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Fakulta
humanitních
studií UK

Faculty
of Humanities,
Charles University

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DAGMAR HÁJKOVÁ, PAVEL HORÁK, VOJTĚCH KESSLER, MIROSLAV MICHELA (edd.), *Sláva republice! Oficiální svátky a oslavy v meziválečném Československu*,

Praha 2018, Academia – Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, v. v. i., 536 s., ISBN 978-80-200-2870-9

Sláva republice! examines national day commemorations and celebrations during the Czechoslovak First Republic. This richly illustrated volume asks questions such as: how were commemorative days decided upon? How long did it take to create a comprehensive national day calendar? How were these days politically negotiated? By answering these questions, the volume's editors seek to shed light on how the calendar contributed to establishing loyalty to and identification with the new nation and to what extent (if at all) these efforts were successful.

The first chapter of the volume, by Jana Čechurová, places national days into their legal context and introduces them as part of a wider symbolic matrix that included the republic's flag, coat of arms and national anthem (pp. 46–48). She charts the process that led to passing the national day legislation in 1925, including the various alternative proposals that were made. Čechurová explains that the fact that this law was passed did not mean that the red-letter days were set in stone for all concerned, as the many proposals to change and modify it demonstrate (pp. 63–64, 67–68).

The subsequent chapters can be divided, as the editors themselves propose (pp. 32–33), into three categories, which represent the different purposes of the days. Chapters two, three and four represent days that provided the three foundational pillars of the Czechoslovak state. The first of these, chapter two, deals with 28 October: the foundation of state day. Dagmar Hájková and Miroslav Michela point out that 28 October had already been declared a state holiday in 1919; its proponents hoped that it would contribute to unifying the nation. Instead, the day became a litmus test that measured various degrees of loyalty and disloyalty to the state. The day was controversial with the Slovaks – since 28 October was chosen rather than 30 October, when the Martin declaration was signed (p. 86) – and with the German and Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia (see e.g. pp. 101–102 and p. 112).

The second and third pillars of the republic's foundational myth are somewhat intriguing examples, since neither 7 March, President Masaryk's birthday (chapter three), nor 2 July, the anniversary of the Battle of Zborov (chapter four) were

officially declared national days, although the latter did become Czechoslovak Army Day in 1928 (p. 189). Dagmar Hájková and Pavel Horák reason that the president's birthday celebration – symbolically a direct continuation of the feasts organised for the Habsburg Emperor's birthday (pp. 137–139) – was not included in the legislation since it was seen as a 'traditional celebration' and 'was taken for granted' (p. 141). Whilst the other two celebrations in this category caused conflict with the minorities, the president was generally adored (p. 161).

Vojtěch Kessler's chapter on the 1917 Battle of Zborov highlights the myth-building potential of the day: 2 July was placed into a linear, teleological narrative that started with the defeat at the Battle of White Mountain (1620) and ended with the deeds of the legionnaires and the establishment of Czechoslovakia (p. 191). However, the Zborov legend also came with its own paradoxes: legionnaires fought against their own compatriots (pp. 188–189) and whilst the leaders of the new state rejected Habsburg militarism, the new state itself had also emerged from war (p. 185). The day met with opposition from Germans and Hungarians, who had fought in the Habsburg army, and also from the Slovaks, for whom Zborov lacked relevance (p. 194).

The second category of national days – discussed in chapters five to eight – concerns days that had a tradition of commemoration. Pavel Horák's excellent chapter on the 1 May festivities is the odd one out in this list, as it does not concern medieval figures, but rather an international day. 1 May became a national day in 1919 when the politicians of the ruling parties agreed that it would be celebrated anyway and making it official meant that state authorities would be better able to control the day's events (pp. 223–224). Incongruously, 1 May was perhaps the only holiday for which event planning was not done by the central authorities, but by the various associations and political parties (p. 246). One of the most interesting aspects of the various (highly choreographed) parades was the (unofficial) competition between these different groups for the best parade, giving the day the character of a sporting competition.

The following three chapters deal with the cults of medieval figures. Whilst the more political commemorations of the 'triumvirate' highlighted the state's contemporary achievements, the medieval figures gave a historical justification for its existence. As Dagmar Hájková and Eva Hajdinová demonstrate in chapter six, this was especially the case with Jan Hus day. President Masaryk himself was a great proponent of the day (see e.g. p. 274) and both the Czechoslovak Church and various other associations lobbied for it to be recognised as an official holiday (pp. 278–281). This support for the Hussite past, however, pitted the state's ideology against Catholics and Catholic saints such as John of Nepomuk

(pp. 274–277) and hence, especially once the day had been granted official status, against the Vatican (283–284).

As the editors observe in their concluding remarks to the volume, it was Saints Cyril and Methodius Day that had the best chance of becoming a success (p. 472). Miroslav Michela's chapter makes that potential clear. The cult had a long tradition of being commemorated in Moravia and Slovakia and, more pertinently for the First Republic, it offered a historical precedent for a common Czech-Slovak state in the form of the ninth-century Great Moravian Empire (p. 310). Even so, as Michela shows, the cult of the Byzantine missionaries became politicised early on in 1918 (see e.g. pp. 319–323) and the heavily promoted religious aspect did not find resonance with more liberal circles.

Chapter eight by Eva Hajdinová offers insights into the interwar commemorations of the Bohemian patron saint, St Wenceslas. Like Cyril and Methodius Day, St Wenceslas Day on 28 September also had a unifying potential: as the patron saint of Bohemia, St Wenceslas is the embodiment of Czech statehood (p. 359) and both the Czech and the German communities (pp. 357–358) had a tradition of commemorating the day. 28 September gradually shifted from a religious to a national commemoration during the first half of the 1920s (pp. 361–363). The commemorative peak came with the 1929 St Wenceslas Millennium (pp. 365–376) after which the day became smaller in scale (p. 387).

The final two chapters – nine and ten – by Kessler and Michela respectively, examine alternative commemorations among the German and Hungarian minorities. Kessler's chapter on the German minority's alternative commemorative days looks at 4 March, the anniversary of the death of twenty-five German demonstrators in the town of Kadaň during clashes with the Czechoslovak armed forces (p. 404). Kessler demonstrates how what began as an event closely linked to the town's social democrats later shifted to the right and became a focus for nationalist propaganda (p. 410).

Michela's analysis of the celebration of two Hungarian national days amongst the Hungarian minority – the anniversary of the 1848-1849 revolution, commemorated on 15 March, and the feast day of the founder of the Hungarian state St Stephen – is couched in Roger Brubaker's framework on nationalism following the demise of empires in Central Europe. Michela examines these celebrations from three perspectives: nationalism and national minorities; the nationalism of the newly established state; and the nationalism of the (external) motherland (p. 444). Both Kessler and Michela highlight an important point: after 1938, as the minorities 'returned' to their 'motherland' the traditions that had been suppressed made a rapid return (see p. 425 for the German, p. 466 for Hungarian traditions).

The volume offers a fascinating insight into the processes whereby national days and other commemorations were negotiated, celebrated (or opposed) and how they were intended to instil loyalty towards the new state. Perhaps unsurprisingly, especially given that it included a large number of commemorative days, the Czechoslovak calendar – itself a major compromise after heated negotiations – ended up highlighting the differences within the new state, rather than unifying the nation. One of the volume's strengths lies in how each chapter explores these commemorations from different perspectives: how the Czechs, the Slovaks and also the national minorities, the Germans and Hungarians, viewed the various days.

The chapters lay out a similar trajectory for all the holidays over the interwar period: from initial enthusiasm into a certain commemorative fatigue from the 1930s onwards. Although the calendar of commemorative days remained largely unchanged, the commemorative events themselves declined in spectacle for various reasons, not least the economic crisis of the early 1930s and the rise of Nazi Germany. The latter also contributed to a change in the meaning of the national days, which were now less about the achievement of independence and more about the need to protect it.

The volume's rich collection of visual material is certainly one of its strong points. On the other hand, the length of the chapters is sometimes excessive; most are around forty pages, some even longer. The length could have been better managed by reducing the large number of examples of commemorative events given. It is certainly important in a volume such as this that not all the examples cited are from the official commemorations that (with some notable exceptions) took place in Prague. At times, however, the examples given from other places muddy rather than clarify the overall argument.

The final section of each chapter offers a brief glimpse into what happened to the national days in question after 1938. This is certainly valuable, but a conclusion that would have brought the various threads of the chapter together is missing. The volume's overall conclusion (pp. 469–475) draws some general points from the chapters and the role that national days played in the interwar period, but a more analytical approach could have highlighted the various interconnections between the days themselves, which are often mentioned but are not fully explored.

An important aspect of national days is their performative function and their occupation of the symbolic space within which they are celebrated. The introductory chapter by Dagmar Hájková, Pavel Horák, Vojtěch Kessler and Miroslav Michela does an excellent job in placing these commemorative events into a larger methodological framework that explains their importance as a perfor-

mance, drawing on Erwin Goffman's metaphor of the theatre and social interactions (pp. 26–28). Whilst all the chapters deal with how national days were staged, the discussion of the performative function of the days can at times slide into the descriptive rather than the analytical. Two examples where this is more successfully presented are Pavel Horák's chapter on 1 May and Dagmar Hájková and Miroslav Michela's chapter on 28 October – especially the section entitled 'Sounds, colours and gestures' (*Zvuky, barvy, gesta*, pp. 97–99), which features an outstanding analysis of how the national days were performed, bringing the parades to life.

Despite the minor criticisms mentioned, this is an exceptional volume that provides a comprehensive exploration of the commemorative landscape in the interwar Czechoslovak Republic.

Andrea Talabér