

Between East and West: The Vienna School and the Idea of Czechoslovak Art

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In 1919, a year after the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic, two influential Czech journals, *Volné směry* (Free Directions) and *Umělecký list* (The Artistic Gazette) published a debate on the origin of early medieval art and architecture in Bohemia and Moravia.¹ The basic question, which also appeared in the title of the polemical articles on this topic, was 'West or East' and reflected the search for the origins of medieval architecture and its affiliation with either eastern or western paradigms in Czech art history. The main cause of this particular debate was a book on the early mediaeval architecture Ravenna that had been published in 1916 and written by Vojtěch Birnbaum (1877-1934), a Czech art historian and a former student of the Vienna Institute of Art History.² Birnbaum was concerned specifically with the question of origins, not only of the architecture of Ravenna but, more generally, of the early Christian basilicas and rotundas in Bohemia. For him the latter could be traced back to models in western Europe, namely, Italy, France and Germany.³

Discussion of the consequences of his main thesis was delayed due to the effects of the First World War, but the debate was particularly heated in the setting of the newly formed state. The topic was nothing new, though, because in Bohemia, the different arguments on the origin of early medieval art had already been addressed by a number of art historians of Czech or German origin in the nineteenth century. The more famous dispute, however, took place in Vienna in reaction to Josef Strzygowski's book *Orient oder Rom* (Orient or Rome) published in 1901, which criticised Franz Wickhoff's view that early Christian art was a stylistic development of the art of Rome. Strzygowski had also argued against the assumption, promulgated by, amongst others, Wickhoff and Alois Riegl, that Near Eastern art was dependent on Greek and Roman culture.⁴ Following the ideas of Viennese teachers, Birnbaum opposed Strzygowski's claims, arguing instead that early Christian architectural forms, and not only those of Ravenna, could indeed trace their origins back to prototypes in Rome, that is, in western Europe, and not in the 'East.'

¹ Jaro Nebeský, 'Západ nebo východ?' *Umělecký list* no. 1, 1919, 121–122. Florian Zapletal, 'Západ nebo východ?' *Umělecký list* no. 1, 1919, 147–151, Vojtěch Birnbaum, 'Západ nebo východ?' *Zprávy Volných směrů*, August–September 1919, 49–53.

² Vojtěch Birnbaum, *Ravennská architektura*, Prague: Česká akademie císaře Františka Josefa pro vědy, slovesnost a umění, 1916 and 1921.

³ Vojtěch Birnbaum, 'Stavební povaha nestarších českých bazilik', *Časopis společnosti přátel starožitností českých*, no. 27, 1919, 1–22; Birnbaum, 'K otázce našich rotund', *Památky archeologické*, no. 35, 1927, 167–185.

⁴ Josef Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom? Beiträge zur Geschichte der Spätantiken und Frühchristlichen Kunst*. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1900.

This was not unilaterally accepted by all Czech scholars, however. To summarize the main points of the argument, Birnbaum's critics accused him of being 'Pragocentric,' prejudiced, and arrogant; above all, he was accused of using a 'German method.'⁵ The debate that his book provoked was typical of the situation both of Czech art history, and of the broader political and cultural context after the First World War. Specifically, one can read it as a symptom of the political environment of the newly created Czechoslovak democracy.

This article examines the debate prompted by Birnbaum in the light of the broader transformations Czech art history was undergoing. In particular, it considers the continuing legacy of the Vienna School of art history on the one hand and the political milieu of Czechoslovakia on the other. For the question 'East or West' was a topic of concern not only for art historians in Prague, but also for policy makers of the Czechoslovak state.

Czechoslovakia and the Czechoslovaks

The Czechoslovak Republic was declared on 28 October 1918; its borders were confirmed by the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919 and its Constitution was adopted in February 1920. The new union of the two dominant national groups, the Czechs and Slovaks, was the result of relatively short negotiations between predominantly Czech representatives and the Entente powers held in the United States and in Paris during 1918. The initial discussions about the domestic composition of the state were marked by constant conflicts with the German and Magyar minorities in the proposed territories. These included attempts to establish German provinces *within* Bohemia and Moravia, a war between Romania and Hungary fought, in part, over Slovakia, and the redefining of Hungary's borders, ratified at the Treaty of Trianon of 1920, which ceded 'Upper Hungary' (Slovakia) to the new republic, leading to continued resentment and strong nationalistic sentiments in the region throughout the interwar period.⁶ Tensions were also felt between the two majority national groups, the Czechs and the Slovaks, in which the latter soon found itself under-represented in the Parliament and the government.

When the two dominant Slavic nations of the Czechs and Slovaks were united in one state for the first time in history, along with Polish, German, Hungarian and, in 1919, by Ruthenian minorities, a new political and also social and cultural situation was created.⁷ The sudden disintegration of Austria-Hungary, the fall of the Russian empire and the continuing presence of powerful minorities in Czech and Slovak territories brought many problems: a new identity had to be created for the inhabitants, which would justify their post-war joint existence and secure their political claims.

Consequently, after 1918, the idea of the Czechoslovak people and Czechoslovak language was widely promoted in the press and by politicians, and

⁵ Nebeský, 'Západ nebo východ', 121; Zapletal, 'Západ nebo východ?', 149.

⁶ Jan Rychlík, 'Czech-Slovak Relations, 1918-1939', in Mark Cornwall and R. J. W. Evans, eds., *Czechoslovakia in Nationalist and Fascist Europe, 1918-1948*, London: British Academy, 14-15.

⁷ Cf. Andrzej Szczerski, *Modernizacja. Sztuka i architektura w nowych państwach Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej 1918-1939*, Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2010, 311-315.

attempts to prove the existence of things *Czechoslovak* were made. To legitimise such a construct, it was necessary to (re-)create a common cultural tradition according to which the Czechs and Slovaks consisted of a single entity.⁸ Czechoslovakia found itself in a situation typical for this early phase in the development of nation-states; characteristic were the search for the relics of political autonomy, recovery of the memory of a former time of independence and reconnection with a mediaeval written language. Politicians and scholars like were energetic in their pursuit of these goals.⁹

At the same time, although it was a parliamentary democracy, Czechoslovakia was in certain respects a reincarnation of Austria-Hungary, for it inherited many of its internal conflicts and national problems as well as producing new ones. While still under Habsburg rule, leading Czech political representatives referred to their historical and state right and grounded their claims for an independent state in the historical existence of the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Such claims had been modelled on the demands of Hungarian nationalist politicians who pointed to the historical kingdom of Hungary to legitimise their demands, which ultimately led to the compromise with Austria in 1867.¹⁰ The Slovaks, in contrast, with no prior historical tradition of political sovereignty, could only argue for their natural right to form a state on the basis of ethnic self-determination. The Czechoslovak political programme in many respects continued this situation and the Slovak claim to autonomy on ethnic grounds was not recognized by the central government on the grounds that it would encourage the Bohemian Germans to start placing similar demands.¹¹ The year 1918 thus did not bring the radical restructuring of domestic political and cultural arrangements many had anticipated. Indeed, the legacy of the ethnic and national tensions of the Habsburg monarchy continued in many aspects of life, including scholarship.

Czech Vienna School Students

The course of Czech art history after the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy can also be explained in the light of this political situation. In general, academic scholars were the beneficiaries of the inherited institutional practices of Austria Hungary, but they also faced new challenges related to the role of historical research in the new state. The university in Prague continued as two language-specific organizations, and the Czech university reverted to its original name of Univerzita Karlova (Charles University). The German University, which continued to attract German-speaking students until its closure in 1945, was still located in Prague despite efforts by university leaders to move it to the predominantly German city of Liberec in northern Bohemia.¹² Czech-speaking academic life expanded beyond

⁸ Rychlík, 'Czech-Slovak Relations', 15.

⁹ Miroslav Hroch, 'The Social Precondition of National Revival in Europe', (1985), quoted in Umut Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, New York: St Martin's Press, 2000, 159–160.

¹⁰ Rychlík, 'Czech-Slovak Relations', 14.

¹¹ Rychlík, 'Czech-Slovak Relations', 14–15.

¹² Zdeněk Kárník, *České země v éře první republiky (1918–1938): Vznik, budování a zlatá léta republiky (1918–1929)*, Praha: Libri, 2000, 185.

Prague through the establishment of new institutions; in 1919, a new Czech university was opened in Brno, while in Slovakia, the first university providing education in Slovak and Czech was also set up in Bratislava. As a sign of the inequalities of the new state, however, the Comenius University of Bratislava employed a large number of Czech teachers during the first few decades of its existence since there was a lack of suitably educated Slovak speakers.¹³

In this environment, where new academic as well as political institutions were created, there was an immediate need to fill the newly created positions at universities and in government offices with experienced individuals.¹⁴ Many of those working in the departments of the new Czechoslovak state were historians and art historians trained either in Prague or Vienna before the First World War. A pertinent example is the art historian Zdeněk Wirth (1878-1961), who had worked for the Central Commission for the Investigation and Conservation of Architectural Monuments (Central Commission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung von Baudenkmalen) in Vienna with Riegl and Dvořák before the First World War. Wirth joined the new Czechoslovak Ministry of National Education in 1918 after service in the war and his responsibilities included overseeing the protection of monuments and the administration of what was to become the national art collection.¹⁵ Another art historian who had studied in Vienna, Vincenc Kramář (1877-1960), was appointed director of the Picture Gallery of the Society of Patriotic Friends of the Arts in 1919 which, as Milena Bartlová notes in her contribution to this journal, later became the National Gallery.¹⁶

As graduates of Vienna came to occupy crucial positions in Czechoslovak cultural institutions after 1918, they brought the influences and ideas of their teachers to the new state. A clear summary of their understanding of the Vienna School and its legacy can be seen in the 1909 obituary of Franz Wickhoff by Vincenc Kramář, which in a way reads like a generational manifesto of those who identified with the theories of Wickhoff and Riegl.¹⁷

Apart from being one of the first to explicitly refer to the scholars there as the 'Viennese School,' Kramář summarized the main characteristics of the School's method and identified its main representatives, Wickhoff and Riegl, who were named the 'very founders of the Viennese art-historical school which has nowadays adopted a leading position in its field.'¹⁸ Two further articles by Kramář, one on Max Dvořák and one a review of Dvořák's study of Hubert and Hans van Eyck, extended

¹³ Kárník, *České země*, 183.

¹⁴ Kárník, *České země*, 180.

¹⁵ Jiří Roháček and Kristina Uhlíková, eds., *Zdeněk Wirth pohledem dnešní doby*, Prague: Ústav dějin umění Akademie věd ČR, 2011, 14 and Jan Skřivánek, 'Ministerstvo kultury a Národní galerie v období první republiky', Master Thesis presented at the History of Art Department, Masaryk University Brno, 2007, 7.

¹⁶ Milena Bartlová, 'Continuity and discontinuity; the legacy of the Vienna School in Czech art history'. *Journal of Art Historiography* 8 (2013).

¹⁷ Vincenc Kramář, 'Franz Wickhoff', *Volné směry*, no. 12, 1909, 211-214. Translated into English as 'Obituary of Franz Wickhoff' by Marta Filipová in *Journal of Art Historiography*, 8, 2013.

¹⁸ Kramář, 'Franz Wickhoff', 211.

this to include Dvořák as a key representative of the 'new science' that originated in Vienna.¹⁹

For Kramář the Vienna School could be recognised in its stress on a new, critical approach to artistic material and analytical attention to detail following Morelli. The art historians focused on, for example, the influence of both internal and external factors on the origins of the work and its the genetic connection with the global development of art.²⁰ Kramář characterized the School as a progressive centre of scholarship that aimed to put 'an end to dilettantism and shallowness' in the study of art history, which, he argued, had been hitherto overly preoccupied with iconography and factual information.²¹ The School, Kramář argued, combined all efforts art reform in art history into a single comprehensive system for the study of art.²² In this regard one of the most important aspects of the Vienna School, he argued, was its replacement of amateurs with rigorous 'scientists.' This opposition between the 'amateurish' approach of earlier scholars and the methodical study of Vienna School representatives would reappear in the debate between Birnbaum and his critics about Ravenna.

Importantly, Kramář noted, the Vienna School also developed a synthetic view of art history that placed all works of art into a single universal and continuous line of development. Kramář saw this universalistic view of art as its most significant feature whereby it effaced state borders and national differences, as well as temporal distances.²³ This transnational vision of art's history proved especially useful in the new political context after the First World War.²⁴ While Birnbaum, Kramář and others focused on emphasising the specificities of their own national artistic traditions, they also placed them into the context of the universal evolution of art, stressing in particular the broader current of Western European art. This attempt to resolve the apparent contradiction between the universalism of the Vienna school and the national character of local artistic practices was the product of a complex development that had been taking place in the cultural politics of Bohemia for a considerable time before 1918.²⁵ From the late nineteenth century onwards, art historians, historians, anthropologists and art critics had attempted to define Czech art as a specific form of national expression, while also putting emphasis on its links with contemporary art abroad.²⁶

¹⁹ Vincenc Kramář, 'Max Dvořák', *Přehled* 8, 1909-10, 52-53, 75-76; Vincenc Kramář, 'O vídeňské škole dějin umění', *Volné směry* 14, 1910, 41-43, 75-78, 110-112, 170-174, 209-210.

²⁰ Kramář, 'Franz Wickhoff', 211.

²¹ Kramář, 'Franz Wickhoff', 211.

²² Kramář, 'O vídeňské škole dějin umění', 110.

²³ Kramář, 'Franz Wickhoff', 211.

²⁴ Ján Bakoš, 'From Universalism to Nationalism. Transformation of Vienna School Ideas in Central Europe', in Robert Born, Alena Janatková and Adam Labuda, eds, *Die Kunsthistoriographien in Ostmitteleuropa und der nationale Diskurs*. Berlin: Mann Verlag, 2004, 86.

²⁵ Bakoš, 'From Universalism to Nationalism'; Margaret Olin, 'Alois Riegl: The Late Roman Empire in the Late Habsburg Empire', in Ritchie Robertson and Edward Timms, eds, *The Habsburg Legacy, National Legacy in Historical Perspective*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994; Matthew Rampley, 'Art History and the Politics of Empire. Rethinking the Vienna School', *Art Bulletin* 91/4, 2009, 447-463.

²⁶ Otto M. Urban, 'The Beginnings of Modern Art History and Art Criticism in the Czech Lands', *Centropa* 5/1, 2005, 40-48; Marta Filipová, 'The Construction of a National Identity in Czech Art

The idea of the history of art as a transnational development, to which so many Czech art historians subscribed, did not bring an end to the nationalism that was so dominant in art history during the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. The series of polemical articles on the question 'West or East' published in 1919 provide an insight into a burning debate on the national – as well as international – affiliation of Czech art, as well as Czech art history. The main proponents still considered the key point of the debate to be based on the issue of national differences. However, the earlier concern with the ethnic and national character of art was now revised to include the wider geopolitical issue of Czech art's 'western' or 'eastern' orientation. For Birnbaum and his colleagues, if it was proved that early medieval architecture of Bohemia and Moravia had 'eastern' and therefore Slavic origins, it would mean that it was disconnected from, even inferior to, western European architecture. On the other hand, to link the architecture of Bohemia with that of Ravenna would point to its Latin origins. Birnbaum and his Czech peers promoted this latter vision, which aligned them with the 'scientific' and progressive method of their Vienna School teachers.

Two of Birnbaum's most outspoken critics were Florián Zapletal (1884 - 1969) and Jaroslav Nebeský (1892–1937). Zapletal, a freelance art historian, photographer and journalist, had studied Czech and German in Prague and also spent two semesters studying in Vienna.²⁷ He also travelled extensively around Russia and the Ukraine. Nebeský was a graduate of art history in Prague, and, together with Zapletal, had strong inclinations towards pan-Slavism. He was interested in Czech cultural heritage and, after the birth of Czechoslovakia, he argued passionately that art historians and artists, as well as the political class, should orient themselves towards the East.²⁸ By 'East,' he meant not only the eastern regions of Czechoslovakia, Slovakia and Ruthenia, but also the wider Slavic world. And although he did not make it explicit, his suggestion that the true origins of the Slavs could be found in Soviet Russia indicates that the East he wished to reconnect with was the specifically Soviet East.²⁹

Among the criticisms Zapletal levelled at Birnbaum was the accusation that he had used an overtly 'German method' which, according to Zapletal, had come to dominate Czech art history. Indeed, the influences of German-speaking scholars on many Czech art historians were indisputable considering that Austria and Germany were the main centres of art historical teaching and research in Central Europe. In contrast to other disciplines such as philosophy and the study of literature, however, which were increasingly inclined towards ideas from France, Britain and North America from the early twentieth century onwards, art historians in Czechoslovakia continued to be heavily influenced by the work of colleagues in

History', *Centropa. A Journal of Central European Architecture and Related Arts* 8/3, 2008, 257–271; Milena Bartlová, 'Creating Borders: the Uses of Art Histories in Central Europe', *Ars* 40/2, 2007, 129–133.

²⁷ Kristina Glacová, 'Florian Zapletal historik umění(?)', in František Hýbl, ed, *Život a dílo. Sborník příspěvků z konference Muzea Komenského v Přerově, p. o. 18.–19. října 2005*, Přerov: Muzeum Komenského v Přerově, 2006, 157.

²⁸ For example Jaroslav Nebeský, 'Krise západnictví', *Umělecký list* 2/1–2, 1920, 29–36.

²⁹ Nebeský, 'Krise západnictví', 35.

Germany and Austria.³⁰ Critical of this situation, Zapletal argued for the need to 'break windows through the German walls which have isolated us from Europe and the rest of the world and condemned us to intellectual misery.'³¹ Dismissing Birnbaum's method as 'German, [and] Viennese,' he stated: 'this is why [Birnbaum] can see so little, so poorly, this is why he is so vague about what he calls *breadth of knowledge*.'³²

This 'breadth of knowledge' – by which Zapletal meant the idea of universal art – stood at the centre of Birnbaum's allegedly German method. Moreover, Birnbaum's approach was flawed, Zapletal maintained, because it was limited to using merely German textual sources.³³ Instead, Zapletal called for 'specifically Czech values' to be injected into research which should accordingly be written from a national point of view.³⁴ He envisaged this as being accomplished through attention to that art which for him was most Slavic in the history of the peoples of the Czechoslovak state: early medieval, or Byzantine art.³⁵

Zapletal also recommended that in the light of the reorganized political borders, attention should be paid to the art of the new territories of Czechoslovakia and to the art history of non-Czech nations, the Slovaks and Ruthenians especially. As he pointed out, these regions had been studied by German and Hungarian scholars, but this was 'not from the viewpoint of our history, not from our national and state perspective but from a foreign one.'³⁶

Birnbaum refuted his adversary's criticism and pointed to the historic artistic connections between the Czechs and Germans. It was the exchange between these two cultures, he argued, that had shaped all other aspects of Czech culture and society and influenced current scholarship: 'There is no domain of our culture, not even a great cultural personality, that does not stand, to a greater or lesser extent, under ... German influence,' he claimed.³⁷ For a Czech art historian to acknowledge the influence of German and Austrian traditions was a significant step, given the political context, for it recognised the cultural and intellectual exchange between the two groups at a time when Czech nationalists had been determined to emphasise their *difference*. Birnbaum went further, however, openly endorsing the so-called 'German' approach to art historical research on the one hand and, on the other, arguing for the need to focus on Bohemia, in other words, the westernmost region of Czechoslovakia that was in closest proximity to Germany.

Birnbaum also dismissed the amateurs, a by now familiar criticism, who favoured the 'method of the pro-eastern Viennese school which [...] means a deep drop of German scientific thinking.'³⁸ This was clearly a reference to Josef Strzygowski, a major source for Zapletal and who had argued that proof of the eastern origins of early Christian architecture did exist, but, as Birnbaum put it, in

³⁰ Kárník, *České země*, 182.

³¹ Zapletal, 'Západ', 113.

³² Zapletal, 'Západ', 149.

³³ Zapletal, 'Západ', 149.

³⁴ Zapletal, 'Západ', 149.

³⁵ Zapletal, 'Západ', 147.

³⁶ Zapletal, 'Západ', 149.

³⁷ Birnbaum, 'Západ', 52.

³⁸ Birnbaum, 'Západ', 51.

‘some very far eastern land no one has ever been to.’³⁹ Birnbaum connected this fabled land with the area around Uzhhorod (now in Ukraine but at the time located in eastern fringes of Czechoslovakia) where, he emphasised in dismissive fashion, ‘maybe some of this eastern art could be found.’⁴⁰

Birnbaum reopened this discussion a few years later following a lecture Strzygowski delivered on the architecture of the Western Slavs at the Department of Slavic Philology at the Czech university in Prague in March 1924.⁴¹ Strzygowski’s main thesis was that early mediaeval architecture in wood and stone served as a vital stimulus for the later architectural development of, for example, Baroque churches. He also identified several types of wooden churches from the early Romanesque period that were indigenous to Bohemia, and he argued that their floor plan could be detected in churches of a much earlier date. These vernacular wooden and, later, stone churches in Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Slovakia and Sub-Carpathenian Ruthenia – or the territory of the then Czechoslovakia – had also had an influence, he argued, on the subsequent development of larger scale architectural forms.⁴²

What was significant about these claims was Strzygowski’s emphasis on the presence of local vernacular influences and not of Byzantine, German or Italian ones on early sacral architecture. Birnbaum summarized his objections to this thesis in an article published in the same year and they ranged from matters of fact to subjective personal attacks.⁴³ Pointing out Strzygowski’s Austro-German nationality Birnbaum drew attention to the irony that he wrote on Czech (Slavic) architecture from a stance that would be more usually expected from Czech nationalist authors.⁴⁴ Birnbaum also criticised Strzygowski’s reliance on the findings of Ferdinand Josef Lehner (1837-1914), a Czech-speaking art historian (despite his German name) whose work on the history of art in Bohemia had long been seen by Czech scholars as dilettantish.⁴⁵ Lehner he described as the last standing Romantic whose writing was merely a compilation of materials with elementary terminology for beginners.⁴⁶

Birnbaum’s criticisms touched on another issue of wider significance. Specifically, he classified the wooden churches at the centre of the polemical discussion as folk art, a topic that had long preoccupied Vienna School art historians. Folk art had become an important subject of art historical research in Central Europe towards the end of the nineteenth century because of the belief that it constituted an authentic expression of ethnic and national identity.

Birnbaum and his colleagues in Prague were very much influenced by the ideas of Riegl.⁴⁷ Specifically, Riegl had maintained that folk art had always been exposed to the influences of international high art and was thus the product of

³⁹ Birnbaum, ‘Západ’, 52.

⁴⁰ Birnbaum, ‘Západ’, 52.

⁴¹ Published as Josef Strzygowski, ‘Der vorromanische Kirchenbau der Westslawen’, *Slavia. Časopis pro slovanskou filologii* 3, 1924-1925, 392-446.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 466.

⁴³ Birnbaum, ‘Nový názor na počátky české křesťanské architektury’, *Obzor* 4, 1925, 1-11.

⁴⁴ Birnbaum, ‘Nový názor’, 1.

⁴⁵ Zdeněk Wirth, ‘Ferdinand J. Lehner’, *Památky archeologické* 26, 1914, 69-71.

⁴⁶ Wirth, ‘Ferdinand J. Lehner’, 69.

⁴⁷ The key text in this regard is Riegl, Alois. *Volkskunst, Hausfleiß und Hausindustrie*. Berlin, 1894.

cultural borrowings and exchange, and not the expression of a single, autochthonous vernacular culture.⁴⁸ Similarly, Birnbaum held that the design of wooden churches in Bohemia had been derived from stone architecture and consequently that, as with all folk art, local wooden architecture had taken its inspiration from high art. Folk art thus represented a belated appropriation of 'pan-European art,' he argued, disseminated to the people by the culture of the towns, churches and castles. This attitude, which understood folk art to be derived from the forms of high art and to be a belated hybridisation or assimilation of 'pan-European' art, would play an important role in the deployment of the emerging concept of Czechoslovak art. It was often used by Czech sympathisers with the methods of the Vienna school to explain the roots of the art of the newly created state and its relation to western European art.

The Idea of Czechoslovak Art

The foundation stone for the construction of the idea of the Czechoslovak nation and the policy of Czechoslovakism was the linguistic proximity of the Czech and Slovak languages.⁴⁹ Codified in the Constitution of 1920, Czechoslovakism emphasised the common political interests of the two groups. The Czechoslovak language, however, which came into existence in the Language Law from the same year, however, did not define the language as a single expression of the two ethnic groups, as is often believed, but rather was meant to reflect the existence of the new Czechoslovak nation, state and institutions.⁵⁰ The use of a common denominator was motivated by the desire to present the idea of the Czechoslovak nation as clearly and simply as possible not only abroad but at home too.

Such attempts to simplify the presentation of the claims of the two main ethnic and linguistic groups by joining them in a single unit were not a complete novelty and had first been made during the First World War. As early as 1915, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk had written a confidential memorandum, 'Independent Bohemia', outlining his idea of the future composition of the new state. He declared that a post-war Bohemian state should consist of the Czech regions (Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia) and that 'to these would be added the Slovak districts of Northern Hungary...' because 'the Slovaks are Czechs, even though they use their dialect as their literary language.'⁵¹

As the social historian Ladislav Holý has remarked, during the First World War, use of the idea of the Czechoslovak nation was 'the conscious strategy of Czech and Slovak diplomats in their effort not to confuse the politicians of the Alliance, who were expected to be unfamiliar with the history and ethnic

⁴⁸ Georg Vassold, 'Riegl, Strzygowski and the development of art', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 111.

⁴⁹ Jiří Kocian, 'The Czechs versus the Slovaks: Bilateral Relations, 1944-1948', in Cornwall and Evans, *Czechoslovakia*, 208.

⁵⁰ Ondřej Bartoš, 'Jazykové právo v první ČSR', Master thesis submitted at the Faculty of Law, Masaryk University Brno in 2011, 38.

⁵¹ Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, 'Independent Bohemia', in Robert William Seton-Watson, *Masaryk in England*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943, 125.

composition of Central Europe.⁵² In addition to Masaryk's memorandum, the 'Washington Declaration' of 18 October 1918 mentioned both the Czechoslovak nation as well as the entitlement of the Czechs to unification with their 'Slovak brothers.'⁵³ Likewise a declaration made in 1917 by exiled Czech members of parliament based in Paris called for 'unification of all branches of the Czechoslovak nation in a democratic Czech state also containing the Slovak branch of the nation.'⁵⁴ The Czechs and the Slovaks were therefore treated as a single group, namely, identified either as Czechs, with the Slovaks merely being a sub-group, or as Czechoslovaks, in which, again, the Czechs were the dominant group.

The idea of 'Czechoslovakism' and of the Czechoslovak nation was not only a political neologism but was also used in a number of historical studies retrospectively. There was a renewed search for historic evidence that might aid the task of uniting the separate histories of the Czechs and the Slovaks into one single narrative. An example of this mindful re-reading of history is Albert Pražák's book *Československý národ* (The Czechoslovak nation) of 1925, written at a time of increasing resistance of the Slovaks to the Czechoslovak idea and Hungarian criticism of it.⁵⁵ Pražák was a historian of Czech literature and, after the end of the First World War, a professor in Bratislava. He focused on the links between Czech and Slovak literary works; although genuinely interested in Slovak literature, he also promoted the idea of a single Czechoslovak nation and identity.⁵⁶ In the chapter entitled 'The proofs of the title "Czechoslovak nation",', for instance, Pražák claimed that in history, the Slovaks had also been called Czechs, Czechs or Slovaks, Czechoslovaks, and Czech Slavs.⁵⁷ In broader terms, the names of the Czechs and Slovaks meaning a single nation could appear in many forms: both as Czechoslovaks and Czechoslavs, which were for Pražák interchangeable. **

Pražák produced numerous historical examples to support his idea of the common past and heritage of the Czechs, Moravians and Slovaks. Particular importance was given to the proximity of their languages. The fact that the Czechs and Slovaks could understand each other meant for Pražák that the two groups were speaking just one language with different dialects. Likewise the visible similarities between the rural cultures of parts of Moravia and Slovakia and the formal similarities between their material cultures offered proof, he argued, of the

⁵² Ladislav Holý, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation. National Identity and the Post-Communist Social Transformation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 95.

⁵³ Masaryk, 'Independent Bohemia', 116-124; 'The Washington Declaration', *Virtual Archive of Central European History*, Cornell University, available at http://dspace.library.cornell.edu/bitstream/1813/2139/1/Founding_of_Czechoslovakia_1918-1924.pdf, accessed on 12 March 2013.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Holý, *The Little Czech*, 95. It should also be noted that the French title of the Czechoslovak National Council, the Paris-based exile government during the First World War, was 'Conseil National des Pays Tchèques,' where, again, 'Tchèques' stood for both Czech and Slovak. Although this body of politicians attempted to create a new political entity, they wished to prevent any fears of balkanisation of Central Europe that the Allies might have had.

⁵⁵ Albert Pražák, *Československý národ*, Bratislava: Akademie, 1925.

⁵⁶ František Kutnar and Ladislav Marek, *Přehledné dějiny českého a slovenského dějepisectví. Od počátků národní kultury až do sklonku třicátých let 20.století*, Prague: Lidové noviny, 891-892.

⁵⁷ Albert Pražák, *Československý národ*, Prague: Akademia, 1925, 14.

existence of 'Czechoslovak national unity.'⁵⁸ The research of ethnographers and historians he quoted provided enough evidence for him to claim that at the turn of the century, there was 'an organic link between Moravian Slovakia and [what was then] Hungarian Slovakia.'⁵⁹ The literary work of the dramatists Alois and Vilém Mrštík, or the paintings of Joža Uprka based around village scenes and events showed how ethnographic material from Moravian Slovakia had clear parallels in Slovak folk culture.⁶⁰

The attempts to reassess the geography of national history and culture were made not only by politicians and historians, but also art historians, who likewise started studying national art in the light of the new political situation.⁶¹ Zapletal's call for research into the art of the new political entity was answered by the publication of two books on 'Czechoslovak art' by Czech Vienna school followers, although, since they maintained the methods learnt at Vienna, the works were rather different from what Zapletal had perhaps envisaged.

Both *Československé umění* (Czechoslovak Art, 1926) and *Umění československého lidu* (The Art of the Czechoslovak People, 1928), were intended as introductory texts for a domestic audience as well as, in the case of the earlier volume, a foreign readership, since *Československé umění* was also published in English, German and French and contained summaries in many other languages. Most of the authors of the books were from the circle of Vienna school followers in Prague. *Československé umění* was compiled by Zdeněk Wirth with contributions by Birnbaum, Antonín Matějček (1889-1950) and the archaeologist Josef Schráníl (1883-1940).⁶² They co-wrote the main text and provided commentary on the extensive visual material, focusing on areas of their expertise.

As chief conservator and protector of monuments of the new Czechoslovak state, Wirth had ample opportunity to become involved in writing up relevant laws and gave him access to decision-making about historic buildings and museums.⁶³ He also authored a number of texts not only on monument protection in the new political context but also on various aspects of art in Bohemia. For Wirth *Československé umění* was a programme statement and 'in a way, the expression of the opinions of one generation on the meaning of our art.'⁶⁴ Attention was given to 'both the greatest periods in the history of Czechoslovak art: Gothic and Baroque, and the significant individuals characteristic for this development,' and the

⁵⁸ Pražák, *Československý národ*, 11.

⁵⁹ Pražák, *Československý národ*, 11.

⁶⁰ Pražák cites e.g. Pavol Blaho, *Hlas* 4, 293, Ján Botto, *Slovenská čítanka*, Praha: Moravsko-slezská Beseda, 1911, 84. Pražák also included 17 pages of quotations from historical documents and speeches referring to the concepts of 'Czechoslovak nation,' 'Czechoslovaks,' or 'Czech Slavs' spanning the beginning of the 8th century and 1925.

⁶¹ Cf. Bartlová, 'Creating Borders', 129-133.

⁶² Small contributions to the descriptions of the visual material were made František Žákavec, J. Alsner, Rudolf Hlubinka, František Xaver Jiřík, K. Kühn.

⁶³ Kristina Uhlíková, 'Zdeněk Wirth, český historik umění a organizátor památkové péče', in Jiří Roháček and Kristina Uhlíková, eds., *Zdeněk Wirth pohledem dnešní doby*, Prague: Artefactum/ÚDU AV ČR, 2011, 14-15.

⁶⁴ Zdeněk Wirth, ed., *Československé umění*, Prague: Vesmír, 1926, 32.

individual contributions surveyed the so-called high art of Czechoslovakia, from the early Middle Ages until the late 19th century.⁶⁵

The authors were indeed mindful of the political construct of Czechoslovak art, for it features not only in the title of the book but also serves to introduce each section on a specific period, which refers to an aspect of 'Czechoslovak' culture in one form or another, projecting the notion of Czechoslovakism onto the past. For example when discussing mediaeval art, Birnbaum introduced the subject claiming that 'the development of Romanesque sculpture in Czechoslovakia [sic] was closely connected ... with the development of monumental architecture.'⁶⁶ Nevertheless, this is as far as notions of Czechoslovakism went and the subsequent analysis focused mostly on works of art in Bohemia, especially in Prague, and, less frequently, in Moravia. This pattern was characteristic of all the chapters and the approach of other contributors. The Baroque, for instance, was identified by Wirth as another peak in 'the history of Czechoslovak art.'⁶⁷ In Wirth's view, 'in the last decade of the seventeenth century, Baroque in Czechoslovakia [sic] finds new forms of development' and Baroque architecture grew into one of the most valuable in Central Europe. He documented this development, however, solely with examples from Prague, omitting any monuments from Moravia and let alone Slovakia.⁶⁸

As a result of this attitude which privileged examples from Bohemia, no works of art from Slovakia or Ruthenia appeared in this publication and even the extensive illustrated section did not include a single work from this part of the new state. As a result, the artistic development of Czechoslovakia was mostly limited to Prague or Bohemia. Indeed, Wirth, in fact, rationalised the geographical and ethnic limitations of the selection in his concluding paragraph where he claimed that the works of art were selected on the basis of their local (meaning national) origin and 'their relationship to Czechoslovak national culture and history.'⁶⁹ This emphasis on national identity and the omission of art from Slovakia or art by Bohemian Germans was indicative of the approach to the visual arts in Czechoslovakia and the canon defined by the Vienna school graduates. For them the so-called high art of Czechoslovakia consisted of a body of works of art selected on an exclusive ethnic basis.

The second text, *Umění československého lidu*, can be seen as a kind of antithesis to the earlier work in terms of its geographical focus. Compiled again by Wirth, with contributions by Matějček and Ladislav Lábek (1872-1970), an ethnographer from Plzeň, it addressed the topic of vernacular art.⁷⁰ Although this book did not have the same distribution in other languages, it contained summaries in foreign languages and its message was equally important. The authors intended it as a critique of the identification of folk art with national art and they located the inspiration for folk culture in the forms of high art. At the same time, they recognized the place of folk art in the history of Czech, or Czechoslovak art, because

⁶⁵ Wirth, *Československé umění*, 32.

⁶⁶ Birnbaum in Wirth, *Československé umění*, 7.

⁶⁷ Birnbaum in Wirth, *Československé umění*, 32.

⁶⁸ Birnbaum in Wirth, *Československé umění*, 32.

⁶⁹ Birnbaum in Wirth, *Československé umění*, 32.

⁷⁰ Zdeněk Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, Prague: Vesmír, 1928.

– as they stated – in the period between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, folk art ‘adopted the role [...] of a cultural agent in the nation.’⁷¹ The geographical frontiers of their interest remained the same, the state of Czechoslovakia, but now their attention was indeed turned to the regions east of Bohemia. The individual sections and illustrations examined the different aspects of folk art in these regions, such as architecture, interior decoration, ornament, pottery, minor sculpture and traditional costume; their material, techniques and sources of inspiration.

In his introductory paragraphs, Wirth explained the rationale behind covering the entire territory of the Czechoslovak state in the introduction where he claimed that the eastern regions, industrially and culturally under-developed, had preserved folk art to a greater extent than the western parts. There was a ‘different level of cultural maturity in the individual Czechoslovak lands until the mid-nineteenth century and an uneven level of cultural progress.’⁷² Folk art in Bohemia had been lost, he argued, because it had become industrialised and urbanised, but a few pockets of regional folk art could still be found in Moravia alongside ‘large areas of living folk art in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia.’⁷³

The fact that this group of scholars decided to compile a volume on folk art requires more detailed commentary especially because most Czech art historians linked with Vienna were critical of the folk art movement. Matějček and Wirth in particular had been sceptical over the use of folk motives in contemporary design and visual art and fought against the application of folkloric forms to architecture and art.⁷⁴ Rather than being the expression of the nation, folk art was, for Wirth as much as for Riegl before him, the product of one particular class, that is, the peasantry or ‘the small people of the villages.’⁷⁵ This class was defined by its isolation, its relative self-sufficiency, but also by the influence of the patriarchal family structure and its slow pace of life.

Consequently, for Wirth, the artistic practices of the peasantry were determined by a rustic naivety and informed by the instincts of the primitive soul and traditions.⁷⁶ In his view, which paralleled that of Riegl, folk culture had declined with the rise of modern industry, better communications and changing living conditions, and its remnants could be only ‘seen in museums or Slovak villages.’⁷⁷ It had become a historical document and should have stayed as such rather than being exploited in the form of ornaments and folk motifs by the contemporary design industry.⁷⁸

⁷¹ Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, 24.

⁷² Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, 11. Ruthenia had already been focus of a number of ethnographic studies – cf. Renata Tyršová, *Svěráz v zemích československých*, Plzeň: Český deník, 1918; Amalie Kožmínová, *Podkarpatská Rus. Práce a život lidu po stránce kulturní, hospodářské a národopisné*, Prague, 1922.

⁷³ Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, 11.

⁷⁴ Zdeněk Wirth. ‘Lidové a moderní umění’, *Styl. Časopis pro architekturu, umělecká řemesla a úpravu měst* vol 1, no. 2, 1909–1910, 9–16.

⁷⁵ Wirth, ‘Lidové a moderní umění’, 9.

⁷⁶ Wirth, ‘Lidové a moderní umění’, 10.

⁷⁷ Wirth, ‘Lidové a moderní umění’, 15.

⁷⁸ Wirth, ‘Lidové a moderní umění’, 15–16.

Matějček expressed a similar scepticism.⁷⁹ For him, there were important differences between high art and folk art in relation to their value and originality. High art consisted of independent, original works of art by great individuals and these works were genetically interconnected. Folk art, on the other hand, in a more general sense, was the art of anonymous authors without an individual, personal will; it was a secondary and derivative art, incapable of creating new values.⁸⁰ Matějček articulated these views in a number of articles, perhaps most notably in 'O vyschlém prameni,' the title of which, translated as 'On a Dried-Up Spring,' indicates his attitude to the subject.

For Matějček folk art was always derived from primary, higher forms of art, and it was this high art, which produced the particular creative style or epoch. This, also explained why folk art could not be identified with national art. He argued that folk art only flourished when there was a *lack* of Czech artists and, 'when the nation as a whole was pushed away from cooperation in artistic culture and [... Czech art] was only local art. [...] In this period without national art [the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries], the common people assumed the creative lead and nationalized the outcomes of the great international culture.'⁸¹

Matějček therefore acknowledged the historical importance of folk art, but he limited it to a specific period in the past. In the present, he claimed, the nation had its own artistic geniuses who created new independent art and brought about the decline and eventual demise of folk art.⁸² The national art of the present was thus to be found not in the class that once produced folk art, but where 'the power of the national spirit has its greatest creative tension, where a true artistic act is born,' that is in the stratum of consciously creative individuals.⁸³ As Riegl had argued before him, Matějček claimed that folk art was the product of a conservative rural culture that was dying out, while international (and universal) art epitomised the creative achievements of the nation.⁸⁴ Although Matějček as well as Wirth, in *Umění československého lidu*, recognized the ways in which folk art represented a creative appropriation of the Baroque and had resulted in the 'regeneration of Germanized Prague' at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they still saw it as belonging to the past. Accordingly, they argued that its originality and significance should not be exaggerated.⁸⁵

These views reflected Riegl's critical position, which the Czech authors built on and developed, but inasmuch as they remained convinced that one could still talk of the 'national character' of art, Wirth and his colleagues developed a strand of thinking that ran contrary to the beliefs of their Vienna School teachers. Where Riegl

⁷⁹ Antonín Matějček, 'O vyschlém prameni', in *Hlasy světa a domova*, Prague: Spolek výtvarných umělců Mánes, 1931.

⁸⁰ Matějček, 'O vyschlém prameni', 205.

⁸¹ Matějček, 'O vyschlém prameni', 218.

⁸² Matějček, 'O vyschlém prameni', 218-219.

⁸³ Matějček, 'O vyschlém prameni', 220.

⁸⁴ Cf. Georg Vassold, *Alois Riegl und die Kunstgeschichte als Kulturgeschichte: Überlegungen zum Frühwerk des Wiener Gelehrten*, Freiburg: Rombach, 2004. Peter Noever, Artur Rosenauer and Georg Vasold, eds., *Alois Riegl Revisited: Tagungsband Zum Symposium 'Alois Riegl 1905/2005'*, Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2010.

⁸⁵ Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, 5 and 24.

had emphasised the extent to which art functioned as a site of cultural borrowing, exchange and fusion, they argued that ethnic differences were visible in artistic form.

Not all Czech art historians shared this critical view of folk art. Václav Vilém Štech (1885-1974), for example, one of the most prominent art critics based in Prague, wrote an article 'Podstata lidového umění' (The basis of folk art) that was meant as a critical reaction to Wirth's *Umění československého lidu*. Although accepting the significance of Wirth's book, Štech also drew attention to some of its problematic generalized assumptions.⁸⁶ Like Matějček and Wirth, Štech recognised that folk art was derivative in certain respects, and involved the appropriation of higher forms of art (he used the term 'rustikalizace,' i.e. 'rustication') but gave it a more active and creative role than his colleagues. The process of appropriation was for him a transfer, reformulation, and reassessment of extraneous models that could be taken from abroad or from the culture of other social classes. Folk art therefore reused the ideas and motifs of the works of high art, adapting them creatively to the social contexts of the rural peasant class.⁸⁷ Štech's conclusions were based, in part, on the rather different methodological framework he used. Although a student of Wölfflin he eschewed the concern with formal language alone that had arguably been central to the way folk art was discussed, and combined stylistic analysis with social and economic history. For Štech the relation between folk art and 'high' art reflected the differences between the visual cultures of the city and the village.⁸⁸

Štech identified 'a special, melodic sense in our folk art [that] connects the segment and matter and transfers each objective fact [...] into a lyrical ornament.'⁸⁹ Alongside this slightly romanticised view of folk art as an active force, role, he also examined the relationship between the local impulses and external stimuli that impacted on folk art. Thus folk art was shaped by local tradition and, simultaneously, external influences that included the art of other social classes as well as imported artistic forms from abroad. Importantly, in contrast to Wirth and Matějček, for whom folk art could be identified with national art only during a specific period, Štech claimed that there was a continuous link between national identity and folk art. As a social phenomenon, folk art was for him a collective activity and it was expressive of the national culture.⁹⁰

In order to provide evidence for his claims, Štech, like Wirth and Matějček, took a number of examples from Slovakia, where 'so many independent regions are hardly accessible' and where many artefacts of 'high' culture, such as that of the Romans or Magyars, had been preserved.⁹¹ Folk art, too, preserved in these regions, had a specific melodious and pictorial character, which distinguished it from that of the Magyars or Germans. Štech saw this as a proof of the close relation between

⁸⁶ Štech, 'Umění města a venkova', in *Pod povrchem tvarů*, Prague: Václav Petr, 1941, 52-60.

⁸⁷ Štech, 'Podstata lidového umění', in *Pod povrchem tvarů*. Prague: Václav Petr, 1941, 47.

⁸⁸ Štech, 'Umění', 52.

⁸⁹ Štech, 'Podstata', 45.

⁹⁰ Štech, 'Umění', 59.

⁹¹ Štech, 'Podstata', 47.

Slovak and Czech folk art and therefore evidence of the 'Czechoslovak unity' promoted by Pražák.⁹²

Published in 1929, at a time of continuing political and ethnic claims of the Hungarians over parts of the Slovak territory, Štech's essay also argued that Slovak vernacular expression differed considerably from that of Hungary. It had 'a different rhythm,' 'a different logic, a different imagination and different colour and melodic quality.'⁹³ He thus gave folk art a strong political role, for Slovak folk art 'more clearly retained the joint destinies' of the Czechs and Slovaks than any urban artistic practice, and contained, 'the reasons of political divisions and unions ... [and] the blood relation of the Czech and Slovak peoples...'⁹⁴

This view of the Slovaks and their art was again a consciously response to the current political and cultural situation: the birth of a new Czechoslovak state in which the Czechs and Slovaks were seen as one nation which could be documented by finding similarities in folk art. Indeed, even though Wirth and Matějček had been dismissive of folk art, they still acknowledged the existence of a joint Czech – Slovak cultural heritage, although at different levels of 'cultural maturity.' In their interpretation Bohemia possessed high art and was easily identifiable with the artistic development of western Europe, whereas Slovakia, Ruthenia and certain rural regions of Moravia were rich in vernacular traditions. Although mainstream Czech art history of this period was relatively free of explicitly racial rhetoric, it did construct its arguments on the basis of questionable ethnic and linguistic divisions. Moreover, it in many ways mirrored the ideas of German Bohemian scholars based in Prague, such as Joseph Neuwirth (1855-1934), or earlier figures such as Alfred Woltmann (1841-1880), who had maintained a nationalistic view of the (German) ethnic basis of art in Bohemia.⁹⁵ Neuwirth, for example, an academic adversary of Dvořák, who was briefly based in Prague and Brno, had held that mediaeval art of any quality in Bohemia had been German, because only Germans had had the financial and artistic resources to accomplish works of such high quality.⁹⁶

The assumptions on the part of Wirth, Matějček and others concerning the historical and cultural division of Czechoslovakia and the cultural and economic superiority of Bohemia over the eastern Slovak regions may be linked to the political histories of the two national groups. In the Habsburg monarchy the lands of the Bohemian crown had always existed as a historical, although not autonomous, entity, while the Slovaks never achieved recognition of their status within Hungary.⁹⁷ The interwar empowerment of the Czechs was further encouraged by an advanced national self-awareness that dated back to the Habsburg monarchy. Although the Austrian government granted some degree of autonomy to its minorities, allowing for the development of many specifically Czech cultural and

⁹² Štech, 'Podstata', 47.

⁹³ Štech, 'Podstata', 47.

⁹⁴ Štech, 'Umění', 59.

⁹⁵ Cf. Jindřich Vybíral, 'What Is 'Czech' in Art in Bohemia? Alfred Woltmann and Defensive Mechanisms of Czech Artistic Historiography', *Kunstchronik* 59/1, January 2006, 1–7.

⁹⁶ Josef Neuwirth, 'Bildende Kunst und Kunstgewerbe', in Rudolf Lodgman von Auen, *Deutschböhmen*, Berlin: Verlag Ullstein und Co, 1919.

⁹⁷ Jan Rychlík, 'Czech-Slovak Relations, 1918-1939', in Cornwall and Evans, *Czechoslovakia*, 15.

political institutions, the Slovaks, ruled by the Hungarian administration in Budapest, were more restricted. Subjected to extensive magyarisation, the Slovaks were not given many opportunities to institutionalise their rising national awareness. Indeed, after the Treaty of Trianon, the interwar Hungarian government continued to lodge claims to the Slovak territory.

Czech efforts to create tighter links with Slovakia on the basis of linguistic and ethnic proximity were indeed challenged by many Hungarians in the early twentieth century. Before and after the war, Lajos Steier (1885-1938), a historian and publicist of Hungarian origin, published a number of propagandistic pamphlets arguing against Czech 'imperialism' and in favour of the Magyarisation of Slovakia.⁹⁸ In a short text *There is no Czech Culture in Upper Hungary* published in English 1920, he contested the existence of Czechoslovakia and argued instead for the historic links between Slovaks and Hungarians, calling for the historically 'peaceful and harmonious union' of Upper Hungary (Slovakia) with the rest of Hungary.⁹⁹ In Steier's view, 'according to the false theory of the Czechs, the Slovak nation is in reality Czech and the Slovak nation and the Czechs together form a cultural as well as a geographical and historical unit.'¹⁰⁰ At the same time, Steier used the same argument as Birnbaum in his defence of against Zapletal's accusation of being too Germanic – he emphasised the closer historical affinity between the Czechs and Germans as opposed to the alliance of the Czechs and Slovak constructed on the basis of their Slavic origins.

Despite the obvious problems with Steier's point of view, his claim that the Czechs ignored or dismissed the Slovak national idea was not ungrounded. The high-handed attitudes of many Czechs to Slovakia (let alone Ruthenia) were linked to a belief in their cultural and historical superiority. On the other hand, however, it needs to be pointed out that the Slovaks social elite could sometimes cultivate such an image themselves. As an example, Milan Hodža (1878-1944), an influential nationalist Slovak politician and historian who became the leader of the Czechoslovak Agrarian Party in 1918, promoted the distinction between 'the naturally practical and collaborative Slovak people,' dressed in simple clothes and skilled in hand and the 'arrogant, fainéant, reactionary, factious aristocrats' of Hungary.¹⁰¹ Linking Slovak national awareness to the humble virtues of peasantry thus allowed him to develop a claim for the surviving Slavic connections that were retained in the core of the nation and formed the basis for the new union with the Czechs.

Conclusion

To an extent, the image of Slovakia as based on folk culture built on the historical stereotypes about the noble Magyar or Czech versus the Slovak peasant.¹⁰² The two

⁹⁸ Lajos Steier, *Csehek és tótok*, Budapest, 1919; Steier, *A tót-kérdés*, Liptovský Mikuláš, 1912.

⁹⁹ Lajos Steier, *There is no Czech Culture in Upper Hungary*, Budapest, 1920.

¹⁰⁰ Steier, *There is no Czech Culture*, 42.

¹⁰¹ Milan Hodža, 'Šviháci', *Slovenský Týždenník* V/19, 10 May 1907, reprinted in Milan Hodža *Články, reči, štúdie* 1, Prague: Novina, 1930, 141-145.

¹⁰² Cf. Louis Felbermann, *Hungary and Its People*, London: Griffith Farran and Co., 1893, 210.

Czech publications on 'Czechoslovak art' presented art in Slovakia, if it was mentioned at all, using the same framework. The fact that the most influential interwar art historians were concentrated in the main cultural institutions in Prague, coupled with their firm orientation towards demonstrating the connections between Czech and Western European art, led to a neglect of the regions further east and to neglect of eastern connections in art. The art of Slovakia was, in these interpretations, very much the art of the 'East' (however vaguely defined), which a number of Czech art historians taught in Vienna saw as primitive, low forms of art that now belonged to museums.

The question of 'East or West' was therefore applied not only to the historical affiliation of art and architecture on the territory of Czechoslovakia but also to the methodological orientation of scholars. Through their publications and polemical debates, those based in Prague who followed the theories of especially Riegl and Dvořák, thus effectively answered the 'East or West' dilemma in favour of the western preference and managed to transform the history of art in the current political conditions to suit the new national borders while still faithful to the original ideas of the Vienna school.

Discussion of this debate may seem to be of local significance, except for the fact that it casts light on the dissemination of ideas from Vienna across Central Europe in the early twentieth century. Moreover, this episode shows clearly that while 1918 and the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic may be regarded in certain respects as a historical caesura, in others, continuity with the Habsburg past was the order of the day, most particularly in intellectual life.

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