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Introduction

The twelfth issue of the *Adeptus* is devoted to the so-called “fateful eights” in the histories of Slavic countries. We have been inspired to do so both by the date of publication of this issue – December 2018 – as well as the intellectual confusion around the concept itself, particularly in Czechia. The concept of “fateful eights” (*osudové osmičky* in Czech), that is years ending with the number eight which have turned out to be pivotal to the history of the country and the nation, stems primarily from Czech culture, and the term has taken root in Czech mass consciousness thanks to its widespread use in books and television. It usually applies to major events and turning points in the twentieth century. In 1918, the world welcomed the establishment of the First Czechoslovak Republic, the country that was to be dismembered in 1938, when Nazi Germany and the Western powers concluded the Munich Agreement. In 1948, the Communists seized power in post-war Czechoslovakia; the Czechoslovak Pavilion was awarded the first prize at the 1958 Expo in Brussels, while 1968 marked the outburst and the crushing of the so-called Prague Spring, an attempt to build “socialism with a human face”.

These events continue to elicit highly emotional reactions, mostly due to the significant position they occupy in the twentieth-century history of Czechia and Czechoslovakia.

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It is impossible to judge whether the sheer number of these pivotal points does in any way make Czech and Slovak history stand apart from others, as histories of other Slavic nations abound in similar “eights”, echoes of which continue to shape their histories or political situations. It is, however, Czech culture that developed this specific interpretive key and offers a number of dates that argue its feasibility – including the 1278 Battle on the Marchfeld, which saw the “poor prince” Rudolf Habsburg defeat Ottokar II, the “Iron and Golden King”, thus launching the ultimately successful campaign for his family to take over the Czech throne; the founding of the oldest university in Central Europe in 1348 in Prague; the Prague defenestration in 1618 and the start of the Thirty Years War in its aftermath (which itself ended in 1648!) and the “Spring of Nations” revolution in 1848, or the laying of the cornerstone for the Prague National Theatre in 1868. And that is not even counting twentieth-century dates.

The fact that Czechs have such an interesting and popular picture of history encouraged us to examine whether the “fateful eights” could also serve as an interpretive filter for the histories of other Slavic nations. After all, the year 2018 is more than just the centenary of the foundation of independent Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The year also marks the 50th anniversary of the events of March 1968 in Poland, the 70th anniversary of the Yugoslav–Soviet split, and the anniversary of Ferdinand I’s coronation as Tsar of Bulgaria, the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary, the assassination of Empress Elisabeth, or the Revolutions of 1848, the impact of which extended far beyond Czech lands – to name only a few of the events that reshaped the face of Slavdom and Europe itself.

The question yielded highly interesting answers. Apart from essays exploring the impact of “fateful eights” on Czech history, the twelfth issue of the *Adeptus* also includes texts examining the role of the “eights” in Serbian and Polish history. Srđan M. Jovanović reviews the impact of the latest “fateful” eight in Serbian history by investigating Serbian media communications regarding the foundation and survival of the Kosovan state, proclaimed – naturally – in 2008. Łukasz Bertram examines the effect of the dissolution of the Communist Party of Poland in the “fateful” year 1938 on the Communist movement in Poland, while Karolina Wróbel-Bardzik analyses the link between the Polish “fateful eight” of 1918, marking the regaining of Polish independence, and the foundation of the Warsaw zoological garden in another “eight” year, as well as the relationship between the modernisation of urban space and the role of animals therein. Beata Kubok offers a new look at the “fateful 1938”

in an essay in which she examines the concept of the “Munich betrayal” from the angle of the theatricalisation of Czech public life. We also invite you to take a closer look at the texts which attempt to deconstruct the very concept of “fateful eights” in Czech history. Karolina Ćwiek-Rogalska points out the illusory nature of pivotal dates ending in eight in the works of Czechoslovakia’s first president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, while Aneta Daszuta describes how misleading it can be to portray Czech structuralism solely through the lens of the conventional “octal” periodisation.

The issue also features an essay by the acclaimed Czech philosopher and theologian Erazim Kohák, never before released in Polish and published in the original Czech only as samizdat, in which he examines the problem of “the meaning of Czech history” while drawing attention to its rather unusual readings. The essay is not translated into English due to the author’s practice of self-translating his work into this language, so, by way of exception, the issue includes only a version in Polish translation.

Translated by Jan Szelągiewicz

Note:

This is the translation of the original article entitled “Wstęp”, which was published in *Adeptus*, issue 12, 2018.

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