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Papyrology in Czechoslovakia

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PAPYROLOGY IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The interest of Czechs in the monuments of Greek literature can be traced back to the beginnings of the 16th century. At Wittenberg, Jan Blahoslav, later bishop of the Unity of the Czech Brethren, learned Greek and the members of his community translated the New Testament from the Greek. The return to Catholicism in the 17th and 18th centuries reasserted the domination of Latin studies over Greek in the now Czechoslovak states. The teaching of Greek declined until the humanistic revival which accompanied the incorporation into the Hapsburg monarchy. The most important educational reforms were enacted in 1854 and, although the Reform has been changed in details, its enactments dominated Czech high schools for more than a century. The climate of interest was a favorable one in Czechoslovakia when large quantities of papyri in Greek began to come to Europe from Egypt in the 1880s.

In 1934 the Library of the University of Prague acquired its collection of papyri from Theodor Hopfner, professor at the German University of Prague. The collection had previously belonged to Carl Wessely, and Hopfner stipulated that these papyri, which are still in the library, bear the name *Papyri Wessely Pragenses* (PWP). It was also Hopfner who began the publication of these papyri; first in 1935, the so-called "magic papyrus" in *Archiv Orientální*, and the second in 1936, "Letter from Syros to Heroneinos," in a history of the Roman Empire in Czech.

After World War II almost all the other pieces of PWP were published by Ladislav Varcl; they proved to be documents of economic character illustrating the activities of an Egyptian farm in the 3rd century A.D. The texts were subsequently printed in *SB VI* 9406-9415. Jan Merell, professor of the Theological Faculty of Prague, has not only edited papyri (e.g. "Nouveaux Fragments du Papyrus 4," *Revue Biblique* 43 [1938] 5-22), but his monograph dealing with papyri and textual criticism in the New Testament has served as an introduction to papyrology to many Czech students and scholars since its appearance in 1939.

Before World War I two legal papyrologists, disciples of L. Mitteis, Egon Weiss, a German, and Otakar Sommer, a Czech, had come to Prague. Weiss was first Reader and then Professor of Roman Law at the German University, while Sommer was Lecturer in Roman Law on the Law Faculty of Prague, and later Professor at Bratislava. Weiss' *Griechisches Privatrecht* (Leipzig 1923) made copious use of papyri; Sommer's *Katagrafê* of 1922 had its origin in a seminar on legal papyrology. Three of Sommer's disciples remain active: Václav Budil, who became Reader at Bratislava on the basis of his monograph, *Hypografê* (1936); Jiří Cvetler, who was Reader at the Prague Law School and whose monograph on *daneion* in the Ptolemaic period appeared in 1934; and Adalbert Poláček, who has written widely in the field of Roman law, as well as papers and reviews on more papyrological subjects.

The Nazi occupation and the opening of World War II brought the closing of the law schools in Czech universities. After the war Cvetler tried to revive interest in papyrology, both in his capacity as Reader in Prague and later as Professor at Brno. Cvetler accepted the chair at Brno because of the short distance to Vienna with its collections of papyri; yet in 1950 even the Faculty of Law at Brno was abolished. Despite other discouraging developments during the 1950s, an international Congress on Graeco-Roman antiquity which took place at Brno in 1966 brought about the reintroduction of Greek into a limited number of Czech high schools. Further, when the Faculty of Law at Brno was reestablished in 1969, Cvetler took the chair of legal history there; a small number of students began once again to participate in a seminar on Greek papyrology. Of these pupils one must note in particular Lubomíra Havlíková, now a promising Byzantinist, and Stanislav Balík, Reader in the Prague Law School, who has recently published a paper on monopolies in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt (1978) in Czech with English summary.

Ulrich Wilcken wrote that the best way to learn to read the difficult hands of the papyri was to perfect one's knowledge of the language of Greek. It is still possible to study Greek in the universities of Czechoslovakia. In addition, a section of the Czechoslovakian Academy, the Cabinet for Greek, Roman and Latin Studies, not only publishes periodicals in which matters concerning papyrology are welcomed, but also organizes meetings on classical antiquity.