

CHAPTER 7

Inaugural Addresses of Prague University Rectors between Science and Providing Service to Society, Nation, and State in the First Half of the 20th Century

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Abstract

Based on analysis of a series of rectorial inaugural addresses from both Prague universities (a Czech one and a German one) from 1890s–1947, the author tries in his presentation to capture the development of views regarding the goals and aims of two particular Central European universities. In the perception of the relevant protagonists, the view of university's mission oscillated between its role of an elite scientific institution which keeps up with international trends (this was often asserted in the speeches of rectors whose background was in natural or medical sciences) and the need for university to play a central social and political role. The latter view was expressed in particularly strong terms especially when inaugurations took place during the turning points of Central European history (WWI, post-1918, 1930s, post-1945) and it usually came from representatives of humanities, social, economic, and legal sciences. The function and content of Prague rectorial speeches are analysed both in the context of research of rectorial speeches at German universities and in the context of recent research into academic celebrations of important anniversaries.

Key words: Inaugural addresses – Prague universities
– Elite scientific institutions – Ideological and political
instrumentalisation – 20th century

Introduction

In 1882, the ancient Prague university was by law split in two parts. From that time until 1939 (1945), Prague was thus the seat of two formally equal universities. Both remained integrated in the network of universities in the western part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Over time, however, their position and status within both the ‘national’ and international academic environment and broader social context evolved, among other things due to changes linked to the break-up of old state formations and the emergence of new states in Central Europe.

Prior to 1882, the university of Prague was more or less a provincial teaching and research institution, which educated the intellectual and professional elites of Bohemia and Moravia. Yet while its students came both from the ranks of the German-speaking minority and increasingly also from the Czech-speaking majority population, its teaching staff consisted mainly of German-speaking academics who migrated not only within the Austrian academic environment but within all of the German-speaking regions. After the 1882 split, the German university maintained not only its position of a regional Austrian university, but also its frequent contacts with universities in Germany. Its students, however, still came mainly from the Bohemian Lands. In connection with the increasing success of the Czech emancipation movement in late 19th and early 20th century, which culminated in the creation of an independent state in 1918, the German university in Prague was undergoing a complicated transformation of loyalties. Nonetheless, throughout the entire period in question, it maintained its status of the top academic institution of the German-speaking population of Bohemia and Moravia and until 1914, it was one of many loyal institutions of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

During the First World War and then prominently again in the 1930s, however, many of its students and teachers increasingly sym-

pathised with pan-Germanic movements of various ideological orientation, including Nazism. During the interwar period, the German University at first sharply opposed the new 'national' state of the Czechs. Relatively soon, though, it became reconciled with its new position of a leading academic institution representing the most important national minority in Czechoslovakia, that is, with a status unique in the European context.

The new Czech university, too, was after 1882 formally one of many regional Austrian universities. Moreover, like some other universities in the Austrian provinces which taught in national languages (e.g. Kraków/Krakau or Lviv/Lemberg), it was already during the existence of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy the top academic institution of the Czech nation, whereby in the Central European context, a nation was defined mainly by language. After the creation of Czechoslovakia, the Czech university in Prague became the top academic institution of an independent state. This position implied not only a certain role in research and education, but also in political and social transformations.

Regarding the scientific standards of the two Prague universities, the German one maintained its reputation of a distinguished university, which attracted teachers from Austria and Germany before they managed to receive appointments at first-rate universities in Berlin or Vienna. The Czech university quickly overcame the initial teething problems and established itself as a standard teaching and research institution that kept in touch with international developments. In the interwar period, however, its social role, which included not only its position of a 'national treasure' but also active involvement of many of its professors in cultural and political life outside university, was as important as its main mission. This brief introduction indicates that even at the beginning of the 20th century, both Prague universities had to balance their position between service to society (city, region, nation, state) on the one hand and issues of scientific research which transcends state borders or ethnic affiliation on the other hand.¹

There are several ways in which we can try to capture the charac-

1. Svobodný 2015; Havránek and Pousta 2001; Seibt 1984.



FIGURE. 1: The Great Aula in the Carolinum, where inaugural ceremonies of the both Prague universities were held until the mid-1930s (1928).

ter of a university and its role as an institution in the service of society, elite scientific centre, or an organisation balancing between the two. On the one hand, we could analyse the programmatic statements made by representatives of the institution in question, that is, declarations which were usually intended for a broad public and delivered at special occasions. The other way, which delves deeper into institutional history, involves an analysis of actual results (the development of infrastructure, numbers of students and teaching staff, publication activities, etc.) on the one hand and the study of the direct and indirect impact of academic activities on the society, economy, technology, culture, and politics in general.

In my current contribution, I choose for the former approach, that is, an analysis of programmatic statements by leading representatives of the two universities. It is worth noting that in the 19th century, the then young Norwegian university in Kristiania (now Oslo) struggled with a similar dilemma as the Prague universities when it had to balance between its service to a small nation under-

going a process of national emancipation and the high demands of international science. Its delegates, headed by the rector and representatives of some of the most important sciences represented there, presented their vision of the university to a broad Norwegian and international, academic and non-academic public in 1911 at the occasion of celebration of centenary of their university's foundation. Some of their speeches focused on the social role of the university, while others emphasised its status of a leading scientific institution. In practice, the university tried to meet both roles in which it was 'cast' in about an equal measure.²

Prague universities, too, had several times prepared for a presentation of their achievements and visions to the broad public at the occasion of celebrating an anniversary of their foundation. It is an irony of history that the planned grand celebrations of the 500th anniversary in 1848 and the 600th anniversary in 1948 were prepared by two very different institutions and in both cases, the celebrations were significantly disturbed, or rather modified in reaction to precipitous political developments.³

For the Prague universities, programmatic statements delivered during such anniversary celebrations are of little use, which is why we chose other, no less representative texts. We have decided to focus on the inaugural addresses of rectors, who assumed their function at the beginning of each academic year. Much like at universities in Germany, both Prague universities kept almost complete collections of inaugural addresses of rectors from the late 19th and the first third of the 20th century. In Prague, the German collection covers the period from 1894 to 1936, the Czech one 1907 to 1938, with the exception of two rectorial addresses from 1945–1947.⁴ (A

2. Fure 2015.

3. Ďurčanský and Dhondt 2015.

4. Rectorial addresses of the German University in Prague appeared regularly in print. They were published as part of anniversary publications under various names, such as *Rectors-Instalationen der k. k. deutschen Carl-Ferdinands-Universität in Prag*, *Die feierliche Inaugurationen der Deutschen Universität in Prag*, *Die feierliche Inauguration des Rektors der Deutschen Universität in Prag*, *Bericht der deutschen Karls-Universität in Prag über das Studienjahr...*, etc. They are kept in the Archive of the Charles University in Prague. A list of titles of rectorial addresses of

comprehensive overview of rectorial addresses at universities in German-speaking lands, that is, Germany proper, Austria, Switzerland, but also the German University in Prague since the end of the 19th century until the second half of the 20th century has been compiled by project *Rektoratsreden im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert – Online-Bibliographie.*⁵

Inaugural Rectorial Addresses in the 19th and 20th Century

In Germany, intense research based on the abovementioned sources has been going on for several years.⁶ Our German colleagues expect that a thorough analysis of these sources should not only help evaluate the quality of the university in question but also contribute to an assessment of contemporary political atmosphere and its accents (especially so for the period after 1933).⁷ German historians view inaugural addresses, as well as reports by rectors who are leaving their office, as sources of extraordinary importance, as – to use a somewhat poetic expression – ‘*jewels of academic historiography*’.⁸ Incoming rectors regularly and relatively frequently (annually) ac-

the German University in Prague in 1894–1931 is also found in an online database: <http://www.historische-kommission-muenchen-editionen.de/rektoratsreden/anzeige/index.php?type=universitaet&id=168>

Rectorial addresses of the Czech Charles-Ferdinand University and later Charles University appeared as part of anniversary publications, usually under the title *Inaugurace rektora* [Rector's Inauguration], *Zpráva o studijním roce...* [Report on the Academic Year...], or *Universita Karlova v Praze v roce...* [Charles University in Prague in the year...]. In the Archive of the Charles University, these inaugural brochures are bound together with lists of lectures and lists of personnel and institutes for the relevant academic year. Some rectorial addresses were published separately (sometimes in an extended form), while others, after 1945, appeared in the daily press.

5. <http://www.historische-kommission-muenchen-editionen.de/rektoratsreden/anzeige/index.php?type=list&id=universitaet>

6. <http://www.historische-kommission-muenchen-editionen.de/rektoratsreden/texte/unigeschichte.php> and

<http://www.historische-kommission-muenchen-editionen.de/rektoratsreden/texte/organisation.php>

7. Häuser I, 2009, p. 3.

8. Häuser I, 2009, p. 1.

quainted the entire academic community, assembled representatives of social, political, and cultural elites, but also the broad public not only with the most recent discoveries but often also with more general trends and problems in their field of expertise, often linking these subjects to current social and political realities.⁹

At both Prague universities – like at universities in Germany – representatives of all four faculties (faculty of theology, law, medicine, and philosophy) regularly took turns in the elected function of a rector. After 1920, they were joined by representatives elected from the new faculties of natural science. Natural scientists, however, were represented among rectors even before, as representatives of the faculties of philosophy from which their sciences had separated. Nonetheless, rectorial addresses presented the state of various sciences unevenly, since as part of the regular rotation, theology and legal sciences were relatively overrepresented, while the now expanding and further specialising medical, social, and especially natural sciences were represented in the rotation of faculties relatively less. In Prague, much like in Germany, incoming rectors tended to focus in their speeches on issues relevant not only from a professional but also a social point of view. Their speeches thus reflected also various current scientific and popular discussions, and especially during the troubled periods of the 20th century they did not avoid even controversial political topics.

Prague Inaugural Rectorial Addresses in 1894–1947

In the last decades before the First World War, the German University in Prague was headed by several scientists of European stature. Shortly after the split in 1882, its rectors included, for instance, the physiologist Ewald Hering (1882/83), physicist Ernst Mach

9. For more on the definition, development, contents, and preservation of rectorial addresses in German-speaking countries: <http://www.historische-kommission-muenchen-editionen.de/rektoratsreden/texte/rektoratsrede.php>

On their preservation and accessibility in libraries and archives, see:

<http://www.historische-kommission-muenchen-editionen.de/rektoratsreden/texte/standort.php>

(1883/84), and chemist Karl Huppert (1895/96).¹⁰ The earliest published rectorial addresses come from the 1890s, a period when issues that could interest broader public and not only experts were usually taken up mainly by lawyers. This was repeatedly the case at the German university (Joseph Ulbrich, Friedrich von Wieser, Emil Pfersche, Heinrich Rauchberg, Adolf Zycha),¹¹ less frequently at the Czech one (Jaromír Čelakovský, Kamil Henner).¹² Among the inaugural speeches of natural scientists and physicians from this period, historians of science rate highest the 1895 lecture by Karl Huppert (1832–1904), professor of medical chemistry. In his address *Über die Erhaltung der Arteigenschaften*, Huppert for the first time presented and later published his idea, inspired by his colleague Ewald Hering, professor of physiology, about a connection between nucleic acids and the issue of heredity.¹³

At the time of our interest, historical argumentation was often part not only of social discussions but also political conflicts in the Czech Lands.¹⁴ It is therefore rather unsurprising that at both universities, excellent historians were often elected rectors. In 1902, Adolf Bachmann (1849–1914), professor of Austrian history and an active politician,¹⁵ presented in his address at the German university an overview of German historiography in the 19th century.¹⁶ His Czech counterpart, Jaroslav Goll (1846–1929), founder of Czech positivist historiography, was elected rector of the Czech university in 1907 and his inaugural address traced the history of 25 years since

10. For a list of rectors of the German university in 1882–1918, see Havránek 1997, pp. 343–347.

11. Titles of their inaugural addresses can be found at <http://www.historische-kommission-muenchen-editionen.de/reaktoratsreden/anzeige/index.php?type=universitaet&id=168>

12. The lower number of inaugurations of lawyers is due to the fact that Czech inaugurations are preserved only after 1907/1908.

13. Huppert 1895; Štrbáňová 2004, pp. 195, 205–207.

14. Kutnar et al. 1997, pp. 384–40, 449–458.

15. He was a deputy of the Bohemian provincial diet and the Austrian Imperial Council for the German Progressive Party. Within both Bohemian and imperial Austrian politics, Bachmann represented German nationalist positions and rejected the Czech efforts to achieve greater autonomy.

16. Bachmann 1903.

the split of the Prague university.¹⁷ Unlike his followers in 1920 and 1934, he did so quite factually and objectively. Especially noteworthy from the perspective of later developments are the inaugural addresses of physiologist František Mareš (1857–1942), the last Czech rector to be elected before the outbreak of the First World War. In his 1913 speech, he presented the core principles of his vitalist philosophy (according to which life equals creative power).¹⁸ In 1920, after he was elected rector for the second time, his address was dedicated to a defence of his political activities (see below).

Typical examples of lectures which summarised a broader context of research in natural science and medicine are found in the inaugural addresses of both Czech and German rectors from 1910 and 1912. They spoke of the challenges which biological research faces,¹⁹ about the mysteries of biology,²⁰ and – in a summarising contribution of the famous German medical chemist Richard von Zeyneck in 1913 – of progress in research in natural sciences.²¹ And last but not least, the abovementioned philosophising lecture by František Mareš also belongs this group.

The First World War tested the loyalty of both universities to the state, i.e., the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and to the nation, that is, Czech and German nation in their various definitions: Germans in Bohemia, Germans in the Habsburg Empire, or Germans in general (including the allied German Empire). Throughout the war, obligatory praise of the dynasty, the empire, and its war effort was repeatedly a conspicuous part of rectors' reports about the previous academic year. Czech rectors usually emphasised loyalty to fatherland in the narrow sense, i.e., the Czech Lands, while the German rectors tended to include the German Reich as well.

Remarkably, the wartime was also reflected in some inaugural addresses. Two German rectors, Heinrich Swoboda (1856–1926), professor of Classical philology and history, and Ottokar Weber

17. Goll 1908.

18. Mareš 1914.

19. Janošík 1910.

20. Vejvodský 1912.

21. Zeyneck 1914.

(1860–1827), professor of general history, analysed the historical and current concept of alliances.²² The ophthalmologist Anton Elschnig (1863–1939) addressed pressing health issues linked to the war in his considerations about various ways of treating eye injuries.²³ Incoming rectors in Leipzig also explicitly reacted to the war, much like rectors of the German University in Prague. At the beginning of the war, Albert Köster (1862–1924), professor of German studies, analysed the role of universities in times of war,²⁴ while the economist Wilhelm Stieda (1852–1933) already during the war tried to outline a prognosis of its impact on Germany's post-war economic development.²⁵

In inaugural speeches of Czech rectors, one would search for direct references to the war in vain. One cannot tell, however, whether this is because so few inaugural addresses were actually delivered or whether rectors, by not speaking about current affairs, demonstrated their reserved approach to the war, which they did not see as something they should be involved in. On other occasions, Czech rectors, however cautiously, dared to express their loyalty. This was not only in their regular addresses when leaving the office, but also, for instance, in an official speech of the historian Josef Pekař (1870–1937) at a memorial gathering commemorating the recently deceased Emperor Franz Joseph in 1916.²⁶ This speech is the more interesting because after the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, professor Pekař was often asked to deliver official addresses about former 'traitors' (and his scientific opponents, among others) who were now 'national heroes', such as president of the Czechoslovak Republic Tomáš G. Masaryk or Ernest Denis (a French historian, Bohemist, politician, and ardent supporter of Czech and Slovak independence).²⁷

And finally, in the context of loyalties demonstrated at the most important festive academic occasions, let us note that not only the

22. Swoboda 1915; Weber 1917.

23. Elschnig 1918.

24. Häuser II, 2009, pp. 1081–1092.

25. Häuser II, 2009, pp. 1131–1148.

26. Zpráva o studijním roku 1916/17, pp. 3–8; Hanzal 1993, pp. 13–23.

27. Hanzal 1993, pp. 103–117, 132–139.

German, but also the Czech university in Prague awarded in 1916 an honorary doctorate to Archduke Charles, heir to the Austrian throne.²⁸

In 1918, the break-up of the multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the creation of new 'national' states, including Czechoslovakia, radically changed the mutual position of the two main ethnic groups inhabiting the Czech Lands. The Czech population became the 'state nation' while the German inhabitants of Bohemia and Moravia overnight found themselves in an undesirable position of the largest ethnic minority within the in fact multi-ethnic Czechoslovakia. Mutual relation between the two universities, which were still formally equal, had also radically changed. The Czech university became the most important academic institution of the new state. Aided by a new ambitious education policy, it started a new stage of its development, which, however, in late 1920s reached its limits due to an economic and later also political crisis. Activities of the German university, which was hitherto in many ways favoured by the Austrian state apparatus, were not restricted and the university managed to maintain its position within the network of German-speaking academic institutions, i.e. both in Austria and Germany. On a symbolic level, however, which was reflected even in legislation, the Czechoslovak state did relegate it to a secondary status.²⁹ Mutual relations between the two national communities and their universities were also reflected in the sources we are interested in, that is, in declarations by the leading representatives of these universities. References to this subject appear already in the first post-war years.

The mutual relation between the two Prague universities was newly defined by a law of February 1920, called after its main advocate 'Lex Mareš'. František Mareš (1857–1942), professor of physiology and a Czech nationalist politician, was for his work on behalf of the Czech university elected in 1920/21 rector of the Charles University – as the Czech university came to be called based on the new

28. Zpráva o studijním roku 1915/16, p. 14; Die Feierliche Inauguration... 1916/17, p. 10.

29. Svobodný 2015, pp. 112–114.



FIGURE. 2: The Carolinum (Charles College), historic seat of Prague University (1938).

law. Its German counterpart was denied this name and the law also rejected its claim to being a successor of the ancient Prague university. Mareš's inaugural address was in fact a defence both of his person and of actions of the Czech academic and state institutions which the German university had accused of 'falsifying history'. It contained mainly various detailed historical and legal arguments which led to the endorsement of the abovementioned legal act, arguments which failed to convince even some Czech academics. In his historical argumentation, Mareš among other things referred to Goll's inaugural address, or rather its extended version from 1908. At the same time, he explicitly disagreed with August Naegle's views as expressed both in his published works and in speeches he made while rector of the German University.³⁰

During the hectic times of the end of the war and in the first post-war months, thus also a time when this law was being pre-

30. Mareš 1921.

pared, it was August Naegle (1869–1932), professor of theology, who was twice in a row elected rector of the German university. The main subject of his inaugural address of January 1919 was St. Wenceslas, a historical prince and patron saint of Bohemia. In his critical biography, Naegle emphasised his accommodating approach to the ‘German Empire’ and his transformation into the national saint of the Czechs. He then appealed to Bohemian Germans not to give up their share in the historical legacy of Bohemia as represented, among others, by St. Wenceslas.³¹ Just two years later, however, Czechoslovak politicians with the support of part of the Czech academia did deny the Germans in Bohemia and Moravia their part in the shared historical legacy, as represented in this case by the academic tradition. Naegle’s address when leaving the rector’s office in the fall of 1920 was then a direct and sharp polemic with arguments presented by Rector Mareš in his inaugural speech of 1920 and a harsh indictment of actions of the Czech authorities and the Czech university.³² Yet even his historical and legal argumentation, which he, like Mareš, prepared with the help of some other academic colleagues, was not utterly convincing and in all particulars correct.

Implementation of the law regulating the relation between the two Prague universities was not fully consistent. For instance, representatives of the German university for a number of years refused to hand over to the Charles University the historical sceptres of the Prague university.³³ It was another Czech nationalist politician, Karel Domin (1882–1953), professor of botany, who used his time as rector to press for a thorough implementation of this part of the law. He then described his ‘struggle for the completion of historical justice’ both in his report when handing over his office in 1934 and in a

31. Naegle 1919.

32. Naegle 1921.

33. The insignia of the Prague university, partly medieval, partly from the Early Modern Era, especially the sceptres of the rector and the deans of faculties, were traditionally another symbol of academic autonomy. After the 1882 split of the university in two, they were kept by the German university. After 1918, they were granted to the Czech Charles University and in 1939, they were again appropriated by the German Charles University in Prague. At the end of the war, in 1945, they were removed, transported away, and their further fate remains unknown. See: Hruza 2008.

separate publication called *Můj rektorský rok* [My Year as Rector].³⁴ His own inaugural address, delivered in November 1933, in the year of ‘*the fifteenth jubilee of national liberation*’, as Domin often emphasised,³⁵ rather remarkably did not mention either this anniversary or the mutual relation of the two Prague universities. Instead, Domin spoke of conservation of nature from the perspective of a biologist and his rectorial address later appeared as a separate publication.³⁶

Some other inaugural addresses of rectors of the Charles University also quite pragmatically reacted to pressing problems of the young state, though not always in a way as political as the one mentioned above. Especially rectors elected from the Faculty of Law tended to choose subjects which reflected problems and challenges in the area of legislation, monetary policy,³⁷ and national economy.³⁸ Most programmatic and state-building of these lectures was the inaugural address of Karel Hermann-Otavský (1866–1939), professor of business and exchange law and the first rector of the Czech university in the newly independent Czechoslovakia. He spoke about the imminent tasks which the legal system of the new republic would have to face and presented his address in the presence of president of the republic.³⁹ The exceptional character and social relevance of this speech was highlighted also by the following rector, Josef Zubatý (1855–1931), who said: “*It has been a time-honoured custom that the rector, upon introduction to his office, speaks on a subject from his area of expertise. My predecessor, His Magnificence Mr. Pro-Rector, deviated somewhat from this custom. While choosing a subject from his speciality, he presented a speech interesting not only by its scientific core but also most timely and relevant. He did so, as he himself said, ‘under the dictate of the times when the eyes of all aim forwards, to a road we are to travel in a new situation, when our freedom is still young’. I believe that it would be propitious to follow his example.*”⁴⁰ And indeed, Zubatý, pro-

34. Domin 1934.

35. Domin 1934, p. 53.

36. Domin 1933.

37. Horáček 1922.

38. Drachovský 1934; Funk 1939.

39. Hermann-Otavský 1919.

40. Zubatý 1919, pp. 51–52.

fessor of Indian studies and comparative linguistics, spoke at his inauguration about the decline of his native language.

Rectors of the German University, whose political sympathies ranged from extreme German nationalism and opposition to an independent Czech state all the way to so-called 'German activism', did not express their political views in their inaugural addresses so openly. Alongside August Naegle, the 'iron rector' of 1918–1920 and 1929/30, radically German nationalist, anti-Semitic, and anti-Czechoslovak views were represented especially by Marian San Nicolò (1887–1955), professor of Roman law and rector in 1931/32 and 1932/33. In his inaugural address, however, he spoke only on his area of expertise.⁴¹ On the other side of the range of attitudes of German professors with respect to the new Czechoslovak Republic we find, for instance, Robert Mayr-Harting (1874–1948), professor of Roman and business law. As an 'activist' politician, he even served in 1926–1929 as minister of justice in the Czechoslovak government for the German Christian-Socialist Party. Yet even his inaugural address was politically neutral (he served as rector in 1921/22).⁴² An interesting example of evolution of political views from cooperation with Czech colleagues all the way to becoming a Sudeten German politician and Nazi sympathiser can be traced in the career of Gerhard Gesemann (1888–1948), professor of Slavic studies.⁴³ Yet he, too, started his term as a rector (1933/34) by delivering a lecture dedicated fully to his area of specialisation (ethnography of the Southern Slavs).⁴⁴ Karl Hilgenreiner (1867–1948), professor of Church law, had undergone an even more complex transformation of views: from a representative of the nationalist wing of the German Christian-Socialist Party, through rapprochement with the Sudeten German Party, all the way to denouncing the occupation of the Czech Lands by Nazi Germany. In his inaugural address in 1935,

41. <http://www.historische-kommission-muenchen-editionen.de/reaktoratsreden/anzeige/index.php?type=reaktor&id=-2096243796>

42. <http://www.historische-kommission-muenchen-editionen.de/reaktoratsreden/anzeige/index.php?type=reaktor&id=2101775045>

43. Konrád 2011; Míšková 2007.

44. Gesemann 1934. His inaugural address appeared in a substantially extended version in print (222 printed pages).

Hilgenreiner spoke about the relation between universities and a worldview.⁴⁵ Increasing anti-Semitism of German students and professors, meanwhile, manifested itself openly already in 1922, when by the principle of faculties taking turns, the office of rector went to Samuel Steinherz (1857–1942), professor of auxiliary historical sciences of Jewish origin. He refused to act in accordance with an old Austrian tradition and immediately resign his office. In the end, despite the protests of nationalist and anti-Semitic students, and thanks also to support in legislation, the democratic atmosphere of the young republic, and support of the Ministry of Education, he did serve his full term as rector.⁴⁶ His inaugural address dealt exclusively with a subject from medieval Church history, an issue perhaps only seemingly unrelated to the current situation.⁴⁷

Among Czech and German natural scientists and medical doctors, we can observe certain general differences in their approach throughout the interwar period. The German ones tended to choose more general subjects from natural and medical sciences, often with excursions into philosophy or ethics (Carl J. Cori, Otto Grosser⁴⁸). Their speeches thus aimed at a broader audience, not only experts in their own fields. Their Czech counterparts, on the other hand, physicians Otakar Kukula, Vladimír Slavík, Rudolf Kimla, and Karel Weigner, as well as the geologist František Slavík, usually focused on particular problems in their field of expertise, i.e., surgery, forensic medicine, pathological anatomy, anatomy, geology and chemistry. Professor Jindřich Matiegka (1862–1941), founder of modern Czech physical anthropology who during the interwar period participated in formulating the population policy of the young Czechoslovak state, somewhat defied this trend. Unlike his colleagues, he was not a representative of a ‘pure’ natural science and his rectorial address, too, in which he spoke about the ‘racial’ composition of the Czechoslovak nation, was somewhat more general.⁴⁹

45. Hilgenreiner 1936.

46. Šimůnek et al. 2013, pp. 216–228.

47. <http://www.historische-kommission-muenchen-editionen.de/rektorsreden/anzeige/index.php?type=rektor&id=-28089694>

48. Cori 1928; Cori 1931; Grosser 1929.

49. Matiegka 1929.

There was also a noticeable difference between the Czech and German rectors who came from social sciences and humanities, though the subjects they addressed to some extent complemented each other. The Czech rectors (František Pastrnek from the Slavic studies, archaeologist Lubor Niederle, historian Gustav Friedrich) usually chose topics reflecting the national fervour of the young republic, that is, subjects from Czech or at least Slavic languages and literature, archaeology, history, or ethnography. Their German colleagues, on the other hand, chose subjects from Classical or Germanic studies⁵⁰ but they did not balk at controversial issues linked to Czech–German or Hussite–Catholic rivalry (for the third time the abovementioned August Naegle in 1929⁵¹).

The abovementioned historian Josef Pekař, too, chose for his inaugural address in 1931 a contentious subject from social sciences, but this time it pertained to a debate which was happening mainly in the Czech academic and indirectly also cultural and political environment. He spoke about the periodization of Czech history, thus opening another chapter in the so-called ‘struggle for the meaning of Czech history’.⁵² Prominent protagonists of this debate, which started already in late 19th century, included Josef Pekař and Tomáš Masaryk, erstwhile academic colleagues, now a rector and a president of the republic. Briefly, the controversy was between the two main directions in thinking about and researching the Czech history, namely between the ideological and theological conception defended by the philosopher Masaryk and the empirical and positivist approach of the historian Pekař.⁵³

In the autumn of 1939, just several months after the occupation of the Czech Lands by Nazi Germany in March 1939, Professor Bedřich Hrozný (1879–1952), expert in Hittite culture of worldwide renown, was expected to start his term as a rector of the Charles University. His inauguration, however, did not take place because

50. <http://www.historische-kommission-muenchen-editionen.de/reaktoratsreden/anzeige/index.php?type=universitaet&id=168>

51. Naegle 1930.

52. Pekař 1931.

53. Kučera 2005, pp. 33–80.



FIGURE 3: Rector's inaugural ceremony of Professor Bydžovský in the Great Hall of the Faculty of Law (1946)

on 17 November, 1939, the German authorities had ordered the closure of Czech universities. Despite these developments, Hrozný decided to address the academic audience and broad public with a festive speech. It took place not in the facilities of the already closed university but in the Great Hall of the Municipal Library. His lecture, named *On the Oldest Migrations of Nations and On the Subject of the Proto-Indian Civilisation* soon appeared in print and in both the spoken and the printed version claimed to be an inaugural rectorial address.⁵⁴ Hrozný's purely scientific argumentation and conclusions, among other things about the passing success of civilisations which aimed at conquest or the problematic nature of theories of racial purity, made at the time a very different impression and both the audience and the occupying authorities viewed the speech as a demonstration of defiance.

A later, and for a long time last, stage of the conflict between the concept of a university as a top scientific institution on the one hand

54. Hrozný 1939.

and an institution in service of society on the other hand, came with the inaugural addresses of two of the three first (and for a long time also last) freely elected rectors of the Charles University after 1945. Both in their speeches addressed, among other things, the relation between science and society and the position of a scientist in a society. The first post-war rector, Jan Bělehrádek (1896–1980), professor of medical biology and parliamentary deputy for the Social Democratic party, emphasised the social aspect of modern science and the fact that science and society mutually influence each other.⁵⁵ His successor, Karel Engliš (1880–1961), professor of economics, two years later (in 1947) on the other hand emphasised not only scientists' contributions but also their personal responsibility and tried to moderate the growing radical tendencies among university students.⁵⁶ After the 1948 Communist coup-d'état, neither of the rectors could remain at the Charles University. Engliš resigned his office already in February and adopted a forced retirement, while Bělehrádek left into exile.

Conclusions

Neither the Czech nor the German Prague university elected in the first third of the 20th century as its rector a scientist of world renown (perhaps with the exception of the abovementioned Bedřich Hrozný). Some of their professors did achieve international fame but their careers peaked either at other universities (e.g. Albert Einstein, formerly professor of the German University in Prague) or at another time (for instance Jaroslav Heyrovský, who received Nobel Prize for chemistry in 1959). Though both the Czech and the German university were in the interwar period clearly the most important scientific institutions in the country, this was not reflected in the speeches given by their rectors. In the turbulent transitional decades of late 19th and early 20th century, both universities largely remained in the service of their national communities and this showed both in their official statements and in practice.

55. Bělehrádek 1946.

56. Engliš 1947.

Already before the First World War, both the specifically academic and broader public tended to pay special attention to addresses of rectors from both universities whose background was in historical or legal sciences. Their speeches often aimed at providing arguments relevant to the cultural and political rivalry between the two national communities. This trend became even more pronounced after 1918 in independent Czechoslovakia, when rectors of the Czech university defended the right of the Czech university – and more broadly the right of the Czech ethnic community – to a privileged position in the new state, which, they claimed, had been ‘justly and deservedly’ won. German rectors, on the other hand, used historical and legal arguments in their defence of rights which were at that time denied both to their university and their ethnic community. On both sides, this politically driven instrumentalisation of humanities and legal sciences led to a degree of misrepresentation.

Ideological and political controversies which used arguments from humanities were not, however, limited to debates and rivalries between the two ethnic communities. In some cases, they also took place within the Czech camp: as exemplified, for instance, by the discussion about the meaning of Czech history, which started in late 19th century and went on until early 1930s. Extremely nationalist or anti-Semitic positions of some representatives of the academia (teachers and students) on both sides appeared especially since late 1920s and early 1930s. They were voiced outside academia, mainly in journalism, in the parliament, and in the streets, but fortunately not in the rectorial addresses.

The worst, however, was yet to come: nazification of the German university after 1938, closing of the Charles University by the occupying German authorities in 1939–1945, dissolution of the German University in 1945, and sovietisation of the Charles University after 1948. New ideological divisions, regarding for instance freedom of research and scientists’ responsibility, were present already in the addresses of the two last freely elected rectors after 1945. Nonetheless, many disciplines, especially natural and medical sciences, managed to maintain their scientific standards even at times when the university as a whole was dominated by communist ideology and

politics. And even after 1952, when institutes of the Czechoslovak Academy of Science were created alongside universities as the main elite research institutions, some teams, departments, institutes, or clinics of the Charles University maintained or even newly achieved the status of top research centres, in some cases even in international context.

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