1 Maps, Epochs, Seers, and Saints

A popular sixteenth-century map-making convention represented Europe as a female figure, with Bohemia, the lands of the Crown of St. Wenceslas, as its heart. This metaphorical location has long appealed to the Czechs and is tailor-made for tourist brochures.[1] Since the heart is the body's center, it reinforces another favorite Czech location on the map of the mind, the center. Milan Kundera, a Czech émigré writer, helped revive the concept of "Central Europe" during the 1980s, but his lament for a lost center resonated with older Czech attitudes about their central position in Europe, rooted in the nineteenth century. This center also represented moderation, opposed to extremes in any direction.[2] Another Czech mental map locates them centrally between the cultural forces of the Germans and Latins (sometimes simply called "Europe") and the world of the Slavs, which could be opposed to Europe if the occasion warranted.[3] As the westernmost Slavic nation, the Czechs have also seen themselves as a bridge centered between the "West" and the "East," a metaphor that saw an unhappy revival after World War II.

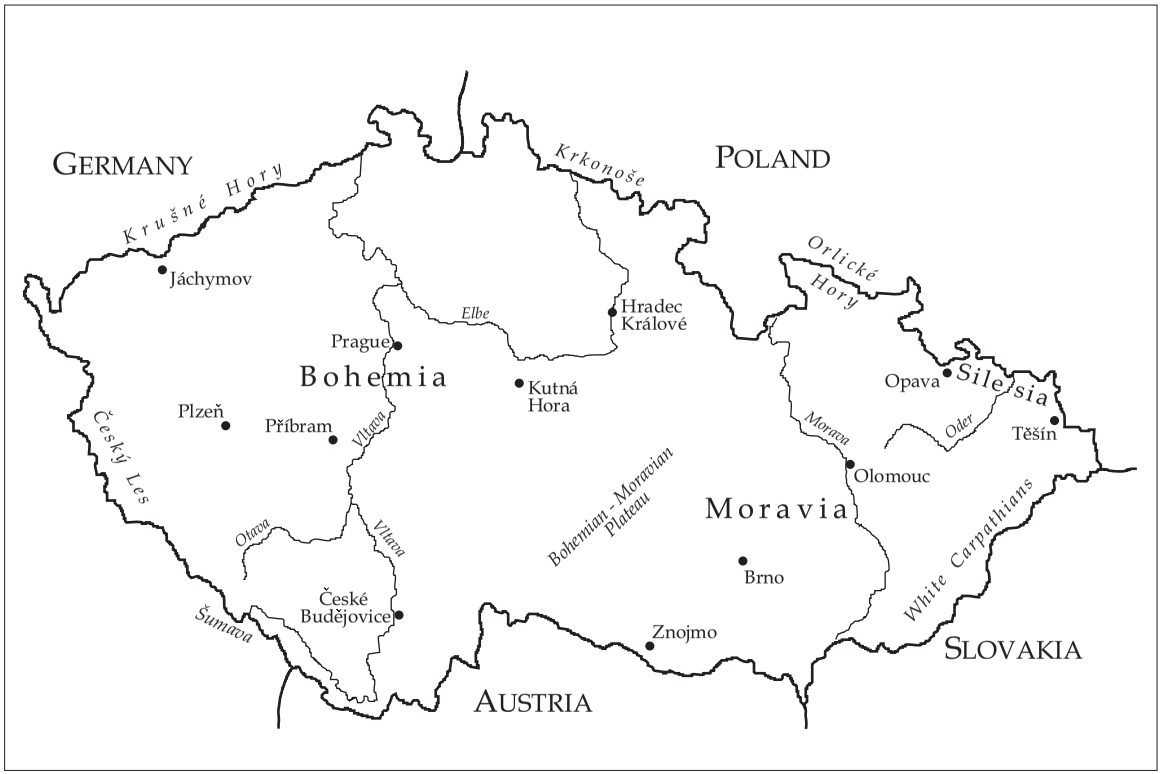
The Czechs and their homeland are usually not the center of other people's mental maps. One need not limit oneself to Neville Chamberlain's phrase on the eve of the Munich Conference in 1938, about "faraway lands" and "people of whom we know nothing." William Shakespeare used Bohemia to stand for any far-off, exotic clime, even equipping it with a coastline.[4] In succeeding centuries, as the commercial and

then industrial revolutions transformed the European economy, the Austrian Empire and with it the Bohemian crownlands ended up trailing behind and struggling to catch up with the West European powers. Twentieth-century politics also relegated the Czechs to the "Eastern" side of the political divide that shaped the dominant European map for the last two generations. Even since 1989, with thousands of Westerners (including Americans) living in Czechoslovakia and its successor republics, these lands are still hardly in the middle of our mental maps.

SETTING THE STAGE: WHERE ARE THE BOHEMIAN LANDS?

The physical setting for this history is fixed easily enough: the lands of the present-day Czech Republic, which closely correspond to the core of the historical Kingdom of Bohemia (Bohemia proper, Moravia, and part of Silesia) lie between 51° 03′ and 48° 33′ north latitude, and 12° 05′ and 18° 51′ east longitude. The climate is continental and temperate. Physically, the Bohemian lands enjoy natural mountain frontiers: the Krkonoše and Orlické Hory (also known as the Sudeten Mountains) on the northeast bordering Poland, the Šumava mountains blending into the Český Les (Bohemian Forest) along the southern and southwestern frontier with Austria and Germany, and the Krušné Hory on the northwestern border with Germany. The Bohemian-Moravian Plateau marks the border between Bohemia and Moravia; the White Carpathian (Bílé Karpaty) chain separates Moravia from Slovakia in the east. Though lacking Shakespeare's coastline, the Bohemian lands enjoy adequate connections to major European river systems. The Elbe (Labe) flows into the North Sea, the Oder (Odra) into the Baltic, and the Morava (which gives its name to Moravia) into the Danube and thence to the Black Sea. The most significant tributary of the Elbe is the Vltava (Moldau), immortalized in Bedřich Smetana's tone poem "Má vlast" (My Country), which flows from south to north along almost the entire length of Bohemia.

The human inhabitants of these lands have long exploited their natural resources. In prehistoric times copper, tin, and iron ore were mined in the Bohemian lands. Gold was extracted from the sands of the Otava River, and silver from Kutná Hora (Kuttenberg), Jáchymov (Joachims-



Map 1. The Czech Republic since 1993

thal), and Příbram (Przibram) contributed to the wealth and power of the Bohemian kings, just as Czech uranium (often from the same locations as the medieval silver mines) contributed to the nuclear power of the Soviet Union. Other mineral resources include coal, though high-quality black coal is relatively scarce. Deposits of poorer quality brown coal have been mined extensively, but burning brown coal for power has caused serious environmental damage. Alternative energy sources like hydroelectric and nuclear power remain controversial.[5] High-intensity industrial farming also contributed to environmental degradation through erosion and the buildup of toxic chemical residues from over-use of fertilizers and pesticides.[6] These contemporary ecological problems represent one facet of a relationship between land and people that stretches back over millennia.

In gentler ways, too, centuries of human habitation have shaped the Bohemian lands. Forests (spruce and fir in the higher elevations, with broad-leaved trees such as oak, beech, birch, and linden at lower levels) interspersed with fields characterize the landscape. Human hands felled trees and cleared fields, transforming the woods by removing undergrowth so livestock could graze. The Czech speciality of carp-raising in large ponds, dating back to the Middle Ages, created another typical feature of the countryside. Perhaps there is some affinity between Jakub Krčín of Jelčany, monomaniacal pond builder in the sixteenth century, and the planners of the Lipno, Orlík, and Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros dam projects in the twentieth? At any rate, the relationship between human beings and their land remains significant to Czechs in many ways—from environmental politics to weekend cottages and trips to the woods for mushrooms.

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS: FROM PREHISTORY TO THE SLAVS

What, then, about the people who have inhabited these lands? Recently discovered artifacts have pushed the estimated date for the earliest human presence here to between 1.6 and 1.7 million years ago.[7] Through the long millennia of the Paleolithic, or Old Stone Age, *Homo erectus*, *Homo neandertalensis*, and the anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* left their traces in the Bohemian lands. It is difficult to say whether humans moved into and out of the region with the changing

climate during the last Ice Ages, or stayed continuously. When the Ice Ages ended approximately 10,000 years ago, humans had to adapt as the cold, dry steppe habitats, with their herds of large mammals, were replaced by broad-leaf forests and animals similar to today's. The changed hunting conditions encouraged smaller human settlements concentrated along rivers and lakes, where fishing supplemented forest hunting.

Even greater changes in human society came with the introduction of farming and domestic animals—possibly the greatest development in human culture since the use of fire. With the change from hunter-gatherer to agricultural societies, the Neolithic, or New Stone Age, begins. Neolithic settlements in the Balkans pre-date the sixth millennium B.C., in the course of which they spread through the Danubian basin into the Bohemian lands. Scholars argue over whether farming societies arose in Europe independently, through immigrants from the Near East, or through "historical convergences" that spread influences from one people to another. Of the major domesticated plants and animals, only cattle were native to Europe: sheep, goats, wheat, and barley were imports from the Near East.[8]

Farming societies were established in Central Europe by the fifth millennium B.C., and thereafter it appears that human settlement in the Bohemian lands was more or less continuous. Archaeologists usually identify the successive cultures of the Neolithic, Bronze Age (end of the third millennium B.C. to eighth century B.C.), and Iron Age (eighth century B.C. to the present) by some typical feature, often ceramics or burial practices, or by the site where they were first discovered. Without written records it is difficult to say with certainty, but one broadly accepted view holds that most Neolithic Europeans were Indo-European speakers. This probability becomes definite only with the historically documented Celts of the later Iron Age.

When the Celts came into contact with the ancient Mediterranean world, they found their way into the writings of Greek and Roman authors and onto the historical stage. From these references we learn that a Celtic tribe known as the Boii inhabited the region in Roman times, and from them the country derives its common non-Slavic name, Bohemia. The Celts, whose settlements in Bohemia date to the mid-fourth century B.C., were skilled craftsmen, built settled communities, and had a highly developed social organization. The further development of Celtic society in the Bohemian lands, however, ended in the first century

B.C.[9] The most important cause was the arrival of Germanic tribes moving into Bohemia from the north.

The Romans clashed with the Germans beyond their frontier several times during the next centuries, but by the later fourth century Roman power was waning rapidly. At that time the Huns (a nomadic people of Asian origin) attacked the lands of the Ostrogoths near the Black Sea, setting off mass population movements, the "barbarian invasions" linked to the decline of the Roman Empire in the west. During the turmoil of the next century, the Bohemian lands were relegated to the periphery of the Roman world, and historical sources mention them only rarely. The Germanic tribes also disappear from the sources, and instead a new people begin to appear in the region, coming initially from the north and east—the Slavs.

The origins of the Slavs are still much debated. Generally, scholars agree that they expanded in historical times from an area north of the Carpathian Mountains, between the middle reaches of the Dniepr and the upper and middle Oder and Vistula rivers. The Slavs arrived gradually, in small groups, seeping into the spaces left by the departure of the Germans, coexisting with and absorbing remnants of previous communities. By the beginning of the seventh century, Slavic settlements had expanded throughout Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, from the mouth of the Elbe and the Baltic coast to the shores of the Black, Adriatic, and Aegean seas.

The Slavs belong to the Indo-European linguistic family, and at the time of their migrations they probably spoke fundamentally the same tongue. Latin and Greek sources refer to them as Sklavenoi, Sclaveni, Sclavi, and so on, but they called themselves, according to the first written records of the ninth century, Slověni. This term is sometimes derived from *slovo* (word, implying the ability to speak intelligibly) while their name for their neighbors to the west was Němci (from *němý*, incapable of speech, mute).[10] Over the course of centuries the Slavic linguistic family differentiated into three branches: the West Slavic (including Czech, Polish, Lusatian Serbian, and dialects of now-extinct Slavs along the Elbe and Baltic coast), South Slavic (Slovene, Croatian, Serbian, Bulgarian, and Macedonian), and East Slavic (Russian, Ukrainian, and Belorussian). The development of separate standard Slavic languages began with the creation of Slavic states during the ninth and tenth centuries.

The early Slavic states formed in a historical setting shaped by the still-existing legacy of the classical world. One source of that legacy, the

Byzantine Empire, preserved an urban, imperial, Christian civilization, ruled by an emperor whose line of succession ran back to Caesar Augustus. In the Romanized provinces of Western Europe the Christian church was well organized, with a hierarchical structure of bishops based on the former Roman cities, owning the supremacy of the bishop of Rome, the pope. The Christian church in the west, however, operated without the powerful political authority represented in Byzantium by the emperor. Even after the papal coronation of Charlemagne, king of the Franks, as emperor in 800, it was the pope who was recognized as the vicar of Christ. From the tenth century onward, the popes balanced between the revived imperial power and other forces, notably the western branch of the Germanic Franks (the future France).[11] As the Slavs moved into Southeastern and Central Europe, including the Bohemian lands, their development would be affected by influences coming from each of these sources.

FROM THE EARLY SLAVS TO THE MORAVIAN STATE

With the arrival of the Slavs in the Bohemian crownlands, the main character of our history steps upon the stage. That at least was how Cosmas of Prague, dean of the cathedral chapter, saw it. Author of a twelfth-century Latin chronicle that makes him the first native historian of Bohemia, Cosmas recounts how the Slavs' tribal leader, Čech, takes them to the summit of mount Říp to look at their new homeland, "that land that I have often promised you, a land subject to no one, filled with game and birds, flowing with sweet milk and honey, and . . . with a pleasant climate."[12] Cosmas's tale of the Czechs taking possession of their promised land reappears in later chronicles, remains until today part of the Czechs' historical imagination, and immediately evokes recognition.[13] Though this story is the stuff of great legends, it has no historical documentation. What we can piece together from fragmentary written sources and archaeological evidence nevertheless gives us a picture of the arrival of the new settlers and their adaptation to their new surroundings. That adaptation—settling beside, displacing, and gradually absorbing remaining groups of non-Slavs—took several centuries.

By the mid-sixth century another group of Asian nomads, the Avars, dominated the Slavs and remnants of Germanic peoples in the Pannon-

ian basin. According to a Frankish chronicle, these Slavs revolted against the Avars in 623 or 624, choosing as their leader a Frankish merchant named Samo. After defeating the Avars, Samo established a personal realm, the earliest state among the Western Slavs, where he ruled for thirty-five years. Samo's empire (which probably included part of the Bohemian lands) dissolved after his death. The Slavs returned to their tribal associations, settling around fortified sites on high ground.[14]

Early sources sometimes use the Latin-derived terms "Bohemia" and "Bohemians" as though they represented a single land and people, but at other times they mention different Slavic tribal names. These tribal groups gradually changed from kinship-based to territorial associations, grouped around a fort and its ruling family. Ninth- and tenth-century sources suggest that Bohemia had three such tribal groupings, including the Czechs in the center, while with the exception of one tribal group in the north, only Moravians are mentioned in Moravia.[15] The free males decided tribal affairs, choosing a leader from among the prominent families. The status and functions of this leader (called in Czech *kníže*, prince or duke) is reflected in the names of some of the early dukes: Svatoslav, Jaroslav (religious ritual), Mojmír, Přemysl (virtues of rulership), Bořivoj, Svatopluk (military prowess). A rudimentary aristocracy of prominent families helped cross tribal boundaries and led to the formation of larger political units.[16]

A powerful and ambitious neighbor, the Germanic kingdom of the Franks, hastened the Slavs' political organization. The Frankish ruler Charlemagne restored the empire in 800, and extended its control through Bavaria, Saxony, and Italy. The Slavic regions beyond also beckoned to Frankish merchants, missionaries, and ambitious noble warriors. From 805 to 806, Charlemagne's armies defeated the Czech tribes and forced them to pay tribute.[17] Following his death in 814, Charlemagne's heirs quarreled, weakening the Frankish state. His grandson, Louis the German, who controlled the eastern portion (Treaty of Verdun, 843), reasserted Carolingian authority by religious expansion. From the bishoprics of Regensburg, Passau, and Salzburg Christian missions set out among the Slavs.

The Slavs in Moravia responded to the Frankish example first.[18] Their duke, Mojmír I, was baptized at Passau in 831, and thereafter the Moravians built stone churches in their fortified settlements, the earliest known example consecrated at Nitra in the 830s by the bishop of Salzburg. In January 845, fourteen "dukes" of the Bohemian Slavs also ar-

rived at Louis's court in Regensburg to accept baptism, but when Louis intervened in Moravia to place Mojmír's nephew Rostislav on the throne, they renounced their politically motivated conversions.[19]

Rostislav had his own interests in Bohemia, where he clashed with the East Franks, highlighting the dangers of Frankish social and religious penetration. In 860, Rostislav asked the pope for Christian missionaries directly from Rome. When his request had no results, Rostislav turned in 863 to the Byzantine Emperor, Michael III, and Patriarch Photius. According to the Slavic *Life of St. Methodius*, the Moravians told the emperor: "We have prospered through God's grace, and many Christian teachers have come to us from among the Italians, Greeks, and Germans, teaching us in various ways. But we Slavs are a simple people, and have none to instruct us in the truth, and explain wisely."[20] The patriarch and emperor selected two Greek brothers from Salonika, Constantine and Methodius, for this task. They knew the Slavic language in daily use around their native city, and translated portions of the liturgy and scriptural texts into it, using a writing system invented by Constantine, the glagolitic script.

During their joint missionary work in Moravia between 863 and 867, Constantine and Methodius educated a number of new priests, using the newly written Slavonic liturgy. Their mission fell foul of the Frankish clergy, however, who complained to the pope. The brothers went to Rome, where Pope Hadrian II supported them, making Constantine a bishop and allowing him to enter a Roman monastery under the name Cyril. After Cyril's unexpected death, Methodius was sent back to Moravia, but the Bavarian clergy imprisoned him. It took Pope John VIII's intervention to get him released, at the price of a ban on using the Slavonic liturgy.[21]

In 870, Rostislav's nephew Svatopluk deposed him. The Bohemian Slavs—including the ruler of the Czech tribe, Bořivoj, the first member of the house of Přemysl mentioned in the documents (872)—supported him against the Franks. Bořivoj accepted Christianity at Svatopluk's court, supposedly from Methodius himself. Svatopluk's attitude to the Byzantine mission was cooler than Rostislav's, however, and when Methodius died in 885, his followers left to take their missionary work to the Bulgarians. Svatopluk's death in 894, and the arrival of new nomads from the east, the Magyars, further weakened his realm. In 903 or 904 the Magyars decisively defeated the Moravians. Its core broken and most of its leaders slain, the Moravian empire fell apart. Protected by its

mountains from recurrent Magyar inroads, Bohemia changed from a Moravian periphery to the political center of the western Slavs. The Přemyslids, rulers of the central Bohemian Czech tribe, were the dominant force in this development.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE CZECH STATE

Cosmas's chronicle and other sources preserve the early traditions about the foundation of the Přemyslid dynasty. According to these legends Přemysl was the first duke of the Czechs. Libuše, a prophetess descended from Father Čech, chose him to leave his plow and oxen in the field, wed her, and rule the Czechs from her castle at Vyšehrad. By Bořivoj's time, the core of the Czech territory was probably ruled directly by the duke through a network of such forts. Bořivoj founded Prague by erecting first a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and later (perhaps around 885) a new castle on the ridge of Hradčany. Bořivoj's son and successor, Spytihněv I (ca. 894–ca. 915) broke away from Moravian overlordship, paying tribute to the East Frankish king, and placing Bohemia's church under the bishop of Regensburg. The other Czech dukes recognized his supremacy, but maintained a great deal of their own independence.

The turn of the ninth to tenth centuries was turbulent for the Franks too. When the Carolingian dynasty died out, the dukes of the five regional duchies in the old East Frankish kingdom, Bavaria, Saxony, Thuringia, Franconia, and Swabia, contended for the Carolingian succession. The Czechs supported the Bavarians, but in 919 the Saxon Henry I (the Fowler) became king. The implications of that event were not yet clear when the ruling Czech duke, Vratislav I (915–921) died. Vratislav's son, Václav, was still a minor, so his widow, Drahomíra, headed a regency. Rivalry between Drahomíra and Ludmila, Václav's grandmother, ended in 921 with Ludmila's murder. Václav, who began to rule shortly thereafter, transferred her remains to Prague, and supported the clergy whom she had patronized, and who venerated her as a saint.[22]

Václav (921–935) reined in the dependent dukes who had become restive under the regency and used Christianity to strengthen his state. He paid tribute and swore an oath of loyalty to Henry the Fowler in 929, but in return he received relics of St. Vitus for the newly established

rotunda of St. Vitus in the Prague castle. Václav and his younger brother Boleslav developed a rivalry that has been interpreted in different ways. Nationalist Czech historians have seen it as a reaction against Václav's supposedly pro-German policies, while the German side (especially during World War II) presented Václav as supporting a realistic policy of Czech submission to a stronger Germany.[23] In the face of the reviving German kingdom under the Saxon Ottonian dynasty, Václav proceeded cautiously; Boleslav later pursued a more energetic policy. The question of Bohemia's relations with the German state (whatever form it took) would remain a constant theme in Czech history.

The conflict between the two brothers culminated on September 28, 935, with Václav's murder by his brother's servants. After Václav's death, Boleslav I (935–972) actively pursued consolidation and a running conflict with Henry the Fowler's son and successor, Otto I. In 950 a strong Saxon army forced him to renew the vassal's oath of fealty, and five years later, Boleslav and the Czechs supported Otto in his great victory over the Magyars near Augsburg. Boleslav also extended Přemyslid control through Moravia and parts of today's Slovakia to Cracow, and farther east, eventually reaching the Bug River.[24]

Boleslav's expansion rested on a more effective system of control.[25] The murdered duke Václav contributed to this consolidation of Přemyslid power. He became—together with his grandmother, Ludmila—one of the Czech patron saints and an emblem of Bohemian statehood.[26] In the struggle to build a firmly organized state, St. Václav (in latinized form, Wenceslas) and St. Ludmila gave charisma to the Přemyslids and Christian legitimacy to the Czech state. The Czechs developed the idea that the country belonged to St. Václav, but in practice the duke as his earthly representative treated it as his possession and its inhabitants as his subjects. He relied upon his armed retainers to support him, fight his battles, and extract contributions and taxes. Traditionally they approved the election of a new duke, a symbolic recognition of their influence, which depended on service to the duke rather than owning land.

The basis of Boleslav's system was the castle or fort, at this time still usually a wood and earth structure, sometimes with an outer wall encased in dry-set stone. Boleslav extended the network of castles and settled officials taken from his retinue in them. From the castles they collected taxes, supplies, and other payments from the local population. The castles with their churches were also centers for the spread of Christianity.[27] Greater stability encouraged trade. Prague hosted foreign mer-

chants, among them Germans, Latins, and Jews. Ibrahim ibn Jakub, a Spanish Jew sent from Cordoba on an embassy to Otto I in 965, wrote that Prague was "built of stone and lime," and emphasized that it was "the largest town [among the Slavs] in terms of trade," exporting slaves, tin, and furs. Bohemia, he wrote, was "the best country of the north."[28]

The Bohemian church was still under the bishop of Regensburg, so Boleslav worked to create his own bishopric in Prague. The pope agreed, and helped establish the Benedictine convent of St. George in the Prague castle, which served as the Přemyslid burial place and a center of St. Ludmila's cult. The emperor approved the Prague bishopric in 973, placing Prague under the archbishop of Mainz: more prestigious, farther away, and less likely to interfere. The first bishop of Prague was a Saxon, but the second, Vojtěch (982) was a native Czech of the Slavník family.[29] The Slavníks were the last ruling tribal dukes in Bohemia, with their own ambitions. Vojtěch urged a vigorous assertion of Christian teaching, and expected secular duties similar to the German clerics. Vojtěch left for Rome in 988, but at the demand of Boleslav II (972–999) he returned in 992, and helped establish the Benedictine monastery of Břevnov in 993. He left Bohemia the next year, and so survived the bloody conquest of the Slavník castle by Boleslav II's retinue and the murder of all Slavníks present in 995.[30]

In Rome, Vojtěch had become close to the young emperor Otto III (crowned in 982). When Vojtěch was martyred in Poland on a mission to the pagan Prussians in 997, Otto sponsored his canonization (999). On a pilgrimage in 1000 to venerate Vojtěch's remains in Gniezno, Otto granted the Polish ruler Bolesław I, the Brave, the royal title.[31] He also established a Polish archbishop in Gniezno. When in the same year Stephen I of Hungary was crowned king, an archbishopric was also established at Esztergom. The Czechs were left with neither king nor archbishop of their own for centuries. Instead, the young Bohemian state experienced a major crisis when Boleslav II died in 999.