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Onomastics and Czech historiography

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Abstract: Although onomastics is an independent discipline, its results are used in other fields of research and thus it becomes a kind of auxiliary science – in this case a historical auxiliary science. In this sense, it is used by Czech historiography, especially in two ways.

The first of these is historical geography, especially the history of settlement. Already the classical authors of the field from the 1st half of the 20th century, such as August Sedláček or J. V. Šimák, mentioned the names of settlements as an important guide in determining their age; the key work in this research, however, was the *Osídlení Čech ve světle místních jmen* [The settlement of Bohemia in the light of place names] by Vladimír Šmilauer (¹1960, ²2015). Especially in the development of settlements (top)onomastic research continues to play an important role: an example is the reconstruction of the Přemyslid state and its fortification network (Žemlička 1995).

The second historical field where onomastic research is applied is the study of names and especially their changes in relation to the development of society. Here, too, individual studies were published decades ago, but to a large extent, the ground-

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breaking work was the book *Ulicemi města Prahy* [The streets of the city of Prague], with the participation of historians Václav Hlavsa and Josef Janáček (Čarek et al. 1958). Historical-onomastic research was fully developed after 1989. Not only by publishing new street lists (for Prague at the end of the 1990s), but mainly by individual partial works devoted especially to name changes in connection with key moments of Czech history, totalitarian regimes, etc.

Keywords: History of science, Czech onomastics, changing names of towns.

L'onomastique et l'historiographie tchèque

Résumé : Bien que l'onomastique soit une discipline scientifique indépendante, ses résultats sont utilisés dans d'autres recherches et deviennent ainsi une science d'appoint, notamment une science d'appoint historique. Elle est utilisée dans ce sens par l'historiographie tchèque.

Premièrement dans la géographie historique et particulièrement dans l'étude de la colonisation. Déjà les auteurs classiques de la 1^{ère} moitié du XX^e siècle, tels qu'August Sedláček ou J. V. Šimák, mentionnaient les noms des colonies comme des guides importants pour la détermination des faits dans le temps. Le principal travail dans cette recherche était *Osídlení Čech ve světle místních jmen* [La colonisation de la Bohême dans la lumière des noms des lieux] de Vladimír Šmilauer (¹1960, ²2015). La recherche (top)onomastique continue de jouer un rôle important dans la recherche sur la colonisation, entre autres, dans la reconstruction de l'état des Přemyslides et du réseau de fortification (Žemlička 1995).

Le second domaine historique dans lequel la recherche onomastique est utilisée, c'est l'étude des noms de lieux et surtout de leurs transformations en lien avec le développement de la société. Les diverses études ont été écrites il y a plusieurs décennies, mais jusqu'à une certaine mesure, l'œuvre qui a marqué le tournant, c'est le livre *Ulicemi města Prahy* [Dans les rues de Prague], écrit en collaboration avec, entre autres, les historiens Václav Hlavsa et Josef Janáček (Čarek et al. 1958). La recherche historico-onomastique a noté un plein essor après 1989. Non seulement grâce à l'édition de nouvelles listes de rue (pour Prague, vers la fin des années 1990), mais surtout grâce aux diverses contributions, consacrées notamment aux changements des noms en rapport avec les moments clés de l'histoire tchèque, les régimes totalitaires, etc.

Mots-clés : Histoire des sciences, onomastique tchèque, changement de nom des villes.

Die Onomastik und die tschechische Historiographie

Zusammenfassung: Obwohl die Namenforschung oder Onomastik eine selbstständige Wissenschaftsdisziplin ist, werden ihre Ergebnisse in weiteren Forschungen genutzt und sie wird damit zu einer Art Hilfswissenschaft – in diesem Fall zu einer historischen Hilfswissenschaft. In diesem Sinn wird sie von der tschechischen Historiografie insbesondere in zwei Konstellationen genutzt.

Der erste von beiden ist die historische Geografie, insbesondere die Besiedlungsgeschichte. Bereits die klassischen Autoren dieses Fachgebiets ab der 1. Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts, wie August Sedláček oder J. V. Šimák, führten die Namen von Siedlungen als wichtigen Anhaltspunkt bei ihrer Altersbestimmung an; die entscheidende Arbeit in dieser Forschungsrichtung war jedoch Osídlení Čech ve světle mistnich jmen [Die Besiedlung von Böhmen im Licht der Ortsnamen] von Vladimír Šmilauer (¹1960, ²2015). Insbesondere in der Erforschung der Besiedlung spielt auch weiterhin die (top)onomastische Forschung eine wichtige Rolle: z. B. die Rekonstruktion des Přemyslidenstaates und seines Befestigungsnetzes (Žemlička 1995).

Das zweite Geschichtsfach, in dem die onomastische Forschung Anwendung findet, ist das Studium der Ortsnamen und Straßennamen und insbesondere ihrer Wandlungen in Bezug auf die Entwicklung der Gesellschaft. Auch hier wurden die einzelnen Studien bereits vor Dutzenden Jahren erarbeitet, doch eine entscheidende Wende brachte das Werk Ulicemi města Prahy [Durch die Straßen von Prag] 1958), an dem sich u. a. die Historiker Václav Hlavsa und Josef Janáček beteiligten (Čarek et al. 1958). Die historisch-onomastische Forschung entfaltete sich nach 1989 in vollem Maß. Nicht nur durch die Herausgabe neuer Straßenverzeichnisse (für Prag Ende der neunziger Jahre), sondern vor allem durch einzelne Teilstudien, die Wandel der Namen im Zusammenhang insbesondere dem mit den Schlüsselmomenten der tschechischen Geschichte, den totalitären Regimes usw. gewidmet waren.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Wissenschaftsgeschichte, tschechische Onomastik, wechselnde Namen von Städten.

Onomastics and Czech historiography

JIŘÍ MARTÍNEK

1. Introduction

While onomastics is a discipline of its own, its results are also made use of in other fields, for which it serves as an auxiliary science – and thus also as an auxiliary science of history. (It is true that it is not commonly included amongst the "common" auxiliary sciences: in the core Czech textbook of the field, *Vademecum pomocných věd historických* [Vademecum of auxiliary historical sciences] by Ivan Hlaváček et al. (2015), there is not even a mention of onomastics – in contrast to chronology, heraldry and sigillography.) Nevertheless, we can of course find pieces of research in a number of historical studies, which could be termed onomastic.

Within Czech historiography, onomastic research is mainly used in two regards. First of all, in the research of settlement history (and the oldest Czech history), and secondly in the research of in particular ideologically motivated changes to the names of towns and cities, streets, mountains and other toponyms, something which is to some extent associated with Czech history, if not one hundred percent, especially in regard to the research of the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century and their emergence and collapse. Naturally, we do not list all uses of onomastic research and methods within Czech historiography, but provide rather a brief outline of the issue.

2. History of settlement

The first mentions of the use of names as sources for the research of past events (although we cannot, of course, yet speak of onomastic research in the academic sense) can be found long ago in the Czech mediaeval chronicles. The "Czech Herodotus", the chronicler Cosmas († 1125), for example, says that Czechs got their name from "Forefather Czech", who brought the ancestors of the Czech tribe to the territory of today's Czechia. (The chronicle is written in Latin, so Czech here is referred to as *Bohemus*, since the land is *Bohemia*. Cosmas, of course, was not aware of the Celtic Boii tribe who gave the country its name – *Boiohaemium*.) Similarly, Cosmas made up the names of three sisters who gave rise to the ruling Přemyslid dynasty, giving them the names *Kazi, Teta* and *Libuše*: for those unaware of Czech mythology, I should add

that Libuše married Přemysl, a ploughman who then became ruler (similarly to the way Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus became Roman ruler – yes, Cosmas was very familiar with the works of ancient historians), thus establishing the ruling dynasty. The names of the three sisters were created in accordance with the names of three forts within the broader surroundings of Prague, which were called *Kazín, Tetín* and *Libušín*, and were already very old in the 12th century. Modern onomastics does not agree with Cosmas: we cannot prove the existence of Teta (Tethka), Libušín is thus called after the name *Ľuboša* (which could also be a man...), and Kazín may have got its name from the Benedictine monks from the nearby Ostrov monastery near Davle, for whom the hill was reminiscent of Italy's Monte Cassino, a place of fundamental importance for that religious order. *Cassino, Cassinus, Kazín, Kazi*.

We could, of course, continue to list similar cases in other chronicles since especially in the early modern period the interpretation of geographical names became a common component of the description of a particular territory. This is probably unnecessary in this overview, but I feel I should at least give one illustrative example here where the author explained the origin of place names with such enthusiasm that it rather elicits amusement. Renaissance chronicler Václav Hájek of Libočany († 1541), otherwise considered quite a reliable author for the 15th and 16th centuries, took the not uncommon method for his time of "anything I don't know, I'll make up". Not only did he know the exact dates of events and add complete family trees to the above-mentioned sisters of Kazi, Teta and Libuše (e.g. Kazi was an ancestor of one of the major noble families during Hájek's period), but he also gave some explanations of the origin of the names of some Czech locations. The town of Velvary, for example, lies in Central Bohemia. Its name, in terms of onomastics today (and I believe also then) is very clear in terms of Velvary being a place where a lot of cooking was done (from *vařit* 'to cook'), but Háiek explained its origin - in relation to his imagined Hungarian occupation of Bohemia in the mid-10th century (!), specifically in 956 – as coming from Hungarian Bél-var, i.e. 'Breadcrumb town' (Hájek z Libočan 2013: 212). He claimed that the citizens there gave the Hungarian raiders only breadcrumb (in Czech 'střída'), although Hájek deduced the name from the similar sounding Hungarian word for 'middle'. No comment.

The first modern onomastic interpretations date back to the works of Czech national revival historians in the 19th century (see Šrámek 2007: 385–387), such as Ján Kollár, František Sláma and, of course, the most renowned figure in the field, František Palacký (1798–1876). True academic research on the boundaries of history and onomastics began at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. We can find individual interpretations of the names of places and the related inference of relevant historical events within the works of many historians of the time – one good example would be August Sedláček (1843–1926), who wrote a monumental work on Czech castles, over fifteen

beautifully illustrated volumes (Sedláček 1882–1927). In addition to this opus magnum, he also wrote the *Mistopisný slovník historický království Českého* [Historical topographical dictionary of the Kingdom of Bohemia] of around 1000 pages, published in 1909, in which he endeavoured to explain the origin of the names of individual places (Sedláček 1909), and he naturally did so in a much more exacting manner to his predecessors. For example, in the entry "*Hradiště*" he listed around 300 locations thus named whose names might refer to the existence of a castle ("*hrad*") or a similar building at some time in the past. The same author attempted to produce a comprehensive list of no-longer used toponyms in his book, *Snůška starých jmen, jak se nazývaly v Čechách řeky, potoky, hory a lesy* [A collection of old names for rivers, streams, mountains and forests in Bohemia] (Sedláček 1920). A large number of regional historians also wrote individual studies focusing on specific place names (Šrámek 2007: 396).

The field of older history, in which onomastic research is probably most applicable, is the history of settlement. This became particularly topical in the first half of the 20th century (in connection to demonstrating whether a particular location was originally settled by a Czech or a German population), but at the same time this research resulted in a number of very significant findings on the extent of mediaeval Bohemia, the colonisation of its border areas, etc. Wilhelm Friedrich (1881–1914), for example, who died prematurely on the front during the First World War, pointed out in his work, Die historische Geographie Böhmens bis zum Beginne der deutschen Kolonisation (Friedrich 1912; for information on the author see Martínek 2013), the large number of locations named according to various types of trees, and endeavoured in this way to define the extent of Slavic settlements in the 12th century. A detailed analysis of mediaeval settlements was written by professor of local history at Prague University, Josef Vítězslav Šimák (1870–1941), whose lifelong work was the book Středověká kolonisace zemí Českých [Medieval colonisation of the Czech lands] (Šimák 1938), the fifth volume of an extensively conceived and never completed multiple volume work of Czech history published by Laichter's publishing house. In the book, Šimák went from region to region (from village to village) describing the method of settlement during the period of massive development of the Czech lands in the 12th–13th centuries, providing a detailed list which made use of the results of historical and archaeological research, as well as onomastic methods (i.e. the names of locations with an endeavour at dating their origin). Of Šimák's colleagues and successors amongst historians and geographers, the list of others who made use of onomastics in one way or another also includes František Roubík, Bohuslav Horák and Ladislav Hosák, and amongst German researchers in the Czech lands, in particular Ernst Schwarz.

It was at this time, however, that Czech academics received a major aid – and not from the pen of a historian, but rather of a linguist. Antonín Profous

(1878–1953), professor of Czech at one of Prague's grammar schools (gymnasiums), had been studying interpretations of place names, initially within individual regions, but with his life's work eventually resulting in a huge five-volume compendium, Místní jména v Čechách. Jejich vznik, původní *význam a změny* [Place names in Bohemia: Their origin, original meaning, and changes], published in a total of five volumes between 1947 and 1960 (Profous ¹1947, 1949, 1951, ²1954; Profous & Svoboda 1957; Svoboda & Šmilauer 1960). This work of around fifteen thousand locations includes not just an expert interpretation of the origin of their names (even though onomasticians today may not always agree with these), but in particular provides a thorough list of their forms in historical sources from the early modern period to the 19th century, including the citation of sources. In the list of more than 300 locations with the name *Lhota*, for example (the most common Czech village name, from the word *lhóta* > *lhůta*, an Old Czech word referring to a temporary exemption from certain obligations), he demonstrated that practically all these locations dated to the earlier period of colonisation, with the first documented in sources in 1199. This invaluable aid remains important today: recently considerations were made of publishing the work again as a reprint, and it is also accessible online (https://mjc.ujc.cas.cz/).

Profous was unable to publish his work in full, getting up to the letter *V*; as such, the fourth volume was completed for him by renowned linguist Jan Svoboda, with the 1960's publication of the fifth volume aided by another legendary academic, Vladimír Šmilauer (1895–1983). However, at that time Šmilauer was working on another major work, which essentially marked the completion of settlement research as made possible by onomastics: Osidleni Čech ve světle místních jmen [The settlement of Bohemia in the light of place names] (Šmilauer ¹1960, ²2015). Šmilauer's work also divided names according to their suffixes into a number of historical epochs (e.g. -*ib*, -*ves* etc. are the oldest, followed by -ov, -in, usually from the 10th-12th centuries, with the youngest, usually village names, ending in -ice or -ovice) and it includes a number of maps which portray the method of settling Bohemia during the entire Middle Ages. This can be further adjusted by using the methods of other fields, today in particular archaeology, and interpreting this research in correlation with onomastic findings. Linguists who built on this work include in particular Ivan Lutterer and Rudolf Šrámek, while in terms of historians, Zdeněk Boháč (1933–2001) in particular wrote a number of works, including his excellent study, Dějiny osídlení středního Povltaví v době předhusitské [The history of the settlement of the Central Vltava region in the pre-Hussite period] (Boháč 1978).

This does not mean, of course, that historical research making use of onomastic methods came to an end. Of the most recent works, we could mention a study written by historian Josef Žemlička (*1946), in which he endeavours to date the origins of a set of forts from the peak of the Přemyslid

era which he attributes to Břetislav I (reigned 1035–1055) by listing the names of certain fortresses from the 11th century and comparing them to written sources, alongside archaeological findings (Žemlička 1995). The names of the forts established (*Břeclav*, *Vraclav*, *Jaroměř*, *Spytihněv* etc.) to some extent copy Christian names used within the Přemyslid princely family, and furthermore the only Přemyslid ruler in whose generation all these names align is Břetislav... This theory is also supported by other indications, among other with regard to historical development in Bohemia (and the newly attached Moravia) at that time.

3. Ideological name changes in modern history

The second area where onomastics is used in historical research is the study of modern society – and rather than the subject of study being the origin and interpretation of names, it is their changes in relation to political regimes, and in particular totalitarian regimes (whether Nazism or communism). Within the Czech context, there were not as many changes in the names of towns and cities or regions as there were in the former Soviet Union, for example – there were not as many ideological renaming of places such as occurred in the case of Gottwaldov (named after the first communist president, and formerly and currently known as Zlín) in Czechoslovakia – with such changes made at more of a lower level, mainly in regard to streets and squares.

Changes in toponymy occurred within the Czech lands in a number of waves – in the second half of the 19th century (the Czechisation of towns as a result of Czechs' rising demographic predominance over Germans during the National Revival period), after 1918 (eliminating names connected with the monarchy), during the German occupation in 1939–1945, in post-war response (German names disappeared, with a number of the new names existing only temporarily as a result of the rise of the communist regime in 1948), and after 1989 (abolition of communist names); sometimes, of course, streets changed names in other circumstances, such as when municipalities were merged into larger units (in Prague, following the incorporation of suburbs in 1922 this dragged on for a quarter of a century!), or in connection with the various political changes which Central Europe experienced plenty of during the twentieth century.

Individual researches analysing changes in the names of streets have been conducted in the past – the above-mentioned J. V. Šimák, for example, studied street names in his hometown of Turnov in a newspaper article (Šimák 1912), while František Ruth did the same for Prague and its suburbs, today city districts, in 1903–1904 (Ruth 1903–1904). These all broadly apply to the "preideological" period, although, as I have mentioned, the twentieth century was rather turbulent in the Czech lands and would certainly provide material for

research. The issue of taking this on, however, was more complicated, as drawing attention to old names was often perceived as politically inappropriate (especially when this was in regard to the disappearance of names commemorating people who were supposed to be forgotten). In this regard, a pioneering work was the book Ulicemi mesta Prahy [The streets of the city of Prague] (Čarek et al. 1958), published by a collective of historians (including Václav Hlavsa and Josef Janáček), archivists and linguists in the politically more convenient period shortly after the death of Soviet dictator, J. V. Stalin. This book was perceived mainly as a guide, but the material – the names of streets from the Middles Ages to the then present day - was naturally a fascinating historical study, although material in regard to the period in which the book was written was not fully exploited analytically. Numerous discussions were held of reissuing the book, but during the 1970s and 1980s in particular (even though Prague had expanded three times between 1960 and 1974 with a number of municipalities being added to the city which naturally resulted in changes to broadly duplicate names) there was no interest in being reminded of certain acts from past periods since their actors were still alive, never mind mentioning inconvenient people...

A new book in similar lines was not published until 1997–1998, when it, under the title *Pražský uličník* and in two volumes, appeared (Lašťovka & Ledvinka 1997–1998). This was the work of a team of archivists led by Marek Laštovka and with the support of long-term head of the city archives, Václav Ledvinka (*1947), who also authored the introductory study describing the historical circumstances of the system of Prague street names. (The book's third volume, focused on new additions from later decades alongside some corrections was published in 2008; a new, revised edition of *Uličník* was published in 2022 – Lašťovka et al. 2022.)

Pražský uličník has naturally inspired the publication of other similar guides also providing a lot of reference material for historical research on how regime changes, etc., were reflected in street names. Plzeň in West Bohemia (Fantová 2019) and Chomutov in North Bohemia (Rak & Pachner 2005), for example, have their own books on their street names, while Brno (www.encyklopedie.brna.cz) has a more broadly conceived city encyclopedia on the internet. Hradec Králové has at least a list within Wikipedia, and there are further examples of smaller places.

In addition to the overview studies mentioned, there are also a large number of individual studies focused on a particular issue. Of studies which represent individual areas of research on the frontier between history and onomastics, mention could be made of a book edited by Lenka Křížová and Jiří Martínek entitled *Od Karlova mostu ke Gottwaldovu* [From Charles Bridge to Gottwaldov], published in 2017 (Křížová & Martínek, eds., 2017), which presents various approaches to the issue. In this publication, a total of 13 authors look at the personalities in the names of cities, towns and places from

various perspectives – they analyse names in the Middle Ages and modern period, discover the names given according to modern founders of localities in question (Count Esterházy, factor owner Baťa), describe the disappearance of monarchist names, draw attention to names of still living persons on maps and explore unofficial and derisory names within Prague urban toponymy of the communist era (the chapter's author, Martina Ptáčníková, recently published a book on this topic, see Ptáčníková 2021).

4. Conclusion

The text of the article does not go into detail in regard to all the historians who made use of onomastic methods in their work. Nevertheless, I believe that it represents an overview of fundamental information on the issue and shows what direction the collaboration between historians and onomasticians has taken (and can continue to take).

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