

# Meeting the Other in the New World: Jesuit Missionaries from the Bohemian Province in America\*

Markéta Křížová

This paper focuses on the participation of missionaries from the “Bohemian Province” of the Society of Jesus in the colonization of America in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the representation of the New World in letters and reports sent to the home province. As a result of the activities of the Jesuits, monitored closely in their home province, and complemented of course by other direct and indirect involvement in the process of overseas colonization, the inhabitants of the Czech Lands found themselves integrated into the newly established Atlantic system and participated in an intense interchange of information and cultural influences.

## KEYWORDS:

Society of Jesus; Missions; America; Czech Province; 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century

There is no need to explain the circumstances of the founding and early expansion of the Society of Jesus, or Jesuit Order, through the efforts of the Basque *hidalgo*, Don Iñigo López Recalde de Oñaz y de Loyola, in 1540, as these are described in detail in numerous scientific publications.<sup>1</sup> It is important, however, to stress that the general context that gave the principal impulse for the establishment of the Jesuit community was the same one that brought the Protestant Reformation into existence: the feeling of general spiritual and social crisis in European society, the need for the intensification and interiorization of the faith and the purification of the life of believers on the example of Jesus Christ and the Apostles. The Jesuit Order was certainly not founded to oppose the Reformation. The first followers witnessed the intrusions of Luther and were critical of them, but had not considered the German dissenter decisive in the future they designed for themselves. The image of Loyola as a great David called up by God to slain Luther, the Goliath, was elaborated only by his biographers; and, ironically enough, they were further developed by the Protestant opponents of the Jesuits.<sup>2</sup> But, of course, Loyola and his followers identified with the principles articulated at the Tridentine Council, those of the defense, namely strengthening and

---

\* Research for the present article was done thanks to a grant from the Czech Science Foundation GAP405/12/1242, *Bohemical Sources for the Comparative Study of Spanish Colonial Expansion of the Early Modern Era*.

- 1 These events are best described by John O'MALLEY, *The First Jesuits*, Cambridge — London 1995.
- 2 For example, Martin CHEMNITZ, *Theologiae Jesuitarum brevis ac nervosa descriptio et delineatio*, in: idem, *Loci theologici*, Frankfurt — Wittenberg 1690, quoted by John O'MALLEY, *The Historiography of the Society of Jesus: Where Does it Stand Today?*, in: idem (ed.), *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773 I*, Toronto 1999, p. 5.



dissemination of the Catholic faith, added them to their concept of general reform and for more than two centuries actively promoted them on European soil as well as outside it. The first document of the new Order, *Formula Instituti*, specified the persons to whom the Jesuit ministries would be chiefly addressed: “The Turks or any other infidels, even those who live in the region called the Indies, or [...] any heretics whatever;”<sup>3</sup> revealing the impact of the overseas discoveries upon the Jesuit deliberations. The Order had not yet been approved by Paul III when Francis Xavier was already on his way to the Portuguese possessions in India and later in Japan. Missions in the Congo and Morocco were founded in 1548 and one year later the members of the Society, under the leadership of Manuel da Nóbrega, first stepped on the soil of the New World — in Brazil.

In the meantime, the Order grew rapidly. When Loyola died in 1556 the membership had risen from the original ten to more than a thousand, creating the need to establish an efficient organizational structure. On the largest scale, there were administrative units called “assistances”, because each came within the purview of one of the Jesuit General’s “assistants”. These corresponded approximately to the major nations or linguistic divisions of Europe, i.e. Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French and “German”, the last one covering the whole of Central and parts of Eastern Europe, but also the English, Flemish, and Belgian provinces (in 1755 a new “Polish” assistance was separated from the German one). The assistances were then broken into “provinces”. In theory, all members of the Order were supposed to abandon any former allegiances. But, very shortly after the founding of the Order, complaints were voiced from within about the lack of ability of its members to comply with this requirement. In his letter to Juan Antonio Balthasar of the province of New Spain Ignacio Visconti, the general of the Order, required that “any shade of nationality” should be wiped out of the missions.<sup>4</sup> Still, the frequent usage of the term should not lead us to the automatic relating of the Jesuit notions of nationality to our own. *Nacionalidad*, against which Visconti voiced his grievances, could have been an intense self-identification with a specific ethnic group, as well as loyalty to a specific city, region, sovereign, culture, or a close circle of friends or relatives. This was true also in the case of the members of the Bohemian Province, part of the German Assistance, that constitutes the main subject of the present study.

The Spanish Crown maintained in general a cautious posture towards the entry of foreigners into its overseas possessions. But, under the pressure of a shortage of religious workers in the New World, Spanish King Philip IV made possible the entry of those foreign missionaries into Spanish possessions in America who came from provinces ruled by the members of the house of Habsburg, thus reversing the traditionally cautious posture of the Spanish Crown towards the entry of foreigners into its American possessions. In the same year, Jesuit General Paulus Oliva announced the news

3 George E. GANSS (ed.), *Ignatius of Loyola: The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, St. Louis 1970, p. 68.

4 Cit. Francisco ZAMBRANO, *Diccionario bio-bibliográfico de la Compañía de Jesús en México*, Vol. 15, México 1961–1977, p. 235f.

to the provincials,<sup>5</sup> in an act that triggered a prompt response. By the middle of the next century, about one third of the Jesuits in the missions in America came from countries other than Spain — from Italian and German states, from the Habsburg Empire, but also from Ireland and France. In 1702, the period of the War for Spanish Succession (1700–1713) when the Bourbons replaced the Habsburgs on the Spanish throne, the fear of foreign incursions found its expression in a decree prohibiting the entry of foreign clergymen to the American colonies. However, in 1715, the lack of missionaries soon necessitated the repeal of the prohibition.<sup>6</sup> Altogether about 600 foreign Jesuits entered New Spain during the century and a half; and among them, more than 100 from the Province of Bohemia.<sup>7</sup> By dint of this increase in the number of personnel it was possible for the Society of Jesus to found and maintain hundreds of missionary communities in the New World and settle them with many thousands of Indian natives from various tribes. The best known to their contemporaries, as well as the most studied by the historians, were the “reductions” of Paraguay.<sup>8</sup> However, there were many others, from California to Chile (not mentioning the unique case of the missions in French Canada, run exclusively by French Jesuits).

The initial motivations of the Jesuit missionaries and their perception of the New World, and the overseas regions in general, are presented in letters in which the *Indipetae*, “those asking to be sent to the Indies” (the word “Indies” covered America as well as Africa and Asia), explained their applications and tried to prove their read-

- 
- 5 The circular letter of the General in: Anton HUONDER, *Deutsche Jesuitenmissionäre des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts. Ein Beitrag zur Missionsgeschichte und zur deutschen Biographie*, Freiburg 1899, p. 211.
  - 6 Agustín GALÁN GARCÍA, *Jesuitas a indias durante el siglo XVIII: la historia de un esfuerzo europeo*, in: *Compañía de Jesús en España* (ed.), *La Compañía de Jesús en América: Evangelización y justicia* (siglos XVII y XVIII), Córdoba 1993, p. 87–94, here p. 90.
  - 7 Theodore E. TREUTLEIN, *Non-Spanish Jesuits in Spain's American Colonies*, in: Adele Ogden — Engel Sluiter (edd.), *Greater America* (Essays in Honor of H.E. Bolton), Berkeley 1945, pp. 219–242. For the lists of the missionaries from the Bohemian Province, see Václav RYNEŠ, *Los jesuitas bohémicos trabajando en las misiones de América Latina después de 1620*, *Ibero-Americana Pragensia* 5, 1971, pp. 193–202; Rudolf GRULICH, *Der Beitrag der tschechischen Länder zur Weltmission des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, Königstein im Taunus 1981; Anna FECHTNEROVÁ — Oldřich KAŠPAR, *Checos, moravos y silesios en el Nuevo Mundo en los siglos XVII y XVIII. Registro bio-bibliográfico*, *Annals of the Náprstek Museum* 15, 1988, pp. 165–204 (translation into Czech under the title *Češi, Moravané a Slezané v Novém světě v 17. a 18. století. (Bio-bibliografický přehled)*, *Folia Historica Bohemica* 13, 1990, pp. 289–326). There are also popularizing, but inspiring texts by Josef Koláček, including a biography of the missionary Šimon Boruhradský/Simón de Castro (Josef KOLÁČEK, *Šimon Boruhradský: 1650–1697*, Roma 1997).
  - 8 Frederick J. REITER, *They Built Utopia (The Jesuit Missions in Paraguay, 1610–1768)*, Potomac 1995; Manuel MARZAL, *La utopía posible: Indios y jesuitas en la América colonial*, Lima 1994; Graham CUNNINGHAME, *A Vanished Arcadia: Being Some Account of the Jesuits in Paraguay, 1607–1767*, London 1988; Fernando MEDINA RUIZ, *El paraíso perdido. Las Reducciones Jesuitas del Paraguay*, México 1987; Philip CARAMAN, *The Lost Paradise: An Accounts of the Jesuits in Paraguay, 1607–1768*, London 1975; etc.



iness for the mission task. Several hundreds of them are preserved in the Roman archive of the Society of Jesus.<sup>9</sup> There are also the official proclamations issued by the highest representatives of the Order. From them it follows clearly that the goals of the Jesuit missions in general went far beyond the simple preaching of the Gospel to non-Christian people. The missionaries aimed to influence fundamentally every aspect of the natives' material and social life, forcing them to imitate the European culture (or, more precisely, the ideal of the European culture espoused by the missionaries). There were, of course, differences in the various mission regions. In particular, the Chinese culture was described in favorable terms by the Jesuits, almost on a par with Europe. Also, the reformist endeavor in China was fairly similar to the Jesuit activities in Europe, centering on the formation of the ruling elites and their descendants through education in schools and through private tutoring.<sup>10</sup> This was never the case with the Jesuit interpretations of America, sometimes portrayed as a hostile, dangerous environment inhabited by cruel heathen, and at other times idealized as an example of primitive simplicity, bringing to the fore a strong impulse for a general reform of Christendom and mankind. But, with all their imperfections, brutishness and ignorance, the American natives seemed more apt to fulfill the designs of the reformers than the inhabitants of Europe, as they were seemingly lacking one important characteristic of most humans: history. With the exception of some inhabitants of Mexico, the American natives were illiterate and thus unburdened by the tradition and remembrances of the deeds, customs and mistakes of their ancestors, and let themselves to be molded by the missionaries.<sup>11</sup>

While expanding their missionary regions, the Jesuits often followed in the footsteps, or even accompanied the colonizers, being supported financially from the state treasuries in order to add speedily the marginal territories to the colonial empires. At the same time, precisely by choosing America as their principal sphere of activity, they were often trying to escape the pressures they encountered in the Old World, the tight doctrinal homogenization and state supervision that characterized the post-Tridentine Era. In contrast to Africa and Asia, America was completely and genui-

9 Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Fondo gesuitico, titulus IX: Indipetae. For the Indipetae from the Bohemian province, see Martin SVATOŠ, *Materiály týkající se staré České provincie SJ, dochované v generálním archivu Tovaryšstva Ježíšova v Římě* [Materials Concerning the Old Bohemian Province of the Society of Jesus Preserved in the General Archive of the Society in Rome], *Archivní časopis* 57, 2007, No. 4, pp. 255–261.

10 David E. MUNGELLO, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology*, Stuttgart 1985, pp. 36–42, analyses the fascination with China in Early Modern Europe. Also the “Indipetae” who asked to be sent to China accentuated their scientific capacities. For the Jesuit mission strategy, see Ronnie Po-Chia HSIA, *The Political Theologies of Empires: Jesuit Missionaries between Counter-Reformation Europe and the Chinese Empire*, in: Jaroslav Miller — László Kontler (edd.), *Friars, Nobles and Burghers — Sermons, Images and Prints: Studies of Culture and Society in Early Modern Europe*, In Memoriam István György Tóth, Budapest — New York 2010, pp. 213–232.

11 For a detailed explanation of the Jesuits' reform endeavors see Markéta KŘÍŽOVÁ, *La ciudad ideal en el desierto: Proyectos misionales de la Compañía de Jesús y la Iglesia Morava en la América colonial*, Praha 2004.



nely new, a hitherto unknown world. Its discovery was completely unexpected, its expanse was great, even vast, and its inhabitants, flora, fauna and mineral wealth were extremely different from every other land previously known. In 1516 Thomas More proclaimed his fictional hero Raphael Hythloday to be a companion of Amerigo Vespucci and positioned the island Utopia, inhabited by a happy people united in an equally happy society, on the shores of the New World. Historians and essayists, European as well as American, have been quoting and commenting on his text ever since as proof of the undisputable and unbreakable connection between the discovery of the New World and the European “utopia”, whatever the definition of the term might be.<sup>12</sup> The missionaries from far-flung outposts as well as the superiors of the Order in Europe often expressed the conviction that precisely upon the new converts in overseas territories rested “the restoration and salvation of the whole world.”<sup>13</sup> The same image of the New World supported the published histories and compilations of “model” letters written by the missionaries in order to inform the general European public about the missions’ tasks. For Central Europe of the greatest relevance was the so-called *Welt-Bott* (“Messenger of the World”), a 26-volume compendium of letters from members of German Assistance sent into their provinces of origin. Importantly, together they presented an impressive image of the feats of the German Jesuits (*Teutsche Jesuiten*) accessible to the German general public in their native tongue, not only praising the work of the Society of Jesus, but also appealing to the nascent patriotic thinking in the German states.<sup>14</sup> Following these reports, numerous young men decided to join the Society of Jesus and many of them later decided to enter the missionary service. The missionaries in the field, in turn, asked that their letters be included in the subsequent volume of the *Welt-Bott*; needless to say this wish was also accompanied by purposeful stylization of the letters even before they got into the hands of the editors.<sup>15</sup>

- 
- 12 See for example Arturo USLAR PIETRI, *La otra América*, Madrid 1974, pp. 29–30; Steve J. STERN, *Paradigms of Conquest: History, Historiography, and Politics*, *Journal of Latin American Studies* 24 (Quincentennial Supplement), 1992, pp. 1–32.
- 13 Ernest J. BURRUS — Charles W. POLZER (ed.), *Eusebio Francisco Kino: Kino’s Biography of Francisco Javier Saeta, S. J.*, Roma — St. Louis 1971, p. 197.
- 14 Joseph STÖCKLEIN (ed.), *Der Neue Welt-Bott. Allerhand so Lehr- als Geistreiche Brief-Schriften und Reis-Beschreibungen, welche von denen Missionariis der Gesellschaft Jesu aus beyden Indien, und andern über Meer gelegenen Ländern, seit An. 1642. bis auf das Jahr 1726. in Europa angelangt seynd I–V*, Augsburg — Grätz — Wien 1726–1761, quoted in “Zuchtschrift des Verfassers” in the first volume, without pagination. For the analysis of the “patriotic” goals of the edition see Bernd HAUSBERGER, *El padre Joseph Stöcklein o el arte de inscribir el mundo a la fe*, in: Karl Kohut — María Cristina Torales Pacheco (edd.), *Desde los confines de los imperios ibéricos: Los jesuitas de habla alemana en las misiones americanas*, Frankfurt a. M. — Madrid 2007, pp. 631–659; and also Markéta KRÍŽOVÁ, *Problem of (proto)National/Ethnic/Regional Identities of Jesuit Missionaries from Central Europe in America*, Leipzig 2015 (Working Paper Series of the Centre for Area Studies, No. 5).
- 15 Examples of Jesuit missionaries who strived to get their letters published in *Welt-Bott* mentioned in Bernhard DUHR, *Deutsche Auslandsehnsucht im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart 1928, p. 47.



The Jesuits from the Bohemian Province were often identified — on the pages of the *Welt-Bott* as well as in other sources — as “Germans”, that is, members of the German Assistance, and they mostly felt the same way. Formulations such as “we the Germans” were abundant in the letters of the missionaries.<sup>16</sup> They denoted the affiliation to the Province or Assistance, but also the awareness of the shared mother/communication tongue, and maybe even the sense of a common culture, different from — and sometimes perceived as superior to — the lifestyle that they found in their new place of work, America. As other “Germans”, the “Bohemians” largely shared the ambitions of their brethren of the Order. Still, they also preserved their specific identity as members of the Bohemian Province, *los bohemios*, professing it by their allegiance to St. John of Nepomuk<sup>17</sup> or the “Virgin of Brno” (probably Our Lady of the Snows at the principal Jesuit church in that city).<sup>18</sup> They professed some specific motivations for their missionary endeavors, stemming from the fact that the Kingdom of Bohe-

- 
- 16 Karel Slavíček, a Jesuit from the Bohemian Province who was sent to a mission to China (and whose “Czech” ethnicity is not doubted by historians), identified himself and his companion, Ignaz Kögler from Bavaria, as “we two Germans” (*duo nos Alemanni*; bilingual Czech-Latin edition of his letters, Josef KOLMAŠ (ed.), *Karel Slavíček: Listy z Číny do vlasti a jiná korespondence s evropskými hvězdáři, 1716–1735* [Letters from China and Other Correspondence with European Astronomers, 1716–1735], Praha 1995, p. 24). Franz Xaver Pauer wrote to another member of the Bohemian Province, Andreas Michel (in Spanish): “even though I am a useless countryman, still unfaltering German.” Archivo General de la Nación (Mexico) [hereinafter AGN], fund Jes. IV-10 exp. 114, fol. 147<sup>r</sup>.
- 17 Letter of the missionary Andreas Hüttel of 1764 mentioned a feast to the honor of this saint (AGN, Jes. IV-10 exp. 84, fol. 116<sup>r</sup>–116<sup>v</sup>). Another Bohemian, Daniel Januske, asked in his *memoria* (that is, a list of necessary goods to be delivered to his mission) for the year 1723 a “picture of St. John of Nepomuk” (Archivum Societatis Iesu Provinciae Mexicanae, No. 1704). Silesian Franz Xaver Bischoff named after this saint a safe haven on the coast of California (Miguel LEÓN-PORTILLA (ed.), *Miguel del Barco: Historia natural y crónica de la Antigua California*, México 1973, p. 386) and also asked to be sent a picture of this holy patron (Letter of Franz Xaver Bischoff to Joseph Göbel, La Purísima, 11-X-1759, British Library, London, Add. 13986, No. 28, fol. 306<sup>r</sup>–306<sup>v</sup>).
- 18 All of the letters of missionaries from the Bohemian Province preserved in the archives of the Czech Republic, were edited by Pavel ZAVADIL, *Bohemia Jesuitica in Indiis Occidentalibus. Latinská korespondence českých jezuitů z Ameriky, Filipín a Marián v českých a moravských archivech. Kritická edice* [Bohemia Jesuitica in Indiis Occidentalibus. Latin Correspondence of Bohemian Jesuits from América, the Philippines and the Marianas in Czech and Moravian Archives], Ph.D. dissertation, Charles University in Prague, accessible online: <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/detail/121385> [retrieved 29. 8. 2016]. The accompanying study is in Czech, but the letters are edited in their original form, mostly in Latin, with occasional switches to German and Czech. Quote from Eymer’s letter is on p. 204. Czech translation of many of the texts, accompanied by more general comments regarding the life and work in the missions, was published by the same author under the title *Čeští jezuité objevují Nový svět: Dopisy a zprávy o plavbách, cestách a živobytí z Ameriky, Filipín a Marián (1657–1741)* [Czech Jesuits Discover the New World: Letters and Reports on Voyages, Travels and Life from America, the Philippines and the Marianas], Praha 2015.

mia had had a notoriously bad reputation in Europe since the 15<sup>th</sup> century as a land of heretics and apostates, threatening the stability and order of the true Christian community.

Already during the life of Ignacio de Loyola, Bohemia became one of the first mission lands of the Society of Jesus. And, in fact, the choice of words for describing the Bohemian “wilderness” and “desert” was very similar to those that were used to describe the New World. The Jesuits in Prague felt as guards on the ramparts of the Catholic faith and those bringing the light of the Gospel to barbarians.<sup>19</sup> The uprising against the Habsburg rule in the years 1618–1620 further tarnished the reputation of the Bohemians and Moravians as being notorious, treacherous, and rebellious Lutherans. Thus, if all Germany were labeled as a land of heretics by some Iberians (as mentioned in a letter of Andreas Suppet), even more distrust and mockery would be leveled at the Bohemians. Roughly fifty years after the end of the Thirty Years War, however, the re-Catholization bore its fruit and the Czech Lands experienced a spiritual resurgence, of which the interest of the young men to participate in the missions — the interest that many times surpassed the expectation to be sent — was only one manifestation.<sup>20</sup> The fact that the Bohemians themselves became protagonists of the great work of the Catholic regeneration, spreading the Gospel to other parts of the world and mediating the results of their work to their home colleges, brought great satisfaction to them and to all members of the Bohemian Province. The two Bohemians who died violently in overseas missions, Augustin Strobach (died in 1684 on Tinian Island, one of the Mariana Islands — the Philippines and the Marianas belonged administratively under the American colony of New Spain), and Heinrich Wenzel Richter (died in 1696 in Peru), were — apart from the medieval Saints Wenceslaus, Ludmila, Adalbertus, and John of Nepomuk — the only “genuine” Czech martyrs, and as such they were celebrated in printed and pictorial eulogies.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Strobach was the only Jesuit from Bohemia whose

19 See Henry SULLIVAN, *El jesuita Rodrigo de Arriaga (1592-1667): Rector de la Universidad Carolina de Praga (Bohemia) durante el Siglo de Oro*, in: Carlos Mata Induráin — Miguel Zugasti (edd.), *Actas del Congreso “El Siglo de Oro en el Nuevo Milenio”*, II, Pamplona 2005, pp. 1605–1612; J. O’MALLEY, *The First Jesuits*, pp. 241–242.

20 As documented Anna SKÝBOVÁ, *Zur Problematik des Patriotismus der böhmischen Kirchenhierarchie am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, in: Miloš Řezník — Ivana Slezáková (edd.), *Nations — Identities — Historical Consciousness. Volume Dedicated to Prof. Miroslav Hroch*, Praha 1997, pp. 203–339, since the 17<sup>th</sup> century the “land patriotism” of clergy, at least, but also other upper levels of the society mixed the regional and confessional self-identification.

21 Emanuel DE BOYE, *Vita et obitus venerabilis P. Augustini Strobach [...]*, Olomouc 1691; IDEM, *Vita et obitus Vener. Patris Henrici Wenceslai Richter [...]*, Praha 1702; see also Jan ROYT, *Los PP. Misioneros Augustin Strobach y Enrique Richter en un Grabado Praguense del siglo XVIII*, *Ibero-Americana Pragensia* 33, 1999, pp. 137–141, for the description of the etching that depicted these two protagonists of the overseas missions; Jiří M. HAVLÍK, *Bohemia (Pia et Sancta Societatis Jesu — Die Entstehung der tschechischen Legende in der Gesellschaft Jesu (1650–1700)*, in: Heidemarie Bachhofer — Kateřina Bobková-Valentová — Tomáš Černušák (edd.), *Ordenshistoriographie in Mitteleuropa — Gestaltung und Wandlung des institutionalen und persönlichen Gedächtnisses in der Frühen Neuzeit*, St. Pölten — Praha 2015 (Mo-



body was transported back from the mission posthumously and buried in his home town of Jihlava/Iglau, with a ceremony aiming at driving home the message of Re-Catholicization going on in the Czech Lands.<sup>22</sup> The descriptions of the sufferings of Strobach and Richter in the hands of American pagans, as well as the trials of other Bohemian Jesuits, clearly fit into the Baroque literary taste, but at the same time, they symbolically integrated Bohemia and Moravia into the community of the Catholic faith. Small wonder, then, that a newly appointed missionary from Bohemia, Adam Gilg, on arriving on the Mexican shore, “kissed the soil of America” in hope of divine favor for his work.<sup>23</sup>

Very often, the initial idealizations of the Indians and the New World gave way to disillusionment. If the petitions of the would-be missionaries and the propagation treatises such as the *Welt-Bott* offered their readers a highly idealized image of the missionary endeavor, the letters that were sent to the home provinces months or years after their author commenced his task often gave a completely different image of the New World. Instead of a garden of paradise, it was described as “a garden full of spines deprived of all human consolation”, according to Adam Gilg.<sup>24</sup> However fervid, the Jesuits were Europeans, cherishing a specific value system. Their awareness of the cultural barrier appeared in virtually every report and letter from any mission. The missionaries doubted the rationality of the natives, their capacity to embrace the Christian faith, and even their humanity.<sup>25</sup> For the Czech readers the image of a “fierce Indian” was corroborated by a Latin history written by Joseph Neumann and published by the Prague University in 1730, dealing with the uprisings of the Indians in the northern part of the Spanish colony of New Spain, where the author worked as a missionary for almost half a century.<sup>26</sup>

---

nastica Historia II), pp. 47–70 for the analysis of how the biographies of prominent Jesuits (the two missionaries-martyrs among them) were integrated into the “Bohemian Jesuit Heaven” destined to give model examples to the young members of the Bohemian Province of the Order.

22 See Pavel FOCHLER, *Las Marianas y el Padre Agustín Strobach, S. J.*, in: Markéta Křížová — Simona Binková et al., *Ir más allá... Fuentes bohemicales para el estudio comparativo de la expansión colonial española en la temprana Edad Moderna*, Praha 2015, pp. 195–213.

23 P. ZAVADIL, *Bohemia Jesuitica*, p. 232. Another example of the enthusiastic pronouncements of the would-be Jesuits, offering to shed their blood for the redemption of the natives, gives the letter of Paul Klein, written in Sevilla in 1679, *ibid.*, p. 333.

24 Gilg’s letter of 1692 *ibid.*, p. 239. For a summary of the reasons for the Jesuit “melancholy” in the missions see Pavel ZAVADIL, *Frustración y desilusión de los jesuitas bohemios en las misiones del Nuevo Mundo*, in: M. Křížová — S. Binková et al., *Ir más allá*, pp. 83–101.

25 See a letter by Wenceslao Breuer of the year 1699, who described the Indians as “peoples without reason, with ways of education equaling to those of the brutes”, in: P. ZAVADIL, *Bohemia Jesuitica*, p. 162. Also Joseph Neumann compared the Indians to “wild animals” (*ibid.*, p. 439).

26 Joseph NEUMANN, *Historia seditonum quas adversus Societatis Jesu missionarios, eorumque auxiliares moverunt nationes Indicae, ac potissimum Tarahumara in America Septentrionali [...]*, Praga 1728; published in Spanish translation: Bohumír ROEDL (ed.), *Historia de las Sublevaciones Indias en la Tarahumara*, Praha 1994.





Experiencing the slow progress of their missionary endeavors, the missionaries felt useless and deceived. Besides, they were isolated from “civilized” life (Neumann apologized in one of his letters for his bad Latin, as “there is no chance to use the Latin language here, with the exception of the Mess and the breviary”<sup>27</sup>). Thus the image of Europe in need of reform and remedy from the New World was replaced by that of Europe as the sole seat of arts and crafts, highly elevated above the other parts of the world. However, even though these letters did not confirm and expand on the wholly positive image of the “noble savages” of America and inspire hopes for speedy realization of the magnanimous work of general reform, they nevertheless offered their readers back in Europe a rich source of information and inspiration. Of course, there had been some earlier pieces of information about the overseas discoveries that reached Bohemia and Moravia: among them, Czech translation of a leaflet by Amerigo Vespucci, *Mundus novus*, that presupposed the existence of the continent of America, published as early as 1506,<sup>28</sup> or a cosmography in the Czech language, written by Zikmund of Púchov and published in 1554, that included a description of the Caribbean islands and of the conquest of Mexico.<sup>29</sup> There were other sources of information as well, including accounts of merchants and adventurers who ventured into the Spanish colonies and, at least in some cases, came back home. But, in contrast to these isolated early pieces of news, the Jesuit letters and reports were numerous, systematic, well-propagated and probably made a much more lasting impact.

The inhabitants of Bohemia and Moravia were offered vivid descriptions of strange climates, “when for a while the sun glows and burns, and in a while it rains and freezing winds blow [...], not mentioning enormous numbers of various flies, terrible crocodiles, tigers [i.e. jaguars, MK] and snakes”, in a colorful description of Samuel Fritz, a missionary in the Amazonas region.<sup>30</sup> They were given information on palms and cactuses, on sharks and “sea cows”; on the appearance, shape, smell and taste of bananas, “under the skin white and delicious, similar to butter and really melting in the mouth”.<sup>31</sup> Even the missionary George Brandt, whose long letter of the year 1686 was full of complaints about the bad weather, perils of the journey and rudeness of the Spanish colonists in America, could not help wondering about

27 Letter of 1682, in: P. ZAVADIL, *Bohemia Jesuitica*, p. 459. Similarly, John Gintzel wrote in 1695 from Brazil that “we can hope for just a very slight spiritual benefit of the Indians, as they are wild animals, unable to conceive the value of spiritual things. [...] How can I find consolation?” (ibid., p. 256).

28 Pravoslav KNEIDL (ed.), *Mikuláš Bakalář: Spis o nových zemích a Novém světě* [...] [Treatise on the New Lands and the New Worlds...], Praha 1981. The pamphlet has been preserved in one single copy in the Strahov Library in the Memorial of National Literature (Památník národního písemnictví).

29 Zikmund Z PÚCHOVA, *Kozmografia Česká* [Czech Cosmography], Praha 1554. This cosmography was the translation of Latin *Cosmografia universalis* of Sebastian Münster, originally published in 1544.

30 Letter of 1685, in: P. ZAVADIL, *Bohemia Jesuitica*, p. 221.

31 Letter by John Tilpe of 1680, ibid., p. 598. This is probably the first description of the banana in the Czech language.



the various peculiarities of the New World. “I saw sea dolphins, which coil their bodies almost to a circle and then spring up above the surface like arrows. In Portobello I saw five sea turtles, brought in by fishermen, each could have weighted hundred and fifty pounds. [...] I saw and ate caiman eggs. They have the white and the yolk and as for their taste do not differ in any way from hens’, only they are perfectly round.”<sup>32</sup> A missionary in Chile, Andreas Suppet, informed in 1701 the Jesuits in his home province that “the rotations of the four seasons are reversed here. Now [in December] we almost melt here because of the heat, while you shiver with winter frosts”.<sup>33</sup> All of these varied snippets of information prompted the readers in the home province to revise their image of the world and their position in it, presenting to them the vastness of the overseas regions, their natural riches, varied populations, and the relative unimportance of Europe.

Even though there can be no doubt about the sincere religiosity of the Jesuit missionaries, many of them were also observing nature in their regions, responding to and adding to the rapidly growing corpus of scientific literature that was contributing to the transformation of European thought at the dawning of the Modern Era. The prominent representatives of this type of activities from among the Bohemian Jesuits included Adam Gilg, a cartographer working in the northwestern regions of Mexico (one of his maps is preserved in the Brno archive),<sup>34</sup> John George Camel, a botanist active on the Philippine Islands,<sup>35</sup> and Matthäus Steffel, whose dictionary of the language of the Tarahumaras, the inhabitants of Sonora, also in Mexico, is preserved in Brno.<sup>36</sup> All of these Jesuits shared the results of their study with their brethren at home. What is even more important, in spite of the already mentioned prejudices towards the native people of the Americas, and the limitations brought about by the very specific objectives of the missionaries, they were able to bear witness in their letters of the existence of cultures governed by their own laws, values and cultural logic, of peoples living in complete isolation from the lifestyle of Europe, and still remaining people, creatures of God. That probably constituted the most important contribution of the Jesuits to the intellectual development of Central Europe.

The flow of letters ceased when, in 1767, Spanish King Charles III banished all the members of the Society of Jesus from his lands in Europe, Asia and America by a special decree. The decision came into effect in subsequent months, the missionaries were deported to Spain and from there, the Spanish and Spanish American members of the order went into exile in Italy and the foreigners returned back to their original

32 Ibid., p. 149.

33 Ibid., p. 589.

34 Simona BINKOVÁ — Carlos LAZCANO SAHAGÚN, *La herencia jesuítica y la Ilustración: el caso de la geografía y la cartografía del Noroeste de México*, in: M. Křížová — S. Binková et al., *Ir más allá*, pp. 103–127.

35 Ondřej POKORNÝ, *Botánica en torno a los siglos XVII y XVIII y el misionero Juan Jorge Camel*, in: M. Křížová — S. Binková et al., *Ir más allá*, pp. 215–231.

36 Matthäus STEFFEL, *Tarahumarisches Wörterbuch nebst einigen Nachrichten von den Sitten und Gebräuchen der Tarahumaren*, Ms., Moravský zemský archiv v Brně [Moravian Land Archives in Brno], fund Sbírka rukopisů Františkova muzea, sig. G 11 809.

provinces; nine years later, the Order was dissolved by the Pope.<sup>37</sup> Some of the returned missionaries then produced memoirs, reports and other forms of testimonies. Even though most of them remained unpublished, there is reason to believe that, just as the letters and reports from previous times, they were circulated in manuscript in the intellectual circles connected with the former Jesuit Order and the university milieu. The ex-Jesuits from the former Bohemian Province, in contrast to their brethren from Italy and other parts of Europe, did not participate in the debates, in which the Jesuits challenged the opinions of enlightened authors on the American nature and its negative effects upon its inhabitants.<sup>38</sup> Rather, their reminiscences of America evoked a certain feeling of nostalgia, as opposed to the reports from the same missionaries at the time of their active service, reverting back to the original image of a pristine paradise inhabited by pure and simple people. This image of America is depicted in a pictorial book, *Codex Pictoricus Mexicanus*, authored by ex-missionary Ignaz Tirsch at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and preserved in the National Library in Prague.<sup>39</sup> In spite of a rococo-style delicacy of the colored drawings, even here we can see the persistent interest of the Jesuit missionary in the realities of the New World, the physiognomies of the neophytes, its flora, fauna and outlandish architecture. Through the manuscript, as well as through previously published, copied and re-read letters, the American Indians, at least at the level of the discourse, integrated into the newly established Atlantic system and within it, became part of the intense interchange of information and cultural influences that contributed in an important way to the process of “modernization” of the Old World.

Of course, it is rather difficult to ascertain the impact of Tirsch’s *Codex*, as well as other works of the ex-missionaries, to fellow the members of the Order and the public outside it; the more so, because, unlike the letters and reports from the previous period, we lack reactions and comments on them, apart from the general “anti-Jesuitism” of that period, denouncing the bigotry, avarice and domineering nature of Loyola’s order. By this time, however, the principal features of the image of America were firmly established in the popular consciousness — of course, not only thanks to the Society of Jesus, but still in response to the Jesuits’ instigations,<sup>40</sup> combining ide-

37 Eva María St. Clair SEGURADO, *Expulsión y exilio de la provincia jesuita mexicana, 1767–1820*, Alicante 2005; Ernest J. BURRUS (ed.), *Ducrué’s Account of the Expulsion of the Jesuits from Lower California (1767–1768)*, Roma — St. Louis 1967.

38 Debates summarized in Antonello GERBI, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750–1900*, Pittsburgh 1973.

39 Ignaz TIRSCH, *Codex pictoricus mexicanus*, Národní knihovna České republiky [National Library of the Czech Republic], Oddělení rukopisů a vzácných tisků [Manuscripts and Early Printed Books Department], sign. XVI B 18; the whole work is accessible online: [http://v2.manuscriptorium.com/apps/main/en/index.php?request=show\\_tei\\_digidoc&docId=rep\\_remake81&client=](http://v2.manuscriptorium.com/apps/main/en/index.php?request=show_tei_digidoc&docId=rep_remake81&client=) [retrieved 29.8.2016].

40 For documentation of the Jesuit influence in the Enlightenment image of America and its inhabitants see Markéta KRÍŽOVÁ, *Od pohanství k barbarství: Sekularizace “zámořského divocha” v osvícenském diskursu* [From Paganism to Barbarism: Secularization of the “Overseas Savage” in the Discourse of the Enlightenment], in: Daniela Tinková — Jaoslav Lor-





alization (that implied the critical posture toward their own society and culture) with the sense of the superiority of the Old World over the other continents. Through these perceptions, the inhabitants of the Lands of the Bohemian Crown were encouraged to feel their sense of belonging to the imagined community of “Europe”.

### RÉSUMÉ:

This paper focuses on the participation of missionaries from the “Bohemian Province” of the Society of Jesus in the colonization of America in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the representation of the New World in letters and accounts sent to the home province. In their endeavor they were motivated by the general striving for reform of European society, the need for the intensification and interiorization of the faith and the purification of the life of believers following the example of Jesus Christ and the Apostles. The American Indians, devoid of history, were to serve as the first subjects of the reformist endeavor. The initial idealization of the American continent and its inhabitants soon gave way to disillusionment and to descriptions of the Indians being little more than barbarians or brute animals. All these transformations of discourse were shared with the Jesuits in the home province of Bohemia via letters and reports that were sometimes exchanged with the general public. The letters included detailed descriptions of American nature. Though there can be no doubt about the sincere religiosity of the Jesuit missionaries, many of them were pursuing various types of natural observations in their regions, responding to and adding to the rapidly growing corpus of scientific literature that was contributing to the transformation of European thought at the dawning of the Modern Era. As a result of the activities of the Jesuits, closely monitored in their home province and complemented by direct and indirect involvement in the process of overseas colonization, the inhabitants of the Czech Lands found themselves integrated into the newly established Atlantic system and participated in the intense interchange of information and cultural influences.

**Doc. Markéta Křížová, Ph.D.**, is Associate Professor at the Centre for Ibero-American Studies at Charles University in Prague. Her research focuses on Early Modern intellectual history, European overseas expansion, colonial history of America and cultural encounters and competitions (marketa.krizova@ff.cuni.cz).

---

man (edd.), *Post tenebras spero lucem: Duchovní tvář českého a moravského osvícenství* [Post tenebras spero lucem: Spiritual face of the Czech and Moravian Enlightenment], Praha 2008, pp. 185–204.