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Excerpt

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Introduction

SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY STUDIES AND THEIR CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE

At about the same time that the Fourth Meeting of Czechoslovak Historians reached the conclusion that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries form a period which deserves more attention, similar opinions began to be expressed elsewhere. This was not purely a matter of chance. The French Marxist writer, Pierre Daix, in his article 'The unknown 17th century', pointed out that historians have until now concentrated more on the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, which seem on the surface to have been far more 'revolutionary'. 'Our knowledge of the seventeenth century is minimal and is riddled with misunderstanding; it is high time for a revision.'¹ Essentially the same sentiments have been expressed by Pierre Vilar in his studies of the Spanish 'Golden Age' and historical reality, by Pierre Chaunu in his *Civilization of Classical Europe*, Pierre Goubert in his captivating monograph *Louis XIV and Twenty Million Frenchmen*, and Fernand Braudel in his brilliant, but slightly specious, *Material Civilization and Capitalism*.² All this agrees substantially with the conclusions of the historians who, in a number of articles in *Past and Present*, saw the period 1560–1660 as a European crisis, with those of the Soviet historians, B. F. Porshnev, N. A. Chistozvonov and M. A. Barg, and finally with the opinions of a group of Americans who place the beginnings of the early modern age in the period 1550–1650.³

But the idea that the seventeenth and the twentieth century have a great deal in common, that the former was a period not only of change, but of substantial and revolutionary change, is nothing new. Voices asking whether we are not living again in the seventeenth century, whether the twenty-year period between the World Wars was not merely a truce separating two sections of a new Thirty Years' War, came to be heard as early as the beginning of the Second World War.

This question was also asked at least in passing by a historian well acquainted with the Thirty Years' War, the late Otakar Odložilík.⁴

However I believe today that this train of thought is not taken into account often enough. Historians who lived through the Second World War and the following thirty years are perhaps too much aware that we are not living in the seventeenth century, but in the twentieth, in which human society has reached new heights of technical achievement and has come within reach of universal destruction – things undreamt of even by the chiliastic writers of the seventeenth century. But if contemporary historiography continues to betray a spiritual kinship with a period long vanished, it is a manifestation of the collective experience of people taught by Marx and Freud, Lenin and Einstein, shorn of the shallow optimism which characterized the liberal and nationalist historians of the last century. For our immediate forebears so many problems seemed so simple partly because they did not consider them to be problems at all, partly because they were unwilling or unable to grasp the mentality of preceding generations.

Today historians have discarded most of their illusions about the public response which scholarship will evoke and stand slightly puzzled before new tasks. It is not very difficult to show that traditional historiography worked with myths, legends and stereotypes. It is far more difficult to show what the 'new historiography' should look like. Of course, Fernand Braudel was easily able to demonstrate the absurdity of the notion of the 'encirclement of France' in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and Gaston Zeller has demonstrated that the thesis of a struggle for the 'natural' frontiers of France is unacceptable. But this does not mean that there was no struggle between Habsburgs and Bourbons for hegemony in Europe. The difference is that our explanations are not merely personal, as they were when much was written about the statesmanship of Henry IV, the cruelty or benevolence of Ferdinand II, the genius of Richelieu and Wallenstein. For us the problem is to understand how a ruler as an individual carried out his policies, how he managed his power apparatus, which in a society divided into classes had its characteristic features, its interests and traditions. This means that the historian cannot get along without 'political' history, that he cannot neglect demography, the history of administration, social movements, quantitative history. Without them it is almost impossible to understand economic problems. Nor can he do without the study of mentality, collective psychology or cultural history. All this means that the tasks of the historians studying the society of the seventeenth century are far more difficult today than they

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have ever been before. To study the biological conditions of life is no simple matter, and it is only with the greatest caution that quantitative methods can be applied to materials from a pre-statistical age. Neither bureaucracies nor social movements can be studied in isolation, as we have come to realize in the last decades, and as for the study of mentality, we stand only at the very beginning.⁵ But that people living in the last quarter of the twentieth century, readers of Franz Kafka, James Joyce and even Vladimir Nabokov, can blink in astonishment at the unexpected parallels between two centuries so widely separated by the gulf of time and by the illusory idea of mechanical progress, has been shown in a new way by Robert Mandrou in his stimulating book about the inquisition and persecution of witches in seventeenth-century France, and by Christopher Hill in his *World Turned Upside Down*.⁶

The change in our thinking about the seventeenth century and its central politico-military conflict, the Thirty Years' War, can be seen from a glance at two American university textbooks written by the same group of authors: Crane Brinton, John B. Christopher and Robert Lee Wolf. In their earlier book, called *Modern Civilization. A History of the Last Five Centuries*, the authors explain the origin of modern civilization (that is, Western civilization of the twentieth century) mostly from the foundations laid in the eighteenth century. The Thirty Years' War is here seen as a series of dynastic-religious wars without any further significance. By contrast the more concise *Civilization in the West* published later in 1964, presents the seventeenth century as a period of social, political and spiritual ferment which reached new heights when it began to accomplish something new. As a result of the purgative Thirty Years' War and the English Revolution, France and England faced each other in a contest for hegemony in Europe and overseas.⁷

Briefly, the unity of feudal and Catholic Europe was shattered in the first half of the sixteenth century. On this point, A. G. Dickens, J. H. Elliott and Heinrich Lutz agree, and Lutz declares that in the middle of the sixteenth century the European continent presented the spectacle of *Christianitas afflicta*, the broken and suffering Church.⁸ According to the circle of historians around the journal *Past and Present* a 'European Crisis' begins with the Dutch Revolution. Dutch historians, who do not believe in a general European crisis, emphasise the aspect of revolution, which they analyse in the wake of A. Meusel and K. Griewank.⁹ For them the Thirty Years' War was an episode in the Eighty Years' War between the Netherlands and Spain, and it can in fact be so considered if we place it in the line of development which

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begins with the Dutch Revolution of the sixteenth century and ends with the English Revolution of the seventeenth.

All this means that historical interest in the Thirty Years' War has increased. Not that it is equally strong everywhere. It is for instance not particularly noticeable in a region where we would expect to find it: in the German-speaking areas. This is surprising, particularly for the Marxist historians, who can rely not only on the chronological writings of Marx or the popularizing work of Mehring, but also on the pioneering studies of A. Meusel and K. Griewank. During the 1930s and the Second World War, the Thirty Years' War was used as something of a bogeyman by Nazi propagandists and others, perhaps because the seventeenth century was the field of a number of historians in exile: C. F. Friedrich, V. Valentin, D. Gerhard. For this reason the first postwar work on the Peace of Westphalia and the conflict between the principles of representative monarchy and absolutism was done by West German historians. But in the past decade German historiography has taken up the problems of the Thirty Years' War only in the work of Fritz Dickmann, F. H. Schubert, Dieter Albrecht, and H. Langer in the German Democratic Republic. But the most stimulating contributions have come from German-speaking historians living outside Germany — above all Hans Sturmbeger in Austria and S. H. Steinberg in Britain.

Steinberg's work, which often betrays a polemical tone, differs from the parochialism of French and German historians. Steinberg repeatedly points out that in the period in which the foundations of modern Europe were laid general European problems naturally assumed greater significance. The same tendency is to be noted in the work of Spanish historians who have freed themselves from the bogeyman of hypernationalism, as well as in the writings of those historians who have chosen to study the seventeenth century in a global rather than a European context.

In the present situation the study of the Thirty Years' War is not only justified as history, but also opens up unexpected prospects. It is of course necessary to agree on what we mean by the Thirty Years' War. In 1954 I defined it as a political conflict which was the logical result of a crisis in the policies of the old feudal ruling classes in various regions of Europe. Because in Bohemia this political and social crisis had deep economic roots, I believed that its analysis would enable us to place this troubled period of Bohemian history in the larger context of the historical development of European society. It now seems that this view was not wide of the mark and that it was of some use.

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It was taken up ten years later by Theodore K. Rabb in his introduction to a collection of articles about the Thirty Years' War: 'Today there can be no doubt that the war must be seen as a phenomenon embracing the whole continent, which influenced the history of international relations and the internal development of most European countries.'¹⁰

SOURCES AVAILABLE FOR THE STUDY OF THE
STRUCTURE OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY SOCIETY

The logical first step toward the serious study of the Thirty Years' War or any of its aspects is to place it in proper relation to the most significant revolutionary conflicts of the time, that is the Dutch and English Revolutions. After studying English policy on the Bohemian question of 1618–20 I reached the conclusion that

diplomatic history makes no sense without an explanation of the structure of a given society. If we fail to consider that Jacobean England was a society in transformation, headed towards revolution, her policies will seem to us hopelessly chaotic. Furthermore, however important and interesting the relations between England and Bohemia before the Battle of the White Mountain may have been, their significance was less than that of those between Bohemia and the Netherlands. For it was not England and France, but the Netherlands on the one hand and the Vatican and the Spanish Habsburgs on the other, who were the active elements in European politics in the years 1618–20. The social and economic foundations of European policy at the beginning of the Thirty Years' War are better explained by the example of the Netherlands, the most advanced of all European states at that time, than by the English example.¹¹

It has become clear, however, that the confrontation between diplomatic partners is an imperfect reflection of reality. The relationship, say, between Bohemia and the Netherlands is comprehensible 'only against the background of a changing European society'.¹² But what was the character of this social change? Gerhard Ritter has suggested that in the second half of the sixteenth century, during a structural crisis, there arose in western Europe 'modern anti-feudal states' (as Fernand Braudel called them): the Netherlands, England and France.¹³ In central Europe this crisis was not resolved, according to Ritter, and the corollary was that 'the repercussions of the religious wars of the sixteenth century⁸ were delayed, and were transformed into a conflict among the great national states of modern Europe'.¹⁴ Ritter's explanation of the Thirty Years' War thus returned to the traditional forms, which were taken up by A. Meusel in his studies in German

history. A departure from this traditional picture of unchanging society and changing conditions of social and political conflict was made by Dietrich Gerhard in his attempt to explain the history of European society on the threshold of the modern age as a struggle between feudal societies, whose democratic aspects Gerhard overestimates and the levelling effects of absolute state power. Gerhard's approach was thoroughly political; he attempted to prove that regionalism and feudalism (or rather, representative institutions) distinguished Europe from Russia and America, and that this development took place primarily during the conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁵ Gerhard's challenge was not taken up, as far as I know, except by some Dutch historians. They mentioned his thesis in their discussion of the conservative character of the Dutch Revolution of the sixteenth century which began as a feudal opposition to Spain and was led to a victorious conclusion by burghers, who promptly fell over each other in their scramble to gain admittance into the nobility. Fernand Braudel's thesis about the decline of late Renaissance Italy is similar (*la faillite de la bourgeoisie*). The social basis of power conflicts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, has been shown more clearly – by F. H. Schubert in his studies of the Netherlands at the beginning of the Thirty Years' War, and by others elsewhere.¹⁶

In 1966 an international colloquium on *Problems of Social Stratification* was held at Paris under the direction of Roland Mousnier.¹⁷ As far as it is possible to judge from the publication which resulted from the colloquium, the theme was conceived too broadly, certainly too broadly for our purposes. Four of the contributions were devoted chiefly to problems of the seventeenth century: I. Schöffler spoke on the social structure of the United Netherlands in the seventeenth century, G. E. Aylmer on 'Caste, estates and classes in seventeenth-century England', F. L. Carsten on Brandenburg-Prussia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and J. A. Maravall on the divisions in Spanish society as revealed in the comedies of the Golden Age. These studies by no means cover the whole of Europe and cannot be compared with the more ambitious attempt by E. J. Hobsbawm, or with several studies by Christopher Hill, which deal with trends common to all of Europe. Since the work of Hobsbawm and Hill will be discussed later, it will be sufficient to say here that in the last decade attention has centred on the study of the social structures of two countries whose rivalry was proverbial for three generations of Europeans and even eclipsed the traditional antithesis between Europe and the Turkish Orient: the Netherlands and Spain.

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In considering Dutch work, we can agree substantially with Schöffer's idea that during the Eighty Years' War (from the beginning of the rebellion against Spain to the middle of the seventeenth century) a type of society was formed in the Netherlands, which later blended with its English rivals and partners, to oppose the type of society represented by France under Louis XIV. In contrast to Dietrich Gerhard, the Dutch historians affirm that feudal institutions continued to exist into the seventeenth century, but in name only. In reality they had vanished. A new 'model' of society and state had emerged, with the burgher regents as the new 'élite'. This bourgeois élite showed a marked upward mobility in the first half of the seventeenth century and a general process of 'aristocratization' in the second. Here one's position in society was determined by property and affluence. Both were paid for by larger groups, the 'small men' who in urban areas represented 80 to 90 per cent of the population, and the growing numbers of *Lumpenproletariat*. In the Netherlands, however, there were differences not only between the élite and the poor *non possidentes*, but also between the western maritime provinces, Holland and Zealand, where the middle class predominated, and the eastern provinces, Geldern and Overijssel, where the 'old society' survived. Its representatives, together with the Calvinist clergy and some of the the guild craftsmen, formed a political and religious opposition to the patrician regents from the western provinces, those Erasmian-oriented Arminians in whom Trevor-Roper sees the real pioneers of capitalism throughout Europe.¹⁸

According to Maravall and Salomon, Spanish society was no less complex than Dutch society.¹⁹ Salomon finds no balance between the two most important social classes in Castile: the powerful aristocracy and the feeble bourgeoisie. Nor is it possible to speak of a Spanish or Castilian 'absolute monarchy,' which, according to the Marxist view, demands a balance among social forces within a society that had been upset by a pre-revolutionary crisis. The monarchical-aristocratic state lived off the peasantry and rents from landed property. Both Salomon and Maravall have given special attention to the decline of a narrow segment of wealthy peasants, *villanos ricos*, who struggled with the *hidalgos* and landless *labradores* alike. So small a group was unable to influence the deeper, essentially medieval, social structure, in spite of what the authors of a number of contemporary economic tracts, or playwrights like Lope de Vega may have thought.²⁰

José Gentil da Silva concludes that in the struggle between old and new social forces, which elsewhere in western Europe led to

revolutionary changes, the ‘Spanish case’ is interesting because Spain distinguished herself from the rest of Europe by being the first European country to extend her power overseas.²¹ It seems, however, that the situation in Spain was not greatly different from that in a number of regions in central and southern Italy, and that similar regions, declining into economic dependence, may be found outside the Mediterranean area, in Poland and the Baltic.²²

Between these two limited sixteenth- and seventeenth-century ‘models’ – the Atlantic or Maritime and the Mediterranean, the Netherlands and Spain (which themselves were full of internal tension and do not represent static social organisms) – lay, of course, a ‘middle Europe’ which followed neither of these patterns or models completely. According to Miroslav Hroch and Josef Petráň, the southern part of central Europe (the Bohemian Crownlands, Lower and Upper Austria) formed a typically ‘transitional’ region, where neither of the economic tendencies had managed fully to win out. Therefore it is precisely in these areas that it would be fruitful to explore the influence of the war on the structure of economy and society. And this is exactly the aim of the present volume.

From the work that has been done so far it is clear that the structure of society in Bohemia before the Thirty Years’ War was by no means static, that the bourgeois elements, in spite of their political defeat in 1547, had not been destroyed, and that possibilities for social development towards modern structures remained very real. It also seems clear from the so far partial results of sociographical analysis that the Bohemian nobility was subjected to thorough-going changes after the Battle of the White Mountain, chiefly by the confiscation of estates; it is possible to speak of a ‘restructuring’ of the whole of Bohemian society. This research, as far as it concerns the nobility, rests on the confiscation protocols from 1621 to 1634, evidence later collected against noblemen who were politically active in the Estates’ government between 1618 and 1620, and on the records of the Diet concerning the acceptance of foreigners into the Bohemian nobility; after the Renewed Constitution of 1627, there are the appropriate documents collected in the *Tabulae regni*. Only some regional and local studies are available for the bourgeoisie and the peasantry.

The changes in the composition of the ruling class, plotted on a map, show that the most obvious transformation took place within the baronial Estate, whose holdings, especially in the border regions where latifundia had been prevalent since the Middle Ages, were acquired by the ‘new nobility’, cosmopolitan in background, who were generally

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military men or administrative officials. This 'new nobility', contrary to the expectations of Bohuslav Balbín, blended with the rest of the feudal community after one or two generations; in fact it showed such vitality that its descendants maintained their position as landlords through the land reforms of 1918, down to 1945 and 1948. Less clear but deeper and equally lasting were the effects upon the lesser nobility, which was only able to maintain itself on the economic periphery of Bohemia and Moravia, and for the bourgeoisie, including the urban intelligentsia. Here the changes were slower but far more fateful, because in fact they resulted in the destruction of the middle class; the Czech bourgeoisie had to regroup and re-form itself in completely new circumstances during the so-called 'national awakening' of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

If it were possible to speak at all of acts of justice in history, if it were possible to gather all the debts of the seventeenth century into one account and transfer it to a completely different age, one would have to conclude that only the twentieth century, in the land reforms after the Second World War, brought satisfaction to those who work on the land. Perhaps the written records which survive from the age of patrimonial administration could be counted on the credit side. Bohemia, which in the seventeenth century suffered a fateful blow when any chance for further development in continuity with the past was destroyed, is now in a key position as far as historical research into the period of the Thirty Years' War is concerned. For the 'new nobility' after the Battle of the White Mountain was composed chiefly of generals and colonels of the Imperial army, military purveyors and entrepreneurs, who left behind a rich body of evidence. These records are now in Czechoslovakia for good reasons. First, the written records were considered, not always justifiably, as a guarantee of payment of debts owed by the Emperor to their possessors. Thus the widow of General Buquoy, who was killed at Nové Zámky in Slovakia in 1621, received, along with his personal property, the archive of his military chancery. The debts owed Buquoy were paid with the estates of south Bohemian rebels, and his military chancery remained the pride of the family, the basis of its continued social splendour, and the proof of its title to landed property. In other cases family papers were moved from Vienna or from estates outside Bohemia, ending up in Bohemia or Slovakia when the Viennese quarters of the families became too cramped, or when they decided to renovate Bohemian châteaux which had stood empty in the preceding years. This happened, for instance, to the papers of the Schwarzenbergs and the Metternichs.

Secondly, for a number of these families — for instance the Fürstenbergs, Windischgrätz, Herbersteins, Thuns, and others — their Bohemian, Moravian or Slovakian estates were the material foundation of their social pre-eminence and political power. This means that, besides documents resulting from official, military, administrative or diplomatic activities, as well as papers of a purely personal character, there can be found in these patrimonial archives an important class of records dealing with the administration of the estates. These papers are of great importance because they record the activity of feudal entrepreneurship. They include accounts, correspondence, rent rolls, inventories, instructions and the like — materials which have not been preserved elsewhere or at least are difficult to discover. The earliest belong to the period before the Thirty Years' War, and in some cases they have been preserved in unbroken series from the last decades of the Thirty Years' War down to the twentieth century. This means that the contents of the family or 'patrimonial' archives offer not only new and often most valuable source material for political and military history — that is, the history of events — but also make possible, now and in the future, the study of a thoroughly 'modern' set of problems: the history of 'structures'.

For the period of the Thirty Years' War we may say that both groups of documentary evidence are of equal importance. Of course, studies of the modern type are possible chiefly where there is the opportunity of working with comprehensive groups of documents which have been left intact: manorial registers, or diplomatic and military chanceries. About a dozen of these chancery archives have been preserved. They include the military archives of Buquoy, Wallenstein, Collalto and Gallas, and the military-diplomatic archives of the Lobkowitz, Schwarzenberg, Dietrichstein and Piccolomini families, sometimes supplemented by the family archives of the Waldsteins, Thuns, Colloredo-Mansfelds, and Schlicks. The family archives of Hungarian magnates preserved in Slovakia are generally far less complete, largely as a result of the 'millennium campaign' at the end of the last century, which led to the transfer of much of the material to Budapest. But the archives of the Thurzo, Pálffy, Illésházy and Koháry families serve as an important complement to the materials in the Bohemian archives. The contents of these more or less organic units are supplemented by the papers of several dozen members of the 'new' and 'old' Bohemian nobility. The former include the papers of a mixture of Spanish, Italian, Flemish, Walloon, Austrian, German and English soldiers of fortune. Verdugo, Marradas, Caretto-Millesimo,