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Parallel Landscapes:
Bohemia and Moravia in the age of Comenius

Eva Semotanová

Levels of Parallel Landscapes

Parallel landscapes in the age of John Amos Comenius concern early modern landscapes of the Czech lands, captured differently as regards their form and content in selected textual, map, iconographic and material sources. The image of parallel landscapes emerged in many ways, by collecting concrete facts about the landscape, interpretation of older sources, intuitively, as a reflection of visions, respect and admiration for the homeland, transformations through artistic products, especially visual arts, but less as verbal, prose or poetry works.

As the study materials, we chose a map of Moravia by John Amos Comenius from 1624, a map by Paul Aretin from 1619 and description of the Kingdom of Bohemia by the exile Paul Stránský of Záp from 1634 and 1643, which was based on Aretin's map. The mentioned sources capture the early modern landscape in the first half of the 17th century, thus allowing a parallel view of the two neighbouring areas of the Czech Crown, that is Bohemia and Moravia, on a horizontal level. The authors of these sources, John Amos Comenius, the last bishop of the Bohemian Brethren, Pavel Aretin, actor in the estate uprising and Pavel Stránský of Záp, a sympathiser with the estate resistance, came from an evangelic milieu connected with humanistic trends. They were forced to exile because of the post-White Mountain events, especially after issuance of the Renewed Ordinance.

Comparison on the vertical level provides a choice of texts on the Bohemian landscape from spiritually very different Catholic milieu; it is the Miscellanea historica regni Bohemiae with schematic maps of Bohemia produced by the Jesuit priest Bohuslav Balbin in the late 17th century. The next material involves a national-historical description of Bohemia with a map by Johann Georg Mauritius Vogt from the Cistercian monastery in Plasy. The illustrative character and supplementary view of the Bohemian landscape in the 17th and 18th century is interpreted by drawings and graphic art, with complete or partial vedute of cities, castles, palaces and monasteries.

However, can the selected document be regarded an authentic source? Is the shape of the early modern European and Bohemian landscape adequately known? To what extent is it a mere virtual reconstruction, a fiction based on the study of a torso of documentary, cartographic, iconographic and material relics? What was the reason for making descriptions and maps of individual Bohemian and Moravian landscapes? Is the image of the landscapes real, and to what extent? What linked the creators of landscape images, despite their religious sentiments and perception of the current political situation? What are the mutual and contradictory aspects of parallel landscapes in the Czech lands if we compare socially and
spiritedly different periods, that is the early 17th century with the first half of the 18th century?

**Historical Landscape as the Theatrum Mundi**

A deeper understanding of the historical landscape helps to uncover many causes and consequences of the society's historical evolution. The space, or shall we say the landscape, is a “Theatrum mundi” - it creates a stage of events and processes that take place in time, where the actors do not enter or leave - the actors, that is the man and the society, are just present on the stage. The landscape can be sensed as a backdrop (that is the visual art aspect), topography (that is the topographical aspect), the “life of the Earth” (that is the agglomeration of landscape shapes and geological structures), the nature (that is the ecosystems), the environment, artefact (that is the base for formation of a group identity), a place, location or territory, a territory of conflicts; it is possible to find other profiles and delimitation of the landscape towards the man as the main observer and one of the actors of landscape transformations.

For a historian, historical landscape is each landscape of the past, but at the same time, as a relic, an exceptional component of bygone landscapes where the extant traces of human activity are unique. The attribute “historical” is thus determined by the subject of the study, that is a landscape that existed in the past (as a contrast to the present cultural landscape), survival of traces - remains of landscape elements that co-created this landscape (and now document it) and historical information, which is connected with the landscape, for example an impact of historical processes or events. What type of data on historical landscape can we get?

Especially data regarding the overall character of the landscape over a certain period, conditions and transformations of the landscape elements in chronological layers, partial traces of the landscape memory and creation of their image by means of partial probes. We must not forget an ethnologic, artistic and philosophical aspect of the issue.

At present, studies of historical landscapes are based on the outcomes of archeological research not only within prehistoric archeology, but also archeology of the modern period. Non-destructive methods of archeological research include laser scanning of the landscape, which maps the terrain and relics of the human activity in a careful method and processes the results by 3D computer modelling. Up to now, only a fraction of the Czech landscape has been processed by this method of thematized landscape probes.

**Early Modern Bohemian Landscape**

What was the early modern European and especially Bohemian landscape like at the time of John Amos Comenius? The history of Bohemian landscape from unusual viewpoints has recently appeared in numerous professional as well as popularizing books. They capture the connection between a man and the nature in a single landscape-formation unit, especially in the middle ages, the early modern period, but also more recent periods. The early modern landscape of the Czech lands as the background of social events from the early 16th to the late 18th century, however, has not been systematically studied; the existing data are fragmentary and often diverse. The shape of the landscape, its components and transformations contain many unknown facts, namely the space (that is the nature), the investors (that is the catalysts of changes in the sense of ideas and finances) and the creators (that is the artists, architects, builders and other personalities or nameless individuals). The study and reconstruction of early modern landscape, especially in periods older than two or three centuries, is thus relatively difficult; it demands analyses and interpretations of various types of historical sources with application of interdisciplinary approaches, while the results of the research are limited to partial regional probes. The European early modern landscape is summarily described in foreign historical geographic publications and essays, which, however, mention Central Europe and the Czech lands very marginally. They describe the early modern landscape as predominantly rural, because about eighty percent of population were engaged in agriculture; the towns remained relatively small and domestic crafts were mostly oriented to local markets. Between the 16th and 18th century, however, the political and economical development of individual lands and the development of science, technology and communication caused a dramatic change.

In the 16th century, people became increasingly concerned with the landscape and its reflection in the thinking and ideas of the society not only as the citizens and users of the landscape, but also in the sense of philosophy and national history. The natural and geographic factors were considered the main cause of social events. Evaluation of the landscape as the vital space and description of individual lands or regions was much more prosaic and contributed to broader understanding of the current geographical horizon. New practical and aesthetic potentialities for utilization of the landscape emerged. In the historical sources, the early modern landscape is captured in words, maps and pictures. Perception of the landscape as a sensual experience or as a background to tales and events penetrated into creative art, literature and poetry.

The early modern landscape of the Czech lands within the central European macroregion was delimited by the borders of the Crown of Bohemia or in a narrower sense the territory of the contemporary Czech Republic. At the break of the 15th and 16th century, the Czech lands formed a component of the Jagiellons' personal union (1490-1526). Formation of the Bohemian-Austrian-Hungarian state system under the rule of the Habsburgs in 1526 meant incorporation of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and both Lusatia regions into a multinational Habsburg Monarchy; in 1635, Upper and Lower Lusatia, which had already been pledged in 1623, were ceded to Saxony. Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Lusatia were divided into a large number of regions in the early modern period. In the 17th century, Bohemia was sectioned into fourteen regions that included Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Lusatia; Brno, Hradec, Chrudim, Kouřim, Litoměřice, Písek, Podbrdy, Prácheň, Rakovník, Slaný, Víslava and Zatec; Moravia had five regions - Brno, Hradště, Jihlava, Olomouc and Znojmo.
In the 17th century, settlement and cultivation of the landscape in the Czech lands extended into areas 600 meters above sea level, where the so-called young cultural landscape was created. It was connected with extensive pasturing, logging, glass making and mining. Large pond systems from the late 15th and the 16th century extended in the interior. Mountain belts became occupied with miners of precious ores while rich deciduous forests became sparse or completely disappeared in some areas. Cities and towns adopted the early Baroque style in architecture and the lifestyle, inspired by new or luxuriously rebuilt noble residences. Spiritual ideas and influences together with the Baroque style and art contributed to the birth of a landscape phenomenon called the Bohemian Baroque landscape, delimited by the mid-17th and the mid-18th century. The origins of Baroque landscape, however, can be observed in activities of Albrecht von Wallenstein in the town of Jičín and its surroundings as early as the 1620s.

The Landscape of John Amos Comenius - RelativeAccuracy?

John Amos Comenius, a bishop of the Bohemian Brethren, a teacher (the “teacher of the nations”), a scholar and writer, spent his life in European countries in a politically unsettled time marked with the Thirty-Year War (1618-1648) and its consequences for the Czech lands. Despite his tragic personal experiences and his struggling nation, he created a work of huge international and timeless significance.

Many books have been written about the life and work of John Amos Comenius. For several decades, specialists have paid close attention to his map of Moravia, which he created before his exile in 1628. The contemporary maps that followed traditions of the Dutch 16th-century cartographic style, aroused admiration and great delight in leading political, scholarly and cultural persons. Establishment of private map collections became a popular, perhaps even fashionable activity. The authors of maps dedicated their works to the kings or important noblemen, referring to their effort to support their nation, which they adored, by popularizing data of topographic, historical, economical or cultural nature.

Comenius’ map from 1624 captures the Moravian landscape through the eyes of a teacher who is trying to illustrate interesting geographical and historical facts about his nation with relatively high accuracy for deeper recognition of the mapped territory. The author prepared a manuscript map in the early 17th century from materials, which he had been collecting for ten years or even longer. It was based on his own knowledge from stays and travels around Moravia and narrations of the contemporaries; he based many places that he had personally not visited on narrations of people who knew them well. He probably drew information about distances from various printed itineraries. It is very unlikely that he established the map on his own surveying, although he was relatively well experienced in astronomy, surveying and cosmography. At that time, European cartography did not yet use astronomical measurements for maps of larger territories.

Originally, Comenius probably considered appending the map to the book on Moravian history “De Antiquitatibus Moraviae”, but the manuscript has not survived. He especially wanted to correct mistakes in the old Fabricius’ map and supply it with results of his own studies and his contemporaries’ accounts. The map was produced according to the manuscript, engraved in a copper plate and probably issued in Amsterdam in 1624, in a workshop of Abraham Goos, a Dutch cartographer and map publisher. The original manuscript map, which was used for engraving and printing of the map, is unknown and has probably not survived, just like his book on Moravian history.

Comenius dedicated the map to Ladislav Velen of Žerotín, a Moravian regional council commissioner and leader of the Moravian non-Catholic nobles who participated in the estate uprising. Velen was known for his interest in religious freedom and Comenius deeply respected him. He wrote the following Latin dedication on the map: The topographic maps of our land are plentiful and variously issued, my Lord, but they are all full of errors: because, to my knowledge, only Paul Fabricius, Emperor Ferdinand’s doctor, drew them in the map after a survey; all maps that were issued afterwards were drawn on its basis and various errors somehow found their way into them.

Comenius’ map of Moravia was issued repeatedly for more than a century.

The twelve printing plates printed at least one hundred various editions between 1624 and 1701. The first Bohemian edition from 1677 entitled “Moraviae olim regnum nunc marchionatus” was engraved by Samuel Dvůřák and the map was issued as a supplement to a book “Mars Moravicus” by Tomáš Pešina of Čechorod.

The content of the map is largely topographical. Comenius recorded the relief schematically; he drew the waters relatively accurately, especially rivers with marked bridges, residences such as castles, palaces, towns, villages and monasteries and, again schematically, the greenery. He also drew vineyards, a selection of healing springs and spas, glassworks and ore, gold and silver mines. Some areas have more detailed information typical for the given region such as Propast near Hranice, where he visited the seat of the Bohemian Brethren. The geographic names are written in Czech, important locations in Czech and German, for example Brinn B. (Bohemice) Brno. Compared with many contemporary maps of lands and states, Comenius’ map is a relatively accurate cartographic illustration of the Moravian landscape, which provides an overall, balanced image of the landscape features, especially the terrain, watercourses and settlements. The sectioning into five regions is not drawn. The 1627 issue is decorated with vedute of Polná, Olomouc, Brno and Znojmo, which suitably supplement the image of the landscape.

Landscape by Paul Stránský of Zápys - Remembrances in Exile

The parallel landscape to the landscape of John Amos Comenius is the Bohemian landscape of the 1630s. It was captured by a participant in the estate uprising and the post-White Mountain exile Pavel Stránský of Zápys near Čelákovicke (formerly Zapská Stránka) in his book About the State of Bohemia (Res publica Bohemiae) dated 1634. The opening section is concerned with description of the Kingdom
question you wish. Whatever is needs the love of the land, which is the Bohemian soul, whatever can be seen, he will himself tell you. I praise your pen, Stránský, and the work you do for the land: I believe that the future time will keep its gratitude to your work.”

The Landscape of Bohuslav Balbin - Reality and Mysteriousness

The Jesuit priest Bohuslav Balbin had a completely different religious belief, but similar nationalistic feelings in the late 17th century. In *Miscellanea historica regni Bohemiae*, which was published in Prague between 1679 and 1687, he recorded Bohemian geographical and natural phenomena carefully and in great detail. He described the position of the land, its mountain ranges, waters, mineral resources with important deposits, glassworks, paper mills, healing springs, the flora, fish, birds and animals of the Bohemian land, its cities, towns, villages and castles. He enriched the particular data on geographical characteristic of the Czech lands with tales and other interesting things. He described the Bohemian land as a picturesque country abounding in riches and unsurpassed beauty. Balbin based his work on older works about Bohemia, Cosmas’ chronicle, the chronicle of Václav Hájek of Libočany, his own journeys around Bohemia and many other, now unknown sources.

In the introduction of *Miscellanea*, the attentive and witty Balbin remembered the words of the Leiden professor of history and geography, Philip Clüver from the 16th century. He had compared the position of Bohemia in Europe to the navel of a charming queen whose head was in Spain and the stomach in German lands. He also knew Enea Silvio Piccolomini,12 because he, like Silvius, claimed that the Bohemian landscape was rather cold and exposed to northerly winds. Like Stránský, Balbin compared Bohemia to a beautiful amphitheatre.13 All those who mentioned Bohemia claimed that it was surrounded with mountains as a crown and protected by a natural wall of forests and rocks. We can see the same on the maps: anybody who comes to the Czech border can witness it: no matter which way they approached or left, they realized that they were faced with mountains, had to claim mountain paths often carved in rocks and tight precipices. The most accessible and easy path leads to Moravia, but it is also impassable and full of twists in many places. The remaining border areas are protected by steep mountains, deep valleys, horrifying forests, impassable rocks, often streams rushing from a height or other obstacles.14 Balbin included strong emotional overtones in many places in his description of Bohemia: “If you look at Bohemia from a higher hill such as Říp, Bezdez or Sedlo, you will think that you see a very large garden. Every little bit is cultivated, white alternates with red. Cultivated fields are very dark. Bohemia surpasses neighbouring areas with fertility.”15 Balbin also described various secrets and mysteries. He was intrigued by a tale about a white lady, who appeared in various castles and palaces (for example Jindřichův Hradec). He believed that it was not a mere fantasy and gave testimony of people who had seen the white lady with their own eyes.16
In 1611, he produced a map of Bohemia in a shape of a rose for his work *Epitome historica Rerum Bohemicarum*. A full-blown rose lit by the sun with a royal crown represents blossoming Bohemia.

Balbin produced another map of Bohemia for printing in his *Miscellanea* in 1679. It was drawn by Karel Skřela. The stylized circular image of Bohemia is divided by the Vltava and Labe rivers into three sections and framed with border mountains with Latin names: Silva Lunae, Hercynia, Silva Gabreta, Sudeti, Montes, Hermundurorum, Gigantes. In the centre of the map, there is a picture of Prague, and on the Labe River, Mělník is marked by its name. The map is bordered with motifs of a double pearl string with heart-shaped leaves and a pendant, a crown, a sceptre, an orb, a St. Vitus’ eagle and the Bohemian lion. In the late 17th century, the heart-shaped pendant could have represented love and respect, in this case perhaps to Bohemia illustrated on the map.

Both maps are schematic illustrations of Bohemia, where the landscape is suppressed and presented in a very simplified way. Symbolism expressed by the complimentary text and Baroque motifs is an important attribute. One hundred years later, Alex Pařízek, a member of the Dominican order, a teacher, writer, composer, painter and cartographer, found inspiration in Balbin’s *Miscellanea*. In 1781, he created a map of Bohemia called *Historische Karte vom Königreich Böhmen* as an aid for teaching history and geography. The content of the map is strongly thematic and corresponds to information captured by Balbin in his geographical characteristics of Bohemia, selected with regard to the characteristic landscape, economical and homeland study elements. Like Balbin, he mentioned collection of pearls in the Otava River, mining of precious metals, locations of mineral water and exceptional hills (such as Milešovka). Breeding of pheasants in the Hradec Králové region, etc. Usage of Balbin’s data proves the significance of his work for homeland perception of Bohemia.

Landscape of Johann Georg Mauritius Vogt - Admiration and Respect

Johann Georg Mauritius Vogt (1669-1730) from the Cistercian monastery in Plasy expressed his love for Bohemia with unusual openness in his work from the early 18th century “*Das jetztlebende Königreich Böhmen in seiner historisch- und geographischen Beschreibung vorgestellt*”. The book, dedicated to Bohemia and its natural-historical description, was published in Frankfurt and Leipzig by Johann Ziegler in 1712 (in other prints, it was perhaps published until 1730) and again in the second edition in Nurnberg by Johann Rüdiger in 1742. The author described the landscape features and important or remarkable areas of the Kingdom of Bohemia, which he always treated with compliments and respect. In the preface of the book, dedicated to the natural-historical description of the land, the author called Bohemia “his dear homeland”, although he had come to Plasy with his father from Königshofen in Germany.

Johann Georg Vogt acquired surveying and map drawing skills from his father, who was a surveyor in the service of the Plasy monastery. He studied philosophy and theology in Prague and was fond of Bohemian history and geography. His other works of exceptional importance include a well-arranged map of Bohemia “*Nova totius regni Bohemiae tabula...*” published in 1712 together with the mentioned book “*Das jetztlebende Königreich Böhmen in seiner historisch- und geographischen Beschreibung vorgestellt*”. The complex of geographical description and map of Bohemia makes an image of the Bohemian Baroque landscape not only as an expression of admiration for Bohemia, but also as an acknowledgement to Count Šporck, who probably supported edition of the book. Vogt’s book contains special sections dedicated to description of František Antonín Šporck’s estate. This is also clear in acknowledgements that appear in six out of seven vudent in chapters about both estates. It reads: “*Illustrissimo Excellentissimo Domino Dn. Francisco Anthonio a Sporck, S. Rom. Imp. Comiti dicat dedicat et consecrat infimus Servus Joh. Ziegerus Bibliopolae Norimburgii,*” in detail, Vogt described interesting facts about Šporck’s estate in Lysá: “Along one wall of the palace called the New Building, there is a dwelling for the birds built as a cave, where the songbirds entertain Count Šporck and his guests. Not far away, a fountain glitters and on the other side a lovely garden is located.” Descriptions of other locations are much briefer. Only in Český Krumlov, alongside important persons and buildings, Vogt mentioned the third wedding of Wilhelm of Rozenberg (with Ann Mary of Baden) in 1578. He enumerated the quantity and types of food and drink that was consumed at the wedding.

On the map of Bohemia, Vogt drew the administrative sectioning into fourteen regions and added cultural, economical and geographical data and interesting facts. He captured the waterways more accurately than his predecessors; he drew the Vltava arch in Prague and paid attention to large pond systems. The dense road network concentrated in the centre of the land - the main surface routes from all points of the compass converged in Prague. The terminology is mostly German, less Czech (Chlumec, Smidary); in some cases, Czech names are supplied as doublets (Neu Haus als Hradeck Gindrichu).

Personification of Bohemian rivers by Johann Leonhard Blanck (such as the Jihlý brook by Podmoky, the Jizera, Mrlina, Čidla, Labe, Orlice, Vltava, Otava, Berounka, Sázava and the Mastník brook, marked as “Radízků” Radíčka) on the map as well as the Saale, Main and Naab rivers is symbolized by persons grouped in front of a mountain representing the Giant Mountains. It is the first allegory of waterways preceding Reiner’s conception of Bohemian rivers on the map of Johann Christoph Müller from 1720.

Vogt’s map is one of the unique works in cartographic creation of the Czech lands, although it was soon overshadowed by Müller’s map of Bohemia from the early 18th century. Together with the publication “*Das jetztlebende Königreich Böhmen...*”, it is a manifestation of the author’s admiration for Bohemia and his desire to capture geographical and historical facts about his new homeland.

Landscape Painting - The Fine Art of Illustrated Space?

Landscape painting in painting, drawing and graphic arts brings the image of a landscape in all of its forms - real, transformed by artistic approach, idealized or
mian landscape inspired by admiration and respect for the beloved homeland, and the topographic aspect of the description with many natural-historical features.

Pavel Stránícký made an image of a landscape as a remembrance. He produced a virtual view of the Bohemian landscape with application of his own data, information from the Bohemian Chronicle by Václav Hájek of Libočany from the mid-16th century and Aretin’s map of Bohemia from 1619.

Bohuslav Balbin included many myths and legends about natural curiosities and various places of interest. He spiced his colourful narration with attractive tales about fabulous creatures and miracles that had occurred in many places. He appreciated objectively and positively the work of Pavel Stránícký and highly appreciated John Amos Comenius’ work. Like Comenius, his goal was education of the younger generation in data and history of their own homeland. He experienced feelings of exile, but not for his belief; he was forced to leave Prague because of his various critical opinions and other alleged offences. He was even threatened with expulsion from Bohemia.

Johann Georg Vogt was rational in his topographic accounts, only the introduction was emotional. He was brief, even encyclopedic, except for his lengthy description of Count Špork’s and Thun’s estates. The book is accompanied with numerous vedute and a map of Bohemia produced especially by the author for Vogt’s publication. Frequent journeys around the Kingdom of Bohemia probably allowed him to rely on his own data, or sometimes he used indirect information from his journeys or from Plasy.

Map illustration of Bohemia and Moravia in the 17th and early 18th century corresponds to the contemporary European cartographic knowledge, technology and technique. Aretin’s map of Bohemia is schematized but, compared with older cartographic works, still much more accurate and with regional sectioning. Comenius’ map of Moravia from 1624 shows the authors effort to improve the existing map image and use it for educational as well as travelling purposes. Vogt’s map of Bohemia is a work of a cartographic professional; he learned the art of map production from his father who worked as a monastic surveyor in Plasy. He did not hesitate to outline topographic data which he considered special and important for Bohemia such as large pond systems in eastern Bohemia near Pardubice. All of the three maps can be characterized as well arranged maps of a pocket-sized format with medium scales.

Parallel landscapes of the Czech lands represent a fictive transformation of three nature-historical texts and three well arranged maps. They exist in a horizontal juxtaposed position in the sense of a geographic position (that is Bohemia and Moravia), vertical superimposed position in a chronological sense (that is the 17th and 18th century) and separately according to the author’s aim and mission. Nevertheless, they are connected by many links expressed by their common goals and intentions, that is declaration of historical and geographic data about the Czech lands and admiration, respect and love for their homeland.

The Image of Parallel Landscapes – Comparison and Summary

Textual descriptions of the Bohemian landscape were written in the first half of 17th century by Pavel Stránícký in exile, in the late 17th century by the Catholic priest and historian Bohuslav Balbin residing in Bohemia and in the early 18th century by a member of the Cisterian order in Plasy, Johann Georg Vogt, also in Bohemia. The common feature of all the three texts is description of the Bohe-


“Prostant quam plurima diversarum editionum chorographicae tabulae patriae nostrae illustrissime quantum sciam, P. Fabritius olim Ferdinandi imperatoris medicus, eam hustram in tabulam redactit, reliquiae quot quot proderunt posthaec, ex hac descriptae sunt, variis variae illapsis erroribus.” Comenius’ map of Moravia, 1624.


Pavel STRÁNSKÝ, O státě českém, Respublica Bojema [Bohumil RYBA ed.], Praha 1946, p. 11.


Bohuslav BALBÍN, Krávy, s. 70.

Bohuslav BALBÍN, Krávy, s. 147.

Bohuslav BALBÍN, Krávy, s. 294-295.

Eva SEMOTANOVÁ, Tři díjespiné mapy Aleška Pařížka z konce 18. století, Historická geografie 32, Praha 2003, s. 69-92.


PICTURES:

Illustration Nr. 1:
Map of Moravia by John Amos Comenius, 1627
Illustration Nr. 2:
Map of Bohemia by Johann Georg Mauritius Vogt, 1712

Illustration Nr. 3:
Map of Bohemia by Karel Škréta jr., 1679