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“The Flower of Eastern and Western Europe”

British Travellers, Czech Go-Betweens, and the Temporal Culture of Nineteenth-Century Prague

Abstract: Throughout the nineteenth century, published British travelogues revered Prague, bringing the city to the attention of the rest of Europe. Tropes and motifs predicated on German, Oriental, and classical imagery filled the pages of British travelogues, which were, in turn, entertained by Czech go-betweens in their own texts. This article explores the circulation of knowledge in compelling narratives between the travel writers and go-betweens who mapped out temporal representations of the city. A time-knowledge framework not only reveals how Prague’s temporal culture manifested itself in literary narratives and exchanges, but starts to rethink the development of the cultural, political, and social knowledge of the city, by demonstrating how different actors contributed to its production.

Keywords: Travel writing, Britain, knowledge circulation, Habsburg Monarchy, temporality, Czech go-betweens.

Introduction

“Perhaps there is no city in the world which, by the air which attaches to all its arrangements, more completely separates you from the present, and carries you back into the past, than Prague.”¹

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1 George Gleig, Germany, Bohemia, and Hungary. Visited in 1837, vol. 2, London 1839, 289. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

When Scottish priest and soldier, George Gleig, embarked on his journey to Prague in 1837, he was met with a charming vista before him. As he looked down on the city from the surrounding hills and admired its “splendour” and “magnificence”, he was taken back in time. For all its history and culture, British travel writers visiting the city entertained the overlapping of temporalities. At their feet lay a city architecturally celebrating the Romanesque and Gothic to the neoclassical and modern. Many of these travel narratives gesture to the eruption of the past and the future in the present. An awareness of the city’s temporality was intimated by the travellers, and, at that moment, Gleig too experienced the past extend into the present; everything around him bore a specific temporal signature.

This article takes to the streets of Prague, at a time when the Kingdom of Bohemia was part of the Habsburg Empire. Over the course of the nineteenth century, there was an increasing flurry of visitors to the city, with British travellers making the journey across the continent to explore the heart of Europe. This nascent interest in the city was articulated in travel narratives, which sparked a compelling dialogue with Czechs, who engaged with the travellers’ descriptions of their city and crafted their own literary articulations. In the last few decades, historians have explored travel writing to the region, with Peter Bugge offering the most important and comprehensive analysis of nineteenth-century British travel writing to Bohemia.² Building on these works and by attending to notions of temporality and time conveyed through the British travelogues and the Czech writings, I demonstrate how these temporal perceptions of the city were circulated, reflected, and developed, crafting Prague’s temporal culture.

Temporality is a feeling for the “motion of time”; it indicates an “actor’s intuitive sense of the texture of experienced time”.³ Historicity, on the other hand, is the connection between past, present, and future.⁴ Time is interwoven in travel narratives, which demonstrate how time is mediated through experiences and embedded in encounters.⁵ While time may not be understood as a central characteristic of travel writing, it does encapsulate a vast array of dimensions, not least touching on “scientific progressions, notions of history, and questions of the origins of human”.⁶ According to Paula Henrikson and Christina Kullberg, travel writing has unravelled a “multitude of simultaneous temporalities”, with Helge Jordheim advancing that if simultaneous “multiple temporalities” are so pervasive, there cannot be one

2 Peter Bugge, “Something in the View Which Makes You Linger”: Bohemia and Bohemians in British Travel Writing, 1836–1857, in: *Central Europe* 7/1 (2009), 3–29.

3 Christopher Clark, *Time and Power. Visions of History in German Politics, from the Thirty Years’ War to the Third Reich*, Princeton 2019, 6.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Paula Henrikson/Christina Kullberg, Introduction, in: eaed. (eds.), *Time and Temporalities in European Travel Writing*, New York 2021, 1–24, 14.

6 *Ibid.*, 3–4.

European time.⁷ All these readings of time are filled with cultural imagination and imbued with ideology, which through knowledge circulation are constantly reconstructed and reframed. As such, I ask two very important questions: how does travel complicate the representations of time? And what is the relationship between the multiple temporalities conveyed by British travellers and Czech go-betweens?

The expression of Prague's temporal culture was crafted through literary conversation. Andrew Lass posits that British travellers' mental maps left an "indelible mark on Czech culture" and suggests the need for scholarship to address the relationship between the two.⁸ A focus on British travellers reflects the increase in the production and circulation of travelogues during the nineteenth century, but also offers a non-German perspective on the political and cultural landscape of Prague. By situating time into the history of knowledge discussions, I reveal how certain ideas of Prague were reflected on, developed, or responded to by readers of the travel accounts. As Kapil Raj demonstrates, it was these "processes of encounter, negotiation, and reconfiguration of knowledge" in cross-cultural interactions that shaped the timescape of Prague.⁹ In other words, a time-knowledge framework sheds light on how Prague became known temporally to British travellers, but also to Czech go-betweens, assuming certain meanings and representations embedded in the panorama, architecture, and streets of the city.¹⁰ Through the writing on Prague, in the relationship between British and Czech travel and culture, knowledge of the city was defined by perceptions and experiences of time.

By asking how Czechs engaged with and responded to these British travel texts, I assess the lines of communication, exchange, and influence, which are so often focused on from only one perspective – that of the traveller. Prague was not crafted passively in a hegemonic British "discursive compulsion".¹¹ Discussed by Alida Metcalf and Raj, I have opted for the concept of transactional and representational go-between.¹² In doing so, this article considers the discrete entanglements between the

7 Ibid., 2; see also: Aedín Ní Loingsigh, Coevalness, in: Charles Forsdick/Zoë Kinsley/Kathryn Walchester (eds.), *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies*, London 2019, 45–47.

8 Andrew Lass, In time for the distant 'other', in: Eva Schmidt-Hartmann/Stanley B. Winters (eds.), *Großbritannien, die USA und die böhmischen Länder 1848–1938*, München 1991, 11–17, 14.

9 Kapil Raj, Networks of knowledge, or spaces of circulation? The birth of British cartography in colonial south Asia in the late eighteenth century, in: *Global Intellectual History* 2/1 (2017), 49–66, 52.

10 Johan Östling/David Larsson Heidenblad/Anna Nilsson Hammar (eds.), *Forms of Knowledge. Developing the History of Knowledge*, Lund 2020; Gesa Mackenthun/Andrea Nicolas/Stephanie Wodianka (eds.), *Travel, Agency and Circulation of Knowledge*, Münster 2017.

11 Peter Bugge, "Land und Volk" – oder: Wo liegt Böhmen?, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28/3 (2002), 404–434, 405.

12 Kapil Raj, *Go-Betweens, Travelers, and Cultural Translators*, in: Bernard Lightman (ed.), *A Companion to the History of Science*, Chichester 2016, 39–57, 42; Alida Metcalf, *Go-betweens and the colonization of Brazil, 1500–1600*, Austin 2005.

individuals presented here, all of whom are afforded agency as cultural and knowledge brokers, translators, and writers. Drawing upon a selection of travelogues and topographies, as well as journals and newspapers, I explore the knowledge production of Prague between British travellers and the Czech go-betweens. When writing about the city, they used metaphors and figurative language to structure its temporal culture and sense of past, present, and future. What follows is a glimpse into the circulation of knowledge rooted in temporality and historicity between British travel writers and Czech go-betweens.

“Far more interesting than Berlin”

Following the revolutionary wars, Europe witnessed a perceptible shift in travel culture, disrupting the monopoly that the nobility had on travel. The leisurely Grand Tour – an eighteenth-century trip undertaken by young upper-class men through France and Italy to explore artistic and cultural roots of civilisation – transformed into an opportunity for the middle class to explore lesser-known parts of the continent.¹³ Modernity arrived by rail in the mid-nineteenth century and from the 1830s, a journey which once took days on foot or by coach could be completed in a few hours on the train. The opening of the railway from Vienna to Brünn/Brno in 1839 and to Prague in 1845 knitted together small towns and cities into a somewhat integrated network. On their journeys to Prague, British travellers captured the political and cultural temporalities of the region through their own temporal experiences with narratives of past, present, and future, crafting an image of Bohemia’s temporal culture.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Prague was often defined as a ‘German city’. In part, the strong current of Germanisation by Emperor Joseph II transformed German into the “language of the bureaucracy, of most educational institutions, and of the majority of the city’s elites”.¹⁴ The city was, therefore, home to a continuous battle between its Czech- and German-speaking residents, with German-speakers asserting their cultural and political dominance.¹⁵ British travellers frequently described the capital as “one of the most beautiful cities in Germany”, with John

13 Martina Power, *Historical Consciousness of German Travellers to Bohemia (1750–1850)*, in: *Prague Economic and Social History Papers* 19 (2014), 7–22, 9–10.

14 Chad Bryant, *Strolling the Romantic City. Gardens, Panoramas, and Middle-Class Elites in Early Nineteenth-Century Prague*, in: Chad Bryant/Arthur Burns/Paul Readman (eds.), *Walking Histories, 1800–1914*, London 2016, 57–85, 66.

15 For Czech and German ethnic tensions see: Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival. Germans in Prague, 1861–1914*, West Lafayette 2006, especially, 65–104.

Murray's guidebook observing Prague's "grandeur" and "imposing character" surpassing "any other city in Germany".¹⁶ The representation of a German Prague can be explained by the enduring cultural and linguistic affinity Britain had with Germany, on the one hand, and Bohemia's position in the Holy Roman Empire and the German Confederation, on the other.

The author of one of the most influential critiques of the Austrian Empire, Charles Sealsfield, was a significant Czech go-between. Unknown to many of his contemporaries, he was born in Moravia as Karl Postl and studied in Prague before leaving Austria in 1823.¹⁷ His anonymous travelogue offered a political and historical eyewitness account of the repression and authoritarianism in Metternich's Austria.¹⁸ The stylisation of the travelogue is reminiscent of British texts, and he too applauds Prague as "one of the most picturesque and noble cities on the Continent; far more interesting than Berlin, or any other capital of Germany".¹⁹ Unlike, however, his British contemporaries who prioritised the picturesque and antiquated landscape, Sealsfield's travelogue served to demarcate the Empire's despotism and temporisation of Bohemia's political culture. In his eyes, Bohemia was, without a doubt, one of the "most oppressed and least favoured provinces and kingdoms of the Austrian empire".²⁰ Through his bold narrative, he hoped to shift attention to the region and illuminate its fierce Slavic origin underpinned by liberal sentiments, gesturing to a future that was "far from being extinct".²¹ As Bugge notes, however, his call for the respect of Bohemia's historical rights was a manifestation of *Landespatritotismus*.²² Prague's future was one free of Austrian despotism, and it was with the past extending into the present that a Bohemian future could be imagined.

"An intuitive national feeling and hatred towards foreigners, especially Germans, are among the characteristic features of the Slavonian nations", wrote Sealsfield in 1828.²³ Twenty years later, tension over Prague's national character reached its acme. In the early travel texts, sites of interest and monuments were contextualised as German and in German too. 'Hradschin' and 'Moldau' dominated British travelogues, rather than the Czech 'Hradčany' and 'Vltava'. In a 1903 review of Arthur Symons' travelogue *Cities*, the Czech daily *Národní listy* noted the rarity of a traveller to use

16 John Murray, *A Handbook for Travellers in Southern Germany*, London 1837, 323.

17 Bugge, *Something in the View*, (2009), 9.

18 Charles Sealsfield, *Austria as it is: or, Sketches of continental courts, by an eye witness*, London 1828. Sealsfield's travelogue prompted a political stir across Europe, with translations appearing in the Netherlands and France in 1830. Four years later, a pirated German translation emerged, which was quickly intercepted by the Austrian police.

19 Sealsfield, *Austria*, 1828, 87.

20 *Ibid.*, 69.

21 *Ibid.*, 73.

22 Bugge, *Something in the View*, (2009), 10.

23 Sealsfield, *Austria*, 1828, 64.

Czech names for Prague's streets.²⁴ By the end of the century, while German names were still in use, the character of the city was vehemently Czech or Slavic. Travelling through Prague in 1866, Edmund Spencer noted that "they [Czechs] have not ceased to cherish the recollection of their former greatness, or to a distinct national existence".²⁵ This shift in British travelogues illustrates the Czech and Slavic feeling in the city and suggests that they recognised a national future for Prague, one free from Austria's autocratic authority.

"Something of Asiatic splendour"

In 1837, writing for *The Metropolitan Magazine*, Henry Reeve set out across the continent and made his way to Prague, "suddenly one of those views burst upon us, which, [...] can only be seen once in the startling grandeur of its novelty".²⁶ Looking down on Prague, travellers invoked a sophisticated 'gaze', with a paternalistic rhetoric woven into their narratives, distancing them from any intimate engagement with the city. Travel writers took pride in uncovering different viewpoints and offered new perspectives on the city for their readers, using it as an opportunity to discover new horizons.

While the journey may have only taken the travellers from Dresden to Prague, the panoramic view instilled a sense of the Oriental.²⁷ "In looking at the great features of the city and surrounding scenery" wrote Scottish religious writer John Aiton, "there is something of Asiatic splendour in the aspect or form of the domes, turrets, minarets, hanging gardens, churches, and palaces, which rise up almost without number on all sides in a sort of magnificent amphitheatre".²⁸ There is no doubt that Aiton wandered the city with Murray's handbook in hand, who had been the first to note the city's "Asiatic splendour".²⁹ An interesting example of the textual circulation of stereotypes appeared two years later when Gleig likewise captured the "thousand

24 Artur Symons o Praze, in: *Národní listy*, 3 November 1903, 2. Poet and critic Arthur Symons was born in Wales, which could explain his preference to use a minority language.

25 Edmund Spencer, *Germany, from the Baltic to the Adriatic, Or, Prussia, Austria, and Venetia, with Reference to the Late War*, London 1867, 135.

26 Henry Reeve, *Sketches of Bohemia, and the Slavonian Provinces of the Austrian Empire*, in: *The Metropolitan Magazine* 3 (1837), 349–363, 354.

27 Although not discussed in this article, Bugge notes the Oriental tropes used by British travellers to describe the Jewish Quarter, these were also used by Czech go-betweens, both to evoke foreign interest and prompt modernisation discussions, which culminated with *Finis Ghetto* at the end of the century.

28 John Aiton, *Eight Weeks in Germany. Comprising Narratives, Descriptions and Directions for Economical Tourists*, London 1842, 273–274; Bugge, *Something in the View*, (2009), 16.

29 Murray, *A Handbook*, 1837, 121.

towers, spires, minarets, and domes” which created an “air of magnificence which in some sort partakes of the Oriental”.³⁰ Both comment on the “hanging gardens”, alluding to the ancient tale of the ‘Hanging Baskets of Babylon’, an infamous Oriental motif. Many of these travellers worked within mapped out literary paradigms and copied each other’s ideas, demonstrating little originality. Hagen Schulz-Forberg states that “the art of travel, often referred to as a supposedly true and authentic experience, was nothing but a highly developed system of prescriptions for perceptions”.³¹ And so, while Aiton relied on Gleig’s writing, Gleig was influenced by his predecessor, Scottish writer John Strang, whose seminal text governed the temporal tropes of Prague.³²

Although Prague was described largely as a German city by British travel writers, it was certainly not a modern German city. Rather, Prague was a city of multiple temporalities with an entirely “unknown Slavonic tongue”.³³ The city was a liminal space, a place of ‘in-betweenness’. Ezequiel Adamovsky uses the term “land of absence”, which would see travellers characterise Prague “not by what it is but by what it lacks”.³⁴ The multiple temporalities of the city complemented by the Czech language were a novelty to the British traveller and thus a new experience. By the end of the century, travellers started to qualify these tropes, such as Scottish priest James Macdonald, who described the *Kleinseite* as only “semi-oriental, owing to the copper-covered domes, minarets-like pinnacles, and other Eastern types of church architecture to be seen”.³⁵ Thus, while travellers did characterise Prague as ‘Asiatic’ or ‘Oriental’, it should not be seen as an exclusion from Europe *per se*, rather it should be considered as an effort to make sense of new culture, geography, and language.

The Baroque certainly shades into the Oriental, and so too does the Gothic. There was a tantalising and ensorcelling presence of bygone ages in the city. Revered by Charles IV, the fourteenth century Holy Roman Emperor, Reeve opined how Prague transformed into “the flower of eastern and western Europe, the centre of knowledge and power”.³⁶ According to Bugge, while the use of Orientalist tropes gestured to the exotic and sublime, in actuality it translated into a “metaphor for the beauty

30 Gleig, *Germany, Bohemia, and Hungary*, 1839, 287.

31 Hagen Schulz-Forberg, Introduction: *European Travel and Travel Writing, Cultural Practice and the Idea of Europe*, in: id. (ed.), *Unravelling Civilisation, European Travel and Travel Writing*, Brussels 2005, 13–40, 32.

32 John Strang, *Germany in 1831*, London 1836. All three travellers came from Scotland, which would explain the knowledge circulation, especially between Aiton and Gleig.

33 Aiton, *Eight Weeks*, 1842, 276.

34 Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Euro-Orientalism and the Making of the Concept of Eastern Europe in France, 1810–1880*, in: *The Journal of Modern History* 77 (2005), 591–628, 591.

35 James Macdonald, *Glimpses of Bohemia. Past and Present*, Edinburgh 1882, 23.

36 Reeve, *Sketches*, (1837), 355.

of Prague³⁷. From an aesthetic view, there is some truth in this, however, from a political perspective it is more complex. Thinking back to Sealsfield, a review of his text from 1828 in the British journal *The Athenaeum* lamented Austrian despotism and compared it to the ancient monarchy of “old Assyria and Macedon”.³⁸ This comment has a clear temporal undertone, suggesting that Austria’s political system was visualised as being caught in the ancient world. Thus, the flicker of the Oriental in Prague’s cityscape was inasmuch aesthetic as it was an indicator of the city’s external political suffocation.

According to some Czech go-betweens, Prague was a gateway to the ‘Slavic Orient’. Karel Vladislav Zap, a topographer published widely in the 1830s and 1840s, wanted to shift the lens through which the capital was being understood, emphasising its Czech identity. While British travel writers echoed the city’s Oriental demeanour, Zap understood it as a “purely Slavic essence”.³⁹ And so, he published the first Czech-language guidebook to the city under the guise of the Czech national movement.⁴⁰ Chad Bryant explains that Zap’s primary theme was the “ever-changing material, political, and artistic fortunes”, which blended with the history of Prague as “a ‘Slavic’ city in seemingly contradictory ways”.⁴¹ Zap wanted to reframe the narrative of ‘in-betweenness’, insofar that it pointed to both Prague’s history and its longstanding Slavic character. The Czechs, who considered themselves “a marginal nation – edge of the empire, rebuilding their national consciousness” thus took up the idea of a “‘mission’ and asserted its centrality”.⁴² Writing in 1848 as the chief architect of the Czech national ideology, František Palacký located Bohemia in the middle and heart of Europe.⁴³ As also seen in Zap’s writing, the Czechs were thus determined “by history as well as by geography” to serve as a bridge between the Slavs and Germans, and between East and West.⁴⁴

37 Bugge, *Something in the View*, (2009), 16.

38 *Ibid.*, 47. Austria as it is, in: *The Athenaeum: Literary and Critical Journal* London 8 (1828), 116.

39 Chad Bryant, *Zap’s Prague. The city, the nation and Czech elites before 1848*, in: *Urban History* 40/2 (2013), 181–201, 191.

40 See Karel Vladislav Zap, *Průvodce po Praze*, Prague 1848.

41 Chad Bryant, *A Tale of One City. Topographies of Prague before 1848*, in: *Bohemia* 52/1 (2012), 5–21, 15.

42 Don Sparling, *Under Western Eyes. Closely Watched Czechs*, in: Waldemar Zacharasiewicz (ed.), *Images of Central Europe in Travelogues and Fiction by North American Writers*, Tübingen 1995, 292–304, 298.

43 Bugge, “*Land und Volk*”, (2002), 411.

44 *Ibid.*

“Recollections far back into the past”

A labyrinth of medieval streets, Prague was a timeless city of the past. It had a mystical spirit and Aiton captured the impression it left on the travellers, “but wherever the eye is turned, you see objects which carry your recollections far back into the past”.⁴⁵ As travellers mapped Prague, they did so historically. They eternalised it in the Middle Ages and recognised its bygone importance, “in the middle ages the municipality of Prague was one of the most powerful in Europe”.⁴⁶ Indeed, one of the most enduring ways to speak of the city was – and still is – ‘Magic Prague’, described by Michael D. Gordin as “the domain of alchemists and Golems, mystical rabbis and deranged princes, heroic mercenaries and fantastical scribblers”.⁴⁷ Wandering down to the Moldau, Reeve heard “the past” with “the waters ringing from all the church bells [...] a concert which was celebrated in ancient times”.⁴⁸ The Gothic architecture also shaped the medieval representation of the city and Gleig noted that “each edifice, be it lordly or humble, presents to your gaze some record of prouder days”.⁴⁹ When British travellers meandered through Prague, they evoked its past and unfolded its history, yet they did so with a sense of detachment, entangling myths, legends, and superstitions to convey a sense of mysticism.

Once ardent defenders of religious freedom, the city’s spirituality was epitomised by the tale of St. John Nepomuk. Strang posited that “the mass of the people [...] are perhaps the most superstitious in Germany”.⁵⁰ Prague was devoted to the drowned Saint, and as travellers walked past his sites and relics namely Charles Bridge and St. Vitus Cathedral, they described him as a “boundless memory”.⁵¹ The cult of the Saint transformed into a Catholic fabrication and historical figure.⁵² At times, British travellers were embittered by the Saint, instead focusing on the memory of the Protestant martyr John Huss. This is evident with Gleig – a Protestant priest – who bestowed many pages to Huss, celebrating the “tragic tale of a nation striving for

45 Aiton, *Eight Weeks*, 1842, 274.

46 Reeve, *Sketches*, (1837), 209.

47 Michael D. Gordin, *Einstein in Bohemia*, Princeton 2021, 17; In his book Gordin navigates the “kaleidoscope history of Prague” highlighting its various narratives – medieval and aesthetic – while proposing a third lens of analysis: a city of knowledge; the urtext for this notion of ‘Magic Prague’ is Angelo Maria Ripellino, *Magic Prague*, translated by David Newton Marinelli, ed. Michael Henry Heim, London, 1994 [1973]. For a slightly revised approach see also Joseph Wechberg, *Prague: The Mystical City*, New York 1971; Alfred Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest. Writing, Memory, and the City*, Chicago 2010.

48 Reeve, *Sketches*, (1837), 211.

49 Gleig, *Germany, Bohemia, and Hungary*, 1839, 291.

50 Strang, *Germany*, 1836, 183.

51 *Ibid.*, 158.

52 Power, *Historical Consciousness*, (2014), 13.

freedom and religious tolerance”.⁵³ The explicit use of different legends, myths, and religious superstitions not only reinforced the representation of a medieval Prague, but removed the city from the present, situating it in a timeless past. Travel writers, harking back to the Middle Ages, felt as if they were able to evade what seemed like the acceleration of time back at home and instead found temporal sanctuary in Prague.

British travellers endowed Prague with layered historic and religious meanings. In the texts, the city became a collection of emblems, most notably “the spires” and “the castle”. Vladimír Macura believes that the layers of meanings projected onto Prague meant that the reader could only perceive “the present to the extent to which it was a reflection of the past”.⁵⁴ The Czech historian and politician, Count Francis Lützow, also imbued Prague with its history. Published widely at the turn of the twentieth century, he was born in Hamburg and educated in Vienna and Innsbruck before dedicating himself to a diplomatic career. And as a member of the Austrian parliament from 1881, he championed Bohemian independence. Much of Lützow’s writing was to educate the British public on Bohemia, but was also informed by British travellers and their opinions.

“It is a very ancient saying at Prague [sic!] that when throwing a stone through a window you throw with it a morsel of history [...] As Mr. Arthur Symons has well said, Prague is to a Bohemian ‘still the epitome of the history of his country; he sees it, as a man sees the woman he loves, with her first beauty, and he loves it as a man loves a woman, more for what she has suffered.’”⁵⁵

An important Czech go-between, Lützow published extensively in the English language. He was well acquainted with many of the British travel writers, as demonstrated with his reference to Symons, and in other texts to James Baker, both of whom were also discussed and celebrated in Prague dailies.⁵⁶ “*Reading* foreign travel accounts”, writes Wendy Bracewell, “was not the only way in which ‘the gaze of the other’ could exert influence”.⁵⁷ By repeating the tropes penned in travellers’ reports from Europe’s “self-proclaimed centres” their influence was simply further rein-

53 Bugge, *Something in the View*, (2009), 28.

54 Vladimír Macura, *The Mystifications of a Nation. “The Potato Bug” and Other Essays on Czech Culture*, Madison 2010, 39–41.

55 Count Lützow, *The Story of Prague*, London 1902, xv.

56 Count Lützow, *Bohemia*, Prague 1911; Some examples from *Narodní listy*: *Z Literatury*, 9 December 1894; A.L. Jelen, *Feuilleton. Náš anglický přítel*, 3 February 1903, 1–2; *Z Pražské Kroniky*, 28 February 1904, 10; James Baker, *Čechám*, 4 April 1919, 1.

57 Wendy Bracewell, *The traveller’s eye. Reading European travel writing, 1750–1850*, in: Julia Kuehn/ Paul Smethurst (eds.), *New Directions in Travel Writing Studies*, Cham 2015, 215–227, 224 (emphasis in original).

forced.⁵⁸ Reflecting British travellers, Lützow extended the past into the present, imbuing the city with its rich and vibrant history.

However, Czech go-betweens also recrafted these historically wrought temporalities, and, in turn, introduced a modern dynamism to the city. The jarring and exciting urban transformation of Prague was dutifully noted by Zap and Franz Klutschak. Like his contemporary Zap, Klutschak – who published in German and hoped for the cooperation between Czechs and Germans – wrote a popular guidebook on Prague in 1838, with a total of thirteen editions over the course of forty years. Both writers are interesting to compare, not least for their linguistic choice. Bryant explains that while they “shared a common understanding of the city’s past and the significance of its physical structures, [...] they disagreed about Prague’s present and future.”⁵⁹

Much like the British travelogues, Zap and Klutschak evoked the multiple time-scapes of the past gesturing to the Middle Ages and antiquity, but they also situated Prague in the present-day. Klutschak, for example, embraced industrialisation and was excited by technological developments:

“The romantic nimbus which the heroic deeds of antiquity and the medieval look given by the countless towers, unites with the real, energetic forces of Prague today, and thereby the city will become doubly remarkable for locals and foreigners.”⁶⁰

On the other hand, Zap projected an air of anxiety with regards to the city’s industrialisation, noting that while there were plenty of “richer and noisier” cities with “trade and industry”, none would be as “noble and distinguished” as his capital.⁶¹ According to Macura, “the peculiarity of the image of Prague inheres in the city’s duplex nature, in which Prague as the centre of the national myth combines with Prague as an urban organism.”⁶² By the end of the century, British travellers captured a tension between past and present. In his 1894 travelogue, Baker described the “sights and scenes of medieval life even to-day, that carry one back to feudal times”, while also making every effort to celebrate Prague’s modernity, with its factories and highest technical knowledge.⁶³ Reminiscent of Zap’s and Klutschak’s reinterpretation of Prague’s past, Baker embodied a temporal paradox, one which looked to the present and future, while also reflecting the classical and medieval past.

58 Ibid., 225.

59 Bryant, *A Tale of One City*, (2012), 11.

60 Franz Klutschak, *Der Führer durch Prag. Mit einem alphabetischen Verzeichnisse der Sehenswürdigkeiten Prags und seiner Umgebung und einigen belehrenden Notizen für Fremde*, Prag 1838, 4; Bryant, *A Tale of One City*, (2012), 19.

61 Bryant, *A Tale of One City*, (2012), 19.

62 Macura, *The Mystifications*, 2010, 46.

63 James Baker, *Pictures from Bohemia. Drawn with pen and pencil*, London 1894, 89–90.

“An Italian complexion”

“It presents an Italian appearance”, wrote William Tait, “and looking down from the hill [...] reminded us much of the panorama of Rome”.⁶⁴ This “Italian appearance” also described in Murray’s guidebook was reflected in the “richest style of Italian architecture”.⁶⁵ This vista, associated with ideas of sophistication and culture, conflicted with the more Oriental and German depictions of the city. This is evident when Symons described Hradčany as the “Kremlin of Prague”, from where you could see the “pointed spires, green domes, and red, many-gabled roofs” before portraying the rest of the surrounding area like “Naples rising to Capodimonte”.⁶⁶ Tait also observes that “considering their [Prague’s] nearness to Saxony, the inhabitants here make an extraordinary advance towards an Italian complexion”.⁶⁷ British travellers experienced these multiple temporalities by simply moving within the city space. Aiton noted the “fantastic mixture of Gothic and Italian decorations”, where “at each successive turn, the eye is met with some memorial of historical reminiscence”.⁶⁸ The “ancient and renaissance pasts were to be mobilised” to serve Bohemia’s future both culturally and politically, transforming the idea of ancient Rome into a dynamic force enacted in the present.⁶⁹ In doing so, the proximity posited between the present and classical antiquity situated them culturally with the rest of Europe and created a past to be used as a political weapon against the imperial government.

The visual and political manifestations of antiquity were not limited to British travelogues. Czech go-betweens instrumentalised this image for national resolutions. Bracewell posits that “this is how they see us” was a powerful way of reframing how society, the city, and the nation represented itself to visitors.⁷⁰ By 1847, instead of teaching Czechs about Prague, Zap called them to action. Also reflecting on the comparison to Rome, he declared that “Prague is our Rome, where all our country’s history has been concentrated and where our monuments have been built”.⁷¹ He went on to say that “every Czech who honours his nation should have a holy reverence for these monuments and every [Czech] should be enthusiastic of the obligation to protect them and to care for their preservation”.⁷² This projection of classi-

64 William Tait, *Letters from the Continent – No. II*, in: *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* (1837), 442–452, 445.

65 Murray, *A Handbook*, 1837, 323.

66 Arthur Symons, *Cities*, London 1905, 134.

67 Tait, *Letters*, (1837), 445–446.

68 Aiton, *Eight Weeks*, 1842, 277.

69 Clark, *Time*, 2019, 210.

70 Bracewell, *The traveller’s eye*, 2015, 221.

71 Zap, *Průvodce*, 1848, ii.

72 *Ibid.*

cal antiquity onto Bohemia recognised the nation as the inheritor of Rome, situating it firmly within the chronology of (Western) Europe and affirming the nation's historical authority. Bryant sheds light on the German translation of Zap's guidebook, noting the omission of Prague's comparison to Rome.⁷³ The exclusion evaded Bohemia's tie to the remote past, and instead bound it to the near past of the Austrian Empire. The British travelogues that projected classical antiquity onto the city painted Bohemia as the inheritor of Rome and situated it firmly within the cultural splendour of Europe, whereas in the case of Zap's narrative, it confirmed the Czech historical legitimacy to the city.

According to Franz Fillafer, this "brokerage of pasts" witnessed the interplay between the "discovery of the Greek and Roman ancient worlds on the one hand and non-classical antiquities on the other".⁷⁴ This classical antiquity was an important and convertible asset, permitting Czech go-betweens to "explore and embellish" their own pasts.⁷⁵ Rome was not, however, considered to be a "super-normative pinnacle of perfection" rather its use crafted a cross-pollinated temporal panoply situated between the ancient and domestic pasts.⁷⁶ In addition, Fillafer points out how in Central Europe, antiquity was neither a far distant past nor an inaccessible superior ideal, much like for Zap, it was a "toolkit of inquiry" which entwined with "local pasts awaiting discovery".⁷⁷ There is a relational quality in entangling local pasts with antiquity. In the case of the British travel writers, they acted as intermediaries drawing on Bohemia's Catholic culture to insert Prague into this ancient landscape. It had both cultural and political significance. Zap, and other Czech go-betweens, utilised antiquity as an "engine of knowledge production" to help themselves and others "grasp and form the world" they inhabited.⁷⁸

Bryant notes that Zap considered the city's "greatest attribute" to be its "ability to retain memories of the past within its structures".⁷⁹ The use of 'Rome' was deliberate, insofar that he reframed the comparison to be imbued with Czech nationalism. Two years after Zap's guide, the journal *Časopis českého Museum* virulently agreed with his comment that Prague was their Rome, the glory of which was in the built environment.⁸⁰ Zap was not the only one to make the comparison; as Prague under-

73 Bryant, *Zap's Prague*, (2013), 194.

74 Franz Fillafer, *Interactive Antiquities: A Relational History*, in: Ines Peper/Thomas Wallnig (eds.), *Central European Pasts. Old and New in the Intellectual Culture of Habsburg Europe, 1700–1750*, Berlin 2022, 565–606, 567; see also Václav Smyčka, *Achilles a Želva. Osvícenské narativy pokruku a opožďení*, *Dějiny – teorie – kritika* 12 (2015), 22–39.

75 Fillafer, *Interactive Antiquities*, 2022, 567.

76 *Ibid.*, 577.

77 *Ibid.*, 565.

78 *Ibid.*, 570.

79 Bryant, *A Tale of One City*, (2012), 19.

80 *Uvahy*, in: *Časopis českého Museum* 4 (1849), 133.

went modernisation, writer and journalist Jan Klecanda reminded his readers that amidst all the turbulent changes Prague was their Rome, which needed to be preserved.⁸¹ He emphasised the “double embedment in visions of antiquity and modernity”, which were in “constant communication with one another”.⁸² Periodicals also politicised and aestheticised this comparison. Five decades after Zap’s assertion, the political weekly *Čech* also made the likeness: “Prague is our Rome” it declared, rooting it this time in the Catholic landscape.⁸³ In 1885, writing for *The Cornhill Magazine*, Baker moved beyond the capital and described the town of Pribinec as a “medieval Pompeii” in Bohemia.⁸⁴ The article, which illustrated it as “a paradise in its beauty” offering “a bit of mediaeval life such as even Naples could not afford us”, was translated eight years later for the Czech periodical *Turista* (1889).⁸⁵ This self-representation, but also the British characterisation of Bohemia’s and Prague’s relationship to antiquity, blurred temporal boundaries and encouraged cross-fertilisation: the Czech go-betweens, be it Zap or journalists, “employed the evaluative categories” of antiquity to mould their own past and establish their position on the European stage.⁸⁶

Conclusion

In 1837, Czech patriot Josef Tyl echoed the thoughts of many of his contemporaries: “once in his lifetime must every Czech behold Prague, once he must come to its gates as a pilgrim, like an unbelieving Moslem to the bones of the Prophet”.⁸⁷ He captured the sentiment of the nineteenth century, which witnessed an increased enchantment with Prague from British travellers and Czech go-betweens, both of whom encouraged Europeans and their compatriots to visit the city. For this article, I have situated the region within a wider European discourse on the circulation of knowledge, demonstrating the interplay of self-perceived Czech temporalities with those penned by British travellers. Introducing the dialogue between the two sides spotlights how we can start to understand the representation and transformation of Prague’s

81 Jan Klecanda, *Devatenácté století slovem i obrazem, část 2*, Prague 1904, 774.

82 Gábor Klaniczay/Michael Werner/Ottó Gecser, Introduction, in: eid. (eds.), *Multiple antiquities, multiple modernities. Ancient histories in nineteenth century European cultures*, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2011, 9–25, 9.

83 Co tvoří starobylost Prahy, in: *Čech*, 13 May 1896, 1.

84 James Baker, A Pompeii in Bohemia, in: *The Cornhill Magazine*, January 1881, 45–52.

85 James Baker, České Pompeje, in: *Turista* 5 (1893), 67–69.

86 Fillafer, *Interactive Antiquities*, 2022, 573.

87 Otakar Odložilík, Slavonic Cities III: Prague, in: *The Slavonic and East European Review* 24/63 (1946), 81–91, 88.

multiple temporalities over the course of the nineteenth century. Images of the Oriental not only gestured to Prague's sublime aesthetic but also to its political suffocation and cultural difference, whereas its comparison to the Eternal City firmly established its European heritage eliding the authority of the imperial centre. Prague was, however, also experiencing rapid industrialisation, political turbulence, and cultural changes, which illuminated the city's shifting energies. By the end of the century, there was a marked effort in the writings of British travellers to celebrate Bohemian culture and articulate the importance of the nation's independence.

British travellers and Czech go-betweens acted as cultural and knowledge brokers, crossing both societal and national boundaries to circulate knowledge of Prague's temporal culture. It is important to further consider the role of bilingual Bohemians or German-speaking *Landespatrioten* throughout the period. An interesting point of departure is addressing the Bohemian nobility and their exchanges with British travellers, with whom many were well-acquainted. These conversations would offer insight into temporal utterances articulated between individual actors and societal groups, who had different political incentives and cultural visions for the city. And so, this article offers a glimpse into nineteenth-century Prague and the temporal signature intuited by British travellers and Czech go-betweens, who experienced different pulsations of time through perceptions of past, present, and future.