Nevertheless, the fact that the lesser nobility and the burghers took an active part in the meetings of the Diet showed the growing participation of broader elements of the population in political decision-making. If one assumes democratization to mean the gradual awakening to political and public activity of these sections of the population previously partially or completely excluded from it, then the meetings of the Diet in Bohemia were doubtless a form of a process of democratization. The years from 1471 to 1526 saw the most active period of the Diet, equalled perhaps only by the second half of the nineteenth century, when it met frequently and civil society was developing under very different conditions.[21]

The growing importance of offices of the Land formally bound by royal consent but in fact by the estates, was characteristic of the times. The highest office, that of the Burgrave of Prague invested with supreme military power, was one such instance.[22] Then there was the High Judge, the holder of the highest juridical office and another was the Chamberlain, in charge of the finances of the Land, and the Chancellor as the head of the

Royal Chancellery.[23] Taken together, these officers could be regarded as the government of the Land. They were aristocrats, drawn from the most powerful families, who did not always distinguish clearly between private and public interest; often they ruled the country from their castles. A bureaucracy of lawyers and scribes was slowly coming into existence under the Jagiellons, but for the most part these were employees of the individual aristocrats – officers of the Land. It was only at the Land Court that the so-called orators, i.e. lawyers, schooled advocates, began to insist on written legal norms.

At times, especially when the kings (Vladislav and Louis) were out of the country (at their Buda residence), the highest officers of the Land were in fact the rulers; although their decisions were to be confirmed by the royal seal, in the course of time the seal was left in the care of the Chancellor who with his fellow officers came to take vital decisions for the country. Royal power was further undermined when the Master of the Mint became an officer of the Land subject to appointment by the Diet.[24]

Thus the estates controlled the Land Court, which was concerned with suits involving aristocratic property, as well as the Chamber Court, which settled cases between aristocrats and burghers.[25] The Chamber Court, in particular when it was headed by the magnate Vilém of Pernštejn (who was in charge of the royal household), became the supreme court of justice, and the king was by no means rarely one of the parties in disputes. The kings respected the jurisdiction of these courts.

The royal towns, however, did not recognize the Land Court which they considered an aristocratic institution. They looked to Roman law and German codes of law (such as that of Magdeburg) for models, thus creating a separate political power sphere, independent of the nobility. This is also why the burghers did not identify with the nobles in their efforts to codify a Land constitution. In 1500, when the lords and the knights tried to codify customary law in a statutory constitution, the so-called Land Ordinance, the royal towns refused to accept it.[26] The Land Court, for example, called in vain upon the burghers to account for their actions. The royal towns not only refused to obey but they formed an armed Union of Towns, and not even the king himself could persuade them to concessions.

A striking feature of the monarchy of the estates in Bohemia was the decentralization of executive powers. Historically, in Bohemia there were fourteen regional political and judiciary centres located in towns. Regional government was in the hands of the Regional Captain, usually an aristocrat, aided by a council of burghers and the lesser nobility.[27] The principal agenda was to keep the peace in the region, and to dispense justice in local disputes. The regions had the right to elect their representatives to the Diet,

and to see to it that laws of the Land and regulations adopted by the Diet were carried out. In Moravia the regional administration system developed and the principal centres were Brno and Olomouc.

The powers enjoyed by the estates of Moravia are clear evidence of the degree of governmental decentralization.[28] It is possible to say that Moravia was only loosely linked with the other Lands of the Crown of Bohemia through the person of the king. The separate political and cultural development of Moravia, from 1471 to 1526, was strengthened by the fact that from 1469 it was ruled by King Matthias of Hungary. Matthias was recognized as King of Bohemia by Rome and, in 1479, by King Vladislav as well. Matthias left wide-spread powers in the hands of the Moravian nobility, and did not intervene in the proceedings of the Diets and courts. He gave considerable power to the towns, too, particularly in matters of foreign trade. Thus the structure of the estates in Moravia – the Church was represented by the Bishop of Olomouc and other prelates – differed from the structure of those in Bohemia. Even Matthias's death in 1490, when the lesser crownlands of Bohemia, that is Moravia, Lusatia and Silesia again came under the rule of Vladislav, the estates in Moravia retained their political independence. The close contacts Moravia maintained with Vienna, in particular with Buda, led to early interest in Italian Renaissance culture, which came to Bohemia only later.

Urban democracy

As suggested, all these activities by the estates were signs of a process of democratization. Until this time the lesser nobility and the burghers had been excluded from government, from the judiciary and the legislature. Following the Hussite revolution and during the Czech Reformation thousands of those belonging to these groups gradually became active for the common weal and created appropriate institutions and machinery for their political activity.[29] Under Jagiellon rule, the burghers, in particular, increasingly wielded more power in political life in the Kingdom of Bohemia. The number of free royal towns rose to forty; these towns were independent of the nobility, formally under the rule of the king himself who, with the aid of the Deputy Chamberlain and the Court Sheriff (hofrychtíř) was to appoint the town council and supervise the town judiciary. The king also appointed town sheriffs (usually an aristocrat) but from the middle of the fifteenth century first Prague and then other royal towns were successful in having the royal sheriff abolished.[30] The Catholic towns, including those of Moravia, followed by the Utraquist towns, freed themselves of this royal officer. After 1500, when Prague and then other towns, acquired the privilege of electing

their town council and burgomaster without interference from the king's officers the powers of the town councils increased.

As the power of the royal towns increased, so did that of the 'Great Commune' – the town parliament.[31] In royal towns it had existed even before the Hussite revolution as an association of well-off town inhabitants with full rights for the purpose of looking after the town's finances. During the Hussite revolution the Great Communes extended their jurisdiction both into military-political and ecclesiastical-religious spheres. They intervened, for instance, in the work of preachers and church institutions and also played a part when international agreements were drawn up.

The Great Communes held on to all these powers under the Jagiellon rule, and strengthened them. While the town councils were appointed from above, by the king and his officers, in individual town districts. The Great Communes elected delegates below, in individual town districts. The Great Communes elected delegates to Diets, where they represented the towns; they participated in decisions regarding the composition of delegations to the king and were involved in shaping price and commercial policies. Every important measure passed by the town council had to be agreed with and ratified by the Great Commune which established special commissions and committees in individual town districts. In the course of a year hundreds of burghers would play an active political role in these town institutions.

Wherever the nobility tried to contain or even abolish the Great Communes, social and political unrest broke out, often culminating in revolutionary uprisings. This happened, for instance, in Prague in 1483, and it looked as though the Hussite revolution was about to be repeated.[32] The patricians who did not wish to accede to the demands of the Great Communes were massacred; the victorious craftsmen and shopkeepers also succeeded in facing the departure of monks and prelates from the capital of the kingdom. Then even the royal court left Prague, and it was a year before Vladislav made his peace with the burghers. There were similar encounters in other towns of Bohemia: Nymburk, Žatec, Hradec Králové, and later in Moravia as well (Brno, 1520–1525).[33]

The Great Communes became an important political instrument in the democratization process of Czech society. At first it was in the Towns of Prague that the parliaments became very active (Old Town, New Town, Little Side) followed by all Utraquist towns. The Catholic towns soon perceived the revolutionary character of this new form of power and, from the middle of the fifteenth century, they also organized Great Communes (Plzeň, towns in Moravia). Even in some towns under the jurisdiction of Utraquist feudals or members of the Czech biblicist Church of the *Unitas fratrum* (Mladá Boleslav), burghers could become active in the organs of the

Great Commune. It was significant that after the Habsburg Ferdinand I (1526–1564) came to the royal throne of Bohemia, he at once tried to subdue the estates and to lay foundations of a centralized monarchy; the Great Communes were abolished and it was forbidden to convene them (1528). This was the deathblow to democratization in the townships of Bohemia. When the royal towns were defeated in the so-called War of Schmalkalden (1546–7), the political power of the burghers was completely annihilated and the third estate virtually ceased to exist in the Kingdom of Bohemia.

While I view the increasing power of the Great Communes in the towns of Bohemia and Moravia during the Jagiellon era as part of society's democratization, I do not wish to hide the fact that this active participation of the broader burgher strata in politics had its dark sides. Relatively broad groups of the townspeople came to the fore, with their virtues as well as their vices. These outsiders brought into politics not only their radicalism but also their hatreds, their desires for power, their illusions and their passions. It was not rare for these so-called commoners (*obecní lidé*), that is, members of the Great Communes, to burst into fiercely radical attacks not only against their real opponents but against their own leaders. This pseudo-radicalism of the new elite came to the fore in Prague in the stormy years of 1523–1524 when the demagogue Pašek of Vrat, as head of the Great Commune, joined forces with the nobility to instal a dictatorship in Prague, and took bloody retribution from the Czech and German followers of the Reformation.[34] Influenced by popular nationalistic slogans, the crowd attacked decent honest men who were representing the interests of the towns. These disturbances indicated that clever demagogues could manipulate crowds.

Under the rule of the Jagiellons, however, the burghers ensured their position both as regards the king and the nobles. It was a hard struggle. In 1500 the third estate did not give way to the lords and knights, and did not recognize the codification of the Land Ordinance. In the years that followed, the royal towns formed a political and military union to defend the rights of the third estate by force of arms. In vain the lords and knights came to Buda to persuade King Vladislav that he should condemn the armed opposition of his burghers. King Jiří's grandson, Prince Bartoloměj of Minstrberk, and some of the lesser nobility (Albrecht Rendl of Ušava, Procek of Cetná, and others) managed to convince the king that the burghers were not rebels but loyal allies against pressures brought to bear on him by Czech and Hungarian magnates. Prince Bartoloměj became the political and military leader of the towns in Bohemia, and successfully defended their rights. After his sudden death in 1515 the union did not retreat from its position and obtained the confirmation of all the rights of

the third estate in the St Wenceslas Agreement of 1517.[35] Then the towns were led by the burgomaster of Litoměřice, Václav of Řepnice, whose miniature portrait can be seen in the Litoměřice gradual, kneeling by the stake where Hus was burned, as a pious donor.[36]

The Czech Reformation

This gradual, a magnificent relic of Utraquist burgher art, provides a suitable introduction to the study of another characteristic feature of the monarchy of the estates (1471–1526) – the Czech Reformation.[37] The second half of the fourteenth century saw the emergence of a movement that was closely connected with Wyclifism and Waldensianism and that culminated in the writings and activities of Jan Hus. His death at the stake in Constance (1415) led to the Hussite revolution in Bohemia (1419–1437). The Compacta of Basle meant that the Roman Church acknowledged the Chalice as the symbol of Hussite reforms but Popes Pius II and Paul II abolished the communion in two kinds and tried to re-establish the secular power of the Church in Bohemia and Moravia. Under the Utraquist King Jiří of Poděbrady, the rift between the supporters of the Czech Reformation and the Roman Church widened to a breach. In the Jagiellon era most of the higher and some of the lesser nobility proclaimed obedience to Rome, as did some of the towns in Bohemia (České Budějovice, Plzeň, Cheb, Chomutov, Most and Ústí nad Labem) as well as in Moravia (Brno, Olomouc, Jihlava, Znojmo). Silesia and Lusatia remained within the fold of the Catholic Church.

Thus by the end of the fifteenth century a complicated ecclesiastical organization gradually came into being in Bohemia and Moravia.[38] In Bohemia the Romans (as they were called) had two administrators residing in Prague, while in Moravia the Church was headed by the Bishop of Olomouc. The Utraquist Church – to which most of the population belonged was headed by Jan Rokycana up to his death in 1471; elected Archbishop of Prague, he was not acknowledged by the pope and ignored by the Roman Church. The Utraquist Church was administered by a consistory located in the university in the Old Town of Prague. For both Catholics and Utraquists, rebuilding the ecclesiastical administration broken up during the revolution and the long years of anarchy that followed (1437–1457) proved a difficult task. Only in Moravia had the Roman Church retained some of its landed property and managed to maintain a few monasteries. In Bohemia the property of the Church had been secularized

Alongside these two ecclesiastical organizations another radical Reformation Church became very strong, especially after the end of the fifteenth century: the Unity of Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum*).[39] At first only commoners could be members of this church but after 1500 nobles were also admitted. While the Utraquist Church considered itself Catholic, that is, part of the universal Church, the Unity of Brethren rejected the pope and the Catholic Church in principle, and elected laymen and preachers to administer their affairs; they identified with the evangelical church of Christ. This radical wing of the Reformation in Bohemia endeavoured to find its place in the Christian world, entering into contact with the Armenian Church and, after 1517, seeking common ground with the German and Swiss Reformation. After 1500 it was principally Lukáš Pražský (Luke of Prague) who shaped the theology of the Brethren. He was a graduate of Prague University and laid stress upon the principal importance of faith, thus coming close to the views of Luther.[40] King Jiří and with him many Utraquist ideologists condemned the Unity of Brethren as heretics. King Vladislav, pressed by Rome and by the Hungarian prelates, attempted to persecute the Unity of Brethren, especially in decrees issued after 1508. But the heretics found protectors among the Utraquist nobles and burghers; the estates ignored royal decrees, and the Unity of Brethren flourished both in Bohemia and Moravia.

These complex religious patterns made everyday life very difficult in Bohemia, for it must not be forgotten that the Church organized and administered the passage of time. Since the Utraquists as well as the Unity of Brethren refused to acknowledge and worship many of the saints, including the Virgin Mary and the founders of monastic orders (St Francis and St Dominic), the calendar of the Czech Reformation differed from that of the Catholic Church.[41] The latter kept fifteen to twenty or more saint's days on which no work was done. They were not included in the Utraquist calendar which often led to confusing and troublesome situations. In Prague, for instance, work was allowed on Marian feast days, while in the Catholic towns those non-Catholics who worked in workshops or fields on those days were punished as sinners who desecrated the holy day. Religious tolerance, a spirit of conciliation and compromise, was urgently needed.

In the Kingdom of Bohemia estates were the basis and motivating force of bringing about religious tolerance. After long years of war and conflicts both Catholics and Utraquists were getting together to achieve peaceful conditions for everyday life. Particularly important on the Utraquist side were two noblemen, the brothers Tovačov of Cimburk, and the burghers of

Pernštejn and Jan of Šelmberk, and the sons of King Jiří of Poděbrady, Jindřich and Hynek, who had joined the Catholic Church after 1479. King Vladislav himself urgently sought a compromise solution and pressed the opposing sides to make truce, which was finally achieved at the Diet in Kutná Hora in 1485 where agreement on religious freedoms was reached.[42] As a law of the land it guaranteed freedom of confession not only to Utraquist and Catholic nobility and burghers but to the villeins as well. Every inhabitant of the Kingdom of Bohemia was free to decide between the Church of Rome and that of the Utraquists; it was explicitly stated that a non-Catholic villein on the estate of a Catholic lord was free to worship according to the Utraquist rite, while a Catholic villein on a Utraquist estate could attend services in the Catholic church and obey its priest. Though the religious peace of 1485 was not helped by lengthy theoretical discussions of tolerance, it was the first practical attempt at real tolerance in the history of Europe. Moreover, it went beyond the later Religious Peace of Augsburg (1555) in that the common people, villeins, were also given the right to worship according to their conscience. (The Unity of Brethren was not granted this right at Kutná Hora in 1485 – indeed it was only just coming into existence.) Thanks to the stand taken by the estates, an atmosphere of tolerance reigned in Bohemia and Moravia, and religious bodies of different views existed side by side for a period of thirty-one years.

While democratizing movement affected the political sphere, it also made itself felt in religious matters. Alongside the secularization of church property, there also was a tendency to laicize religious life. Thus, when the Kutná Hora agreement was being drawn up, the principal actors were laymen, nobles and burghers; there is no mention of church dignitaries being present. In the ecclesiastical organization of both the Catholic and Utraquist Churches, as in the Unity of Brethren, laymen were the prime movers, while priests and preachers were pushed into the background. In the Utraquist Church the collective of laymen, called osada (settlement), enjoyed complete autonomy from the end of the fifteenth century.[43] The collective administered parish property (altar vessels, vestments, missals and prayerbooks) and many parishes had the right to appoint and dismiss priests, pastors and preachers. These laymen determined what the clergy should be paid and what emoluments they should enjoy.

Education, vernacular culture and the arts

The University of Prague, reduced as it was to the Faculty of Arts, also came under the rule of the Utraquist Church.[44] The so-called Lower Consistory had a say in the election of Rectors and Deans. Moreover, the

estates too put forward their own candidates for the top offices. By and large these interventions did not improve the educational standard of the university; men of average or little ability were often placed in office. The University of Prague also doggedly resisted attempts to introduce the study of commentaries on Greek and Latin authors into the syllabus. A stern and narrow religious outlook repudiated Classical authors, regarded by some Utraquists as abominable pagans. Nor did young Catholics from the towns enter the Prague Faculty, for an essential qualification was recognition of the Compactata of Basle, and taking Holy Communion in both kinds. Czech Catholic students went to Leipzig University while Moravian Catholics studied in Vienna or Cracow. Students from noble Catholic families usually went to Italy, particularly to the Universities of Padua and Bologna. It was these young men studying abroad who mediated Renaissance humanist ideas of education, art and scholarship to Bohemia and Moravia.

As early as the Hussite revolution, the use of Czech instead of Latin had been accentuated not only in political life but also in church ritual.[45] The estates took up this practice and Czech became the language of the proceedings in the Diet and law courts. Laws were drawn up in Czech first in Moravia in 1494, followed later by Bohemia. It was stressed that proceedings in the law courts and Diets had to be comprehensible to broad sections of the population. Moreover, the radical Utraquists insisted that religious services be held in Czech, and that Czech should be the language of the Mass as well as of the sermons. The Compactata of Basle had not granted the Czechs this right, but in practice Czech became the language of religion in the Utraquist Church, which was becoming more and more negative in its attitude to the Papal Curia. The Unity of Brethren, too, rejected the use of Latin, and employed Czech in sermons, hymns and prayers.[46] Of course, this intensified the specific character of the Czech Reformation while, at the same time, it brought the lay people more actively into religious life.

Czech had been the language of literature and of official municipal documents since the end of the fourteenth century. During the Reformation it became the language of theology and scholarship as well. The original thinker and critic of feudal society, Petr Chelčický, wrote his tracts in Czech as did the Utraquist humanists.[47] Alongside Latin humanism, cultivated by such Catholic scholars as Bohuslav Hasištejnský of Lobkovice, an Utraquist humanism flourished, enriching cultural life in Bohemia by translations from Latin and Greek into Czech.[48] Among those who followed these lines were the outstanding jurist Viktorin Kornel of Všehrdy and Řehoř Hrubý of Jelení, who was the first European scholar to translate into vernacular Erasmus of Rotterdam's famous Encomium moriae (1512).[49] In addition to a

translation of Plato's *Republic* into Czech, which has not survived, other Greek writers were translated by Václav Písecký, one of the bright hopes of Czech humanism who unfortunately died young.

The poets and scholars who wrote in Czech constantly stressed their commitment to spreading Czech culture among the broadest sections of the population throughout the kingdom. Leading humanists praised Czech as a language adequate to express the most involved theological and philosophical concepts. By the end of the fifteenth century humanism, reaching Bohemia from Italy, was represented by two trends. On the one hand, there were poets and scholars who remained in the Catholic Church and wrote in Latin; the greatest among them, the aristocratic Bohuslav Hasištejnský of Lobkovice, refused to write in Czech, sharing the Italian humanists' lack of respect for the vernacular. On the other hand, a group of Utraquist humanists opposed Latin humanism and wrote in Czech, claiming Petrarch and Boccaccio as their models in the use of the vernacular. Prominent in this context was Viktorin Kornel of Všehrdy, mentioned above, the author of an exhaustive treatise on the laws and courts of the Kingdom of Bohemia.[50] Řehoř Hrubý of Jelení devoted himself primarily to translating Latin authors into Czech, with the explicit aim of serving Czech national culture. He was a determined fighter for the rights of the 'third estate', and set before the burghers of Prague the ideal of the heroes of the Roman republic.

In Bohemia and Moravia the humanists welcomed the invention of printing as a God-given means of raising the intellectual level of the broadest possible strata of the population.[51] Parchment manuscripts were exorbitantly expensive, and the lesser nobility and the burghers could not afford them. Praising printing, Augustinus Olomoucensis, a Moravian humanist, noted that '[w]orks for which evil booksellers would ask inordinately high prices can now be purchased for an insignificant sum'. A book which formerly would be owned only by a king or a prince 'even a poor man can have as his own possession today'.[52] Printing too helped the democratization of culture in Bohemia. The date of the first publication printed in Bohemia is a matter of debate, but it is certain that the first printing presses were in operation after the year 1472. The first were established in Plzeň by printers who came from Germany; although this was a Catholic town, it is significant that Czech books predominated among incunabula. In Moravia (Brno and Olomouc) Latin and German texts were printed. Regarding incunabula they contain a considerable number of Czech Bibles for printing met the needs of the Czech Reformation which laid so much stress on knowledge of the Bible. The radical wing in the Reformation movement used the press to defend its position. The Unity of Brethren, polemically engaged in

argument against the attacks of the Roman Inquisition, published the *Apology for the Teachings of the Unity of Brethren* in Nuremberg (1512). In this town, which maintained close trade relations with Prague and Kutná Hora, the first map of Bohemia was printed in 1517. It was commissioned by Mikuláš Klaudyán of Mladá Boleslav, a physician and printer for the Unity of Brethren. This was the first realistic map of any part of Central Europe – maps of Hungary and Poland appeared much later.

Although the printing presses could not satisfy the demand, and were supplemented by books printed in Bavaria, Franconia and Saxony, several Czech printers were well known abroad. The first Portuguese book was printed by Valentin of Moravia, who learned his trade in Nuremberg. One of the first printers to achieve fame in Genoa was Matyáš of Olomouc, who was actively engaged in printing in Naples after 1500. After 1513 the first Jewish printing press in Central Europe was set up in Prague – the Jewish minority in Bohemia enjoyed special protection by the estates. The first Russian Bible was printed in Prague in 1517–1519 by the Belorussian physician F. Skorina. Other Orthodox liturgical texts were also printed in Prague to be sent to Russia.

Looking at the work of Czech printing presses from 1471 to 1526, we find that the vast majority of the 250 books were printed in Czech. In the main, they were editions of the Bible or selected biblical texts, and then religious tracts and polemical writings on the subject of communion in both kinds. In printed books, in this first land of the Reformation, secular themes remained in the background. The estates were decidedly in favour of printing, and by the end of the fifteenth century had ensured that certain important resolutions were issued in print.[53] Even so, ecclesiastical and religious themes accounted for more than two thirds of all texts printed. A similar trend can be seen in literature and the fine arts. In poetry and prose medieval forms and medieval themes persisted in Czech literature; poets succumbed to the moral intransigence of the Reformation and achieved highest proficiency in creating religious hymns. The strict Reformation line can be clearly seen in translations of Boccaccio's tales into Czech. Tales containing erotic incidents were excluded, the naked female body was either chastely covered or the love scene was altogether omitted in the Czech translation. There is a parallel to this pictorial art, in the representations of the Virgin Mary suckling the infant Jesus; unlike in Italian or Netherlands representations, Czech Madonnas always have the breast veiled.

Those paintings of the Jagiellon era which have survived in Bohemia and Moravia clearly show the difference between Italian Renaissance art and that of the Late Gothic in Bohemia.[54] While Italian Renaissance painting reveals up to 20 per cent secular themes between 1400 and 1550, in Bohemia

and Moravia they barely reach 6 per cent. The choice of subject of Jagiellon painting shows a significant preference for the life and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This confirms the Christological orientation of the Czech Reformation, and its profound influence on Czech art, restraining the penetration of Renaissance secular elements.[55]

In architecture of the Jagiellon period, the Late Gothic style also prevailed. Geographically, the sources of inspiration lay along the trade routes that brought the Czech Lands into contact with the rest of Europe. Besides Renaissance Italy, the regions of southern Germany, the Rhine and Danube basins brought outstanding architects to Bohemia and Moravia. Renaissance elements merged into Late Gothic architecture from Italy and (in the reign of Matthias Corvinus) from Hungary, first in Moravia (e.g. Tovačov Castle) and then in Bohemia (the windows of the Vladislav Hall, dating from 1493). The strongest impulses, however, came from southern Germany, whence came the architect and stonemason Benedikt Ried who gradually changed his national allegiance and became known under the Czech name of Rejt. He was responsible for adapting the fortifications of Prague Castle and the magnificent church of St Barbara in Kutná Hora. At first Rejt worked for King Vladislav, but later he also served burghers, noblemen and the estates as his patrons. It was for the meetings of the Diet and sitting of the Land Court that he built the Vladislav Hall of Prague Castle from 1481 to 1500. It is quite clear that this vast hall in Late Gothic style was not intended for the king and his council – the halls used by the Emperor Charles IV would have more than sufficed. The Vladislav Hall is several times larger than the throne room of Charles IV. Knowing the wealth and power of the estates in Bohemia, and aware that in the absence of King Vladislav (after 1490) they had supreme power, controlled the Mint and all political life, we realize that the Vladislav Hall became a permanent monument commemorating the power and the glory of the monarchy of the estates in Bohemia. There is a deeper link between the democratizing traditions of the estates in the Jagiellon era and the fact that to this day the presidents of the Republic are elected in the Vladislav Hall of Prague Castle.

Notes

1 This essay is based on my seven-part synthesis of the Jagiellon era in Bohemia and Moravia (1471–1526) which is still in manuscript, since the censorship did not permit its publication after 1968. [Editorial note: Since this was written, the following work appeared posthumously: J. Macek, Jagellonský věk v českých zemích (1471–1526) [The Jagiellon era in the Czech Lands (1471–1526)], pt. 1:

Hospodářská základna a královská moc [Economic basis and royal power]; Pt. 2: Šlechta [Nobility] (Prague, 1992, 1994)].

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6

Rudolfine culture

JOSEF VÁLKA

I

Around 1600 – after two centuries – Prague regained its significance as an important political and cultural centre in Europe. The cultural explosion which took place around both 1400 and 1600 resulted in Prague becoming the imperial residence; it came to be not only the capital of the Crown of Bohemia but also of the Holy Roman Empire, that is of West–Central Europe.[1] While the Luxemburgs had been intent on making Prague the centre of their dynastic Czech state as well as of the Roman Empire, the Habsburgs in the sixteenth century were deciding whether Prague or Vienna should become this centre. Connected with Vienna through their ancestral political tradition, the Habsburgs were also hereditary rulers of the Austrian domains. Since the fifteenth century the estates of Bohemia have always demanded that the King of Bohemia should reside in Prague. For Czechs, this would provide easier access to court offices and would enable them to influence not only the Crown but also the Empire; for the Czechs Prague itself this would remove the danger of provincialism. The Czechs could support their wish for the ruler to reside in Prague by the ancient residential tradition of this town, and by the existence of a stately royal and imperial seat in the shape of the Prague Castle.

The catastrophes of the fifteenth century had already been overcome and at the beginning of the sixteenth century Prague had again become a lively metropolis where the Jagiellons were transforming the castle and the town into a magnificent Late Gothic residence. By the end of the sixteenth century, Prague already numbered 60,000 inhabitants. Vienna could perhaps equal Prague only by the fact that it also was an imperial town conveniently situated on the Danube. However, since the Turkish occupation of