

which might eventually lead to a comparative study of Czech and Slovak diasporas in Argentina and in the USA (which were previously analysed by Alena Jaklová).<sup>9</sup> Worth a deeper exploration are also the evolving attitudes of urban and rural papers vis-à-vis the host society and to the prospect of naturalisation in Argentina in the course of the twentieth century or the intergenerational shifts between the first, second, and later generations of Czech and Slovak immigrants in Argentina as mirrored through the papers published in Argentina. Finally, it might be worth investigating to what extent the agendas set by *Čechoslovenský zpravodaj*, *Noticioso checoslovaco*, *Juhoamerický Slovák*, *Slovenské zvesti pre Slovákov v Južnej Amerike*, and *Naša zem* mirrored the agenda of the Czechoslovak state, of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, or Slovak separatism.

It is safe to conclude that the communities of Czechs and Slovaks who engaged in a variety of publishing activities in Argentina in the course of the twentieth century prove Anderson's thesis correct. Publications in the national languages helped them forge a sense of unity and shared identity far away from their land of origin. The periodicals published in Czech and Slovak in Argentina between 1907 and 2003 are a clear testimony of the continued sense of the 'imagined' national belonging of their editors and readers spanning several generations and stretching beyond the immediate geographical boundaries of interaction.

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<sup>9</sup> Alena JAKLOVÁ, *Čechoamerická periodika 19. a 20. století* [Czech-American periodicals of the 19th and 20th centuries], Praha 2010; idem, *Národnostní a sociálně-ekonomická sebereflexe českých přistěhovalců v čechoamerických periodikách 19. a 20. století* [National and socio-economic self-reflection of Czech immigrants in Czech-American periodicals of the 19th and 20th centuries], Praha 2006.

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Lukáš Perutka, *La sociedad checa y México, 1821–1939* [Czech society and Mexico, 1821–1939], Prague: Karolinum, 2023, 398 pp. ISBN 978-80-246-5801-8<sup>11</sup>

The distance between London and Prague is just a little over 1,000 kilometres but that did not deter Neville Chamberlain, the ill-famed British prime minister, from uttering one of the most unfortunate and ominous statements of the twentieth century: "How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas-masks here because of a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing."

On the other hand, while there are almost 10,000 kilometres between Mexico City and Prague, this geographical and cultural gap did not prevent prominent members of President Lazaro Cárdenas's brain trust, such as Ramón Beteta or Isidro Fabela, from taking keen interest in the distant Central European republic as a conceivable political, economic, and cultural partner amidst a sea of international hostility, crass imperialism, and rising totalitarianism. So much so, that in 1936 the main avenue of Polanco, a posh district of Mexico City, was named in honour of President Masaryk, then recently deceased first president of the Czechoslovak Republic.

Nevertheless, the Czech historian Lukáš Perutka debunks the romanticised notion that Cárdenas's administration bravely defended Czechoslovakia from Nazi aggression, and sets the record straight. Aside from this, however, Czech-Mexican relations stretch back almost half a millennium, as Perutka painstakingly and impressively shows in the present volume. The relations go as far back as the Conquest of Mexico, when Johann Berger, a soldier from the Silesian town of Hotzenplotz (present day Osoblaha) who was known to his comrades as 'Juan Alemán', actively participated in Hernán Cortés's exploits.

This is most decidedly a highly ambitious work that fulfils its promise. It is an important contribution to our knowledge of the ties between the two countries. While building on and contributing to a growing corpus of works on this subject, it also brings many novel insights (as will be shown).

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<sup>11</sup> Accesible de: <https://karolinum.cz/knihy/perutka-la-sociedad-checa-y-mexico-1821-1939-29761>.

The book focuses on a period stretching between 1821, when Mexico achieved independence, and 1939, when Czechoslovakia was dismembered and partly annexed to the Third Reich. Its main focus just spans a little over a century. It should be noted, though, that because Czechoslovakia was formed as a separate entity only after 1918, the author rather speaks about 'Czech society' when defining and referring to the object of his study.

The book is divided in six chapters, an epilogue, and a final section that summarises the conclusions. The first chapter deals with Mexican independence and reactions to it in Bohemia and Moravia up to 1860. During this period, contacts were limited, and Czech impressions of the newly independent republic were based largely on Czech and German translations and summaries of news coming from English, French, Spanish, and American sources that appeared in various dailies in Prague and Brno. It should be noted that Metternich's stern censorship made sure that subversive liberal, Enlightened, or republican ideas did not reach the Austrian Empire. Still, events such as the secession of Texas from Mexico, the Pastry War, or the Mexican-American War captured the interest of educated Czech and German middle class in both Bohemia and Moravia. In this section, the author also traces the lives and exploits of Czechs who emigrated to Mexico or travelled there.

The newly independent Mexican Republic established diplomatic ties with the Austrian Empire in late 1843 by signing a Treaty of Friendship, Trade, and Navigation. This was a somewhat lengthy process, because Metternich did not want to establish official relations before Spain did. Yet even after the treaty was signed, Vienna and Mexico City did not exchange diplomatic envoys, which fortunately did not stand in the way of economic exchange. The most important goods imported by Austria (in the order of importance) were cochineal, vanilla, sticks, various colonial fruits, furs, and medicinal products. The most important exports to Mexico were beads, bar and wrought steel, ornaments, furniture, pianos and other musical instruments, carriages, ropes for ships, tools and implements made of various metals, rifles, cannons, and both white and marbled soap. Bohemian glass was also highly appreciated.

The second chapter deals with the ill-fated Mexican adventure of Maximilian of Habsburg. In this context, it is noted that alongside the French

troops arriving with the emperor, there also came an army of volunteers, and that included numerous Bohemians and Moravians. The adventures of Maximilian of Habsburg in Mexico and the Czech volunteers who accompanied him in his tragic venture were a milestone in the history of Czech-Mexican relations. Along with the about 7,200 volunteers from the Czech Lands, about a third of whom came from Moravia, there also came military bands that introduced the polka to Mexico.

During the brief Habsburg rule in Mexico, exchange with the Austrian Empire – including the Czech Lands – had significantly increased. Not surprisingly, restoration of the Mexican republic after Maximilian's execution by a firing squad in 1867 had put an end to this commercial exchange. Still, while many of the abovementioned volunteers returned to Europe, others decided to remain in Mexico.

Chapter three investigates the fortunes of Czech travellers and adventurers who explored Mexico, while the following fourth chapter deals with the reestablishment of official contacts between Austria-Hungary and Mexico, tracing their development from the Belle Epoque until the outbreak of the Great War. It is also noted that in the 1880s, there were various attempts to reestablish contacts between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Mexican Republic but they that were systematically blocked by Emperor Franz Joseph himself. Ultimately, it was a Czech, František Kaszka, who played a key role in negotiations that led to the restoration of official ties in April 1901. Afterwards, there was established a regular service of an Austrian shipping line connecting Trieste with Veracruz and other Mexican ports, although this eventually gave way to a more efficient route from Hamburg. The book also describes the extent to which the nascent Mexican brewing industry was indebted to the Czech beer brewing expertise and resources, with malt and hops coming straight from Bohemia, a region which, not surprisingly, gave its name to one Mexico's best-known and most appreciated beers. But first the Mexican Revolution and then the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 had ended these ties.

The new state of Czechoslovakia was proclaimed at the end of October 1918 with Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk at the helm. This signalled a new stage in bilateral relations, which is the subject of the fifth chapter. In 1922, Czechoslovakia and

Mexico have formally established diplomatic ties. They opened general consulates, rather than legations, in Prague and in the Mexico City, whereby the former was headed by Vladimír Smetana. Czechoslovak export increased 50% in the first year of Smetana's tenure. For the following five years, however, Smetana received little attention from Prague. This ultimately led to his resignation, clearly motivated by frustration: he had repeatedly requested funding and directions from the Tuscan Palace, the seat of Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry – to no avail.

In late 1927, Smetana was replaced by Jan Brož, who apparently found the consulate on the verge of collapse. At this time, Prague decided to elevate the consulate to the status of legation, perhaps because Mexico had done so for its consulate in Prague a little earlier. But this proved to be of a merely ceremonial significance, because the Great Depression began to bite. All in all, Brož seems to have achieved little. In 1931, he was hastily recalled and replaced by Jan Potůček, a diplomat with little experience, who arrived in Mexico City in April 1932. This appointment only further worsened the condition of what seemed to be an already weakened bond: he stayed barely one year and resigned his mission from abroad in an undignified and not very diplomatic manner. Afterwards, the first secretary Vladimír Krupka headed the legation as an interim *chargé d'affaires* but his tenure was even shorter, because he committed suicide in May 1932. Then the Czechoslovak legation in Mexico City remained without a formally appointed head and it was only with the arrival of Vlastimil Kybal in mid-1935 that relations between the two countries could finally take off in earnest.

The author pays special attention to the development of bilateral Czech-Mexican relations during the interwar period. Perutka also contributes significantly to our knowledge of Mexican diplomacy in Prague by a thorough analysis of the efforts of Mexican diplomats Enrique Santibañez and Leopoldo Blásquez (1922–1934), thus shedding light on a hitherto little studied phase of Czechoslovak-Mexican relations. All in all, this period was marked by an increase of bilateral trade, Czechoslovak migration to Mexico, and Mexican interest in purchasing weapons made by the Škoda Complex of Pilsen.

During the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940), the bilateral relations were at their perhaps strongest point but, so far, there exist only

a handful of one-sided and fragmented studies from the Mexican perspective. This state of research is undoubtedly due to the insurmountable obstacle that the Czech language poses to most Mexicans and, for that matter, to English-speaking scholars. This crucial episode of Czechoslovak–Mexican relations is the subject of chapter six, which is dedicated to the special connection that emerged between Cárdenas and Vlastimil Kybal, and contributes much to our understanding of that specific period. Perutka's in-depth analysis of Agustín Leñero's demarche in Prague is especially relevant and I believe it will be often quoted.

The triangulation carried out by Mexican agents who re-exported Czech weapons made by the Škoda Complex to the Spanish Republic during the Civil War is a fascinating episode in the history of mutual relations between Czechoslovakia and Mexico. Unfortunately, it is proving extremely difficult to properly document and describe: both because it was a clandestine operation and, secondly, because Czechoslovak resources were used rarely if at all. Nevertheless, Perutka offers a fresh and novel perspective on the matter.

Perutka's book ends with a sad epilogue describing the relations between Mexico and the rump state of Czechoslovakia after the infamous Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938, that is, during the period between 1 October 1938 and 15 March 1939, when the remaining territory of Bohemia and Moravia was occupied by the German forces and Slovakia split away as a separate Nazi vassal state under the leadership of Jozef Tiso. Perutka shows that, contrary to a widespread belief, Cárdenas's government did not condemn the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. This question can now be considered settled. During this time, a number of Czechoslovak citizens sought a political asylum in Mexico, because their state seemed doomed even before the outbreak of the war. One of these was Jan Bažant, a future prominent Mexican scholar, who arrived in 1937, befriended Trotsky, and went on to become a renowned Mexican historian.

This book is based on thorough research in both Czech and Mexican archives, especially those of the respective foreign ministries, the national archives of the two countries, but also several regional, Austrian, and German collections and records. Perutka's book is the result of a thorough and comprehensive effort. It is a significant contribution to our knowledge of bilateral

relations between the two countries. It is destined to become a valued resource used by scholars who specialise in international relations and contemporary history, but also the wider public. Perutka's command of Spanish and his style are outstanding and admirable. This book is a carefully crafted piece of historiography: it flows effortlessly and is a pleasure to read. I can heartily recommend it to scholars and the general public alike.

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Jonathan Singerton, *The American Revolution and the Habsburg Monarchy*, Charlottesville/London: University of Virginia Press, 2021, 390 pp. ISBN 978-0-8139-4832-8

La obra reseñada presenta un análisis detallado sobre el impacto de la Revolución norteamericana en el Imperio Habsburgo, y el involucramiento tanto de las élites políticas como de los comerciantes e intelectuales en los asuntos de los Estados Unidos en los primeros años de su existencia. Basado en un prolongado estudio de fuentes, Jonathan Singerton reexamina la habitual narrativa de la historia norteamericana. La bibliografía es impresionante, contiene numerosos archivos de Austria, Bélgica, Croacia, Dinamarca, Eslovaquia, Francia, Gran Bretaña, Hungría, Italia, República Checa, y Suecia, sin mencionar las fuentes publicadas en otras lenguas.

En su libro se muestra de modo persuasivo que, por un lado, la Revolución fue producto de las particularidades de la colonización británica en el suelo del Nuevo Mundo, así como de inspiración debida a los ilustrados franceses, y que también fue fruto de las aspiraciones políticas y comerciales producidas en varias partes de Europa. Por otro lado, el libro esclarece cómo varios actores en el Imperio Habsburgo, un estado en el centro-oriente del continente europeo, aparentemente absorbido en sus propios asuntos, pero con intereses globales extensivos demostrados desde el periodo anterior, se veían amenazados por la

entrada de un nuevo competidor en el orden internacional, y por las peligrosas ideas políticas promovidas por este. Sin embargo, también se sentían atraídos por las nuevas oportunidades comerciales y la posibilidad de fortalecer su posición a nivel europeo y global a través de la cooperación con los norteamericanos.

El autor va de la historia política y diplomática hacia la historia de las ideas, la historia económica, la historia naval y la historia de la vida cotidiana, de esa forma, consigue entrelazar estos enfoques para crear una imagen compleja y dinámica de las relaciones de dos poderes a través del Atlántico, el “viejo” y el “joven”. El libro se centra en el periodo entre 1776 y 1795, y llama la atención sobre los procesos de largo plazo, al igual que las consecuencias de los precipitados eventos de estas dos décadas. Asimismo, muestra con claridad que el impacto de la Revolución norteamericana dejó huellas profundas y de largo alcance sobre el Imperio Habsburgo y sus partes constituyentes, huellas que continuaron manifestándose a través de todo el siglo XIX.

La detallada investigación de archivo del autor brindó numerosos hallazgos. Se puede mencionar, entre otros, la persuasiva argumentación acerca del hecho de que la monarquía de los Habsburgo ciertamente no era, por lo menos en la fase inicial, inequívocamente un “poder reaccionario”. Al contrario, afirma Singerton, hubo numerosos individuos, incluidos los que ocupaban posiciones superiores en el gobierno y en la corte (y de hecho también miembros de la familia imperial), que por varias razones percibían positivamente la causa americana. Se entremezclan en la narrativa figuras prominentes y notorias, como Jan Ingenhousz, con otras hasta el momento oscuras y desconocidas para los historiadores como el joven y ambicioso médico Joseph Cauffman (pp. 64-66). Otro tema fascinante es la narrativa de cómo la “guerra por [la] independencia americana tuvo lugar en el Mediterráneo y en el Mar Norte” por medio de escaramuzas entre los contrabandistas de armas y la flota británica, y el persistente esfuerzo de los Habsburgo por mantener la neutralidad con respecto a sus propias actividades comerciales navales; también los empeños diplomáticos de los norteamericanos en Viena, que a pesar del fracaso inmediato sirvieron para establecer las bases para el futuro; o la bizarra descripción del encuentro del primer enviado habsburgo en los Estados Unidos, Baron Frederick Eugene de Beelen-Berthloff, con

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