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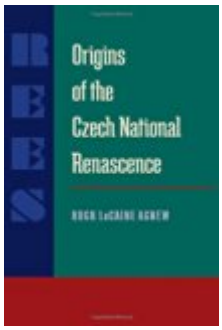

Hugh LeCaine Agnew. *Origins of the Czech National Renascence.* Pennsylvania and London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993. ix + 338 pp. $49.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8229-3742-5.

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Students of Czech history and more broadly of Central and East Central Europe should welcome new scholarship on the beginnings of the Czech national revival in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Many of the more general Czech-language studies from the Communist era combined schematic Marxist-Leninist explanations of the dynamics of the national renascence with elements of older Czech nationalist hagiography and demonology. There were surprisingly few studies published in Western languages between the late 1940s and the 1980s. The oft-cited English-language essays on Czech nationalism of Jan Havranek and Joseph Zacek, for instance, date back to the late 1960s and only offer cursory overviews of the early phase of modern Czech nationalism. Even older, Hans Kohn's *Pan-Slavism: Its History and Ideology* (Notre Dame, 1953; New York, 1960) picks up the development of Czech nationalism only at the end of the Napoleonic Wars and can only discuss a few major Czech thinkers. French and German-language scholarship on the early phase of the Czech national revival has also been scarce since the 1950s with the notable exception of Walter Schamschula's writings. Hugh Agnew's treatment of the cultural and intellectual origins of the revival represents, then, a significant and much needed contribution to the literature.

In a clearly written and logically organized presentation, Professor Agnew discusses the efforts of Josef Dobrovsky, F. M. Pelcl, Frantisek Tomsa, V. M. Kramerius, and many other Czech grammarians, lexicographers, historians, and poets of their generation to revive the Czech language and encourage its use in literature, theater, journalism, and general discourse. Agnew generally follows the three-phase scheme for understanding national revivals among the smaller European peoples that has been developed by Miroslav Hroch and others. Agnew has chosen, though, to examine the first phase when the intellectual and cultural foundations were laid and before the movement began to build important social networks or engage in significant political agitation. The useful introduction briefly but soundly surveys the major interpretive positions regarding the origins of the Czech revival and the continuities and discontinuities of Czech cultural histo-

ry in both the Marxist and non-Marxist historiography. Agnew's overall treatment of the early period of the national revival makes clear, though, that he has little interest in arguments that ascribe the movement's emergence essentially to the struggles of the Czech peasants, urban petty bourgeoisie, and nascent bourgeoisie to emancipate themselves from feudal exploitation and the oppression of Habsburg absolutism as those old economic and political systems waned. Rather, the author emphasizes the importance of cultural change and new intellectual trends, particularly those associated with the Enlightenment, which readily crossed state borders in Europe and transcended class lines between nobility and commoners.

For Agnew the beginnings of the Czech national revival represented above all a process of cultural and intellectual change and construction. Putting more nails in the coffin of old Czech nationalist myths, Agnew points to the many positive contributions to the national movement made by noblemen, Catholic clergy, and the Habsburg authorities, particularly under Joseph II. Despite the continuation of censorship and then the intensification of controls over society during the French wars, the Austrian government assisted the activity of Czech intellectuals, both indirectly and directly, through educational reforms, academic appointments, the introduction of religious toleration, and granting approval for Czech newspapers, other publications, and theatrical productions.

Perhaps the greatest strength of this book lies in its treatment of how early Czech nationalist thinkers grappled with the definition of Czech nationhood and Czechs' relations with the other Slavic peoples of Europe and their German-speaking neighbors. Professor Agnew cogently discusses what Dobrovsky and others of his generation had to say about the place of the Czechs among the peoples of Europe and points to the centrality of the Czech language in all the awakeners' thinking about Czech culture and group identity. They conceived of Czech as a branch of the larger family of Slavic tongues, and many described the Czechs as only part of a larger Slavic nation. Still, it was clear in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, at least before the Romantic generation reached maturity, that Czech intellectuals' interests in the other Slavic languages and peoples were generally apolitical and were motivated by primary concerns for the Czech language and its speakers.

Despite the emphasis in this book on cultural and intellectual processes in the early phase of modern Czech nationalism, the resulting portrait of just how the emerging nationalist culture and discourse were created and propagated is not altogether satisfying. Some problems derive from the author's desire to mention within a brief compass the efforts of the wide range of scholars and writers who were at work in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Including so many results at times does little more than catalog the work of many lesser figures. Agnew's focus on the cultural and intellectual content of early nationalist thought with only a cursory treatment of institutional and political relationships and only the briefest discussion of the thinkers' social and economic situations and their audiences leaves the reader to wonder just how the emerging nationalist value system and discourse were constructed socially and politically. One discerns from Agnew's narrative that by the end of the Napoleonic Wars a community of nationalist intellectuals who worked with each other had emerged, they had an institutional structure to support them, and they were beginning to find audiences and support through patronage, associations, press, and publications. Still, we need more systematic analysis of the processes of social and political construction of the emerging Czech nationalist culture according to the most advanced methods of intellectual and cultural history.

Professor Agnew first conceived this study as a dissertation in the late 1970s. It would be unfair, then, to fault him for not taking more advantage here of recent post-structuralist cultural studies that analyze the emerging Czech nationalist culture and discourse, but there is also the older school of the social and political history of ideas, whose methods he might have used profitably to explain the how and why of the cultural efforts of the early Czech nationalists. One can only hope that Professor Agnew and others will continue to work at explaining the complex cultural, social, and political processes by which early Czech nationalism emerged.

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