

— Writing architectural  
history and building  
a Czechoslovak  
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Issues of nation and language in the architectural history writing of Bohemia and Moravia – those Habsburg provinces now more or less confined by the borders of the Czech Republic – occurred to me in a rather serendipitous way as the result of my interest in Czech history in general, and in the writings of Czech and German architectural historians of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century in particular. Both interests originated from my research on the Bohemian architect Johann Santini Aichel, who was active in the first 23 years of the eighteenth century and was a Prague contemporary of the Viennese Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach. I began to study Santini because I was intrigued by the stubborn and anachronistic plastic qualities of his buildings. I was driven by my aim to discover the architect's, or his clients', intentions behind those strange features. Before me, others had been struck by them: in a 1957 article, "Bohemian Hawksmoor", Nikolaus Pevsner wrote about one of Santini's projects, the pilgrimage church on Zelená Hora, the Green Hill, at Žďár: "the façade [...] may look like a backdrop from *Doctor Caligari*".<sup>1)</sup>

Through my study, I started to understand how Santini's 'Baroque-Gothic' architecture – as it was called in most literature – played a role in the process of reconstruction of identity by local Bohemian and Moravian monasteries that during the fanatical Counter-Reformation of the seventeenth century had been marginalized by an overpowering Jesuit-Habsburg alliance.<sup>2)</sup> I discovered in Santini Aichel – a *Swiss-Lombard* by origin (a third-generation immigrant) and a *Czech* by marriage, in close contact with the *Italian* community in Prague as well as integrated into the higher, mostly allochthonous, *German*-speaking circles of Prague society – a choice subject for the study of the sophisticated nature and techniques of artistic *métissage*.<sup>3)</sup> One of my theses was, finally, that it was precisely his condition as a *German*-speaking *Czech* of *Lombard* origins which placed the successful architect Santini in an ambiguous but not uncomfortable position *between* nationalities, *between* architectural cultures.

Hence, while studying the reception of Santini in the architecture literature of the end of the nineteenth and the

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- 1) Nikolaus Pevsner: Bohemian Hawksmoor. In: *Architectural Review* (London) 1957, CXXI, nr. 721, pp. 112-114, here p. 114.
- 2) Dirk De Meyer: *Johann Santini Aichel – architectuur en ambiguïteit*, Eindhoven: Technische Universiteit, 1997 (two volumes).
- 3) Cf. Dirk De Meyer: *Patria est, ubicumque est bene. Les architectes italiens à Prague, XVIII<sup>e</sup> et début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. In: *Les étrangers dans la ville: minorités et espace urbain du bas Moyen Âge à l'époque moderne*, sous la direction de Jacques Bottin et Donatella Calabi, Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1999, pp. 345-357. – Dirk De Meyer: *I Santini-Aichel un caso di migrazione di architetti nella Praga barocca*. In: S. Della Torre, Tiziano Mannoni, Valeria Pracchi (a cura di): *Magistri d'Europa. Eventi, relazioni, strutture della migrazione di artisti e costruttori dai laghi Lombardi*, Como: Nodolibri, 1997, pp. 237-248.

beginning of the twentieth century, I was struck by treatment of him in nationalist disputes between Austro-Germanic and Czech scholars. I discovered that not only ruthless dictators make people disappear, but also well-versed European architectural historians.

In what follows, the ‘material’ is not the buildings of an architect, but the writings of architectural historians. I present those writings in a specific political context. However, while bringing to the fore issues of nationalism and race



11/ Johann Santini Aichel: Saint John Nepomucen pilgrimage church on Zelená Hora, the Green Hill, near Zďár nad Sazavou, 1719-1722. Photo by Dirk De Meyer, 1991.

in their publications, I have no intention of reducing the authors’ work to mere nationalist writing. Because, as Sigfried Giedion said in *Architecture, You and Me* (1958), “nothing is more embarrassing today than when small-minded people, taking advantage of the fact that they have been born later in time, venture to criticize those who first opened up paths along which we are now treading.”<sup>4)</sup> Rather I want to understand some of the ‘mechanics’ of architectural historiography in ‘the first age of nationalism’.

#### Czech art historians, nationalism, and modern art history

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, modern art history and nationalism came of age side by side. In the century that followed, nineteenth-century ideas of “nation” and “national spirit” continued to impose on our thinking, as Claire Farago has argued, unstable categories that conflated seventeenth century notions of time, geography, and culture with the nineteenth-century politics of nation-state, race, and colonialism. By “producing histories of ‘national culture’, scholars helped to manufacture the modern idea of a nation as an enduring collective. A significant aspect of the *problematic* of ‘nationalism’ is, therefore, to take into account the role of the scholars who produced it.”<sup>5)</sup>

Nationalism should not be understood as an atavistic relic of tribal life whose persistence in modern societies should be considered a lamentable anomaly. Rather, as the Czech philosopher and sociologist Ernest Gellner pointed out,<sup>6)</sup> nationalism and nations are responses to specific needs of modern societies. Nations are modern – and they are constructed. Within that construct, Eric Hobsbawm asserted, a powerful combination of representations – visible symbols of collective practices and values, including architecture and its history – “give palpable reality to an otherwise imaginary community.”<sup>7)</sup>

Academic art history had more opportunity to become central in the debate, because it was never more sure of itself and never more methodologically ambitious than in the Germany and Austria of the first decades of the twentieth century. As Christopher Wood argued, “art history saw itself as a powerful new *Kulturwissenschaft*, a synthetic, explanatory discipline uniquely positioned to mediate among the history of religion, anthropology, folkloric studies, intellectual history, social history, and the history of political institutions. [...] Art history’s cultural-historical pretensions were rooted in a sense of the special eloquence and explanatory power of

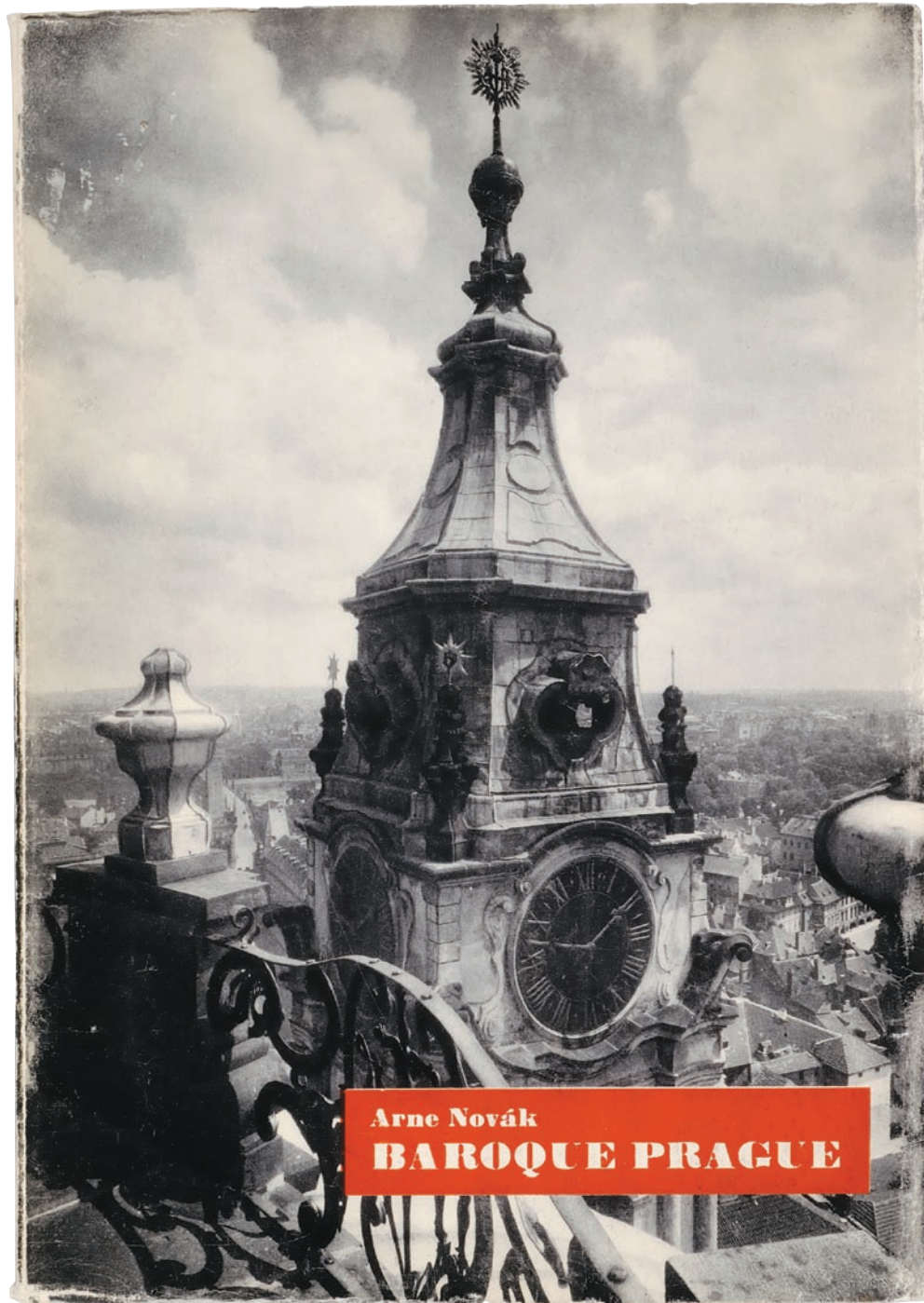
4) Sigfried Giedion: *Architecture, You and Me. The diary of a development*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958.

5) Claire Farago: “Vision itself has its history”: “Race”, Nation, and Renaissance Art History. In: Claire Farago (Ed.): *Reframing the Renaissance. Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450-1650*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1995, pp. 67-88, here p. 71.

6) Ernest Gellner: *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983.

7) Eric John Hobsbawm: *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.





12/ Arne Novák: *Baroque Prague*, 1938 (translation of the original *Praha barokní*, Prague 1913).  
Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.

its objects. [...] The historian who could grasp the principles of artistic figuration could circumvent the tickets of distant and alien symbolic systems and arrive at the foundations of culture.”<sup>8)</sup> Moreover, *architectural history* in particular was playing a central role in what Alina Payne has called “the imbrication of *Stilgeschichte* (history of style), *Geistesgeschichte* (intellectual history) and *Kulturgeschichte* (cultural history) that shaped art-historical discourse in the first decades of (the) century.”<sup>9)</sup>

In the Czech context, the situation was even more radical. “The modern architectures that emerged,” Eve Blau has written, “[...] were heterodox, politically charged, and characterized by a complex historically rooted dialectic” in which innovative design was “often combined with local reference and historical allusion.”<sup>10)</sup> Further Christopher Long demonstrated how “for scholars and architects alike, history became an ally in the quest for both identity and exclusion.”<sup>11)</sup> Whereas nationalism is traditionally more imminent in literary studies, as the primary material was inescapably partitioned according to national languages, in Prague, *architectural history* could become the chosen ally of political and nationalist discourse, not least because of the lack of a Corneille in Czech literature. There was some reason why the early twentieth-century historian of Czech literature Arne Novák turned to architecture and sculpture for his beautiful yet tragically impressionistic essay *Praha barokní* (Baroque Prague).<sup>12)</sup>

The development of modern art history as a scholarly enterprise was intimately linked to the rehabilitation of the arts of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This process had started with Cornelius Gurlitt’s *Geschichte des Barockstils* of 1887<sup>13)</sup> and with Heinrich Wölfflin’s more synthetic and better structured study – as Riegl would comment<sup>14)</sup> – *Renaissance und Barock*, published one year later.<sup>15)</sup> Subsequently August Schmarsow developed, in his *Barock und Rokoko* of 1897, the first fully positive attitude towards the artistic production of the era.<sup>16)</sup>

For late nineteenth-century Czech scholars a positive stance towards the overall and opulently foregrounded Baroque architecture was less evident. Their

8) Christopher Wood: *Introduction*. In: Christopher Wood (Ed.): *The Vienna School reader: politics and art historical method in the 1930s*. New York, Zone Books, 2000, pp. 9-72, here p. 23.

9) Alina A. Payne: *Architectural history and the history of art: a suspended dialogue*. In: *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 58 (1999), 3, pp. 292-299, here p. 294.

10) Eve Blau: *The City as protagonist: Architecture and the cultures of Central Europe*. In: Eve Blau and Monika Platzer (Eds.): *Shaping the Great City. Modern Architecture in Central Europe 1890-1937*, Munich/London/New York, Prestel, 1999, pp. 10-23, here p. 19.

11) Christopher Long: *East Central Europe: National Identity and International Perspective*. In: *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 61 (2002), 4, pp. 519-529, here p. 521.

12) Arne Novák: *Praha barokní*, Praha 1913. A couple of years earlier, Novák had published a reference work on Czech literature: *Stručné dějiny literatury české*.

13) Cornelius Gurlitt: *Geschichte des Barockstils in Italien*, Stuttgart 1887.

14) Cf. Alois Riegl: *Die Entstehung der Barockkunst in Rom*, Wien 1907. I refer to the French edition *L'origine de l'art baroque à Rome*, ed. Paul Philippot, Paris: Klincksieck, 1993, p. 48. Riegl comments on Gurlitt: “[...] Il écrit beaucoup de livres sur l'art, mais sans éprouver véritablement le besoin de faire des synthèses ou de souligner les facteurs communs. Il s'intéresse plus au détail qu'à la vision globale, il décrit mais n'explique pas [...]”

15) Heinrich Wölfflin: *Renaissance und Barock. Eine Untersuchung über Wesen und Entstehung des Barockstils in Italien*, München 1888.

16) August Schmarsow: *Barock und Rokoko*, Leipzig 1897 (*Beiträge zur Ästhetik der bildenden Künste*, Bd. 2).



interpretation was deeply affected by the memory of the bloody defeat of Czech independence that was the outcome of the Roman-Catholic and Habsburg victory on the White Mountain near Prague in the autumn of 1620. Until halfway through the twentieth century, the 150-year period following that defeat was referred to by the Czechs as the *temno*, or 'dark age'. Any 'national meaning' was hard to find in those decades of humiliation. Moreover, the period had also resulted in a neglect of the Czech language. While Czech remained the language in the countryside, the events of 1620 and the ensuing Habsburg centralization had brought about an "Austrianization" of the Prague idiom. It would only be with the (late) industrialisation of the Prague area and the continuous immigration of people from the countryside that the number of German speakers decreased.<sup>17)</sup>

A parenthesis: we have to be careful here in understanding the concept of 'German' as the use of such a term could lead to confusion. The concept of 'nation' had changing significances throughout the period under consideration. Germanism till the end of the nineteenth century represented a linguistic, cultural and intellectual community rather than a socially, economically and politically integrated group.

The Czech nineteenth century is coloured by an intellectual shift from territorial patriotism to a revolutionary Czech consciousness that was rapidly accompanied by a transformation of the institutions. By the late 1890s the Czech-German language conflict escalated to near revolutionary intensity, resulting in rival Czech cultural, educational and financial institutions springing up in parallel to the long-established German ones. The buildings of these new Czech institutions such as the *Spořitelna Česká*, the Czech Savings Bank, or the new Prague Polytechnic School, both built by Ignace Ullmann, received particular attention in the first Czech architectural history books as respectively the "first building of considerable scale built in Prague by [Czech] high finance" and "the first school building worthy of a civilized nation".<sup>18)</sup>

From the very beginning, historical research secured these developments. For instance, in 1818 the famous *Rukopisy*, the allegedly ancient Czech manuscripts of epic songs about Libussa's judgment, were found – or rather forged – by the librarian Václav Hanka to ensure that the Czechs had an older literature than that of the Germans.<sup>19)</sup>

### The German historiography of the late nineteenth century

However, nearly all scholars of Czech architectural history were German, or wrote in German. For most of them, as we will analyse in detail, the history of the Baroque architecture in Bohemia and Moravia was a chapter in one *Geschichte der deutschen Baukunst*, as the title of Robert Dohme's book of 1887 reads.<sup>20)</sup>

Probably the most prominent, if not notorious, among the German art history scholars in Prague in the 1870s was Alfred Woltmann, professor at the k.k.

Karl-Ferdinands-Universität, as Prague University was called at the time. Woltmann described his own mission as "to feel myself a German in Prague, to intervene politically for Germanism, and in all respects to uphold the connection to German intellectual life."<sup>21)</sup> In 1876 Woltmann gave a lecture entitled *Deutsche Kunst in Prag* at the Prague artists' society 'Concordia', which included both Czechs and Germans as members. In that lecture he addressed the question of what exactly was German in Prague art: "And let us ask ourselves: what exactly is German in the artistic appearance of this city? [...] *beinahe Alles* – nearly everything."<sup>22)</sup> Woltmann's position caused uproar at the university, followed two years later by his move to Strasbourg, and was one of the events that eventually led to the split of the institution into a German and a Czech university in 1882.<sup>23)</sup>

Woltmann was not isolated in his efforts to provide (art)historical research and commentaries that reinforced the link with the German *Heimat*. In Prague, in 1861, the same concern is evident in the foundation of the *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen*. The art historical contributions in publications such as this one tend to emphasize the importance of architects of German origin, while downplaying the contributions of local artists or Mediterranean immigrants. From Joseph Hofmann's *Die Barocke in Nordwestböhmen* (1898) until Martin Wackernagel's broad analyses of the architecture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries "in den Germanischen Ländern" (1915), which obviously included Bohemia, much attention was paid to the various representatives of the Dientzenhofer family, namely Georg, Christoph, Leonard, Johann and Kilian Ignaz.<sup>24)</sup> The Bavarian Dientzenhofers are a choice subject for those interested in building a theory of the German 'import' in the Baroque in Bohemia.

In this Germanophile context Johann Santini Aichel was far less useful: Santini was a third-generation immigrant of Northern Italian origin,

17) Cf. Peter Demetz: *Prague in Black and Gold. Scenes in the Life of a European City*, New York: Hillard Wang, 1997, p. 317.

18) "[...] le premier édifice de grandes dimensions bâti par la haute finance [Czech] à Prague" and "ce premier bâtiment scolaire digne d'une nation civilisée"; Antonín Matějček and Zdeněk Wirth: *L'art tchèque contemporain*, Prague: Jan Štenc, 1920, p. 50.

19) Cf. Demetz: *Prague* (as in note 17), p. 335.

20) Robert Dohme: *Geschichte der deutschen Baukunst (Geschichte der deutschen Kunst*, vol. I), Berlin: Grote, 1887.

21) "mich in Prag als Deutscher zu fühlen, für das Deutschtum politisch einzutreten und in allen Beziehungen den Zusammenhang mit dem deutschen Geistesleben festzuhalten." Alfred Woltmann, *Deutsche Kunst in Prag. Ein Vortrag, gehalten zu Prag am 25. November 1876*, Leipzig: Seeman, 1877, p. 9. Excerpts of Woltmann's text are published in: Alena Janatková: *Barockrezeption zwischen Historismus und Moderne. Die Architekturdiskussion in Prag 1890-1914*, Zürich: gta Verlag/Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 2000, pp. 149-150.

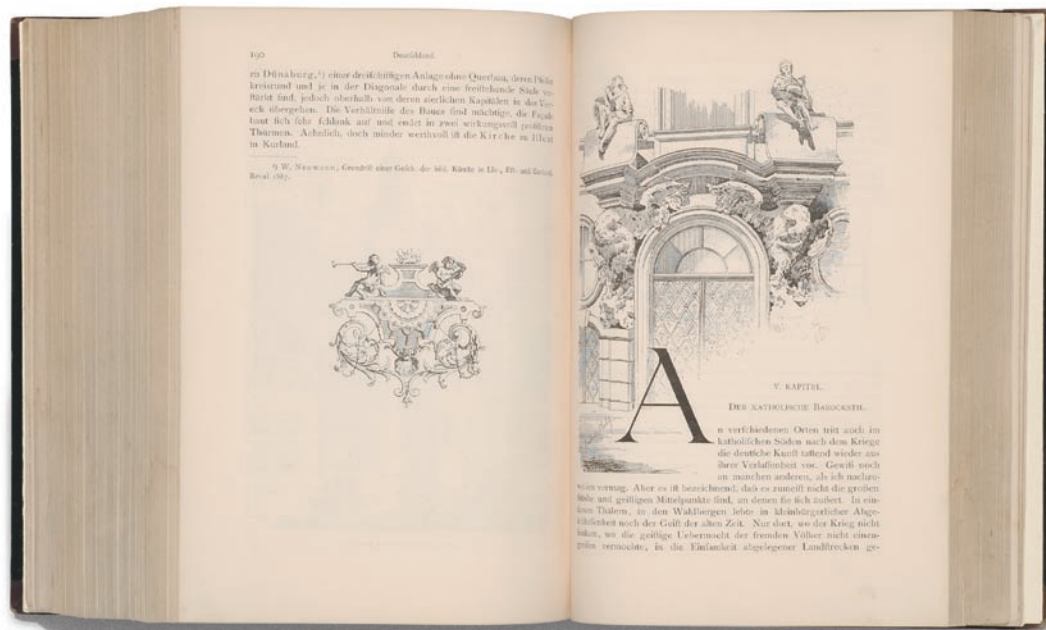
22) "Und fragen wir uns: was ist deutsch in der künstlerischen Erscheinung dieser Stadt? [...] *beinahe Alles*". Woltmann: *Deutsche Kunst* (as in note 21), p. 9; Janatková: *Barockrezeption* (as in note 21), p. 150.

23) For a detailed account of the events, see Jindřich Vybíral: *What is 'Czech' in Art in Bohemia? Alfred Woltmann and defensive mechanisms of Czech artistic historiography*. In: *Kunstchronik* (München), 59 (2006), 1, pp. 1-7, here pp. 1-2.

24) Joseph Hofmann: *Die Barocke in Nordwestböhmen mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Sct. Maria-Magdalenen-Kirche in Karlsbad und ihres Erbauers Kilian Ignaz Dientzenhofer*, Karlsbad: Hermann Jakob, 1898. – Martin Wackernagel: *Die Baukunst des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, Band II: *In den Germanischen Ländern*, Berlin: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion, 1915. Wackernagel's attention to the work of the Dientzenhofers stands in sharp contrast to the near absence of Santini: on Santini p. 114 and p. 157; on Christoph Dientzenhofer: pp. 127-129; on Johann: pp. 116, 126-127, 146, 148-149, 151; on Joh. Leonard: pp. 116-117, 123, 146, 149, 156; and on Kilian Ignaz: pp. 114, 129-130, 133, 157, 197.

married into a Czech family, and integrated as fluidly into Bohemian society as he was into the Italian architects' community in Prague. For Wackernagel and others, "a *Deutschböhme* (a German Bohemian), Johan Auchel, hides behind [...] the Italian artist's name Giovanni Santini".<sup>25)</sup> And Albert Ilg, a late nineteenth-century Fischer von Erlach scholar, even claimed, with a rather Belgian penchant for surrealism, that Santini had never existed, or more precisely that he was the same person as Santino Bussi.<sup>26)</sup>

It might be a surprise in this context that the chapter on 'The Catholic Baroque Style' in Cornelius Gurlitt's pioneering and influential *Geschichte des Barockstiles und des Rococo in Deutschland* (1889) opens with an image of Santini's major building in Prague, the Palais Thun-Hohenstein. However, the name of the architect himself is absent from the whole book with the exception of one mention in parentheses as the "Beauftragter", the collaborator of Kilian Ignaz Dientzenhofer.<sup>27)</sup> As the architect of Palais Thun-Hohenstein Gurlitt names Anselm (sic!) Luragho, "a master, completely conditioned by local influences, and artistically completely estranged from his Italian homeland."<sup>28)</sup>



13/ Cornelius Gurlitt: *Geschichte des Barockstiles und des Rococo in Deutschland*, Stuttgart 1889, pp. 190-191, with the illustration of a detail of the entrance of Santini's Palais Thun-Hohenstein in Prague on p. 191.  
Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.

In this context of cultural appropriation, art history will be written as an *artists' history*. This had of course been the approach since the very first account of art historiography in the Bohemian lands, Franz Martin Pelzel's *Abbildungen böhmischer und mährischer Gelehrten und Künstler* (1773-1786), but in Gurlitt's book the art-historical *subject* acquired central importance. New here was the emphasis on the artist's appurtenance to a *Volk*, and hence the prominence given to the artist's *language*.

Gurlitt, a professor at the Technical University in Dresden, gave an account of a very personal experience with the Prague language question. In his article "Die Barockarchitektur in Böhmen", published in 1890 in the *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen*, Gurlitt wrote: "When one morning I walked up the Prague Castle hill, I perceived the voice of the stones. Many buildings spoke to me in the beloved and well-known language of a foreign people. It was the language in which once Michelangelo forged his fiery soul into sonnets. The full rich tones of Italian rang up out of Prague. More strongly however, German tones rustled in my ear. [...] I heard from them the message of how German art had done its best to decorate the lovely City on the Moldau, and the lament of how Germany would be thanked by foreign peoples." And Gurlitt continued, carefully listening for a third language, which of course we expect to be Czech: "I listened carefully so that I would not miss any language in the jumble of voices! *Aber eine dritte Sprache vernahm ich aus der Wechselrede der Steine von Prag nicht!* – But I did not perceive a third language in the conversation of the stones of Prague!"<sup>29)</sup> Exit Czech architects. And Gurlitt confirms in his *Geschichte des Barockstiles und des Rococo in Deutschland*: "A Slavic art: there is as little of it in Bohemia as there is in Poland."<sup>30)</sup>

As far as the Italians are concerned, "over there [in Italy] their [Italian] architecture was forceful and born from the soil. However, away from home,

25) "[...] unter dem italienischen Künstlernamen Giovanni Santini [...] ein Deutschböhme, Johan Auchel [...] sich verbergen..." Wackernagel: *Baukunst* (as in note 24), vol. 2, p. 114. – The argument is also present in a publication by August Prokop, according to whom Santini was actually a German, Johann Auchel, who adopted the name Giovanni Santini, "wie es damals viele einheimische Künstler taten, so zum Beispiel der mährische Maler Schebesta, der, als er von Italien zurückkam, Sebastini hieß." August Prokop: *Die Markgrafschaft Mähren in kunstgeschichtlicher Beziehung. Grundzüge einer Kunstgeschichte dieses Landes mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Baukunst*, vol. iv: *Das Zeitalter der Barocke*, Wien: Spies, 1904, p. 995, note 3. Further on in the same book (p. 1053) Prokop returns to the question of Santini's name: "Johann Santini-Aichel, wie es auch in anderer Quelle angegeben, daß er eigentlich Auchel geheißten und den Namen Santini nur angenommen habe [...]."

26) Albert Ilg: *Leben und Werke Joh. Bernh. Fischer's von Erlach des Vaters*, Wien: Koenig, 1895.

27) Cornelius Gurlitt: *Geschichte des Barockstiles und des Rococo in Deutschland*, Stuttgart: Ebner & Seubart, 1889, p. 207.

28) "ein gänzlich durch lokale Einflüsse bedingter, seiner italienische Heimat künstlerisch entfremdeter Meister." Gurlitt: *Geschichte* (as in note 27), p. 279.

29) "[...] als ich eines Morgens zum Hradschin hinaufstieg [...] Da vernahm ich die Stimme der Steine. Da redeten zu mir viele Bauten in der lieben wohlbekannten Sprache eines fremden Volkes. Es war die Sprache, in der einst Michelangelo seine Feuerseele [sic!] zu Sonetten schmiedete. Voll und klangreich tönte aus Prag herauf zu mir das Italienische. Stärker aber rauschten deutsche Töne an mein Ohr. [...] Ich vernahm von ihnen die Kunde, wie deutsche Kunst ihr Bestes gethan, die schöne Moldaustadt zu schmücken, und die Klage, wie ihr dies von fremdem Geschlechte gedankt werde." [...] "Ich horchte scharf auf, damit mir keine Sprache aus dem Gewirr der Stimmen entgehe! Aber eine dritte Sprache vernahm ich aus der Wechselrede der Steine von Prag nicht!" Cornelius Gurlitt: *Die Barockarchitektur in Böhmen*. In: *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen* XXVIII (1889/1890), 1, pp. 1-16, here p. 16.



it became superficial and impoverished of its rich forms. Now however, since the Germans have learned to take this art in their own hands, it has quickly become obvious how infinitely more sure they were in capturing the *Gemüth des Volkes*, the mood of the people. And within a short time the Italians who dominated all building activity had moved back into second place.”<sup>31)</sup> And he concluded: “Thus, also in Bohemia, German genius permeated the architecture.”<sup>32)</sup>

Noteworthy is the change not only of terminology but also of the *style* of writing architectural history. Gurlitt’s voice is authoritative and apodictic – making pronouncements rather than laying out facts. His writing is creative and full of verve. This is no coincidence: German art history’s new academic standing, its new relationship to the *Geisteswissenschaften*, and its liaison with humanist studies meant that a great number of art history books were also written for a readership outside restricted academic circles – not to mention the fact that these books were illustrated by an unprecedented number of photographs (for example Dohme’s *Barock- und Rococo-Architektur* of 1892). These editorial changes are more than a marginal aspect of why architectural history was able to assume such an important role in nationalist issues.

### Czech architectural historians, 1890-1918

By the end of the 1880s the unresponsiveness of the Austro-Hungarian government to Czech nationalist aspirations convinced the heirs of Jungmann and Palacký that true autonomy could be achieved only outside the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. It was a cultural *Gesamtkunstwerk* that made manifest this conviction: the premiere of Bedřich Smetana’s patriotic opera *Libuše* in 1881. The history of this libretto is paradigmatic of the Czech situation in the nineteenth century: first written in German, by the Czech patriot Josef Wenzig – and then translated into Czech. The story was largely based on the fabricated fragment of “Libussa’s Judgment” in the *Rukopisy*. The ancient myth, first told to legitimize the Přemysl dynasty, described the wandering of the Czechs, their arrival in Bohemia, and the leadership of the wise Libussa, who in one of her trances guided the people to the place in the forest where the castle and the city of Prague were founded. By 1881, it was monumentalized – or subverted – and an entire Czech tradition, in the age of emancipatory nationalism, found expression in Smetana’s oratorio: “Contemporary audiences understood very well why the final scene of the opera showed Hradčany Castle, and they were thrilled by the recurrent fanfare signifying the power of the ancient Czech state.”<sup>33)</sup>

Smetana composed his opera between 1869 and 1872, but had kept the score in his desk for nine years to save it for the opening of the Národní Divadlo, the National Theatre. Zdeněk Wirth, the most influential Czech-writing architectural historian at the turn of the century, later connected the symbolic meaning of the building with the newly-developed ‘national’ interest in the

baroque period, and he used precisely this building for the cover of his *Česká architektura XIX století* (Czech Architecture of the nineteenth century).<sup>34)</sup> The Baroque represented the last moment of *grandeur* in Czech architectural history: “Nous pouvons distinguer dans l’histoire de notre architecture deux périodes principales, pendant lesquelles la culture artistique s’élève jusqu’aux sommets extrêmes de la création originale et le dispute avec succès à l’art le plus raffiné de l’étranger; ce sont le haut gothique [...] et le haut baroque [...]”<sup>35)</sup> For Wirth, in the period following the first half of the eighteenth century, “Prague devient la province, et par les réformes de Joseph II, on lui enlève même quelques oeuvres importantes de la grande époque du baroque. [...] le réveil de la culture nationale sur le terrain artistique [...] atteint son apogée avec la construction et la décoration du Théâtre National comme symbole de la vie nationale du peuple tchèque [...]. En harmonie avec le développement général de l’art européen, l’architecture tchécoslovaque est passée des styles du moyen âge à la Renaissance et enfin aussi au Baroque et dans le Théâtre National de Žiték [...] elle est capable de trouver une expression de *l’aspiration du peuple et du pays vers un style*.”<sup>36)</sup>

The generation of the so-called ‘Czech renaissance’ tried to recapture at least part of the artistic culture of the Prague Baroque from German annexations. Karel Boromejský Mádl, a Czech architectural historian writing in the last two decades of the century in German and in Czech, denounced the “annexations of our venerable artists of the past *ad maiorem Germaniae gloriam*”<sup>37)</sup> and gave Kilian Ignaz Dientzenhofer a completely Czech profile as one of “the first sons of our country”. Again, Mádl’s argument is rooted in the issue of language; there is ample evidence, he wrote, that “Czech was his mother tongue”.<sup>38)</sup>

However, for other Czech scholars of the turn of the century, the Bavarian Dientzenhofers were too strong a memory of German cultural imperialism. Conversely, architects of Italian origin, and Italian

30) “Eine slawische Kunst giebt es in Böhmen so wenig wie in Polen.” Gurlitt: *Die Barockarchitektur* (as in note 29), p. 16.

31) “Dort [in Italy] ist ihre [Italian] Baukunst eine wuchtige, erdgeborene. In der Fremde aber war sie eine äusserliche und bei allem Reichtum der Form ärmliche geworden. Nun aber, seit die Deutschen die Kunst selbst handzuhaben lernten, zeigte sich schnell, wie unendlich viel sicherer sie das Gemüth des Volkes zu treffen vermochten, und bald waren die einst alle Bauten beherrschenden Italiener in die zweite Stellung hinabgerückt.” Gurlitt: *Die Barockarchitektur* (as in note 29), p. 11.

32) “So durchdrang auch in Böhmen deutscher Geist die Baukunst.” Gurlitt: *Die Barockarchitektur* (as in note 29), p. 15.

33) Demetz: *Prague* (as in note 17), p. 28.

34) Zdeněk Wirth and Antonín Matějček: *Česká architektura, 1800-1920*, Praha: Jan Štenc, 1922, cover and pp. 36-40. The book’s cover title differs from the title on page one: *Česká architektura XIX století*. The publisher of the book, Jan Štenc, had an outspoken interest in contemporary Czech architecture and had his house designed by O. Novotný in 1909 (ill., p. 83).

35) Zdeněk Wirth: *Architectura cehoslovacă*. In: *Expoziția cehoslovacă de arhitectură, de industrie artistică și de industrie relativă la construcțiuni*, București: Salonul de Expoziție / Prague: Orbis, 1930, unnumbered [p. 1]. With French translations. The booklet also contains a text by Pavel Janák: *Industria artei cehoslovace*.

36) Wirth: *Architectura cehoslovacă* (as in note 35), [p. 3]; my italics.

37) “[...] anekce našich starých umělců ad majorem Germaniae gloriam.” Karel B. Mádl: *Ku dvoustoleté paměti narození K. I. Dientzenhofra* (In memory of the two hundredth anniversary of K. I. Dientzenhofer). In: *Světlozor*, 1890, 24; p. 523. Excerpt translated in Janatková: *Barockrezeption* (as in note 21), p. 153.

38) “[...] které vyslovně označuje řeč českou mateřskou.” Mádl: *Ku dvoustoleté* (as in note 37), p. 523, cited in Janatková: *Barockrezeption* (as in note 21), p. 25, n. 58.



14/ Zdeněk Wirth and Antonín Matějček: *Česká architektura XIX století*, Prague 1922. Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.

culture in general, had never imposed this type of cultural imperialism. Hence the long-standing tradition of Italo-Bohemian exchanges lent itself perfectly to translation in political terms. It gave historical precedence to a much desired integration of the new Czech state into a modern Europe. This position, gradually adopted by Czech scholars, also demonstrates how the endeavours to develop a national discourse and to create a national art and architecture were paradoxically the first step towards the creation of internationalism. Eva Forgács pointed out how “these early movements sought to confirm national pride and consciousness in order to elevate the nation as a full-fledged member of Europe and integrate the national culture into the European cultural heritage. The creation and cultivation of authentic national culture was seen as the token of cultural emancipation as well as national progress.”<sup>39)</sup> As Forgács further underlines, this cultural nationalism “lacked aggression and hostility towards other nations.”<sup>40)</sup> It had first and foremost an anti-imperial stance. Indeed, German-speaking scholars, conscious of the necessity to counter the growing narrative appropriation of the Czech lands by the Czechs, had mostly limited themselves to an apologetics of the role of Germans in the architectural history of the territory. However, Czech historians, like Josef Pekař, often did not limit their work to a national history but also developed a historical Czech discourse on the Empire.<sup>41)</sup>

Some Czech artists and architects started to question the issue of an authentic national artistic production: “Did we ever have such art and do we have it now?” asks Miloš Jiránek in his article “Českost našeho umění” (The Czechness of our art), published in the very first days of the new century.<sup>42)</sup> For the most progressive among architects, local tradition was seen probably less as *national* than as a necessary tool to open up the possibility of creating their *own modern* architecture. They understood that the concept of progress was to be rendered compatible with that of tradition – even when they refused direct servitude to socio-political transformations as Pavel Janák did. In “O nábytku a jiném” (About furniture and other things), Janák positions art above men and nature, and defines it as “an independent activity that has no obligation outside itself”.<sup>43)</sup> For others, however, it was deemed that architectural history as well as contemporary practice could and should serve the just political cause. Karel Chytil, for instance, deemed the importance of Prague’s Italian Baroque heritage so great that, he argued, it should be guiding contemporary urban planning practice in Prague.<sup>44)</sup>

39) Éva Forgács: National traditions. In: Timothy O. Benson and Éva Forgács (Eds.): *Between worlds. A sourcebook of Central European avant-gardes, 1910-1930*, Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT, 2002, pp. 47-48, here p. 48.

40) Forgács: National traditions (as in note 39), p. 48.

41) Cf. Marlène Laruelle: L’enseignement de l’histoire à l’Université Charles de Prague, 1882-1918. In *Histoire de l’Éducation* (Paris), 86 (2000), pp. 81-114.

42) Miloš Jiránek: Českost našeho umění. In: *Radikální listy*, vol. 7, no. 4, Jan 4, 1900. Engl. translation in: Timothy O. Benson and Éva Forgács (Eds.): *Between worlds* (as in note 39), pp. 56-57.

43) Pavel Janák: O nábytku a jiném. In: *Umělecký měsíčník* (Praha), 1912-1913, 2, pp. 21-29. Cf. Dirk De Meyer: Eigenzinnige modernismen: architectuur in Praag, 1910-1939. In: *Kultuurleven* (Leuven), 1998, September, pp. 30-35.

44) Karel Chytil: O stavební činnosti v Praze v době baroka (On building activity in Prague during the Baroque period). In: *Zprávy spolku architektů a inženýrů v Království českém*, 1895, 29, pp. 56-62, 73-75. Excerpts translated in Janatková: *Barockrezeption* (as in note 21), pp. 154-155.



With Josef Pekař, Zdeněk Wirth, August Prokop, and Josef Šusta (a former colleague of Max Dvořák), a new generation of art historians came to the fore who distanced themselves from the hitherto mainstream perspective of the Counter-Reformation as the low point of Czech history. They were to be the last Czech generation that had been trained in German, most of them at Viennese institutions.<sup>45)</sup> Both Czech and German art historians of this generation, and even Czech architecture in its most radical (cubist) expression, allied themselves with German-Viennese theory. This is no wonder: all were German educated, and all drew inspiration from advanced aesthetic theory – in particular from Adolf von Hildebrand's *Das Problem der Form*, Riegl's *Stilfragen*, and Theodor Lipps's *Einfühlungstheorie*.

But Czech scholars and architects fused these readings with references to local traditions of late Baroque architecture. The Czech cubist architect Pavel Janák read Gurlitt (as well as Dohme, Wölfflin and Lipps), as is evident from the notes in his diaries, while at the same time turned his attention to the “expressionism” of Santini.<sup>46)</sup> For Janák, as he wrote in “Obnova průčelí” (Renewal of the Façade), “Czech architecture developed both in scope and depth above all through the Baroque, that is, the period that is once again governed by the abstraction which is characteristic of our national spirit.”<sup>47)</sup>

In an article of 1909, Zdeněk Wirth had been the first to draw attention to that most peculiarly Czech phenomenon amongst Baroque architectures: the *barokní gotika*, or ‘Baroque Gothic’, as he defined the Gothicizing works of Johann Santini Aichel.<sup>48)</sup> Wirth's article – influential not merely among Czech audiences<sup>49)</sup> – was more than a rehabilitation of Santini's role; it tried to link a local Czech production with reappearances of the Gothic style in eighteenth-century England and Germany, offering it a life independent from Austro-German Baroque developments.

Moreover – an aspect that I have worked out in more depth elsewhere<sup>50)</sup> – Santini's major works were monasteries and pilgrimage churches, a countryside Baroque, as opposed to Jesuit and Habsburg urbanity. Its visual culture was tailored to the sophisticated desires of the monastic clerks, but also to the bigotry and the folk myths of the peasant population. These buildings and their publics were removed from the cities that were the seats of Austro-Hungarian power. Hence, from a Czech nationalist point of view, they could represent values of an earlier, freer Bohemia, much in the sense of Manzoni's depiction of the Italian peasantry after 1848. More often Manzoni claimed, as Tolstoy would later, that the peasantry is morally superior because peasants have no awareness of themselves in time and history.<sup>51)</sup>

Developments in the writing of Czech architectural history might reveal traces of influences from outside the German and Vienna schools that hitherto had been neglected. Art history scholars at the Czech Prague University were witnesses (or more) to the transformations in the history programmes within

the same faculty. The split of Prague University had brought about not only changes in content, but also methodological and conceptual differences between Czechs and Germans in the approach to history. The Czechs started to develop their own research networks. While Germans depended nearly exclusively on the German world, the Czechs gradually developed contacts with France (and later with Italy and the Slavic world) that brought them in touch with the first attempts at social history foreshadowing the *Annales'* revolution.<sup>52)</sup> In art history, it created a framework for a more folk-oriented history as opposed to the German schools' cult of the great historic personalities. The necessity for the Czech historians to differentiate themselves from the Germanic academic world led them to open themselves up to the new historiographical tendencies toward social history and the currents of European ethnography, including the history of the peasant culture, thus bypassing military defeats and the political vanishing of their Kingdom. As a result, courses taught at the Prague German University stuck with the German and Austro-Hungarian history as *Staatslehre*, while the Czech University turned to a Herderian ‘national history-philosophy’.<sup>53)</sup>

## Epilogue

After nearly four centuries of Habsburg dominance, the end of the First World War brought the Czechs political independence in the form of the establishment of the first Czechoslovak Republic. This, however, did not imply the end of the national issue, as the philosopher and first Czechoslovak president Tomáš Masaryk understood very well. In *The New Europe*, a hastily sketched book with visionary elements, first published in 1918 in English and French as a background study for the delegates of the Peace Conference in Paris, Masaryk wrote: “In the West there are no acute disturbing national questions: the nations of the West have their states and well-established forms

45) They eventually also taught in Vienna, like August Prokop, who later became director of the Arts Museum of Brno.

46) Transcriptions of the diaries in: Irena Žantovská Murray: *Sources of cubist architecture in Bohemia. The theories of Pavel Janák*, [unpublished] Thesis (M.A.), McGill University, School of Architecture, 1990; various pp.; in particular, on Riegl and Schmarsow: diary entry 19.XII (1912); on Robert Dohme and Cornelius Gurlitt: 13.IV (1913).

47) Pavel Janák: *Obnova průčelí*. In: *Umělecký měsíčník* (Praha), 1912-1913, 2, pp. 85-93.

48) Zdeněk Wirth: *Barokní gotika v Čechách v XVIII a v 1. polovině XIX století*. In: *Památky archeologické* (Praha) 1909 (year 1908-09), XIII, 3 and 4, pp. 121-156 and 201-220.

49) In his review article: *Neue Literatur über deutsche und österreichische Barock-Architektur*. In: *Kunstgeschichtliche Anzeigen*, 1910, pp. 10-24, here pp. 12-15, Hans Tietze discusses Wirth's article. Gurlitt picks up the term “Barock-Gotik” in a review article in: *Berliner Architekturwelt* (Berlin) 1911, pp. 40 (April), 82 (Mai), 124 (Juni), 165 (Juli), 208 (August), 249 (September), 292 (Oktober), here p. 249.

50) De Meyer: *Johann Santini Aichel* (as in note 2), and Dirk De Meyer: ‘Boemizzare’ il barocco: Johann Santini Aichel / ‘Bohemizovat’ baroko: Jan Santini Aichel. In: *La Nuova rivista italiana di Praga / Nový italský časopis v Praze*, (7) 2002, 1, pp. 54-61.

51) Cf. Richard Sennett's reference to Manzoni: “Manzoni's “man of the soil” does not look in the mirror of history; he simply lives.” Richard Sennett: *The Foreigner*. In: George Dodds and Robert Tavernor (Eds.): *Body and Building: Essays on the changing relation of body and architecture*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002, pp. 190-208, here p. 197.

52) While these influences were more clearly present in the history programs at the university, they were also apparent in art historical research.

53) Laruelle: *L'enseignement* (as in note 41), p. 95.



15/ Antonín Matějček and Zdeněk Wirth: *L'art tchèque contemporain*, Prague 1921 [published 1920]. Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.

of government, have their old civilisation – France and Belgium will have to rebuild their destroyed cities and villages, to repair their factories and fields, but in the East new states, new forms of governments must be created and the foundation of civilised life must be laid down.”<sup>54)</sup>

However, the radically new political condition would alter the ‘working conditions’ of architectural historians on both the Czech and German sides. Reflecting the dismissal of architecture from the service of national identity, the earlier focus on national identity began to subside in Czech art history and architecture programs.<sup>55)</sup> Tomáš Masaryk, in his capacity as a philosophy professor at the Charles University, had already in the 1880’s, with his journal *Athenaeum*, questioned the romanticism of scientific national discourse.<sup>56)</sup> For Masaryk and his followers the primacy of the state or the nation was superseded by the Masarykian ideal of humanity.

Furthermore, the new Czechoslovak political identity was to reinforce the change in perception of the Counter-Reformation period, and hence of Baroque art. However severely humiliating the Habsburg rule may have been, the cultural benefits of the era could now be valorised more easily after the return of governance to the Czechs.

In Prague, a new government and administration created an opportunity, finally, for Zdeněk Wirth to fully explore his political role as an art historian at the very core of Masaryk’s project. By 1930, Wirth could consider his ambitions for the most part realised: “Les temps modernes et contemporains ont modifié radicalement le caractère de l’art tchecoslovaque en lui donnant sa réelle originalité et les signes distinctifs propres à la race [...]”<sup>57)</sup> But Masaryk, in the 1936 edition of his *Česká otázka* (The Czech Question), understood clearly how much Wirth’s optimistic stance became threatened in the meantime by a frightening question: “How are we going to survive as an independent nation? Our history as well as current developments are forcing us to come to a clear understanding of this question: how can a small nation survive and remain independent?”<sup>58)</sup>

54) Tomáš Masaryk: *The New Europe. The Slav standpoint*, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1918. Masaryk’s original Czech version, *Nová Evropa*, appeared in Prague in 1920. It is Masaryk’s summary of the main causes of the First World War and his outline of the post-war reconstruction of Europe.

55) Cf. Friedrich Achleitner: *The Pluralism of Modernity: The Architectonic ‘Language Problem’ in Central Europe*. In: Blau and Platzer (Eds.): *Shaping the Great City* (as in note 10), pp. 94-106, here p. 104, for the role of architecture; and Long: *East Central Europe* (as in note 11), p. 522, for the art history and architecture programs.

56) Laruelle: *L’enseignement* (as in note 41), pp. 85-86.

57) Zdeněk Wirth: *Architectura cehoslovacá* (as in note 35), unnumbered.

58) Tomáš Masaryk: *Česká otázka*, Praha 1896. Revised ed.: Praha: Čin, 1936.



