

Otakar Odložilík (1899-1973)

Otakar Odložilík, emeritus professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania, died suddenly on July 14, 1973, at Bohyne, Jugoslavia, while on vacation in the Slovenian Alps. A memorial service was held on October 12 in the University of Pennsylvania's Lea Library. It was attended by a large group of close friends, history department colleagues, and former students. He left no immediate relatives.

Prof. Odložilík was born on January 12, 1899, in Kostelec, Moravia, then a province of the Austro-Hungarian empire. He came from a distinguished Czech Brethren family. Quite early he showed great intellectual promise and was encouraged by his family to study history and languages. One of his earliest memories was of having been chosen by his teachers to deliver a speech at a local celebration commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of Emperor Francis Joseph's reign. He was quite young when he matriculated at Charles University. His studies there were interrupted by the First World War. His knowledge of six languages qualified him as an interpreter in the multinational imperial army. After the war he resumed his studies at the University of Prague, where he was awarded a Ph. D. *sub auspiciis Respublicae* in 1923. A postdoctoral fellowship at King's College, of the University of London, was followed by a period of teaching in that institution's School of Slavonic Studies. In 1926 he returned to Charles University, where he taught from 1926 to 1939. In 1934 he was made a full professor and given the academic chair that had been occupied by his intellectual mentor, the noted Prof. Václav Novotný.

Quite early in his career Odložilík established an international reputation through the publication of a series of books and articles in several languages on the intellectual and political significance of the emergence of the modern Czech nation. His *Charles, the Elder of Zerotin, 1564-1635*, published in 1936, became a classic in Czech historiography. The next year he published *An Outline of Czechoslovak History and Wyclif and Bohemia*. With the outbreak of the Second World War and the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Germany in 1939, Odložilík fled to the United States. Like most émigré European scholars, he found it difficult to secure employment. He took short term teaching positions at several colleges and universities, including the University of Colorado and Columbia University. In 1943 he returned to Europe to join the London-based Czech government in exile as an external advisor of the ministry of foreign affairs. Returning to Czechoslovakia immediately after its liberation, he resumed his post at Charles University and wrote an of-

ficial history of his alma mater to mark the six hundredth anniversary of its founding. In 1949 he was elected to membership in the Czechoslovak Academy of Science.

In 1948 Prof. Odložilík again found himself a victim of totalitarianism. Through the intervention of Prof. S. Harrison Thomson, a fellow student of Novotný's and an acquaintance of Vladimir Clementis, the Czech foreign minister, he was able to get a passport to come to the United States to teach summer school at the University of Colorado. When the political situation in Czechoslovakia did not improve, he accepted a permanent position at Columbia University and became an American citizen. For six years he taught at Columbia as the Tomáš Masaryk Professor of Modern European History. In 1955 he left Columbia to join the history faculty at the University of Pennsylvania, where he taught courses in cultural and intellectual history, served as graduate chairman, and directed dissertations in a wide range of fields. He became professor emeritus in 1969.

Odložilík's list of publications, which exceeds 250 entries, can be divided into two major areas of inquiry that very closely parallel the experiences in his own life. Prior to 1939 his books and articles dealt primarily with the three centuries of Czech history stretching from the first beginnings of the great reform movement, which crystallized around the figure of Jan Hus, to the disastrous Battle of White Mountain in 1620 and the resulting suppression of Czech cultural and political aspirations. His relocation in the United States and the free and vigorous intellectual climate prevailing in the American universities stimulated him to add a new dimension to his research. His major focus was now on the history of the rebirth of the Czech nation, which had begun in the eighteenth century and had culminated in events that he himself had witnessed as a young man. In 1965 his last book-length monograph, *The Hussite King*—a translation and updating of an earlier Czech work—was published by Rutgers University Press. In 1966 the Czech Society of Arts and Sciences in America made him an honorary member, praising him as "one of the greatest contemporary Czech historians." To celebrate his seventieth birthday, his pupils and friends, both here and in Europe, produced a festschrift in his honor, *The Czech Renaissance of the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Peter Brock and H. Gordon Skilling in 1970. This volume contains a selected bibliography of Odložilík's publications. A complete bibliography is currently being prepared by Prof. Ludvic Nemeč. Odložilík's library of Czech language historical works and his journals, in accordance with his will, were given to the University of Chicago Library.

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