A FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN CAMBRIDGE AND PRAGUE

I first met Lenka Matušíková on a freezing Prague pavement in November 1992. I had come to the Czech Republic to attend a conference on early modern Bohemian social and demographic history, and Lenka was one of the organizers. I was thrilled at the prospect of talking to people who knew about the archives, history, and modern life of these mysterious lands of Defenestrations and the 'second serfdom'. The scene of our meeting, with the smoky Bohemian fog, the dim outlines of ancient buildings, and the promise of exotic encounters in foreign languages, lived up to every image one might have of penetrating more deeply into the heart of central Europe.

What I didn't know was that the interesting-looking Czech archivist I had just shaken hands with was to become a close friend with whom, for the next more than twenty years, I would enjoy exploring seventeenth-century documents, north Bohemian archives, south Bohemian mushroom forests, Slovak mountains, Cambridge college gardens, the landscape of the Cambridgeshire Fens, the fine art of *knedlíky*-making, and Josef Čapek's classic *Povídání o pejskovi a kočičce* ('Tales of Doggy and Kitty').

Scholarly Discovery

That freezing November day, it was less than three years since the removal of the political barriers that had previously made it difficult for scholars on different sides of Europe to work together. I had finished my first two research projects, the first on 'proto-industry' in the Württemberg Black Forest and the second on the economic position of women in the German lands. I wanted to do something new, to study new questions, and above all to explore eastern-central Europe under the 'second serfdom'. Now that the barriers had come down, all this seemed possible.

I had been invited as an outside advisor on a new project that had started up, a joint venture between Austrian and Czech archivists and historians, for a comparative study of Bohemian social, economic and demographic history in the early modern period. Lenka was one of the founding members from the Czech side, along with Alena Pazderová, Eduard Maur, and a number of bright young students who have now become established academics themselves, including Josef Grulich, Dana Štefanová, and Alice Velková. They were supported by a galaxy of distinguished Czech historians and historical demographers, including Pavla Horská, Ludmila Fialová, Jaroslav Čechura, Jan Horský – and these were only the ones I talked to on that first occasion, the first of many meetings over the years. On the Austrian side of the project were colleagues whom I already knew well because of the longstanding ties

between the Institut für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte in Vienna and the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure: Michael Mitterauer, Josef Ehmer, Markus Cerman, and Herman Zeitlhofer. We all shared an interest in understanding the lives of ordinary people in the rural societies of central Europe.

The conference was wonderful. The many Czech historians attending from different universities spoke inspiringly about the rich tradition of Czech historical demography and economic history. The Austrians brought exciting ideas about computer-assisted methods, comparative cross-European analyses, and interdisciplinary approaches. But it was Lenka and Alena who stole the show, with their demonstration of the extraordinarily rich archival sources for early modern Bohemia: the 1651 Soupis poddaných podle víry, the 1654 Berní rula, the 1710–13 Tereziánský katastr. Many of us had worked on historical censuses and registers from different parts of pre-industrial Europe. But we all agreed that by far the richest historical census we had ever seen was the Soupis poddaných, not just because it covered so many parts of the same country in the same year, but also because of the amazing detail with which it described all the inhabitants of the tiniest villages, even ones with only three households left in 1651. I remember laughing with Lenka and Alena over the idea that one would register not just whether someone was 'Catholic' or 'not Catholic', but whether there was 'hope' or 'no hope' of their conversion. This was the sort of seventeenth-century 'thought police' that I had already encountered on the Protestant side of seventeenth-century Europe, as in one of the Württemberg villages I had studied, where a man gave bread and wine to his dog in the tavern one evening and was reported to the local church-court the next day for joking that it was the body and the blood of Christ. Needless to say, he got into a lot of trouble. We had all, in our research lives, encountered archival documents shedding light on these strange and dangerous corners of life in seventeenth-century Europe.

We had a wonderful time at the conference and learned a huge amount from one another. On the last day, the Czech-Austrian team asked if I would like to join the project myself and tackle some of the themes I had suggested in the course of the conference. How could I say no? I could already see that this international team cared passionately about using archival sources to find out what really happened in early modern Bohemia, that we could all learn a lot from one another, and that it would be enormously enjoyable. And the rest, as they say, is history.

On that final day of my visit to Prague in November 1992, Lenka generously spent time showing me through the colossal volumes of the Soupis poddaných and the Berní rula, advising on which places I might choose to study, and

suggesting what kind of additional sources might be available in local and regional archives. The planning for our international Czech-Austrian-British project on Bohemian history continued throughout the winter of 1992–3. By the spring of 1993 I had managed to get sabbatical leave from the University of Cambridge and had arranged to spend the academic year 1993–4 in Prague working on the project.

On a hot day in late July 1993, Lenka met me and my partner Jeremy at the Státní ústřední archiv (as it was still then called), and drove with us down to the flat in Podolí, where we were to live until the late spring of 1994. When, two days later, on the 1st of August, the hot water immediately disappeared from our building, it was Lenka who explained that there was traditionally no hot water in Prague apartment buildings for the entire month of August because of the need to clean out the central municipal heating infrastructure. Within the project team, we all sat around over coffee that day debating the pros and cons – environmental, technical and human – of different ways of heating cities.

By September 1993, I had decided to focus my research within the project on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century series of Úřední protokol (manorial court records) from the estates of Frýdlant and Liberec, linking these qualitative sources with the quantitative findings from the Soupis poddaných, Berní rula, and Tereziánský katastr. From July 1993 to April 1994, I occupied a desk at the Státní ústřední archiv, working my way through these documents and putting together a database of the whole series of c. 3800 cases recorded by the Frýdlant manorial court between 1584 and 1692. Reading these thousands of handwritten pages from the ordinary lives of early modern Bohemians and transcribing them into a database was my 'journeymanship' in Bohemian history and culture.

But even more important was what I learned from Lenka. Every day in the archive, Lenka would invite me into her office for coffee after lunch. There, we often discussed the work in the documents that we had done that day – her documents on the history of the Jews, both pre-modern and twentieth-century, my documents on ordinary women and men in northern Bohemia. We discovered we were both interested in the same things.

For one thing, we shared an interest in rural craftsmen: I through my interest in proto-industry, Lenka through the craftsmen she discovered on the estate of Poděbrady during her work within the project. We were charmed to discover how the Bohemian countryside was full of a colourful array of non-agricultural activities. Even under the 'second serfdom', women and men in rural Bohemia did not just engage in subsistence agriculture but were involved in a wide range of market-oriented crafts and services. Nor did serfs just engage in industries when they were ordered or compelled to do so by

the manorial administrators. Instead, they decided by themselves on a huge variety of ingenious ways of earning a living. The Bohemian countryside was a variegated and entrepreneurial place, with many ordinary people, including women and Jews, putting together their livelihood from an amazing conglomeration of different crafts and services – including many things they weren't officially supposed to be doing.

Another interest Lenka and I shared was the history of the Bohemian Jews. We often discussed over coffee the examples we found in archival documents of the regulations limiting what Jews could do in the early modern period, the things they did anyway, and the wide range of ways they contributed to Bohemian society over the centuries. The Frýdlant manorial court records that I was studying revealed the many-sided experience of Jews in small Bohemian towns and villages. On the one hand, Jews and non-Jews associated with one another normally on a day-to-day basis: in 1588 a Frýdlant Jew, just like any other subject of the lord of Frýdlant, was required to provide guarantees that he would present himself to the manorial court upon his return from Lusatia; in 1615, three Frýdlant woollen-weavers bought several hundredweight of raw wool from two Jews from Prague; in 1630, 'the Jews' *Richter* in Prague' reported that a Frýdlant villager had properly repaid the money he'd borrowed from the Jew Christoph Jakowiz to buy two horses. Such cases testified to the normal presence of Jews in everyday Bohemian life in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. But other cases gave evidence of casual anti-Semitism, as in 1614 when the manorial *Secretarius* in Frýdlant defamed a *Schöppe* (community elder) in a village by calling him a Jew; or in August 1677, when the *Kreis* sent orders to Frýdlant that no-one was to be allowed to travel through the estate without a health certificate, 'especially Jews, Gypsies, and Polacks with bears'. There was even at least one serious conflict, when a fight broke out in August 1631 between a group of Frýdlant Jews, a Raspenava villager and a Frýdlant baker over a horse sale – although the Frýdlant manorial court saw many other similar fights over horse-trading which did not involve Jews. Lenka had many examples from her own research of the long combined history of the Jewish and non-Jewish inhabitants of Bohemia, characterized by long stretches of tolerance and cooperation interrupted by sudden bouts of intolerance and conflict. We came to see how the position of the Jews in any European society casts light on how that whole society worked – its official structures, its special privileges, the interstices within which ordinary Jews and non-Jews lived their daily lives.

Lenka and I also shared an interest in the history of women, and often traded examples from our documents on how women survived in pre-modern Bohemia. This interest continued, and we were ultimately able to follow it up

by doing some research together using Czech court records. In the summer of 2003, Lenka came to Cambridge on an award from the Professor Dame Elizabeth Hill Fund of Cambridge University, which supports research into handwritten Czech documents from the pre-1700 period. During this research visit, Lenka and I worked together on Czech documents to find out more about everyday life in early modern Czech villages. One of the most interesting sets of documents we found were those recording the history of Anna Kovářka, who died as a poor, old *podruhyně* (lodger) in the village of Radovesnice on the estate of Poděbrady in 1655. The *rychtář* (village headman) and four *konšelé* (village elders) visited Anna on her deathbed and tried to bully her into revealing where she kept her money. When she protested that she had no money and told them to leave her alone to die in peace, they went into her storage-chest, found 36 *Taler*, and took it for themselves, using it to pay their *Kontributionen* (war taxes) and reward their friends around the village. What was particularly interesting to me and Lenka was that all the women in the village knew about the crime. But they were too afraid to tell the authorities, because they feared that the *rychtář* and *konšelé* would take revenge on them. In the words of Anna Vsteklá, the woman who was caring for Anna Kovářka on her deathbed, 'I was not allowed to inform the manorial administrator because they could take revenge on me, because the *sousedi* (village householders) needed the money ... I was waiting for someone wealthier to inform the authorities'. Ultimately, the crime was discovered, but the manorial administrators did not punish the men because they were the richest draft-peasants in the village and it was important that they be free to cultivate their fields and do *robota* with their animals on the demesne farm. These five men who stole money from a dying woman even continued to occupy their positions as village *rychtář* and *konšelé* because, the administrator said, there were no better men to do so. From cases such as these, Lenka and I came to understand more, not only about women's position, but also about the interlinked nexus between community and manorial power in seventeenth-century Czech villages.

Over the years, Lenka and I have continued our scholarly interchanges on Bohemian history and archival science. I nominated her to serve on the Endangered Archives Panel, an initiative linked to the British Library which provides funding for projects to save archives which would otherwise be lost or destroyed. This enabled us to spend time together in Cambridge every summer for a number of years. Lenka introduced me to northern Bohemian regional archives, especially in Liberec and Děčín. When Lenka gave keynote lectures to Czech and Jewish genealogical conferences in the USA, we worked together on how best to explaining Czech archival sources to researchers from abroad, and ultimately published an article in the journal Naše rodina

on 'Bohemia after the Thirty Years War: Historical Sources Deposited in the National Archives in Prague'. When I gave a lecture at the Czech Embassy in London a few years ago, Lenka advised me on my introductory speech. Now that I am again working on Bohemian history, this time on the Berní rula and the Tereziánský katastr, Lenka is the most well-informed and generous of advisors. I look back with pleasure and gratitude on more than two decades of mutual discovery and fruitful cooperation with Lenka about Bohemian history and archival documents, and look forward to many more such experiences together in the years to come.

Czech Culture

But our long scholarly cooperation has been only one aspect of the friendship between me and Lenka. The other aspect has been the equally important and rich discovery of each other's culture. One of the reasons I accepted the invitation to attend that first project conference in Prague in November 1992 was that I had always been interested in the Czech lands. My father, a plant ecologist, had studied at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver with the distinguished Czech botanist and plant ecologist, Vladimír Krajina, an impressive figure I remember as a visitor to my parents' home in my childhood. As a young student studying history at the University of St Andrews, in the winter of 1978 I drove in a little half-broken-down Renault Four from Scotland across snowy central Europe into what was then Czechoslovakia. It was a 'Thirty Years War pilgrimage' to the places that I had hitherto only read about in the books of Josef Polišenský: the chancellory room in Prague Castle where three Habsburg councillors were thrown out of a window, the field where the Battle of the White Mountain was finished in an hour, the room in the Cheb Bürgermeister's house where Wallenstein was woken up in the middle of the night and killed. In the early 1990s, to have the opportunity actually to do research on the history of the Czech lands, and to live in Prague in such an exciting period of change and opening, was the fulfilment of many dreams.

Lenka was a moving spirit in making this experience not just one of scholarly studies but one of a deeper discovery of Czech culture. This began during my year as a guest researcher at the Státní ústřední archiv. One day in the autumn of 1993 I brought to coffee a beautifully illustrated book of Czech fairy tales, *Dlouhý, Široký a Bystrozraký a jiné Pohádky*. Lenka and I started reading it together. Suddenly, the Czech language, which I had been learning slowly from the lessons in a worthy but boring textbook containing tedious dialogues between modern students, came alive. In the Czech fairy tales, I found myself reading a rich and colourful language, with stories that actually had adventures in them, learning vocabulary such as 'princess', 'castle' and

'horse' – so useful for living in Prague in the 1990s! – and finding out how to describe pictures of jesters wearing 'žlutý leginy' (yellow leggings, as worn by the character Dlouhý). Every day Lenka and I would read about Dlouhý, Široký and Bystrozraký, she would give me *domácí cvičení* (homework) overnight, and the next day after lunch I would re-tell the story to her in Czech.

When we finished the fairy tales, Lenka brought in her childhood copy of Josef Čapek's *Povídání o pejskovi a kočičce*. It was one of the most charming books I have ever read, and I still imagine there to be a neighbourhood somewhere in a Czech town, where Kočička is mending a hole in Pejsek, using an earthworm for thread!

Through Lenka, the world of old Czech tales opened up to me. I still cherish Lenka's copy of *Povídání o pejskovi a kočičce*, which she gave me – and the medieval-style pair of 'žlutý leginy' which she bought me at a Prague street-market. Thanks to Lenka, I learned to read in Czech the way that a child learns, by reading strange and funny stories in the company of people with whom one enjoys spending time.

Ever since then, Lenka has continued to open windows for me onto Czech culture. Recently she gave me Božena Němcová's book *Babička*. Reading about how life deepens and becomes more colourful for the children in the story when the Grandmother comes to live at the Old Bleachery also deepened and made more colourful for me life in a Czech village of that time, its agrarian calendar, the customs of the villagers, and the lives of rural women. In turn, I try to find books that Lenka will like, such as *The Nine Tailors*, the crime novel by Dorothy Sayers, set near the Hundred Foot Drain in the Fen Country north of Cambridge, which Lenka and I have visited together; or the English mystery stories by Jill Paton Walsh set in the fictional Cambridge college of St Agatha's, where the 'detective' is Imogen Quy, the college nurse. Through reading these stories in each other's languages, we learn to understand each other's countries and cultures.

Lenka has also made sure I carried out research into an even more serious and profound aspect of Czech culture – its food. One of the first Czech foods I fell in love with was *knedlíky* (dumplings). Once Lenka learned this, she decided that we must conduct combined Czech language and dumpling lessons. So one evening, I came over to Lenka's place and, speaking only Czech, we cooked up no fewer than three kinds of dumpling – *bramborové knedlíky* (potato dumplings), *slaninové knedlíky* (bacon dumplings), and for dessert *ovocné knedlíky* (fruit dumplings) with butter and poppyseed. Fortunately, we had the assistance of five men, including Lenka's three sons, to help us deal with the output of this dumpling manufactory! Even then, after eating all

those different kinds of dumpling I felt so full that I would never need to eat again – and thus understood why *knedlíky* were such a good way of providing energy to a hardworking Czech farm labour force.

Mushrooms were another important aspect of Czech culture which I learned about from Lenka. My partner Jeremy and I travelled with Lenka in southern Bohemia and eastwards into Slovakia to the High Tatra, and were introduced to the serious art of hunting wild mushrooms. We came to admire Lenka's ability to track down a *hřib smrkový* (cep mushroom) at a distance of several hundred metres in a deep forest hidden in the moss behind thick undergrowth. We concluded that she could probably find mushrooms in the middle of a moonless night, by instinct alone.

We also learned about how twentieth-century history was experienced in our different cultures, as it was lived in the history of our own families: my two Canadian grandfathers who fought in two different World Wars; the dividing of the two parts of Europe after 1945, by which a great Czech plant ecologist came to teach my father at a Canadian university in the 1950s; the events of 1968, which brought several Czech children into my school classes in Calgary in the late 1960s (who soon spoke perfect Canadian English); and the events of 1989, which evoked serious conversations inside so many Czech families, changed so many lives on both sides of Europe, and created the possibility for me and Lenka to be friends. Walking together through the streets of Prague, Liberec, Frýdlant, Třeboň, Levoča, Kežmarok, and many other beautiful places, Lenka and I each learned more about the history of ordinary people like us, the archival documents that record our lives, and the colourful differences and surprising similarities between our cultures.

Lenka and I grew up in different places, 7769 km and 8 time-zones apart, speaking different languages, under different political systems. Yet when we met, we discovered that we had many things in common – we laughed at the same things, we loved the same stories, we often guessed each other's thoughts. Knowing Lenka for the past 22 years has not only enriched my knowledge of Czech archives, history, literature, landscape, and *knedlíky*. It has also made me understand in a much deeper way the Czech proverb, 'Kolik jazyků znáš, tolikrát jsi člověkem', which is only inadequately translated into English as 'The more languages you know, the more ways you are a human being'. I think that what Masaryk meant by this was not just that we should literally learn each other's languages, as Lenka and I have tried to do, but that by communicating and making friends across cultural boundaries, we discover further dimensions to what it means to be a person. Certainly, that is one of the many things I have discovered by knowing Lenka Matušíková.

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