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The Symbols That Failed: The Formation and Promotion of Czechoslovak State Symbolism after 1918

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Abstract

This article presents selected symbols that were adopted, either through official legislation or through political and social negotiations, as symbols of the state after the fall of the Habsburg Empire and the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic. Their main weakness was their strong association with Czech identity. The symbols of the new state came from the period of mutual national struggles and identity affirmation in the last decades of the monarchy, but they were only significant for the modern Czech nation. This was the reason why they never became a unifying element of the democratic and multinational Czechoslovak state, nor did they appeal to most of its Slovak inhabitants, whose historical traditions and symbols were virtually ignored. What is more, they were even perceived as provocative and hostile by the German, Hungarian, Ruthenian and Polish populations of the interwar Czechoslovak Republic.

Keywords: nationalism; Czechoslovakia; state symbols; national identity; Habsburg Empire

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Thomas G. Masaryk, the first president of independent Czechoslovakia, famously claimed that "states are sustained by the ideals from which they were born" (Masaryk, 2005, p. 303). But the thesis obscures the fact that, as any other community, state organisms undergo a never-ending process of self-affirmation, which evolves over time and reflects political negotiations and social consensus. Concerning Masaryk's thesis, these "ideals" had to be redefined, created, or confirmed after 1918. Indeed, it is certainly not possible to say that they were immanently present, independent of their bearers, even though Masaryk may have had a specific and systematic idea of them, based on his specific and difficult-to-classify humanitarian democratic worldview (Masaryk, 1938). We will not, however, open here a spectacular debate on the dispute about the meaning of Czech history – it was already done several times elsewhere (Havelka, 1997). In the following sections, I would like to focus rather on the semiotic content of these ideals. I will provide a partial overview of the semiotic signs that were used by those who reflected and felt intimately what could be called "Czechoslovak statehood".

As will also be shown here, the range of what was presented as "Czechoslovak" by the Prague center, by government circles, and especially by the influential center around President Masaryk was essentially Czech. Slovak traditional symbols were practically not incorporated into the national symbolic domain (as the promoted notion of the Czechoslovak nation might suggest), not to mention the symbolic language of other ethnic groups in the multinational state. One of the reasons for the absence of explicitly Slovak admixtures in the state "Czechoslovak symbolism" was the question of the lack of a consensual form of Slovak identity as such. These "Czech" semiotic signs will be the following phenomena or "sites of memory" (Hlavačka, 2011, pp. 16–23; Nora, 1984), "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) or, in short, symbols (Salomon, 1955, pp. 103–133): the name of the state; the territory of the state; the state colors, emblems, and flag; the national anthem; and a selection of figures from the state pantheon.

First of all, it should be mentioned that the disappearance of the symbols of the old regime was gradual rather than revolutionary (Peroutka, 1991a), and the same is true of the establishment of new symbols. The vast majority of them had their roots in the days long before 1918. The upheaval of that year, however, assigned them new roles and functions. In my analysis, I will not include one of the most defining symbols, i.e. the citizens of the state. Just as, for example, France is symbolized by the French and Vietnam by the Vietnamese, the same is true of Czechoslovakia but the situation is much more nuanced. Nobody would probably debate the question of whether or not the Czech nation existed before 1918. The existence of the "Czechoslovak nation" is much more complicated. So much so, in fact, that a brief outline of the issue of "Czechoslovakism" would go far beyond the space allotted to this text (Bakke, 2004, pp. 23–44; Galandauer, 2000, pp. 538–551; Opat, 1992, pp. 90–97; Rychlík, 2017, pp. 431–440; Šedivý, 2000, pp. 563–568).

The Czech identity itself, in the form in which it entered 1919, was for the most part already formed in the national struggles of the last decades of the Habsburg mon-

archy (Střítecký, 1993, pp. 9–14). On the other hand, in 1918, Slovak national identity was an unanchored mixture of local, religious, and linguistic attitudes. The construct of Czechoslovakism (Hudek et al., 2021), emanating from Prague, was indeed a kind of "lend a hand" in the post-revolutionary period, but, as I show in this article, it was a strongly paternalistic, or even colonial, attitude (Šuchová, 2011). In the long run, therefore, it could not appeal to the Slovak inhabitants of the state. Especially not in the absolutely Czechizing form in which it was shaped in the euphoria after the 1918 coup. Only a part of the political representation in Slovakia identified with the idea of Czechoslovakism (e.g. Slovak politicians and publicists Vavro Šrobár or Ivan Dérer), while another part of the political spectrum perceived the idea of Czechoslovakism as an explicitly hostile concept (Rychlík, 2017). It is then a matter of considering whether to view some of the symbolism as specifically Czechoslovak in the state sense or Czech in the ethnic or national sense. Many such symbols, such as the national dress (Moravcová, 1986), the national flower or tree (Milotová, 2019), lost their disjunctive function as the language became the litmus test of ethnicity in this area (Kořalka, 1996, p. 97).

The Name of the State

The name of a given state is undoubtedly among the most prestigious state symbols. The discussion on the term "Czechoslovak Republic" (Czech: *Republika Československá*) never really gained much intensity, although unofficial names appeared here and there (e.g. *Československá říše* or *Československá lidová republika* in Czech, *Tschechsch-slowakischer Staat*, *Tschechoslowakische Staatswesen*, *Tschechenstaat* in German, see Lemberg, 1993, p. 243). The mainstream of Czech political thought of the day was undoubtedly shaped by the thought of T. G. Masaryk (Havelka, 2003, p. 19). His views on the form of the state system acquired clear contours, although, like those of others, they underwent changes during the First World War, especially after the Bolshevik coup and certainly during his American sojourn (Kessler, 2017; Masaryk, 2016). The form of a democratic republic seemed adequate, even though the Czech people had no experience with it (Kovtun, 1991).

The existence of the established adjective "Czechoslovak" was important for its essentially unproblematic reception. It was a kind of substitute for the German distinction between *tschechisch* and *böhmisch*. In this perspective, the Czechoslovak was represented exclusively as an ethnic Czech, more precisely – as a resident of Bohemia of Slavic origin.

The rapid adoption of the name "Czechoslovak Republic" or "Czechoslovakia", on the other hand, helped the idea of the existence of a distinct and unified nation of Czechoslovaks to settle in, not only within the population of the state but especially elsewhere. Evidence of the success of this construction can be seen in the inertia with which the name and the idea of a unified ethnicity were maintained for many years after the demise of the common state.

The Territory of the State

State territory can also be spoken of as a symbol (Haslinger, 2010; Kessler & Puš, 2022, pp. 359–392; Smith, 2004). However, I am not referring here to precise geographical demarcation, nor trigonometry, nor larger or smaller border disputes. Rather, we are dealing here with a mental map of the state formation, which is not about exact geographical dimensions, but rather images, memories, and the will of the community. Such a map is not officially printed anywhere, it cannot be "read" cartographically; it is rather a matter of a mental image (Schlögel, 2003, p. 243). Even those who have no knowledge of noetic conceptions of space (Havelka, 2005, p. 196) must admit how significant the shape of their state is for the Czech ethnic group. The shape, well fixed from maps since the early years, fulfills its symbolic role mainly because of its relative stability across epochs (Haslinger, 2010).

The historical core of the Czech state had changed only slightly. On the other hand, in 1918 neither the intellectual nor political elites of the Slovak, much less the Czech ethnic group, had a consensus about the shape of the Slovak territory. When the issues of the Sudeten German provinces (Wiskemann, 1938) and subsequently the Slovak Council Republic were finally resolved (Hronský, 1998; Tomášek, 2005), the borders of the Czechoslovak state were confirmed at the Paris Peace Conference – they included the so-called historical lands of the Crown of St. Wenceslas: Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, to which Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus were added. The result was thus not a compromise, but a "unification of the sets" of the historical right and the right to self-determination (Perman, 1962, pp. 215–218).

The principle of historical rights, which was based on the two key postulates of the Czech lands as a self-contained unit and the inviolability of the borders of the Czech lands (Galandauer, 1988, p. 12), was an outcome of the modernization process and national rivalries during the nineteenth century. The memory of medieval royal majesty was overshadowed by the simple fact that a Czech state would not be viable within ethnic borders. That is why German proposals for administrative ethnic separation were always met with such intense resistance (Kazbunda & Kárník, 1995).

The application of the right of self-determination to the area inhabited by the Slovak ethnic group acted as a precedent widely used and argued by the representatives of the Bohemian Germans (César & Černý, 1960, pp. 39–58). On the Czech side, the following arguments against the secession of the border territories were made: the lack of historical and legal tradition, the non-autochthonous origin of the German ethnic group there, the non-compactness of German settlement, the impossibility of independent existence and, last but not least, the existential security of Czechoslovakia proper.

In addition to the strategic-geopolitical justifications, the last argument has its psychological side. Czechoslovakia was one of the few European countries that had clearly defined and, even to an outsider's eye, clearly visible natural borders. To deprive

the new state of its border mountain ranges would mean that it would become completely defenseless and incapable of independent life. Thus, the elongated shape of the state, called a dragon, snake, or worm by the nationalist Germans (Strobl, 1928, p. 13), became its symbol. The bitterness of the Munich treaty of 1938, which deprived Czechoslovakia of a significant part of its border areas, was caused in particular by the disruption of this symbolic shape. The Czechs never cared so much about their fellow German citizens as about the territories they inhabited, which made their state so "beautifully rounded and complete".

The metropolis of Prague occupies a very specific place in the space of the state territory. Although after the end of the war, the problem of the construction (urban, institutional, and symbolic) of capitals arose in all newly established states, the Czechs tended to regard the significance of the "monopolization" of Prague as something exceptional (Soukupová, 2012, p. 14). Therefore, for example, central events were always held in the capital as part of commemorative festivals of a national or state-wide character (Voigt, 1989, pp. 9–37): anniversaries (Hájková et al., 2018, p. 19) such as those of the battle of Zborov (holiday on 2 July, referring to the battles of Czechoslovak legionaries during World War I), Jan Hus (holiday on 6 July, referring to the date of the burning of the Czech religious reformer), St. Wenceslas (holiday on 28 September, the day of the murder of the Czech saint), but also jubilees such as the seventieth birthday of the writer Alois Jirásek (1921), the centenary of the birth of the composer Bedřich Smetana and the painter Josef Mánes (1924), the fiftieth anniversary of the death of František Palacký (1926), etc. All these events were, among other things, occasions to use other symbols of the state, namely the state colors, emblems, or flag.

These were codified as state symbols by statutory regulations. This was not true of the shape of the state, but it was implicitly considered a symbol by the ethnically Czech population. The shape acquired a sacred aura and was fixed as something that was historically given, even primordial, something that was not discussed and did not admit of correction. And at the center of everything stood Prague as the unquestionable center of the state, with which, for example, Brno or Bratislava could not compete in the slightest (Brugge, 2004).

The State Colors, Emblems, and Flag

In the case of national holidays, for example, there was a broader societal discussion, but it was experts who had a major say in the question of state emblems (Čechurová, 2018, pp. 45–72). The state color, the state emblem and the state flag were to become the main expression of the identity of the citizens of the new state (Hlinomaz, 1992, pp. 81–184). These were inseparable symbols of a modern state and national existence (Moravcová, 1996, pp. 160–181). For quite a long time after the Declaration of Independence, the existing

combination of white and red, which had already been highlighted as national colors in the nineteenth century, remained the national colors. Almost exactly one year after the formation of the state, a government bill was introduced "providing for the national colors and the national flag and empowering the government to make further provision for flags, banners, and emblems" (*Vládní návrh zákona*, 1919). This proposal included a drawing of the flag with a blue wedge, which distinguished the flag from neighboring Poland and, in a way, from Austria. The drawing was prepared by the emblem commission at the Ministry of the Interior (Svoboda, 2010, pp. 3013–3016), and the forms of use of the flag were then clearly defined by a legal standard. The common association of the blue wedge with Slovakia dates back to 19 March 1920, when the report of the Constitutional Committee was submitted to the Parliament, which "issued provisions on the national flag, state signs, and the state seal" (*Zpráva výboru ústavního o vládním návrhu zákona tisk č. 1773*, 1920).

The existing coat of arms of the Kingdom of Bohemia (a silver double-tailed lion in a leap on a red shield) was codified by the Revolutionary National Assembly as the national emblem as early as May 1919. After protests by the Slovak political representation, the Slovak coat of arms (originally the Hungarian coat of arms with three mountain peaks and the patriarchal cross, which was recolored in 1861 by the Slovak Matica, i.e. the Slovak National Cultural Association based in Martin, from green-white-red to blue-white-red) was placed on its chest, thus creating the so-called small state emblem. The so-called middle state emblem, in turn, contained the emblems of all five countries, i.e. Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Slovakia, and Subcarpathian Rus. The emblems of the first three were based on traditional heraldic continuity, while those of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus had to be newly created (Klimeš, 2009, pp. 40–84). Finally, the so-called great state coat of arms contained, in comparison to the previous one, also the emblems of Těšín (Cieszyn), Ratibor, and Opava (Troppau) and a golden ribbon with the inscription "Truth Prevails".

While the traditional country emblems had a historical basis with which virtually all groups of the country's inhabitants were able to identify, it was more difficult with the national colors or flag. It over-emphasized the Czech national context and was unacceptable to German or Hungarian citizens. The symbol of the state, which in practice is almost ubiquitous in terms of visual representation of the state, thus aroused the most emotions and was perhaps associated with the most controversy. The chance was not taken, and instead of uniting, it divided. Of course, the dislike that the flag aroused among German and Hungarian citizens was also realized by Czech officials. Not only did they not try to solve the problem, but it seems as if they were even duly proud of the forceful enforcement. This is indicated by the repeatedly formulated and published rules that specified the use of the flag and especially commanded a degree of respect. The flag was to be flown only in an open space (not in a room), it could be carried only vertically, it could not touch the ground, and it could not be part of the clothing (that was where the tricolor

belonged exclusively); even the president bowed before the flag, if it was damaged it had to be burned, etc.

The national anthem belonged not only to the symbols that received legal codification relatively soon after the establishment of the republic (13 August 1919) but also to those that gradually began to perform their function at a time when the state did not legally exist. With the passage of time, the almost extinct emotional charge of the lyrics of the song from the play *Fidlovačka* by Josef Kajetán Tyl, set to a tune by Josef Škroup during the First World War, acquired a new dimension. Originally a legitimate continuation of the Czech version of the official anthem of the monarchy, "Zachovej nám, Hospodine" [God Save Francis the Emperor], it subsequently turned into a transparent declaration of defiance against the Habsburg state and its military machine in particular (Sak, 2008, pp. 23–69). As a result, especially in the late months of 1918, Tyl's play *Fidlovačka* itself experienced a certain renaissance. The only possible competitor for the imaginary position of the national anthem could have been the song "Hej, Slované!" [Hey, Slavs!], which fulfilled a similar role during the war years, and, moreover, was enhanced by the popular plot of Slavic reciprocity. After the fall of the Russian Empire, it obviously lost its importance. In the period of state consolidation and the definition of binding forms of state symbolism, i.e. in the early 1920s, not only the well-known Slovak song "Nad Tatrou sa blýská" [Lightning over the Tatras] was added – the anthems of the Entente powers were also played or sung on official occasions.

A decree of the Ministry of the Interior of 13 August 1919, for example, specified on what occasions the anthem could be played or sung. This enumeration then seemed exclusive: these were moments of celebration and state representation. The use of the anthem in everyday life was forbidden. It was an attempt to turn a "humanized" anthem/song into a truly precious and exclusive symbol (Moravcová, 1996, p. 168). The state apparatus adhered to these rules with quite a lot of consistency and also deployed coercive mechanisms. This was not only true of the national anthem, but also of the other symbols mentioned above, such as the flag. The first instance of political administration, including the police and gendarmerie, had an important controlling but also repressive function in these matters. The extreme forms of protection of state symbols and enforcement of respect for them or punishment of their defamation were codified in the well-known Law for the Protection of the Republic of 1923 (*Zákon na ochranu republiky*, 1923), which, for example, sanctioned the insult of the President of the Republic in Section 11 or the defamation of the name, emblem, flag, or colors of the Republic in Section 20. The penalty for defamation of state symbols was either a fine of up to 10,000 Czechoslovak crowns or imprisonment for up to one month. The Law for the Protection of the Republic also ended a formative legislative period during which state symbols such as the national colors, the national flag, the national emblems, and the national anthem were codified. However, this does not exhaust the range of state symbols. In addition to the legally codified ones, there was also a range of implicit symbols that emerged through social consensus.

The State Pantheon

The symbols that had been promoted through social and political discussions rather than legislation did not enjoy or need similar legal protection. This collectively respected status provided them with even more "protection". These were immaterial and essentially abstract phenomena, although they were usually concretized in physical locations and forms, such as a monument, a memorial, or an entire locality that suggested a sense of authenticity and literally invited the holding of various commemorative rituals (Řezník, 2014, pp. 59–80). For most of these phenomena, if you will, their status as symbols was defined as a pillar of national identity as early as the nineteenth century. Their common feature, not exceptional in this respect to the case of the Czechs, was the narrow view of historical events, personalities, or phenomena associated with the history of the ethnic group.

In the following selection, I will use Aleida Assmann's classification, which postulates three worthy and appropriate roles that symbols, or their originators, can play (Assmann, 2011, pp. 25–42). These will be the role of the victor who overcame evil, as is the case of the Czechoslovak legionaries, who represent not only the symbol of the Zborov myth, but also, in general, the military prowess of the entire state; the role of the martyr who resisted evil, as represented by Jan Hus and, in general, the Hussite myth; and the role of the victim who passively suffered evil; here I use the symbolism of the Habsburg period of oppression, that "dark period" (Czech: *temno*), with the victim symbolically representing the entire nation.

Just as most communities have a comprehensible grand narrative of their origins and direction, so too is it part of the imagination of many collectives to symbolically mark an epoch that represents an imaginary "bottom" from which the collective can rebound. Just as the Russians have their *smuta*, the Poles their *potop*, the Czechs have their *temno*. Although this "myth" has already been successfully refuted several times (Rak, 1994), after 1918 it fulfilled its integrating and especially explicative role to the full. According to Czech historian Miloš Řezník:

> Every reflection of history is an expression of its time. It is no coincidence that, with the increasing passage of time, it says more and more about itself than about the historical period to which it is devoted. We read less and less – to use a banal example – of the works of Palacký or Ranke in order to learn about Czech medieval, Roman, or Prussian history, and more and more out of interest in Palacký, Ranke, and the nineteenth century. (Řezník, 2006, p. 7)

Through the prism of the idea of decline caused by the ungrateful Habsburgs, the revolutionary act and the definition of the new statehood after 1918 became more comprehensible. The revolution had removed the "bad" and now it was time to build the "good". The activities of those who stood on the "Pekař" side in the dispute over the meaning of Czech history (including Josef Pekař himself) – i.e. pleaded for the definition

of Czech symbols and traditions on the basis of continuity with the previous regime – thus appeared in this perspective as Sisyphean work, not unlike the demolition of myths that were "real" (Šubrt, 2015, p. 12). Every community, rather than the results of the work of historians-academics, tends to believe in a form of the past consisting of idealized images that, at first glance, fill the entire thought world of each individual recipient with meaning (Randák, 2008, p. 150). Furthermore, the "Masaryk" party to the argument, disregarding the fact that T. G. Masaryk was an undisputed, and uncritical, authority from his position as president, could also take advantage of the positive teleology that their version provided. Just as "the Reformation was supposed to be the meaning of Czech history", it could act as a kind of legacy to "today" (meaning the period after 1918) and at the same time be an activating appeal for the future, an incentive to continue the efforts of Czech greats as defined by Masaryk's worldview (Machovec, 1968, p. 111). Pekař's perspective, in that the First World War and especially its outcome was a Central European tragedy (Havelka, 2003, p. 18), did not have an activating charge and, in a time of heightened emotions, provoked rather than forced reflection.

We will conclude this section with a question: why has this Czech national "site of memory" never been properly preserved? The megalomaniacal plans to place a memorial on Bílá Hora, referring to the historic defeat of the Czech Estates uprising in 1620 (Hojda & Pokorný, 1996, pp. 117–146; Petráň & Petráňová, 1998, pp. 143–163), in the course of time, did not come to fruition, and the modest activity of the Sokol county of Podbělohora, which on 7 November 1920 unveiled the mound on Bílá Hora (which still stands today), with not much public interest, remained isolated. Paradoxically, undoubtedly one of the most symbolic phenomena of Czech history lacks anchorage in space.

At the imaginary beginning of the chain of the above-mentioned Czech greats stood Jan Hus, the martyr of Constance, who played the role of a kind of symbolic redeemer for the Czech nation. As early as the 1870s, a strikingly large number of small monuments and memorials to Hus (and Hussites) began to appear, built mainly in the regions (Kuthanová, 2003, p. 62). The very first monument to Hus was built in Jičín by Antonín Sucharda as early as 1872. Among the most valuable of the numerous other Hus's monuments are the statues in Kolín (1912) and Tábor (1928), as well as the monuments by Ladislav Šaloun in Hořice (1911–1914) and in Libán near Jičín (1923–1925) (Hojda & Pokorný, 1996, p. 79). Still, it was exclusively Jan Hus – a harmless reformer who was salt in the eyes of the Catholic clergy only.

In 1915, when on the anniversary of his execution by burning, T. G. Masaryk declared war on the Habsburg monarchy, Hus the reformer became Hus the revolutionary (Kovtun, 1991, p. 28). And even though during the First World War the Czechoslovak legionaries had Catholic, especially St. Wenceslas, symbolism, the reference to Hus, or Hussitism, was the primary one. The Czechoslovak volunteers formed a revolutionary army and fought a revolutionary war (Galandauer, 2002, p. 83). After the proclamation of independence, the importance of Hussite traditions grew exponentially. Public declarations in which

members of the new state establishment embraced the Hussite legacy led to significant changes in the organization of regular festivals in Lipany. The annual celebrations, organized by local government organizations and supporters of Hussite traditions, became a state-regulated and state-organized festival. On 20 May 1919, a gathering was held on Lipá Hora, attended by 30,000 people, but the same thing happened that can be observed in the case of the national anthem (Čornej, 1995, pp. 60–61) – the "nationalization" of the symbol led to its "antiquation".

The Hus phenomenon itself was one of those symbols of the state that were nationally conciliatory, and the dispute over their legacy was fought on a different plane. For the Czech nationalists, Hus and his followers were mainly fighters against foreignness; for the Protestants, they were fighters against Catholicism; for their egalitarianism, they were also acceptable to the Communists; for the Bohemian Germans, they were acceptable in the narrow interpretation of Martin Luther's predecessors; and so the only group that did not identify with the cult was, logically, the Catholic Church (Hájková & Hajdinová, 2018, pp. 267–304). Its opposition to Hus rather helped his promotion as a state symbol, since after 1918 there was a general anti-clerical spirit and antipathy towards the Roman Catholic Church. However, the more attentive observers already then perceived the problematic nature of the construction of the Czechs as followers of the martyr of Constance. Ferdinand Peroutka, a leading Czech publicist, remarked that "the circumstance emphasized by the solemn speakers that we are the children of Žižka is something utterly insignificant in comparison with the grave and sensational circumstance that we are the children of the respectable citizens of the time of Franz Joseph" (Peroutka, 1991b, pp. 18–19).

If we stay with this metaphor, then the last of the thematized symbols represents a kind of "unruly sons", namely the Czechoslovak legionaries. The founding fathers of the Czechoslovak state were faced from the very beginning with the problem of how to reconcile one of the basic constitutive national auto-stereotypes, i.e. the ideal of non-violence (Rak, 1993, p. 87), with the fact that Czech statehood was won in war, by Czech soldiers. The contemporary rise of antimilitarism (Zückert, 2011, pp. 199–218) naturally influenced the highest officials as well. Masaryk's attitude to the army as such and his well-intentioned ideas about the implementation of the militia system are well known. Similar positions of thought as Masaryk held towards the army and militarism were quite widespread before the First World War. When he then became a political and de facto military leader during the war, he was very careful to avoid in his statements a contradiction between his pre-war position and the necessary adulation of military values at the same time. On the other hand, he himself was in fact a legionary, even the commander-in-chief.

The role and significance of the legionaries in the First Republic is a topic sufficiently treated (Alexander, 1986, pp. 43–79; Šedivý, 2008, pp. 16–28), as is the subject of commemorative military activities of the period. The two phenomena partially intersected in the commemorative

celebrations of the Battle of Zborov on 2 July (Kessler, 2018, pp. 179–215; Wingfield, 2016, pp. 129–150). Although the Zborov anniversary was not officially included among national holidays or commemorative days, in practice it fulfilled this role. In addition to establishing 2 July among the general public, this day had a specific meaning for the Czechoslovak army. It became a holiday of all units, institutions, and offices of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces. The myth of Zborov as a symbol, personified by a collective of legionaries and petrified by the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the chapel of the Old Town Hall (Bejdáková, 2011, pp. 282–300; Galandauer, 1999, pp. 251–273), was so intrinsically linked to the establishment of the Czechoslovak state that it overwhelmed the then strong position of military traditions associated with the Habsburg eagle. On the other hand, with the demise and denial of either Czechoslovak statehood (after 1939) or the values on which it was built (after 1948), its symbolic power was logically emptied. Unlike other symbols (the national flag, Jan Hus, etc.), it has not been restored or reinterpreted.

The official Czechoslovak state pantheon was thus practically a model example of Aleida Assmann's typology outlined above. Alongside the victims who suffered passively and who symbolically represented the entire nation under the Habsburg yoke, Jan Hus was placed on a pedestal as a martyr who stood up to evil. This group was then complemented by active (and let us add successful) fighters against evil in the form of Czechoslovak legionaries. Like other state symbols, these did not in any way incorporate figures of other ethnicities. The closest to this was certainly Masaryk's foreign resistance collaborator, the Slovak Milan R. Štefánik, whose sudden death in a plane crash on his return to his homeland in 1919 could be interpreted as martyrdom. However, the role of the foreign resistance as a whole was debated and the role and "authenticity" of Štefánik was questioned by Slovak nationalist politicians and publicists. The problematic nature of his role was fully manifested in 1928 during the unveiling of the Štefánek memorial at Bradla, designed by another famous Slovak, architect Dušan Jurkovič. The ceremony became a tribune of the dispute between political Czechoslovakism and Slovak autonomism rather than a tribute to the deceased general (Macho, 2011).

Conclusions

In line with Eric Hobsbawm's theory of "invented tradition" (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 13), it can be argued that in the case of Czechoslovakia, too, a set of phenomena was created to make present and, in particular, to inculcate certain values on which the new Czechoslovak statehood was based. Some of them were the work of experts, subsequently sanctified by legislation, while others emerged from a society-wide consensus and discussion. It is not so much that these phenomena did not exist before 1918, but rather that their meaning was redefined and their political instrumentalization took place. To successfully promote such a symbolic pantheon, or its adequate representations, a vast,

state-controlled system of education, propaganda, organized celebrations and holidays, as well as the construction of museums, memorials, and libraries, then exerted its forces. These symbols, or the myths they contained, were then successful in proportion to the success of the state they were supposed to symbolize (Heimann, 2009). The euphoria that gripped the Czech population of the Czech lands (Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia) in 1918 contained many negative connotations and phenomena that few Czech observers were aware of or willing to admit at the time. Although the construction of "Czechoslovakism" was proclaimed by the state establishment, virtually no specifically Slovak phenomenon penetrated the pantheon of symbols and pillars on which the new state was to rest. The even larger German ethnic group of the new state, which was settled in the border areas, was even treated with a certain degree of hostility and vindictiveness.

Since we do not have analytical, much less metric, tools to measure "symbol success", the only clue we have is the achievement (or non-achievement) of the goals that the symbol, as a tool of political instrumentalization, is supposed to serve. In this respect, therefore, the symbols of the new state, however much they were intended to bring the new democratic society together, failed completely. This was subsequently evident in the upheavals that came in the late 1930s with the economic crisis and the rise of Nazism in neighboring Germany. The symbols of the Czechoslovak Republic were simply too "Czech" to have any cohesive effect and to represent an alternative to which the majority of the state's population (Slovaks, Germans, Hungarians, Ruthenians, Poles) could adhere.

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Symbole, które zawiodły. Tworzenie i promocja czechosłowackiej symboliki państwowej po 1918 roku

Abstrakt

Artykuł przedstawia wybrane symbole, które poprzez ustawodawstwo bądź w drodze społecznej i politycznej negocjacji przyjęto jako symbole państwa po upadku imperium habsburskiego i powstaniu Republiki Czechosłowackiej. Główną słabością tej symboliki było silne powiązanie z tożsamością czeską. Symbole nowego państwa pochodziły wprawdzie z okresu konfliktów narodowościowych i afirmacji tożsamości narodowej w ostatnich dziesięcioleciach monarchii, jednak miały znaczenie tylko dla nowoczesnego narodu czeskiego. Z tego powodu nie stały się elementem spajającym demokratyczne i wielonarodowe państwo czechosłowackie. Nie przemawiały do większości jego słowackich mieszkańców, których tradycje i symbole historyczne praktycznie ignorowano. Co więcej,

były wręcz postrzegane jako prowokacyjne i wrogie przez ludność niemiecką, węgierską, rusińską i polską międzywojennej Republiki Czechosłowackiej.

Słowa kluczowe: nacjonalizm; Czechosłowacja; symbole państwowe; tożsamość narodowa; imperium habsburskie

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