

SAINT WENCESLAS

THE FIRST CZECHOSLOVAK HISTORICAL
EPIC FILM

Under the auspices of Petr Nečas, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic,
and Monsignor Dominik Duka, the Archbishop of Prague.



Published to commemorate Czech Statehood Day on September 28, 2010, in co-operation
with the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, Czech Radio, Czech Television,
and the National Film Archive.

VIKTOR VELEK

SAINT WENCESLAS

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slovo premiéra

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Introduction

The Saint Wenceslas tradition has always been, and will be, a significant social issue. It has been part of the ten centuries of Czech history and culture, documenting their most important historical milestones. Since his emergence more than a thousand years ago, Saint Wenceslas has represented the highest symbol of the Czech statehood and personification of humane values. It is also an uninterrupted link between generations of ancestors and contemporaries who have always led a dialogue among the present, past, and future. Therefore, the image of duke Wenceslas, a patron saint of the Czech lands, has acquired different forms and colours, reflecting, as the highest value, both the fears and desires of the nation as a whole.

The Saint Wenceslas tradition reflects a thousand years' quest of the nation for its patron saint. The existing uncertainty concerning its meaning originated in its ambiguous interpretation – it is not

only an ecclesiastical tradition, but also a tradition connected with history, culture, nation, and state representation. The quest for its meaning and sense will probably never be accomplished. There is a certain paradox: while various artistic fields display numerous works of art connected with the figure or symbol of the Czech patron saint, the situation in film is very different. The filming of the Protectorate film *Duke Wenceslas* (Kníže Václav), based on Nazi ideology was, fortunately, stopped, leaving only a few fragments. Apart from several recent TV documentaries, the only film focusing on this topic is the epic film *Saint Wenceslas* from 1930.

The genesis of the film *Saint Wenceslas* wasn't accidental: it was meant to complement the official program of the celebration commemorating the 1000th anniversary of the martyrdom of the patron saint, duke Wenceslas, held in September 1929. This significant event inspired a number of artists, contributing to the creation of numerous

new works of art. Most attention was paid to literary and theatrical contributions, the field of music being represented by a composition ordered by the state: cantata/oratorio *Saint Wenceslas* by the composer Josef Bohuslav Foerster and the librettist Antonín Klášterský.

The expensive film project was affected by many obstacles: the resultant form was supposed to satisfy both republican and ecclesiastical circles; it was supposed to reflect the latest findings of the Saint Wenceslas research; Wenceslas was supposed to be represented both as a war hero and as a humanist intellectual; the story of the film was influenced by an academic committee; and, of course, there were hidden political pressures. Therefore, the fate of the film reflected ideas of various groups of Czech society, rather than ideas of its authors.

The initial huge interest in the film diminished when the term of completion and release was moved to the beginning

of 1930. The film became an “unwanted child”, criticized for its plot fragmentation, inexperienced director, and long-windedness caused by the attempt to cover as much as possible. Moreover, Czech society, tired of the topic, was fascinated by new sound films, so the silent film about Saint Wenceslas was shown in cinemas more out of a sense of obligation. Later, the film was only screened as a silent film or as short fragments. The renewed premiere became relevant with the finding of the integral part of the silent film: the original soundtrack by Jaroslav Křička and Oskar Nedbal.

The film *Saint Wenceslas* wasn't a subject of any research for a long time. The main reason is that fine art, lyrics, and recordings are more easily accessible; moreover, the only well-preserved copy of the film lacked the recording of the original soundtrack. Although its artistic value is arguable, it is the only film about the Czech patron saint which deserved a full realization – i.e. including the original soundtrack.

Wenceslas – Duke of Peace



The meaning of the renewed premiere of the epic film *Saint Wenceslas* is to contribute to current discussion of what a relatively young Day of Czech Statehood (September 28) is about, and what part of it is formed by the Saint Wenceslas tradition. At present – as during its premiere 80 years ago – the film seems to be the most accessible way of presenting the topic to the general public.

The film is presented to the audience after it has been improved technically, accompanied by the original soundtrack whose realization was postponed for an all too long 80 years.

The creative team for the renewed premiere assumed an objective approach, without regard to the views of either supporters or opponents of the Saint Wenceslas tradition.

The team also aimed to use the film to raise questions about whether the tradition still has something to say. Or is it enough that we only associate the tradition with Myslбек’s statue on Wenceslas Square, where people mass spontaneously “when something important is at stake”? Isn’t it sad to see that there are more people among us who can tell the story of Joan of Arc, but who know very little about their own patron saint? In his book *The Second Life of Saint Wenceslas* (Druhý život svatého Václava), Jiří Hošna remembers that during the demonstrations in November 1989 “very few people responded to the call from the Melantrich balcony to sing the hymn ‘Saint Wenceslas’. These Czechs from the end of the 20th century didn’t sing, not because they didn’t want to, but because they didn’t know the hymn.” Certain embarrassment, unawareness, prejudice, or utter indifference concerning the Saint Wenceslas tradition are all more deeply rooted in Czech society than we seem to realize. However, a certain latent, subconscious interest in this tradition

has the same deep roots. The history of the film, as well as the realization of its renewed premiere, are covered by the new documentary *Saint Wenceslas – Saint, Duke, Legend* (Svatý Václav – Světec, kníže, legenda), directed by Martin Suchánek, which, using parts from the original epic film, attempts to show the Saint Wenceslas tradition at the beginning of the third millennium.



Disputes at the duke's court: Drahomíra and thane Skeř

Plot of the film

It is not common in the supplementary text to the film to retell its story. However, in the case of *Saint Wenceslas*, it is necessary, because the film was obviously made with regard to what the audience in the inter-war Czechoslovakia knew about the topic. Particularly in the anniversary year of 1929, it was impossible to escape Saint Wenceslas fever. People were confronted with various theories of why the fratricide was committed, and they found it easy to identify individual characters, even before entering the cinema. This, and particularly the adjustment to the “slow” pace of the silent film, is what the general current audience lacks.

The beginning of the film is set in pagan Bohemia. The Přemyslid duke Bořivoj and his wife Ludmila are baptized by the missionary Methodius. When hunting, their son Vratislav meets a pagan girl, Drahomíra, and, after she is baptized, he marries her.

First, their son Wenceslas (Václav) is born, then Boleslav. Wenceslas is raised by his grandmother, Ludmila, in the spirit of Christianity, culture, and humanity. Since his childhood, he has felt that his view of the meaning of life is very different from what he sees in the pagan surroundings. Radmila, a daughter of a significant thane, Skeř, falls in love with Wenceslas, but he doesn't return her love, because he has decided to dedicate his life to God. After Vratislav dies, Ludmila and Drahomíra start fighting for the throne. Wenceslas ascends the throne, but the plotter Skeř incites Boleslav, Drahomíra, and Radslav, Duke of Zlič, to oppose Ludmila and Wenceslas. Instead of a violent fight, Wenceslas challenges Radslav to a duel which ends with Radslav being subjugated. Warlike Boleslav refuses this bloodless solution, behaving in the same way later, in the battle with German troops. Meanwhile, Ludmila is killed at the suggestion of Skeř and Drahomíra, and, therefore, Drahomíra is banished by Wenceslas. After Radslav is subjugated and Drahomíra is banished,

Skeř finds the last chance to gain power – Boleslav. At first, Boleslav refuses the idea of fratricide, but he gradually succumbs to it. Pretending that a chapel will be consecrated, Boleslav invites Wenceslas to his castle. He gets his company drunk in order to find Wenceslas in prayers alone in the morning. Boleslav starts a fight in the courtyard, but he is knocked down. The members of his company come in a hurry and kill the escaping Wenceslas in front of the church door. The penitent mother, Drahomíra, comes to the place of the murder, Boleslav regrets his deed, and Skeř, hit by Wenceslas's heavenly greatness, falls from the castle ramparts, into the swamp.

From a documentary to a feature film

The millennium became a welcome opportunity for everybody who had talked about the need to make an epic film about a certain topic from Czech history for several years. As early as 1918, the aim was supported by Pragafilm, but all attempts failed due to a lack of funds. Based on the *Saint Wenceslas* initiator's contacts with influential people, there was a historical precedent: for the first time, the state provided finance to the film industry, acknowledging its representation of high cultural values, not only entertainment! However, the large costs of the film simultaneously obliged the critics to judge it more strictly than other films; furthermore, the film-makers were obliged to produce a perfect film with excellent acting. In other words, large costs were supposed to be seen on screen, and the film was supposed to compete with similar foreign productions, which were, obviously, far ahead in the field

of historical films. These demands were even enhanced by the censors' ideas which weakened the dramatic character of the film, emphasizing its cultural and educational potential.

The demand for a feature film about Saint Wenceslas became relevant at the end of 1928. On November 28, 1928, the Světozor cinema saw a premiere of a documentary about both the past and present of the Saint Wenceslas cult, i.e. a Saint Wenceslas propagandistic film. This film, called *Saint Wenceslas Relics* (Svatováclavské památky), is preserved in the National Film Archive. The film, about 60 minutes long, produced by Favoritfilm based on the order from the National Committee for the Celebration of the Saint Wenceslas Millennium (Committee), consists of different views of the Saint Wenceslas tradition. The first part shows the pilgrimage to Stará Boleslav, introducing its sights. It is interesting how the Saint Wenceslas tradition is interconnected with the formation of the

state: Saint Wenceslas is celebrated with the sentence "We praise you for October 28, 1918". This part contains precious shots of the Committee members, and shots of the ecclesiastical celebration held on September 28, 1928, at the Saint Wenceslas grave at Prague Castle. There are unique shots of the Saint Wenceslas collection, accumulated by the bishop, Antonín Podlaha. The second part shows out-of-Prague places of the Saint Wenceslas cult. The last part is dedicated to the Saint Wenceslas temple, particularly to its completion. Both critics and audience were fascinated by the aerial shots of the cathedral and the detailed shots of its architecture, which were made for the first time, at the film-makers' great risk. Having received positive responses, the film was slightly adapted, and, since 1929, it has been shown throughout the republic.

The idea to make a feature film about Saint Wenceslas for the year of 1929 was brought up by several interest groups who had the same idea about the major partner.

They relied on financial support from the Committee, which covered most cultural events dedicated to the Saint Wenceslas millennium. It was a logical choice, but, at first, the Committee refused the offer to participate in producing film projects – the Committee had no experience in this field, it was busy with other projects, and it didn't fully trust film as a new medium. Yet, as will be shown later, the Committee helped to save the film *Saint Wenceslas* financially in the most critical moment, just before the premiere.

Let's move to the very beginning of the film *Saint Wenceslas*. The first suggestions to turn the Saint Wenceslas subject into a film were made among members of the later established society called Millennium-Film (Society) in 1925. Their originator was P. Method Klement, originally an atheist and bank clerk, who joined the Benedictine order and worked in the Na Slovanech monastery, Prague. He created a rough draft which was, however, impossible

to be used for the film. He wished, using the film, for the millennium celebration to reconcile the nation, divided between atheists, republicans, and supporters of the Jan Hus tradition on the one hand, and the supporters of the clerical state on the other. The Millennium-Film statutes ("Millennium-Film, Society for Creating Czechoslovak Historical Films") were approved by the Ministry of the Interior on August 10, 1927. The aim of the Society was to turn, gradually, various topics from Czech history into films, in a non-commercial and unbiased way. It is not clear if this was the case, and if a Saint Wenceslas film was a priority, with regard to the coming millennium. However, it is also possible that the Society only wanted to make a Saint Wenceslas film. These thoughts necessarily arise when looking at the members of the Society and their close contacts with the businessmen Karel Pečený, František Horký, and Jan Reiter. The above-mentioned men formed the management of the film company Elekta-

Journal, and we can suspect that the filmmakers used Millenium-Film's enthusiasm to enable the first financial participation of the state in Czechoslovak cinematography.

The general meeting held on October 17, 1927, produced the following management: Ing. Miloš Havel (owner of Lucerna) became the chairman, Gustav Armin Svojsík (director of a concert agency) became the vice-chairman, Dr. Josef Hronek (specialist councillor of the board of the ministry council) became the executive, PhD. et JUDr. Dionysius Polanský (advocacy applicant) became the treasurer, Arch. Jaroslav Cuhra became the record-keeper, professors Rudolf Pařízek and Jan Konůpek (from the state school of graphics), Prof. Dr. Rudolf Tschorn (director of the military museum), Dr. Josef Sklenář (lawyer), and Vilém Brož (director of Lucerna) were members of the committee, Václav Kašpar (editor and writer), Dr. Josef Dostál (archivist of the state archives), and Dr. Ludvík Skula (secretary/specialist councillor

of the Ministry of Finance) were substitutes. Dr. O. Černý (section head of the Ministry of Justice) became the chairman of the court of conciliation, Václav Hladík (accountant in Pfieler) and Josef Rakošan (managing clerk/proctor in Živnobanka) became the auditors. Moreover, the Society closely co-operated with the professors of photochemistry and scientific photography, Dr. Viktorin Vojtěch and Ing. Jindřich Brichta.

The press suspected the Society of being closely connected with the Catholic church, and intending to make an ecclesiastical film with state money. This suspicion is not based on any evidence, although it is obvious that particularly the Members of Parliament representing the Czechoslovak People's Party supported the idea of a Saint Wenceslas film. This suspicion was partly caused by the Society itself: the Society justified the creation of the film with the need to create a certain counterpart of the Italian ecclesiastical film called *Saint Francis*, and it spoke openly about returning Saint Wenceslas to the Czech

nation, emphasizing that Czech statehood is a thousand years old, and that it wasn't formed in 1918. Apart from the criticism of the strong representation of political-clerical circles in the Society, the press criticized the final version of film title: the title *Saint Wenceslas* is the most frequent in the contemporary press, but as late as 1929 it was still possible to find titles such as *Duke Saint Wenceslas* (Kníže svatý Václav) and *Duke Wenceslas* (Kníže Václav). The very first title was *For the National Welfare (Unconquered)* (Pro blaho národa (Nezdolán)). However, there is no direct evidence of clerical motivation. It seems that the Society was interested in spiritual aspects, rather than in the ecclesiastical propaganda of the Saint Wenceslas cult. The Church provided financial support only after the film received a state loan. Funding by the Church wasn't co-ordinated, and it was formed by numerous small presents or interest-free loans. The character of the anonymous donors and borrowers, whose financial contribution was very significant, is not known.

From the subject to the screenplay

Let's move back to the genesis of the film with regard to its content. Klement's subject was first grasped by Chaur, a film censorship clerk, but his text had to be, due to lack of dramatic character, adapted by Josef Munclinger, a stage director of the National Theatre. His name appears among the founders of the Society, in connection with the position of the film director. This choice was questioned in the press as early as April 1927, since he had no experience with film. The Society provided the adapted version to the Ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs, and Commerce. The subject was also examined by the associate professor Schráníl and professors Pekař and Konůpek. The Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment paid 1,700 Czechoslovak crowns for the publication of the Czech text, and its German and English translations. The title *For the National Welfare* was chosen

for the Czech film market, and the less nationalistic title *Unconquered* was chosen for foreign countries. On October 13, 1927, the Society contacted the Czechoslovak National Council, asking for support, and informing it of the intended project. Before Christmas of the same year, the Society received support both from the Council and from the Masaryk Institute for National Education. Even the government promised support, but its promise contained no concrete obligations. At this point, it was clear that the realization of the film required not only the “moral support” from the two above-mentioned institutions, but mainly a partial financial contribution from the government and an excellent unbiased screenplay. The exact budget was supposed to be based on the content of the screenplay.

The content of the sent draft is known from the preserved copies, and it seems to be more suitable, with regard to different versions of the libretto/screenplay, to use its authentic



Director Jan Stanislav Kolár

name *printed libretto draft from May 1927*. The draft consists of four parts, framed by the prologue and epilogue. Based on the reviewing historians’ recommendations, the scene with the tribute of 500 talents of silver and 120 oxen paid yearly by Wenceslas to Henry the Fowler was left out



Director Josef Munclinger

of the film; on the contrary, the historians supported the erotic moment taken from Jaroslav Vrchlický's drama *Brothers* (Bratři). The motif of the lovelorn Radmila, who changes after Wenceslas's death, becoming another Ludmila, and raising her children in accordance with Wenceslas's moral principles, was left out too. In this way, she gradually changes Boleslav, who repents what he has done, bringing his brother's body to Prague and becoming a good Christian. Even the original ending wasn't used in the film; it consisted of different views of the Saint Wenceslas patronage over the country and nation in which the image of the saint contributes to defeat Germans and Tatars, helps Ottokar II of Bohemia and Charles IV, and is connected with the independence gained in October 1918. Finally, Wenceslas rides out of the mountain Blaník with his army, becoming an eternal ruler. It is interesting to compare the formation of the plot with Foerster's composition. In their results, both works are utterly traditional, but there are certain

differences in the authors' approaches. Foerster only chose three out of the original seven parts proposed by Klášterský, and his composition displays the structure "youth – fight – death". He completely left out the mythical theme of the Blaník knights headed by Saint Wenceslas, the victorious Battle of Chlumec (Sobeslaus I, with the mystical help from the patron of the land, defeated the army led by Lothar III), the survival of the nation after the Battle of White Mountain, and a curious scene in front of the statue on the Wenceslas Square on October 28, 1928, where Klášterský even placed legionaries!

Choosing the screenwriters

The screenplay, reworked several times, was limited to focus on the Saint Wenceslas legend itself. The aim of the changes was to decrease the religious dimension, while keeping historical accuracy and piety. Therefore, the resultant form was deformed by numerous requirements, concessions, and compromises which significantly damaged the artistic aspect of the film, taking its chances to succeed among a large amount of commercial films. Looking back, we even argue whether it is possible to represent Saint Wenceslas on screen satisfactorily. And we come to the conclusion that it is very difficult, even in the case of a film with sound. His story, as the story of Jesus Christ, resists being turned into a play or a film. The main problem is that the character of Wenceslas, due to numerous interpretations during the past thousand years, falls apart in the screenwriter's hands. The character of Wenceslas should, simultaneously, radiate heroism, diplomatic caution, authority,

historical films could be made by foreign companies. It emphasized the necessity to promote the state, strengthen the ideas of the Czechoslovak nation, and fight against the Slovak and German irredentism. Moreover, it stressed the necessity to keep up with the production of historical films in Germany, France, and Hungary. The works by Kolár and Munclinger were submitted in time, and the jury (including the bishop, Antonín Podlaha, a Saint Wenceslas supporter) had to choose the winner within a month, or determine the usable scenes from a worse screenplay, and make a final decision on whether the film should be a single feature film, or divided into two parts.

This development phase of the screenplay is shown by two documents from Kolár's estate, preserved in the National Film Archive. Both *Author's Notes to the Screenplay of "Saint Wenceslas"* and the libretto are dated "February 28, 1928". In his *Notes*, Kolár gives a brief description of his approach, naming his sources of inspiration

(e.g. Tyl, Durych, Vrchlický, *Christian's Legend*) and explaining his conception of light and shadow as equivalents for the characters of Wenceslas and Beelzebub. He estimated that the film would be about 80 minutes long. The libretto from February 28, 1928, was preserved in a shorter version and a longer version, both of them being almost the same with regard to content. The scene in which Vratislav's mother meets the duke Belz, inclining to paganism (represented by a shadow, or by Skeř in other versions), who brings Drahomíra, wasn't used in the film. Vratislav had met Drahomíra earlier at the Lutici harvest festival. The ending was left out too; it contained a waving flag with the Saint Wenceslas eagle, the flag with the Czech eagle, the flag with Hussite chalice, and the Czechoslovak flag.

On April 16, 1928, the jury chose four themes for the final screenplay, which should be finished and submitted by the end of June 1928. The debate was relatively stormy. Julius Schmitt suggested hiring an

experienced foreign director; furthermore, it was suggested that Prof. Schráníl should be a member of the committee. Prof. Josef Cibulka was the least satisfied with the libretto, suggesting that everything should be reworked again, and that an open tender should be announced. Millenium-Film asked Ing. Brichta and Prof. Vojtěch to judge both submitted works. Both criticized the character of Wenceslas for not being sufficiently heroic and manly. On May 8, 1928, a committee of film experts was elected which was supposed to ensure, at four meetings with Munclinger and Kolár, the final form of the screenplay. The committee was composed of Prof. Zíbrt and Prof. Matějčíček, representing historians, Prof. Mendl, representing artists, Dr. Vojtěch and Ing. Brichta, representing film-makers, the commercial officer Reiter, representing business groups, and Havel and Hronek, representing Millenium-Film. During the debate with the authors, held on May 22, 1928, it was decided that both versions should be used to produce the third

version, written by a third person. Due to the lack of time, this text was written by Kolár and Munclinger. Kolár's character, Belz, was replaced by the less "fairy-tale" character of Skeř.

Moreover, the text, reworked several times, was subjected to the "supervision" of the committee, consisting of Prof. Josef Zubatý (president of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and Arts), Jan Kapras (historian), Josef Pekař (historian), Jaroslav Hilbert (writer); literature and sources sometimes also add Prof. Josef Vajs (slavicist). The screenplay, with regard to the technical aspects of the film realization, was reviewed by František Horký (a representative of Elekta-Journal). A special copy of the libretto, in a rich binding and with a dedication, was given to President T.G. Masaryk on December 24, 1928, and one copy was given to the chancellor. The aim of the Society was to obtain (particularly through Adolf Prokůpek) part of the 10 million Czechoslovak crowns, earmarked

by the government for spending on culture, and provided to the Anniversary Fund, in connection with the republic's decennium in October 1928. About 100 copies of the libretto synopsis were distributed in January 1929 to the leading figures of political, ecclesiastical, and cultural life. At the same time, when the state was asked to support *Saint Wenceslas*, other films which could contribute to the celebration of the 10th anniversary of Czechoslovakia were considered. The film projects such as *Master Jan Hus*, *Šárka (Ctirad and Šárka)*, and *Treasure of the Nation* were not realized, and, from the summer of 1928, the debate on the Czech historical film was limited to *Saint Wenceslas*.

Along with ensuring the financial support, the film promotion was set in motion too. According to the reports of the Society, the press obtained information that librettists had managed to create a drama of the theatre effect, not only a sequence of scenes. It is strange that it was the

disintegration into scenes that was often criticized by reviewers after the premiere. It is also paradoxical that the screenplay was considered by reviewers as a weak component of the film, even though so much attention was paid to it, and it was one of the reasons why the whole realization was delayed!

“Spiteful libretto”

It is only thanks to the latest research that a piece of information was found which hadn't been noticed by film literature. Probably the only published mention of the “spiteful libretto” which delayed the film realization: “Neither the authors of the libretto nor the Millenium-Film functionaries expected, at the last moment, decisive for the creation of this work, to see a battle – about the libretto. The fact is that the ‘spiteful librettos’ were commissioned, one authored by Dr. Arne Dvořák, a contributor of the ‘Kalich’ journal. For instance, in his spiteful libretto sketch, Dvořák depicted St. Wenceslas’s companion Podiven as a vagabond and drunkard, badgering the priest Paul with the intention to get drunk on sacramental wine.” However, it is necessary to take this opinion of Hronek’s, published in the *Journal for Adorers of Saint Wenceslas* (No. 1–2, 1930), with a pinch of salt: Hronek, as a Millenium-Film functionary, supported the libretto written by Kolár and Munclinger.

The spiteful libretto became relevant in 1928, and Hronek’s mention of the “commission” refers to the disputes of individual political parties. The commissioner was Milan Hodža from the Republican Party of the Agricultural and Farming People, Minister of Education. It is not clear whether Hodža truly disliked the libretto by Kolár and Munclinger, or just pursued his own political goals. However, it is certain that he accepted the idea of a Saint Wenceslas film as his own, because he planned to receive 0.5 million from the state, and later even 2 million, to turn the spiteful libretto into a film. Dvořák’s libretto was positively accepted by a number of influential figures, e.g. Adolf Prokůpek and Antonín Podlaha. Even the “Castle”, which received the spiteful libretto on March 18, 1929, together with the reviews by Podlaha and Pekař, showed greater sympathies to Dvořák’s work, which counted on smaller contributions from the state as an investor, and which was better with regard to the dramatic character of the story and the conception of Wenceslas’s character. Moreover, Millenium-Film wasn’t

capable of proving the guarantees of private capital. On Podlaha's recommendation, Hodža and Dvořák asked the Committee for support, but, on March 14, 1929, the Committee refused the spiteful libretto, saying that it had recommended the text written by Kolár and Munclinger. Moreover, the Committee viewed the spiteful libretto as ahistorical, modernized, and politicized in the spirit of 19th and 20th centuries. It is impossible to say for certain whether Dvořák's spiteful libretto disappeared due to this decision or owing to the end of Hodža's term as a Minister in February 1929. The second version is supported by the fact that Hodža's party successor Antonín Štefánek endorsed the libretto written by Kolár and Munclinger. On March 12, 1929, Štefánek recommended providing the film with President Masaryk's grant, but he set a condition that a concrete cast would be presented and that the libretto would be made more dramatic. The Ministry viewed the plan of the film as supporting the state and educating the nation, and saw Millenium-Film as a respectable partner. The

Society also found support at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which considered the realization of Dvořák's spiteful libretto more expensive than the Society's project; moreover, the Ministry objected to the amount of cruelty and violence, which could have negative impact on the distribution of the work both in Czechoslovakia and abroad.

And what was the spiteful libretto actually about? Prof. Josef Pekař criticized its exaggeration of the national, political, and state elements. He also objected to the scenes with the map of Europe, to building schools instead of prisons, to half-naked dancers, and to the representation of Podiven as a tramp. The idea of a liberating military campaign to Moravia and Slovakia seemed ahistorical to him. In his view, the mention of receiving Communion under both kinds represents an attempt to introduce a Slavic element and a reconcilable tone towards the supporters of Jan Hus into the Saint Wenceslas tradition, depicted mostly from the perspective of western Christianity. Pekař also objected

to the conception of the military campaign of Henry the Fowler, and the payment of a tribute by Wenceslas. Dvořák himself wished to create an objective and celebrative screenplay, written in a contemporary way, not only focusing on dry historical facts. He didn't see himself as Millenium-Film's competitor; on the contrary, he even expressed his willingness to co-operate. In any case, the spiteful libretto is an interesting document of how the Saint Wenceslas tradition was understood.

The first obstacles in financing the film

The judging of the libretto and the spiteful libretto, additional changes to the screenplay, and insufficient capital delayed the preparation of the film. It was clear that the film would be released after the Saint Wenceslas millennium celebrations. A question arose as to whether the project should be continued. It is probable that owing to the interest-free loan from the state (May 31, 1929) Millenium-Film decided to take a risk: start filming without the full financial coverage, film in the autumn and winter, and release the film at the time in which attendance might not be guaranteed. A lack of funds, more specifically two thirds of the total budget, and the effort to release the film as soon as possible after the celebrations determined its form. The option to make a film with sound was abandoned, and the possibility of hiring European stars and a foreign director was viewed in a more realistic way. However, the film

lost its original conception. Choosing the “cheaper” Kolár and Munclinger as directors was certainly more economical, ending the meditations about a foreign director, but it meant worse expectations concerning the distribution of the film abroad.

It is not clear why the task of directing the film was entrusted to an essentially mediocre director, Jan Stanislav Kolár (1896–1973). During the filming, the press speculated about hidden political intrigue, but it can't be ruled out that experienced directors were afraid of a difficult task which was ambitious, but which lacked funding. Kolár managed to succeed as an independent director in 1920–1921, but the reviewers criticized his excessive dependence on foreign models, and, generally, his films weren't received very well. Due to a long illness, there was a long gap between his film *The Dead Are Alive* (*Mrtví žijí*) (1922) and *Řina* (1926), which was ignored both by critics and the general public. Kolár's opinions of film are presented in his book

On Film (K filmu), published in 1927. The participation of Josef Munclinger (1888–1954), who had no experience with film whatsoever, can be seen as a way of appreciating his merits concerning the Society or as a proof of utter naivety. This mistake was revealed at the very beginning of the filming when Munclinger himself gave up all directing tasks. Therefore, *Saint Wenceslas* virtually became a film directed by one man, which turned out to be a handicap: Kolár was responsible for preparing the subject, libretto, and screenplay; moreover, he directed the film and even played a small part in it.

In July and August 1928, the press reported about Millenium-Film's plan to transfer its business activity to “Společnost pro výrobu čsl. historického filmu s.r.o.,” i.e. a company specializing in the production of Czechoslovak historical films, and focus mainly on the supervision of creative work. This newly established company was run by Moravec, a Prague based banking company.

For instance, the newspaper *Národní listy*, on July 5, 1928, reported the following: “There is enormous interest in the capital participation in the film *Saint Wenceslas*, which shows that relevant circles feel that this is a unique opportunity to promote our thousand-year-old culture, and that the money invested in the conscientiously prepared film will bring high returns.” However, it is necessary to take similar articles from the press, particularly from the newspapers *Národní listy* and *Národní politika*, with a pinch of salt. The Society used the press to create a positive image about its activity, even though the reality was completely different: in the summer of 1928, the Society contacted many individuals and institutions, obtaining only 6,000 Czechoslovak crowns for the film! Not even the Church and private sector were interested in the film – the private sector was probably discouraged by the fact that it expected that the film would have a clerical character, and that it wouldn’t be managed well by the inexperienced directors. The state



View of part of the film town at the stadium



loan, approved in January, only represented a third of what the press had expected – for example, on April 16, 1927, the newspaper *České slovo* wrote about 3 million Czechoslovak crowns!

Financial participation was refused by the Cinema Owners Association; moreover, the film section of the Czechoslovak Teachers' Association opposed the fact that a religiously-biased film should be financed from state funds. The Society reacted to similar accusations by more intensive promotion in newspapers, emphasizing the state-representation functions, and the necessity to promote the state abroad. The failure to succeed on the domestic financial market resulted in the Society's attempt to rely on foreign investors. In January 1929, the Society started negotiating with a certain Czechoslovak-French commercial group, which offered to cover as much as 40% of costs of the film distribution. At the same time, there were negotiations with domestic film producers, apparently with

Elektafilm. The film was still supposed to be conceptualized as national, but “not in the narrow sense” – this, perhaps, shows the requirements to obtain foreign capital. The idea of making the film abroad was rather unrealistic. In early June 1929, *Venkov* informed that the English company Astra National LTD would provide 3 million of the film budget. The press also reported that there had been negotiations concerning Anglo-German capital, but they probably fell through in 1929. However, in the summer of 1929, i.e. just before the filming was started, production was entrusted to the Czech company Karel Pečený, producing films under the brand Elekta-Journal. In November 1929, having considered offers from the companies Slaviafilm, La Tricolore, Elekta-Film, Fox Film Corporation, and Lloyd Film, the Society chose the same company to distribute the film. The press didn't notice the offer from the Czech-American company which started negotiations through Viktor Hugo Duras, a lawyer

living in Paris. However, the only known part of the offer is the maximum amount which could be invested, i.e. 2 million Czechoslovak crowns.

Knocking on the non-state investors', as well as the Treasury's, doors

Aiming to obtain the necessary funds, the Society didn't turn to the government directly, but rather to the individual ministries, giving them the screenplay. Due to its budget limitations, the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment immediately refused direct financing of the film. At the end of 1928, the Ministry of Commerce approved an insignificant sum of 25,000 Czechoslovak crowns. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs assumed that state funding could only be provided by the Committee. As mentioned above, the Committee refused to provide the financial support at the very beginning of the project. Therefore, on February 27, 1929, the Society turned to the Ministry of Finance, applying for a loan amounting to 2 million. Interestingly, the cost of a silent film in Czechoslovakia was around 200,000 Czechoslovak crowns; a film with

sound increased this sum about four times. On May 31, 1929, at the suggestion of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment, the government provided the Society with half of the required sum, i.e. 1 million Czechoslovak crowns. Moreover, the money was provided on condition that the loan would be paid off by September 30, 1930, and that one negative of the film, made under state supervision, would become state property; furthermore, all the devices and instruments purchased to produce the film would become state property. The government probably only wanted to meet its moral obligations, considering the issue of the film as solved. The government also provided help in many material aspects: the Ministry of Public Health and Physical Education lent the film-makers Strahov stadium, allowing them to use the condemned buildings. From July 15, 1929, to March 31, 1930, the film-makers set up “a small Hollywood” in them – the first Czech film town. After the Committee’s

and the National Council’s interventions, the film was freed of entertainment tax. However, all the brutal and harmful (for young people) scenes had to be cut out (e.g. the strangling of Ludmila and the murderous attack on Wenceslas), and the film became “a cultural-education film”, labelled accordingly.

Having lost the foreign capital, and having obtained only 1 million from the State, the Society started preparations and negotiations with Czech companies and institutions again. From that moment, the realization of the film was a fight for money to cover the costs of the following week, rather than artistic and creative work. There were also changes in the calculation of the total costs – in June 1928, the original estimate of 2 million was increased to 3 million, only to be increased again to 4 million after the filming started, and, in January 1930, the final budget exceeded 4.2 million! On April 5, 1930, the newspaper *Lidové noviny* announced that the prepared

synchronization should increase the costs to 6 million. Slightly less than 2 million Czechoslovak crowns were estimated to cover synchronization, but this was a rather exaggerated estimate. The opinion that such an expensive film didn't exist anywhere else in Europe was turning into a nightmare.

The fight for a state loan didn't end in May 1929, and the state supported the film again, before its completion – again with a sum of 1 million Czechoslovak crowns. In 1932–1933, particularly German Members of Parliament and a group of people around the communist Member of Parliament, Josef Štětka, criticized the “prodigality” of previous governments, and required the fastest possible termination of the interest-free loans and their repayment. Let's take a closer look at the total cost structure. With regard to non-state finance, only one part is known – the Society obtained funds from Church institutions, e.g. 50,000 Czechoslovak crowns from the Saint Vitus chapter, 20,000 from the Vyšehrad chapter,

and 10,000 from the Olomouc chapter. On October 5, 1929, the Headquarters of the Archbishop Property provided 20,000 Czechoslovak crowns. Religious orders were addressed too, but the results of these negotiations are still waiting to be discovered by a detailed analysis of Millennium-Film's documents in the National Museum Archive. Non-Church contributions included, for example, 50,000 Czechoslovak crowns from the company Českomoravská Kolben Daněk, 500 from Hypoteční banka, or 5,000 from the landowner Robert Stangler. The National Bank of Czechoslovakia provided the film with 20,000 from its contribution to the Anniversary Fund. However, the state itself didn't use the Fund to contribute to the film at all! Negotiations were, for example, conducted with John Kouba, a factory owner, with Robert Arnold, director of Länderbank in Hradec Králové, with Dobroslav Zátka, an entrepreneur, with banks such as Česká spořitelna, Agrární banka československá, Slavia,

Českobudějovická záložna, and with former nobility. The Society was tempted to obtain standard interest loans or leave part of property rights to investors. It also still counted on support from abroad. This is documented by the negotiations conducted at the second congress of Catholic cinematography, which was held in early November 1929 in France. However, afraid of being criticized for the unbalanced character of the film, the Society didn't "boast" of these activities in the press.

An attempt to reconstruct the process of obtaining funds for the film

The reconstruction of how the capital was gradually obtained is not easy, because the available sources often contain contradictory information. It seems that the private sector was informed in such a way as to create an impression that it was only necessary to provide the rest of the missing funds for a very lucrative project, but with regard to state institutions, the situation was always described as utterly critical. It is certain that the Society obtained a state loan amounting to 1 million in the middle of September 1929, but the sum acquired from different sources is not clear. It was probably around 300,000 Czechoslovak crowns from individuals, banks, and institutions. The film suffered from funding problems until its completion, and the filming was in danger of being stopped on several occasions. Therefore, in September, 1929, the Society started preparing an application

for the second state loan. The Society has “its man” in the government: František Nosek, Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, representing the Czechoslovak People’s Party. His task was to ensure the loan before the new election, because the formation of the new government could delay it. Moreover, it wasn’t possible to predict the future government’s approach to the film. The Society filed the application early in October 1929, asking for 2 million more Czechoslovak crowns, because the budget had been increased to 4 million (owing to filming in the autumn and winter)! The government was simultaneously assured that the film could be distributed in France and England. The Society also argued that it would be better to support the film again – before the end of October – and finish it, otherwise the estimated loss would reach 1.5 million Czechoslovak crowns. It is unclear what kind of financial support was ensured by the Minister, František Nosek. The available sources mention loans, but these were certainly not state loans. The

government provided the second loan in December 1929, and loans from the budget of Nosek’s Ministry are very unlikely. Nosek probably only mediated several contributions from persons or companies whose names are not mentioned in the Society’s documents or in the press. On October 7, 1929, the Society thanked him for transferring the sum of 250,000 Czechoslovak crowns, and ten days later the Society received 600,000 Czechoslovak crowns. These funds averted the termination of the production, but they didn’t solve the funding problems in the long-term perspective.

The Society ensured approximately half of the total cost by the end of October, but the negotiations about the state loan were still not finished. Therefore, the Society decided to turn to an institution which refused financial co-operation as the first of all – the National Committee for the Celebration of the Saint Wenceslas Millennium. There were some personnel changes at the end of September 1929, and Millennium-Film

gained an influential supporter, Prof. Jan Kapras. His task was to ensure the sum of 1–1.3 million Czechoslovak crowns from the Committee, but the sum of 500,000 was probably the maximum Kapras was able to obtain. The Society was forced to apply for a state loan, expecting a contribution amounting to 200,000 Czechoslovak crowns from the Anniversary Fund. However, at the end of the year, it was clear that the Society would not receive any funds from this source. The approval of the state loan was also planned to be used in negotiations with the private sector. The Society again relied on Prof. Kapras, who was expected to arrange contacts with the banker, Jaroslav Preiss, and the director, Jindřich Bělohříbek (both from Živnobanka), as well as with many other influential figures. The Minister, Nosek, continued to ensure funds too.

The funding problem consisted in the fact that the Society had to deal with paying off its previous loans and, simultaneously, obtain new funds. The production was

usually paid for immediately, but the Society received the funds later. The following example demonstrates the situation: The Society's obligations at the beginning of December 1929 reached 3,100,000 Czechoslovak crowns, and only 2,500,000 had been paid. Moreover, on December 4, 1929, the Society only had 8,000 on its account, and a week later only 5,000. The film, which consumed more and more funds, needed 1.8 million to be completed. The letters sent at the beginning of December to several ministers (e.g. to the Finance Minister, Karel Engliš, and the Minister of Industry and Commerce, Josef Matoušek) and to the old-new Prime Minister, František Udržal, show that the whole project was in the deepest crisis. Having reached the agreement with Karel Engliš and Ivan Dérer, Minister of Education and National Enlightenment, Udržal agreed, without the government's resolution, to provide the Society with the second state loan, amounting to 1 million Czechoslovak crowns, without specifying the exact form



*Director Kolár with Dagny
Servaes, representing Drahomíra*

of this contribution. The procedure seems simple, but it wasn't. Engliš's Ministry of Finance proposed a short-term loan in the full amount, but this was opposed by the Minister of Education, socialist Dérer, who only agreed to 600,000, and only after several interventions was he willing to agree to 800,000 Czechoslovak crowns. We know for certain that the second state million wasn't approved at once, but it was "put together", based on repeated requests from the Society. On December 14 and 28, 1929, the Society only received twice 100,000 Czechoslovak crowns! Next payments were conducted after the film's premiere on April 19, 1930, (300,000) and on April 23, 1930, (500,000). The total sum of 2 million provided by the state was supposed to be paid off in the following way: 1.5 million was due by September 30, 1930, and 0.5 million was due immediately from the profit on distribution.

The balance at the end of 1929 wasn't positive: apart from 1 million from

the government, the Society obtained 1,700,000 (out of which 1,200,000 was ensured by the Minister, Nosek), still missing more than 1 million to complete the film (e.g. the fight with Radslav, apotheosis, scenes at Boleslav's castle, Tetín, and Velehrad). Non-state capital for the film was increased to 2 million at the beginning of 1930, but the total cost of the film exceeded 4,200,000 Czechoslovak crowns. Therefore, the Society asked banks and insurance companies for an interest-free loan again, and it also turned to influential figures in the Church. Yet a few weeks before the premiere, 0.5 million was still missing to complete the film. We may only speculate that it was finally provided by the Saint Wenceslas League, represented by Václav Janda.

The approval of the second state loan was intentionally delayed by the Minister, Dérer, if Millenium-Film's documents are to be trusted. Both the first and the second state loan were signed by Prime Minister Udržal,

Boleslav's castle built after 1929



who apparently preferred the uncertain return of funds to potential shame if the film wouldn't be finished, and the state would lose the first loan of 1 million. Having provided part of the second loan before Christmas 1929, he averted the potential

termination of the production; the rest of the money was used to pay for further production, and to pay off debts. František Udržal also helped the film by ensuring that the state lent the film-makers military equipment, as well as means and people



One of the designs by the architect Hradský

from state services (buses, soldiers, etc.).

Total financial balance of the film

The archive materials available in the Office of the President of the Republic's archives provide sufficient information about the final financial balance of the film. At the turn of 1935/1936, it was decided, at the suggestion of the Ministry of Finance, that both state loans amounting to 2 million Czechoslovak crowns would be written off as irrecoverable. There were several reasons





Night filming



Letov S-16, used to create a wind storm after Wenceslas's murder



for this decision. The projection of the film in Czechoslovakia fell short of expectations. The film was released after the millennium, it was silent, and it wasn't very successful with reviewers. Moreover, the assumption that the film would be purchased abroad was utterly wrong. The Ministry considered the negatives of the film and their copies worthless for the state. The audit conducted by the Ministry of Finance also showed that neither the producer, Elekta-Journal, nor the distributor, Gongfilm, billed the whole project to Millenium-Film – despite a court intervention. Therefore, the Society couldn't prove in its bookkeeping that it had used the state loans. According to the audit, the production costs amounted to 3,881,374.31 Czechoslovak crowns. The Society had paid Elekta-Journal 4,021,980 Czechoslovak crowns in advance payments. The difference between the sums (i.e. 140,605.69 Czechoslovak crowns) couldn't be plausibly proved, but the payment in cash became impossible: both Elekta-Journal and Gongfilm went bankrupt, and were

completely insolvent. Even the sum of 736,065.85, which was supposed to be paid by Gongfilm to the state from the distribution profits, was irrecoverable. Millenium-Film formally closed business in April 1940, its debts amounting to 3,394,850.80 Czechoslovak crowns.

Preparing for filming

The preparations for filming started immediately after the first state loan was approved, i.e. in June 1929, with only one third of the original budget secured. The directors divided their work in the following way: Kolár was responsible for the technical aspects, while Munclinger was in charge of the artistic and historical aspects. Casting was conducted in the first phases of the filming. Munclinger led the screen tests, and the cinematographer, J. Stallich, filmed the actors and actresses on panchromatic material; then there was a final selection. On September 19, 1929, Zdeněk Štěpánek, known for the film *J.K. Tyl* was tested and accepted. The role of Drahomíra was accepted by the German actress Dagny Servaes, known from Lubitsch's film *The Pharaoh's Daughter* (Faraonova dcera), the role of Ludmila was given to the Russian actress Vera Baranowskaja (she acted in Pudovkin's films *Mother* and *The End of St. Petersburg*), Radslav was offered to Otto Zahrádka. Zahrádka also organized the

riding extras. Their core was formed by 150 athletes, functioning as instructors; the scenes with thousands of people, including soldiers, were led by the assistant director, Eduard Šimáček. Josef Loskot, playing the role of Skeř, turned out to be a valuable discovery for the film-makers. It was probably due to lack of time that the roles weren't assigned by a special committee – it was supposed to be an equivalent of the committee of historians who judged the libretto and screenplay.

The film couldn't be made in the authentic 10th-century setting, so it was decided to create the most accurate replicas. It meant constructing the largest film buildings in contemporary Europe, making costumes, weapons, etc. The materials for costumes and props were chosen so as to look good on the selected film material. The buildings were based on the designs created by Ludvík Hradský, who had studied, together with historians, the available sources in order to be able to produce the most accurate designs. The last overviews of the material show

impressive figures: the film-makers used about 170,000 kilograms of plaster, 36,000 square metres of jute, 40 wagons of timber, 12,000 kilograms of paint, 6,000 kilograms of nails, and about 50 lorries brought moss and grass. Moreover, about 2,300 shields, 1,800 spears, 900 swords, 1,800 helmets, and 1,200 pairs of shoes were made. About 6,000 metres of material were used for the costumes – 120 costumes were made for the protagonists, and 1,000 costumes were made for the extras. 28,000 metres of strings and laces were used for trousers and shoes. During 82 filming days, the cameras filmed about 16,000 people on 56 kilometres of film material; moreover, a large number of photographs were made. Strahov stadium was provided by the city of Prague free of charge. The above mentioned “film village” was gradually built from September 1929; according to some journalists, it somewhat resembled – owing to the improvised way of filming – a prison camp. There were dressing rooms, restaurants, a canteen, technical buildings, administrative buildings, a

fire station, a police station, a Red Cross station; lighting and other electrical works were conducted by the company Elektrické podniky free of charge. Nosek’s Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs provided the crew with telephones and buses; the company Praga provided cars. The sound system was operated by the company Telefunken. The loudspeaker system was not only used to control the crowd scenes, but it also played suitable music accompanying certain scenes (e.g. records with fanfares from Verdi’s *Aida*, or from the opera *Faust*, the opera *Boris Godunov* with Feodor Ivanovich Chaliapin and Kubelík’s suite were played to accompany the studio scenes). It is only to be speculated that the music was selected, apart from the director, by Gustav Armin Svojsík, a member of Millenium-Film and the owner of a concert agency. Night filming required a specific solution – Ing. J. Brichta, technical director of Elekta-Journal, tested a set of large spotlights, purchased specially for this film from the company V. Kolář, based in Modřany, Prague. They were used



Film crew with actors



*Switching station in the primeval forest: director
Kolár and the technical director Brichta*

to add light to the exteriors and during the night scenes. The generators (mobile power stations with direct current) and planes were provided by the Ministry of National Defence, which saved approximately half a million, i.e. the price that would have been paid for renting them from Germany. Therefore, the station was, for example, more powerful than that of the AB studios!

A look behind the scenes of the first phase of filming

Millenium-Film's materials available in the National Museum Archive, in the Saint Wenceslas League's collection, include information about one fact, so far not revealed. The sources about the film say that the film was created by two directors: Kolár and Munclinger. However, this is not true – in order to show that the production of the film didn't face any difficulties, the members of the Society hid the fact that Munclinger had resigned. Munclinger announced his resignation on November 10, 1929, saying that he felt "inferior": Kolár signed his contract earlier, and Munclinger worked without receiving the promised pay for a long time; moreover, he was primarily considered to be a historian, not being allowed to edit the film. At first, the Committee didn't accept the resignation and paid its obligations, i.e. 17,000 Czechoslovak crowns for three months' work and 1,000 Czechoslovak crowns as compensation. The resignation was only

accepted when Munclinger refused the new contract, which openly viewed him only as an expert and a kind of assistant. Munclinger became part of the project before Kolár, so his motives are understandable. Moreover, both directors had conflicts during the filming, which delayed the production even more. The fact that Munclinger was only present on nine out of seventeen filming days can be explained by his duties in the National Theatre, or by his intention to give Kolár freedom. With regard to the fact that the production had to be sped up, Munclinger wasn't backed up by anybody, not even by the film producer, and the roles of history experts were given to František Kysela and Ludvík Hradský.

Millenium-Film soon realized that it was necessary to ensure positive reactions to the film from the general public. There had been negative opinions before filming started, caused primarily by the unclear funding of the project and bad communication with the press. This was changed at the beginning of filming. The first meeting of the newly

established promotion section was held in Millenium-Film's and Electa-Journal's offices on September 25, 1929. The director, Kolár, and the journalist and film critic, Karel Smrž, provided information about the project at the press conference. The cast, crew, and designs of the buildings were introduced; the journalists were informed of the ways of filming individual scenes. The importance of the film, as viewed by the general public, was supposed to be enhanced by statements from important foreign figures from the film industry. For example, on September 27, 1929, the newspaper *České slovo* reported about visitors from France, the actor Raymond Guerin (his own name being Guerin Catelain), actress Claudie Lombard, and the director Marguerite Viel. They were hired for the Czech film *City Jungle* (*Džungle velkoměsta*), and they were impressed by the filming of *Saint Wenceslas*. R. Guerin even obtained the role of Gero in the film. Another form of "PR" was formed by the shots made by the cinematographer, Čech – they became regular parts of Elekta-Journal's newsreels, and, as the newspaper

*Wenceslas's murder in front of
the church door
in Stará Boleslav*



Lidové listy reported, they were shown in the cinemas Adria, Hvězda, and Metro from September 11, 1929. These shots appear, for a few seconds, at the end of the film *Prague 1929* (Praha 1929), showing the course of the millennium celebrations. Both this film and the approximately 15-minute promotion film about the film *Saint Wenceslas* are preserved in the collection of the National Film Archive.

Filming outside of Prague

The film-makers also started inviting journalists, but they had to prepare for harsh conditions caused by the weather. The priority was to film the outside scenes in autumn weather and then, in winter, work on the studio scenes. The first scenes were filmed at Křivoklát castle: Having left at 5:15 a.m., the film-makers reached the base of the crew, Musil hotel, two hours later. The interview with the director, Kolár, conducted on October 11, 1929, for the magazine *Filmový kurýr* contains the exact schedule of the first filming day: during the first two days, several scenes were made around the town of Unhošť (the scene of ploughing the field and the arrival of the messenger with the message of Ludmila's death, the mountain pass with the German army), during the third and fourth day, the fight scenes between the Czechs and Germans in the Křivoklát area, and the lyrical scenes in a birch grove were filmed, and the crew was very happy with the results. On the fifth day,

the scene with Drahomíra and Vratislav was made; on the sixth day, a fight between the Czechs and Germans was filmed. The scene with the first conflict between Wenceslas and Boleslav was made too. It had been planned to stay at Křivoklát for three more days. To provide some information about the costs, it could be said that the day when the largest fight scene was filmed cost 50,000 Czechoslovak crowns. Local people were hired too; there were even school trips to see the filming. It should be added that filming in Prague became an interesting spectacle – many people watched it from the adjacent slope every day.

The crew then moved from Křivoklát to the Boubín primeval forest to film the scenes of Czechs fighting against Germans. The filming in the primeval forest was permitted and, with interest, watched by Charles VI, Prince Schwarzenberg. It was very difficult to prepare the scenes and ensure the technical aspects in this area, and the film-makers were, for example,

forced to reinforce bridges, repair the roads, etc. Transport of people, materials, and equipment was handled by the company Praga, but everything then had to be, in most cases, carried to the filming locations manually! An emergency station was set up in the primeval forest in case there were injuries during fight scenes; there was also a police station called “Primeval Forest”, a Red Cross tent, and a wooden storehouse for weapons called “Saint Wenceslas’s Armoury”; furthermore, some lights were installed to improve poor light conditions. The switching station, built according to the design by Ing. J. Brichta, technical director, was referred to as “a small technical wonder”. The 286 kW generators powered spotlights specially made for the film in a record period of three weeks. A telephone cable was led to the director’s seat; the director himself controlled filming using a whistle.

A detailed description of the filming in Boubín was brought by *Filmový kurýř* on October 26, 1929, and *Venkov* a week

V Boubínském pralese byla v minulých dnech svedena krutá bitva.

První český velkofilm bude už promítán v surové nesestříhané formě.

Natáčení prvního českého velkofilmu »Kníže Václav« pokračuje neobvykle rychlým tempem. V nedělní době dojde už v 21. hodině k promítání. První část filmu pak bude v redakci a opomíjí se v minulých dnech v bitevní scéně pralese.



Večerní České slovo,
November 7, 1929

První část filmu »Kníže Václav«

Nedělní zábavná a poučná příloha Národní Politiky.

© Družba 1929. Družba

SVATÝ VÁCLAV

Obrazy z nového kulturně historického filmu Českého.

První část filmu »Kníže Václav« dostala se v nedělní obědové době do redakce. První část filmu »Kníže Václav« dostala se v nedělní obědové době do redakce. První část filmu »Kníže Václav« dostala se v nedělní obědové době do redakce.

Národní politika,
April 6, 1930

later. The film-makers came to the filming location, guarded by soldiers, from the village of Lenora, situated in the Šumava Mountains. The crew had its base in the Czech Tourist Club's chalet. Every evening, the scenes for the next day were prepared; the days started at 5 a.m., followed by a bus trip to Boubín an hour later. The trips to the filming locations sometimes took several hours. Owing to a lack of light, the filming ended at 4 p.m. The above-mentioned article in *Venkov* brings information about improvised experiments: trunks of trees in the primeval forest didn't seem "photogenic enough", so L. Hradský came up with an idea to spray the dark bark with light paint using a pneumatic sprayer. He climbed a ladder to the line captured by the camera, and painted the trees.

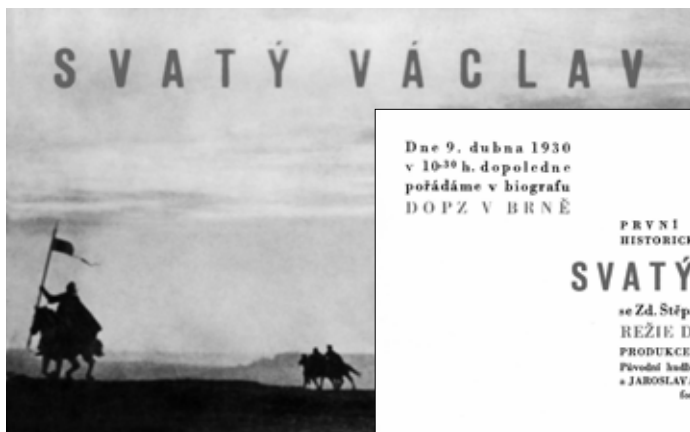
Filming in Prague

Filming in Boubín was finished at the end of October, and the film crew moved back to Prague. The constructions of castles at the stadium were just being finished, and everything necessary for filming in the studios was being prepared. The exterior scenes were filmed using spotlights in all kinds of weather. The scenes with Ludmila were filmed at the stadium, where, simultaneously, the stone walls of Boleslav's castle were being built a few metres away. The film crew moved to the AB studios at the beginning of December (this is where, for example, the scene of the Quedlinburg assembly was filmed). The last filming at the stadium was in winter, but in good weather – this is when the scene in front of Boleslav's castle and the feast in Boleslav were filmed.

The newspaper *Večerní České slovo* from November 7, 1929, reported that the "rough, unedited" version would be shown soon in Elekta-Journal's studios, followed by editing



*Ludmila's murder
at the Tetín castle*



*Invitation to the
Prague premiere*

Dne 9. dubna 1930
v 10-30 h. dopoledne
pořádáme v biografu
DOPZ V BRNĚ

PRVNÍ PŘEDVEDENÍ
HISTORICKÉHO VELKOFILMU

SVATÝ VÁCLAV

se Zd. Stěpánkem v titulní roli
REŽIE DR. JAN KOLÁR
PRODUKCE ELEKTA-JOURNAL
Převodní lašba OSKARA NEZDALA
a JAROSLAVA KRÍČKY posudec sym-
fonický orchestr

K této slavnostní premiéře,
určené v první řadě filmovým
odborníkům a zájemcům,
dovoluje si Vás set, zvát
MILLENIUM-FILM - GONGFILM
PRAHA II., NÁRODNÍ TR. 26
Fil. BRNO, Josefa 21. ul. 1970

Platí pro 2 osoby

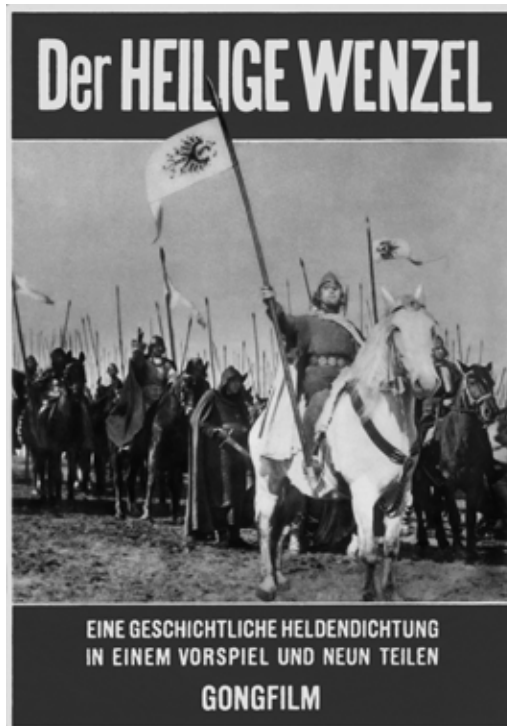
and subtitling. It was more of a marketing step, aiming to attract investors. The film was filmed in two negatives, using panchromatic material, but it was the panchromatic material that required better light during filming. The contemporary press reported that the cinematographers exposed approximately 14,000 metres of the negative; some scenes were even filmed using five cameras. *Filmový kurýr* from December 20, 1929, summed up the process of filming: after two months,

two thirds of the film were finished, with only large scenes waiting to be done, e.g. the fight with Radslav (on snow), and Wenceslas's murder. The process of filming was complicated by more factors – the actors were limited by their roles in theatres, the actresses Baranovskaja and Servaes commuted from Berlin. Capricious weather caused difficult light conditions, so, for example, the conflict scene between Drahomíra and Ludmila, filmed at the stadium, took six days!

*Drahomira shortly after
Wenceslas's murder*



The report in *Venkov* from January 10, 1930, announced the completion of the film, but the information was untrue. At the end of February, there were some scenes to be finished: several fight scenes with Radslav, the murder scene, and the scene with Svatopluk. Their completion depended on sufficient light and good weather. Illnesses weren't tolerated, e.g. Máňa Ženíšková, representing Radmila, played night scenes (from 7 p.m. to 4 a.m.) with bronchitis and fever. When the filming was stopped (due to lack of funds), the completed scenes were edited and synchronized with the soundtrack. The last scenes could be filmed at the end of March, a few days before the premiere: the big fight scene with Radslav, involving 200 riders, 800 foot soldiers, and 60 animals, was shot between the villages of Stodůlky and Motol on Friday, March 21, 1930. Four days later, watched by Karel Viškovský, Minister of National Defence, Wenceslas's murder was filmed; the wind in the scene was created by three plane engines. The completed film was 3,320 metres long.



German version of the film leaflet

Největší!
dílo od počátku čs. kinematografie

SVATÝ VÁCLAV

JOSEF STĚPÁNEK
 VERA BARANOVSKÁ
 DANCY SESTRY
 J. W. ŠPERKNER
 JOSEF LOMKOT
 MAMA ZEMSKÁ

TR. PŘÍTEK
 A. JANOVÁ
 K. QUŠEK
 VL. MAJER
 J. BOVENSKÝ
 K. SCHLACHERT
 O. ZAHRADEK
 J. STEJKA
 V. VYDRA
 J. POCHT
 J. MAŘEK
 J. ŠLEJŠ
 A. CHAUVÁT
 VL. SLAVNÝ
 J. NOVÁK
 P. PRAŽSKÝ
 V. JURET
 J. LROTAJ
 J. NYEMAN
 V. KOVÁŘEK
 N. BRTI
 M. DOSTALOVÁ
 V. HLAVATA
 J. GOTTLEROVÁ
 M. ČERNÁ
 F. BULIN

Filmová epopej o prologu a deseti dělech
 Libreto: Dr. J. S. Kolár, J. Mundlinger
REŽIE: Dr. J. S. KOLÁR

HUDEBNÍ KOMPOSICE:
 OSKAR NEDBAL, JAR. KRÍČKA
 FOTOGRAFIE:
 KAREL KOPŘIVA, V. VÍCH,
 JAN STALLICH, OTTO HELLER
 ARCHITEKTÍ:
 L. HRADSKÝ, B. HEŠ, F. KYSELÁ,
 M. GOTTLIEB

VYROBEK:
MILLENIUM-FILM ELEKTA-JOURNAL
 MONOPOL:
GONG-FILM
 PRAHA II. - NARODNÍ TRÁDA ČÍS. 26

Výhradní premiéra pro Prahu:
BIO ADRIA

*Promotion of the premiere at
 the Adria cinema*

Fearful expectations

An important role in the fate of the film was played by the press, which was divided into two groups, based on their political orientation: pessimistic (with anti-clerical and leftist tendencies, particularly the newspaper *České slovo*) and optimistic (especially Catholic newspapers). Journalists brought frequent reports about the process of filming, and, it should be added, rather than spreading doubts, they invited people to see the film. The filming reports present the most vivid images of the atmosphere. The optimistic group imagined that the film would “push our film art far beyond the borders”, and that it would “represent, with its artistic conception and production format, a milestone in the Czech film business”. The organization of work was praised too. The pessimistic opinions were not only based on political reasons, but they were often caused by a lack of credible information about the preparation of the film. Jaromír Václav Šmejkal expressed the following view

in the newspaper *České slovo* on May 8, 1929: “We are concerned that the promised million will be lost, and this concern is based on many reasons. The film is doomed to be unsuccessful, as other films about the past, e.g. *Jan Hus* and *Jan Žižka*. Are the creators aware that the present time is not very propitious for historical films? How far beyond our borders will *Saint Wenceslas* get? How much of the 1 million will come back? It all appears unclear. Our concerns would be even higher if the production of this film was related to the Church and political circles, i.e. the People’s Party.”

Premiere

The process of completion proceeded in a very stressful atmosphere. Moreover, the film was “delayed” by the censors several days before the premiere, because on March 29, 1930, Millenium-Film asked for a special screening for the censor board which had labelled the film as unsuitable for young people. The censors insisted that the sentence “Come, murder – dogs!”, uttered by Skeř when Ludmila is murdered, and the sentence “Thou shalt pay for this”, said by Drahomíra to Skeř, should be removed. Generally, the censors’ interventions affected the dramatic parts, i.e. the murder of Ludmila, the fight scene in the primeval forest, the feast in Stará Boleslav, and the murder of Wenceslas. Finally, the film was labelled as culturally-educational, therefore suitable for young people under 16 years old.

The exhausted film crew and the Society, affected by numerous financial crises, nervously released the film. The newspaper

České slovo from April 2, 1930, published incorrect information that the premiere took place simultaneously at five cinemas. The official premiere took place at the Alfa cinema on Thursday, April 3, 1930. The film was first shown at 10:30 a.m. to film-makers and cinema owners and at 8:00 p.m. to representatives of the press, diplomacy, government, and the Church. It was unusual to have two closed screenings, the aim being to make the access easier for the non-Prague audiences. Both screenings were accompanied by a large symphonic orchestra, led by Jan Elšnic, the contemporary conductor of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra; the organ was played by the well-known organist, Jaroslav Vojtek. Elšnic also conducted the performances at the Adria cinema. *Filmový kurýr* from April 4, 1930, brought untrue information that the orchestra was led by Kříčka and Nedbal during the premiere. From Friday, April 4, 1930, to May 1, 1930, the film was shown to the general public at the premiere cinema Adria. These

screenings were advertised in the daily press several times. The film was shown again in September and October 1930, e.g. at the cinemas such as Alma, Vzlet, and Národ. All borrowings have been registered since the 1950s, the most frequent borrowers being the Czechoslovak television, film and TV school FAMU, Barrandov film studios, and summer film schools.

Kolár's statement that appeared in Jan Wenig's article "Saint Wenceslas film" in the newspaper *Lidová demokracie* on October 1, 1969, should be viewed very critically. Kolár says the following: "... but [the film] was shown by many cinemas in twelve copies for many weeks, and it was certainly seen by at least a tenth of the population, who reacted to it with the same enthusiasm as audiences abroad and overseas." Even if the mentioned tenth was true, the audience probably consisted of pupils and students with reduced admission fees, which wasn't very significant for paying off the borrowed money. The twelve copies are mentioned

in the notes about the film preserved as part of Kolár's estate in the National Film Archive. The number of people who saw the film in 1930 is impossible to estimate. There were no statistics in the Society's documents or in the contemporary press. There are some fragments of information, for example, that Gongfilm, the distributor of the film, signed a screening agreement before December 31, 1929, with 52 cinemas for 300,000 Czechoslovak crowns. The cinemas were probably also interested in screening the film in the following years. This is documented by censors' letters. One of them contains the stamp of the District Office in the towns of Třebíč (January 5, 1935) and Louny (July 4, 1939). Another letter documents a request from Vladislava Sochanová from Prague, made in May 1935, asking for a new permission – the permission was provided. Finding how many screenings were organized outside of Prague would require extensive research; the Society's documents only contain fragments of information that cinemas outside of Prague

inquired about the conditions for borrowing the film. It remains unclear to what extent the planned gross sales of 1.5–2 million in Czechoslovakia and 2 million abroad, within the estimated 2–3 screening years, were achieved. The opinion, still spread, that the film suffered from low interest among audiences was probably only caused by the contemporary assumption of lower success of the film. The facts are only provided by the evidence of the Ministry of Finance, created to write off both state loans.

Critics' opinions of the film

The division of opinions into contemporary and later is based on the essence of the whole Saint Wenceslas tradition. This tradition attracts different interpretations or, what's worse, deliberate misinterpretations. Therefore, it is no surprise that the film, as everything connected with Saint Wenceslas, became just another controversial issue to discuss the meaning of the tradition. This discussion destroyed the original intention: creating a national, representative, and conciliatory work. Obviously, this was a utopian idea. There were numerous critical voices (from as early as the middle of the 19th century), arguing that the Saint Wenceslas tradition was clerical, pro-Habsburg, reactionary, renegade, and pro-German. Its national character was only represented by its historical dimension, and even this element displayed many "buts".

These discussions culminated in 1929: the leftist circles only accepted the Hussite

theme to be filmed. It is not possible to say that the film received only positive or only negative opinions from contemporary critics – purely statistically, the proportion is, more or less, balanced. However, this balance disappears when the individual components of the film are analyzed, e.g. the director received negative reviews, but the soundtrack was more often viewed as good. The present negative opinion of the film seems to repeat the views preserved in literature, reflecting the political situation. In his book *Václav Tille, the First Film Esthetician* (První estetik filmu Václav Tille), Lubomír Linhart writes that the film should be refused "... for its official, reactionary interpretation of the Saint Wenceslas legend, similarly refused by all progressive parts of the nation, rather than for its technical aspects, although they were, justifiably, criticized too." In his book *Our Film* (Náš film) from 1971, Jan Bartošek refers to Jan Kučera, who viewed the film as "utterly political and propagandistic. It preached the clerical idea of a thousand-year-old unity of the Czech state and nation with

Fight scene





Wenceslas with his mother Drahomira

the Roman Catholic Church and Vatican policy. No other political party of the bourgeois coalition managed to create such an unequivocally reactionary work before the end of the republic.” A changed opinion of the film is brought by the study *On the Relation between Film and History* (K otázce vztahu filmu a historie) by Jiří Rak and Ivan Klimeš from 1987: it is arguable whether the film “failed with the audience” or not; the authors managed to give a better picture of the reasons why the process of the creation was so complicated and why the acceptance of the film wasn’t unequivocal. Apart from the known factors such as the emergence of the film with sound, the authors, correctly, mention insufficient topicality of the Saint Wenceslas tradition after 1918. They view the year 1929 as a period which was “much more suitable for a polemic with the tradition rather than for confirming, or more precisely, illustrating the tradition”.

The director, Kolár, developed a strong relationship with the Saint Wenceslas theme,

and he didn’t see direction only as a craft. Yet, the film represented an occasional work, limited to the coming millennium. This was easily used by critics, looking for arguments to reduce the artistic value of the work. Moreover, critics questioned the objective approach, considering Millennium-Film a catholic society. Even if this had been true, the state would have had a number of ways to change the film – from changes to the libretto and screenplay to direct supervision over filming. And, in fact, the state used these means: there were minimum supernatural miracles which fill the Church image of Saint Wenceslas. The Society itself contributed to this by choosing the film’s title. It evoked a Church film, not a film representing the state. Leftist circles refused the film before the premiere as a reactionary and bourgeois work, aimed to please the Church. These critical opinions focus on the whole Saint Wenceslas tradition and its demonstration in the millennium year 1929, rather than on the film. They can only be considered stimulating – at least for

historians and political scientists – if they deal with contemporary contexts, e.g. calls for dictatorship, for the restoration of the Church’s power, etc.

A film for people or “a polished work by several historians’ dry brains”?

The authors of the film faced a dilemma as to how to approach the film. The fact that it would be more of a pious, retrospective work was indicated by their choice of the title *Saint Wenceslas – An Epic Film in a Prologue and Ten Parts*. The original subject was deformed by numerous external interventions; the dramatic edge was particularly toned down by the above-mentioned removal or softening of the violent scenes, due to the intention to place the film into the culturally-educational category. The first versions of the libretto and screenplay contained a kind of factual, academic, and historicizing approach, so the film might appear as a living chronicle. Therefore, the low dramatic character of the film wasn’t caused by historians and experts who continuously judged the texts. In their opinions, they even called for a more dramatic approach and,

*Wenceslas's last attempt to achieve
peace with his brother Boleslav*



primarily, for a more “human” character of Wenceslas. Yet, the historians who worked on the film left certain traces in it which are, however, only understandable for specialists in medieval culture. Among the contemporary critics, it was, for example, Josef Trojan who mentioned them in the newspaper *Právo lidu* from April 5, 1930: “It seems to be a polished work by several historians’ dry brains who did not view the past as a source of new and beautiful poetry or material which could be formed in accordance with today’s ideas – but who, similar to caricatures of botanists, did not fail to describe every single detail on clothes worn by the least important Wenceslas’s servant, without giving him life, strength, and credibility.” The best description of these “hidden traces” from archaeology and history was provided by the historian, Pavlína Rychterová, in her study *Mittelalterliche Hagiographie auf der Leinwand. Der Film Svatý Václav (1929) als gescheiterter Versuch, ein Nationaldenkmal zu erstellen*. Let’s analyze the film’s beginning

from this perspective. The lake scene is set in front of the Slavic god called Svantovít, whose four faces represent four directions and, simultaneously, symbols of heaven, hell, paradise, and earth. Bořivoj’s headgear in the Velehrad scene reflects inspiration by the *Reichenau Evangelary*, and the representation of Bořivoj and Drahomíra seems heavily influenced by Lang’s film *Die Niebelungen*. As in the case of Byzantine elements, the inspiration is absolutely logical. Pagans were represented using Avar and Langobardic elements, which can be seen, for example, in Skeř’s sword. The film was also inspired by Russian productions, which is represented by Russian-style hats worn by dukes in the Vyšehrad scene. The fascination with history also influenced both the country and the buildings: the moat by the stronghold represents the “Stag Moat”, and the assembly room in Quedlinburg is an exact copy based on the *Reichenau Evangelary*. It was not always possible to achieve the best harmony of the historicizing elements. What stands out, for example,

is the shot of a room with fabrics and bear skins, or Skeř wearing a wire shirt after Wenceslas was solemnly shorn. Wenceslas is sometimes not “dressed appropriately” – while the costume based on the paintings in the Znojmo rotunda looks good, the baroque-like clothes don’t fit. In any case, the production design was prepared with high erudition, without the intention of economizing.

The film reviewers – perhaps with the exception of Václav Tille and Josef Trojan – missed these aspects. What the reviewers only noticed was a striking difference between the primitive buildings and their equipment, and the protagonists’ rich costumes. Generally, it is necessary to take the reviewers’ opinions of the cultural or pseudo-cultural character of the film with a pinch of salt. The opinions of this criterion, as well as the objective character of the film, are balanced in both positive and negative reviews. Critics, rightly, appreciated that the authors didn’t succumb to the temptation

to incorporate pathetic patriotism into the film. The absolute majority of contemporary reviews positively viewed the authors’ honest approach, technical aspects, photographs, historical accuracy, cast as a whole, buildings, and costumes.



*Zdeněk Štěpánek
representing
Saint Wenceslas*

Opinions of the direction

The direction was considered, even before the premiere, a weak part of the film. Kolár was, as the main director, questioned from the very beginning, and the film itself shows that the voices calling for an experienced foreign director were justified. To defend Kolár, it can be said that, as the director of the first Czech historical feature film, he could find no tradition to develop, and if he used his foreign experience, he was criticized for copying foreign production. Only film experts realize that the film was primarily inspired by *Die Niebelungen*, *The King of Kings*, *Ben Hur*, and Russian productions. It is clearly visible that Kolár improved during filming – the second half is significantly better. However, before the second half even began, i.e. at the peak of the first half, with the Quedlinburg assembly, the cinema audience was getting tired! Kolár's direction as a whole was viewed by the contemporary press as merely average, or even poor. The reviewers only appreciated his feeling for

artistic aspects of filming (lights), his work with details, and editing, when analyzing the protagonists' inner motivation. Kolár was, more than once, criticized that the large amount of money which had been used wasn't visible on screen. For example, in the magazine *Studio* in 1930, Emanuel Rádl wrote: "This is the first film made under Czech conditions by Czech people that reached a certain quality; however, even this king among the blind is one-eyed; with the technical means available, the authors could achieve a tenfold aesthetic effect." This rightful reproach primarily referred to the representation of crowd scenes. Those who read the filming reports must have been disappointed by the absence, or the episodic character of the large fight scenes which significantly differed from the advertised thousand extras. Without any doubt, the protagonists were led better than extras, but even this aspect displays numerous mistakes – the roles were best handled by experienced foreign actors.

However, the questioned direction reflects its model, i.e. the screenplay. From the very beginning of the project, the screenplay was considered the best prepared and, generally, the best component of the film. The result, however, showed the opposite. The romantic element is ahistorical, and it is surprising that it was explicitly supported by the reviewing historians. They probably wanted to present themselves as “modern people”; or it might have been a sop to the audience, accustomed to romantic plots. Boleslav only decides to murder Wenceslas when driven by jealousy. The film combined the motives of fratricide with something the medieval legends didn't contain, and the audience was confused. Most reviews criticized the film for its effort to incorporate as much as possible. This is what causes the clumsy and slow story which, based on a proper selection, could certainly display a dramatic character. The film lacks straightforwardness, homogeneity, and a unifying idea – of course, if this is not meant to be the fact that Wenceslas, as a follower

of Christ, intentionally chooses death, and that the coward Boleslav will always be a coward. However, what seems to be missing is any kind of Wenceslas's revolt against fate, which creates the absence of excitement. The critics also noticed somewhat unprofessional subtitles: the sequences of subtitles announce what is going to happen, but this is obvious, and it only disturbs the audience. Kolár's penchant for descriptiveness and details, enhanced by an excessive stress of historical realism, resulted in a very long-winded story. Let's quote the above-mentioned article by Emanuel Rádl: “... in one and a half hours, it is not possible to present a detailed and immoderate description of so many episodic stories surrounding the protagonist, and, on top of it, add an introduction mapping the ancient times and a rich evocation of Svatopluk with a school-like proper example of a boy and sticks.”

The contemporary press was confused by the concealed resignation of Munclinger as co-director of the film. Therefore, the opinion

that the theatrical pathos, exaggerated piety, dramatic gestures, and absence of at least a minimum amount of humour are connected with Munclinger cannot be justified. The film was made, more or less, by Kolár alone, which, of course, doesn't necessarily mean that he wasn't influenced by his previous co-operation with Munclinger in the libretto and screenplay. In any case, the film appears to be a long family saga, with a black-and-white concept of the conflict involving a mother-in-law, a daughter-in-law, brothers, nobles, and a ruler. However, the film brings a certain novelty, which is again ahistorical – the fates of all the present characters are affected by the power-hungry thane, Skeř. By initiating the murder of Ludmila, he manages to banish Drahomíra, so he can easily manipulate Boleslav, through the daughter Radmila. Boleslav was very vividly played by Jan W. Speerger, and though irresolute, impulsive, and conceited, he seems more active and natural than Zdeněk Štěpánek as Wenceslas. The negative, but developing character of Boleslav might have

become, against the authors' will, more interesting for the audience than the ascetic and flawless Wenceslas. At the end of the film, Boleslav seems somewhat justified: he is a bad brother, but a good Czech – he wants to solve conflicts using weapons, seeing the institution of bishopric as a means to limit the sovereignty of the state. There was an extensive polemic concerning the character of Wenceslas. Non-violence, reconciliation of nations, humanity, and voluntary abandonment of power are features which challenge the reproach that the film doesn't present Wenceslas as a great politician. It is more justified to criticize the insufficient depiction of social background, i.e. everyday life of people and country. This is only sufficiently shown in the Prologue, but some critics regarded it as utterly redundant.

The role of Wenceslas was very difficult, both for the actor Zdeněk Štěpánek and the screenwriters: it was supposed to display nothing that the opposite party could attack. Wenceslas's religious character was supposed



Oskar Nedbal

to be shown during his life, but not making him weaker as a ruler. The fact that the film concentrated on the representation of Wenceslas's "symbolic meaning", refusing to present the dramatization of his life, meant



Jaroslav Křička

that Wenceslas realized his exceptionality from childhood, not leaving the model of a Catholic martyr. However, this concept of Wenceslas raised necessary doubts. Most reviewers agreed that Štěpánek played the

given role of a sometimes passive, sometimes surprisingly resolute, kind, and somewhat impersonal, distant, modelled Wenceslas very well technically, saving what he could. There were isolated critical voices that he was too old for this role, or that he wasn't a good film actor. Both of these opinions were later refuted: Štěpánek showed his qualities in later films, and anthropologists, based on the research on mortal remains, conducted in the 1970s, proved that Wenceslas was about forty years old when he was murdered.

Contemporary opinions of the film

Mostly positive reviews appeared in *Venkov*, *Národní politika*, *Národní listy*, and *Filmový kurýr*. There were occasional proclamations of “the greatest work in the history of Czechoslovak film”, and of a great representative potential for foreign countries. Many opinions proved to be wrong soon after the premiere, because the artistic value of the film didn't increase with time, and the film didn't become part of the golden collection of Czech cinematography. It is more precise to say that it stayed – as was written by the newspaper *Národní politika* on April 6, 1930 – “a unique document of its time and history”. Even those who expected more films about Saint Wenceslas were wrong. With regard to film-makers, this topic seems to be either uninteresting or difficult to capture. A more exact view can be found in the magazine *Film* from May 1, 1930: “The true success of Saint Wenceslas will begin in the country. This is

a film for the widest classes of population ...” A similar comment appears in *České slovo* from April 25, 1930: “[...] the film can only impress a child or a pious woman who crosses herself properly when Saint Wenceslas appears upon his white steed on screen.” Jaromír Václav Šmejkal in *České slovo* from April 4, 1930, sums up: “There was a time when we refused to film the history of Saint Wenceslas, Duke of Bohemia. If anybody comes with a similar idea today, we will insist upon our original view.”

The most critical comments appeared in the newspapers *Národní osvobození*, *Rudé právo*, *Právo lidu*, and partly also *České slovo*. There even was an opinion that the film should have been called *Boleslav the Strong* instead of *Saint Wenceslas*, because it makes the unintentional impression that the murder of Wenceslas was inevitable to preserve the sovereignty of the Czech state. There were frequent comments that the film was “boring”, “shallow inside”, “clerical-

bourgeois”, “one-sided and biased”, satisfying a common “bourgeois average”. An opinion that appeared in *Národní osvobození* on April 13, 1930, proved to be true: “Such an expensive film focusing on such an uninteresting theme for different countries cannot be successful commercially.” This newspaper also added a pertinent remark that the film shouldn’t be viewed as a historical film: “It is an opera-like fantasy, placed in a contemporary frame.”

The most original opinion of the film wasn’t even published. It was expressed by the film aesthetician, Václav Tille, in his notes made during the screening. He didn’t praise anything (completely ignoring the soundtrack), using a number of very vulgar expressions. For example, the scene in which Drahomíra and Vratislav meet for the first time is described in the following way: “It looks like stupid historical stories from the beginning of the 19th century, made in a German way, combining folklore, false history, superstitions about the Golden

Age, and romantic dilettantism.” His opinions should be taken with a pinch of salt. For example, Josef Loskot playing Skeř was described as “a dreadful actor with a snub nose and a careless look, only able to grimace. He keeps walking around like all those people who, resembling singers in historical costume, don’t like changing. They all look like characters from cheap coloured pictures.” However, critics generally viewed Loskot’s performance positively. As mentioned above, Tille immersed simultaneously – in contrast with the other critics – deep into legends, revealing the weaknesses of the screenplay. In this way, he, for example, very aptly describes the 19th and 20th century interpretations which penetrated into the film: “The authors don’t understand that an empire can only be controlled by a certain order, not by disputes. This is an impact of chronicles, which focus not on regular everyday life, but on exceptions. But films should describe life, not exceptions! Wenceslas–Ludmila–Boleslav, a dispute which is utterly stupid

and incomprehensible, logically impossible. Even Wenceslas’s inclination to monkhood is criticized!” Tille’s criticism primarily focused on actors’ performances, photography, and poorly controlled crowd scenes which show details too much, and he labelled the film as “a moral pathology of the given period”. He also criticized the form of the chosen realism, wasn’t happy about the setting, and often added references to the film *Die Niebelungen* to the individual scenes.

Making the soundtrack

The silent film is closely connected with music, and, with regard to *Saint Wenceslas’s* length, music was absolutely indispensable. The music for the film was composed, bearing in mind that the film would be synchronized later. This caused that the artistic demands were proportionally higher. The difficult reconstruction of the preserved score and the costs of the recording or a live accompaniment during the cinema screening were probably the reasons why

the film was shown so few times. Moreover, when the film was screened, it was without the soundtrack, or just as samples with non-original music.

Let's focus on the synchronization, i.e. adding the soundtrack to the film. The synchronization was planned from the very beginning, but, due to a lack of funds, it was impossible to use it. We may even call it luck that the authors managed to finish the visual part in time. Therefore, the fact that the film was filmed as silent didn't mean that the members of the Society weren't "modern", but only due to lack of funds. At the beginning of 1930, there were only a few cinemas with sound in the republic, the absolute majority only being equipped to screen silent films. However, the most significant problem was undoubtedly the fact that the existing cinemas with sound weren't provided with the copy of the film including the recorded music at the time of the premiere.

The film was premiered as silent, accompanied by an orchestra, and it was supposed to have two premieres: the silent premiere in the spring of 1930 and the premiere with sound on September 28, 1930. On April 10, 1930, the newspaper *Lidové noviny* brought a somewhat confusing review whose author wrote about the "film with sound", but he meant the film whose music was composed for the later synchronization. The synchronization for the second premiere wasn't realized, and the cinema Národ, for example, screened the film on September 26, 1930, with the accompaniment of the extended orchestra led by B. Pouba. This is also confirmed by Kolár's memoirs, captured by Jan Wenig in September 1969. Yet, it is necessary to say that there were some preparations to record the soundtrack, which is also confirmed by the article from *Venkov* from November 14, 1930, saying, apart from other things, the following: "Instead of being happy that [the film] is being forgotten, the authors have prepared the synchronization

Autograph score (detail)



with the original music by O. Nedbal and Prof. Křička. The synchronization of the film is primarily intended for distribution abroad, but the film will apparently also be shown with sound in Prague.”

The first news concerning the soundtrack for the film *Saint Wenceslas* came from September 1929. The author of the article which appeared in *Národní listy* on September 30, 1929, calls for original music, hoping that “Millenium-Film would certainly find a good composer who would provide the film with impressive music, celebrating the Saint Wenceslas idea, and bringing the Duke Wenceslas to all people”.

At first glance, it seems that the film-makers underestimated the role of music. Viewed objectively, this wasn't the case. However, the composition could only begin when at least some parts of the film had been finished. The selection of interprets and authors had three phases. First, the authors considered using the recordings by the

Prague Teachers' Choral Society, the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, the Czech Quartet, and many other leading soloists. Probably due to lack of funds, it was decided to accept Munclinger's suggestion to create an original musical accompaniment. Munclinger himself proposed the composer František Škvor, and a composition format for a large and a small orchestra with piano. Hiring Škvor probably ceased to be relevant when Munclinger left the film crew. The task to ensure music was taken over by G.A. Svojsík, a member of the Millenium-Film committee. He turned to Josef Bohuslav Foerster to compose the soundtrack, but Foerster was too busy working on his own Saint Wenceslas cantata. Due to a lack of time, the Society didn't accept Foerster's idea to supervise the work composed by one of his disciples. Submitting the music by the end of February was the reason why Rudolf Karel, one of the three addressed composers, refused the offer. The remaining two – Jaroslav Křička and Oskar Nedbal – agreed to work together, one of them composing

the lyrical music, the second composing the dramatic parts. The remuneration for each of them was 50,000 Czechoslovak crowns, and they could work on the music from January to March.

The soundtrack for *Saint Wenceslas* was the first of Kříčka's work in this field. It is even more valuable that he published his feelings: "I had been asked twice to compose film music before. When I was asked for the third time, I actually composed it. Millenium-Film called me at the right time: after the opera premiere, I was just sketching a little Saint Wenceslas legend, based on the lyrics by my sister Pavla (we intended it for children, accompanied by a screening of static pictures – see Guy Ropartz's *Le Miracle de Saint Nicolas*). It was clear I could not refuse. One more note about the theme: I ask the enemies of everything sacred (immediately called "clerical") and patriotic (immediately called "bourgeois") to admit that Saint Wenceslas had at least one positive quality, namely that he was a Czech duke,

not an American entertainer. I thank God [...] – because we are certainly fed up with American singers. I was attracted by new experience, yet frightened by the short term. I was calmed to know that I co-operated with such a skilful and experienced master as Oskar Nedbal." (*Lidové noviny*, April 4, 1930)

Kříčka was later very successful in the field of film music, for example, with films such as *The Merry Wives* (Cech panen kutnohorských) and *Our Swaggerers* (Naši furianti). He is one of the most acclaimed composers of the pre-WWII era. For Oskar Nedbal, the film *Saint Wenceslas* was probably the only attempt to compose film music. He committed suicide at the end of 1930, and his operetta music for the film *Polish Blood* (Polská krev) from 1934 was adapted by Jára Beneš. Nedbal's memoirs are only available in the interview with a journalist, co-operating with the newspaper *Národní politika*, in Bratislava. On April 10, 1930, readers could read the

Boleslav with Wenceslas



following lines: “He had just said goodbye to the old year, still in a woeful mood, when he started composing the first notes of ‘Saint Wenceslas’. He wrote them with deep enthusiasm. He wrote them with love. The fact is that this composition is slowly starting to complete his life’s work – but we do not believe that he would stop writing. On the contrary, he still feels inside, as he penitently confessed, an abundance of power and energy for further creation. Thank god. But he admitted that when working on this composition, so strange, so technically complex – because this film music is composed almost according to geometrical laws, based on metres and seconds – he remembered his first composition steps.”

At the turn of January and February 1930, three newspapers brought an almost identical report about the process of composing the music for the film. Let’s include a quotation from *České slovo* from February 2, 1930: “The individual parts of the film, definitively edited by the director,

Dr. J.S. Kolář, and F. Horký, are shown by the composers in Elekta-Journal’s screening hall, playing the composed musical motifs with them. The exact accompaniment requires that certain parts of the film be screened many times, and a motif be composed so as to end at the exact moment when the last image of the film is shown on screen. There is a speedometer attached to the screening apparatus, enabling the projectionist to check the operation of the machine, and keep it in the same speed as during the screening in the sound studio. Although the progress is very laborious, the appropriate motifs for many parts of the film ‘Saint Wenceslas’ have been definitely composed.”

It is thanks to Křička that we know about how the two composers divided their work: “The following way was very tempting: one would do it, the other would take the money. But we refused this way (in the second half very pleasing to both of us), and divided the work based on acts. (The original

*Peace between the Czech and
German armies*



screenplay contained a prologue and five acts, later divided into nine parts.) Nedbal's absence and his foreign concert obligations meant that I was responsible for more work, particularly the whole Boleslav drama in the context. We agreed on the common motifs, and decided to use polythematic and varied character. The 'small' orchestra should have enough strings for the premiere. (If only! For I fear this orchestra! Oskar Nedbal would later come from Bratislava, waking me up at seven with the telephone fanfare of his tenor, which is as strong as Vlasta Burian's victorious bugle. Then we took concordant turns both at the piano and at the table.) The director, Dr. Kolár, measured my first scenes in metres (1m = 2 seconds and something) and I started on the train, on New Year's Eve. I admit – gently said – I lost my mind after about an hour's journey. I read the screenplay, looking at the second hand of my watch, counting bars in the appropriate speed, and – finally, I caught myself holding the libretto next to my ear, listening to its supposed ticking!"

Composing was complicated by the work with unedited material – therefore, it was necessary to change the music later. It seems that hectic work wasn't only connected with the film-makers, but with the composers too. Moreover, Křička was responsible for most work: "I had the completed rough sketch in January, 'composing' the music with the film (I even adapted the scenes not yet filmed in advance). I have been adjusting the sketch ever since, still having very much to do until the end of March! For example, the feast music. I have changed it four times, still not simple and appropriate enough. Simple, yet expressive! The assembly scenes are difficult, 'conflicts' where you see a black figure coming out of white music and vice versa. I said wryly: we must characterize, but not too much (to work in the opposite way too!)" Reading the following lines, we can see that Křička was probably at the end of his tether: "Why are you surprised I didn't sleep! If it hadn't been for the Podolí sanatorium and its hydrotherapy, I wouldn't have finished Wenceslas sane and in time.

I started sleeping again when I saw that I could catch up with the film-makers, or be even faster. In short, I learnt it. Everything needs practice. Some advice for followers:

1. You need ideas.
2. Do not regret to throw away the whole pages with your sketches.
3. Screen individual scenes even ten times until it works.”

In his fourth and fifth pieces of advice, Křička focuses on the concrete problems in *Saint Wenceslas*: “Choose – particularly for faster parts – more accurate ideas (stirred scenes swallow music: for instance, the Boleslav assembly can swallow the whole sonata exposition as well as the repeat as nothing). Repeat everything you can. Unfortunately, ‘Saint Wenceslas’ didn’t allow us to use this wise piece of advice very often. With regard to music, it is not rewarding at all. Music wasn’t thought about before the start. (Pipers during the feast – almost the only truly musical motif.) We cannot ‘afford anything’, we have to ‘hold back’, and an American composer, who is used to repeating one hit 12 times, adding the rest somehow, wouldn’t earn any

money here. Whatever music we make, it is certain that our American colleague would make 10 films with it. Sometimes, the best music is the music we don’t know about. Sometimes, the agreement is better than disagreement. (Think beyond the screen, not of the screen!) Sometimes, I enjoy charming anticipation more than slavish jumps.”

At the end of his memoirs, Křička focuses on the atmosphere of the co-operation with the director, Kolár: “I wish my followers in film music more peace and time, but I wish them especially such a musical and tactful director as Dr. Kolár, such professional, objective, and kind film-makers as the management of Elekta-Journal, and such a helpful projectionist as Mr. Vích Jr. ‘Boss’ – Dr. Kolár called me gently – ‘before you look at this picture properly, you might want to come up with another melody.’ I was a little angry that he was so careful and so in love with his own child, but, finally, I admitted that he was always right. Elekta-Journal! At the end, I was a permanent



*Wenceslas making peace with
the German Emperor Henry the Fowler*

fixture in that factory; I even had my working coat there, jumping from the piano and screening to the table and back. I was in dire straits. ... Whatever the result, I shall remember Elekta-Journal and its lively staff with love. I left part of my nerves there, but also my heart and love for the thing. Film! Sleep: Write! Quick! In time!”

Opinions of the film music

The opinions of the music in the reviews of the film premiere are notable for the fact that their episodic mentions of the music component are solely positive. The reviewers’ knowledge in this field was apparently low, which decreases their relevance. However, there is a valuable illustration of how the music was perceived by laymen. The Saint Wenceslas hymn wasn’t known to or, in the flow of the film music, wasn’t recognized by the *Filmový kurýr* reviewer (April 11, 1930): “The music by the composers J. Křička and Oskar Nedbal omitted the Saint Wenceslas hymn in the accompaniment, and, with its colourfulness and intensity, it was not in accordance with the story in the first parts.”

There were three reviews focusing solely on the film music after the premiere: one positive review by Hubert Doležil and O.Š. (probably Otakar Šourek or Otakar Šín) in *České slovo* and *Venkov* from April 6, 1930.

Both appreciated the original film music, O.Š. considered it, wrongly, as the very first Czech film music, and, probably when informed, he apologized for his mistake (*Venkov*, April 15, 1930). According to Doležil, the co-operation resulted in “the organic whole, meaningful and distinct, relevant to both the story and its spiritual atmosphere, always serious and elegant. It was natural to choose the predominant archaic tone, working with motifs of the Saint Wenceslas hymn, the hymn ‘Lord, Have Mercy on Us’ (Hospodine, pomiluj ny) and other sources, impressively floating in the instrumentation using more brasses than strings, but there are also parts with the most lively dramatic excitement of the modern musical expression and bright parts of the folk traces in the moments of general joy, where the music is significantly inspired by traditional Russian folk music.” Doležil also praised the co-ordination between the screen and the orchestra; he would only appreciate a full orchestra for the premiere.

O.Š. was less happy about the co-ordination between the film and the music, seeing the reason in the hectic completion of the film. However, “[t]he music in the whole film has a desirously noble and serious expression, it is discrete in colours, and, as a whole, it manages to display the ancient, romantic-legendary tone. It has numerous fine moments in the first half of the film, efficiently supporting the impression of the images, but it is the best in the second half in which, freeing itself more from the Saint Wenceslas hymn, it is more independent in ideas, forming an excellent complement to every important detail in both the story and mood. It is solely due to the nature of the subject that the music cannot revel in intensive contrasts of movements and colours, which Kříčka in particular would certainly like to see.”

A review published in *Lidové noviny* on April 10, 1930, sounds rather negative. Its author, B.V. (perhaps Boleslav Vomáčka or more probably Bedřich Václavěk),

saw the film on the previous day in the Brno cinema run by the Commercial and Industrial Employees' Co-operative, today's cinema Scala. B.V. became sceptical when reading Křička's above-mentioned memoirs, particularly the one about the "horse races" between the film-makers and composers. Questioning the role of Oskar Nedbal was unfair: neither Nedbal nor Křička had any experience with film music. Moreover, there were very few Czech composers with more experience of this type. It was, however, justified to criticize Nedbal's absence in Prague – this was the reason why "... it was only possible to compose patched music, without higher organic connections, artistic depth, and desirable ethical greatness, ever more because there could not be much of an agreement about the joint progress between the two composers, due to the fact that, as I read, Nedbal was busy working on his own artistic projects both here and abroad. ... The principle of the film with sound was interpreted very freely by the authors. The music does not display high artistic values

which would represent our musical culture in the world context with dignity." Yet, despite this criticism, the reviewer admits that it benefited from a similar musical expression of both composers. According to the reviewer, the distance between the composers and the time pressure results in the fact that the music, as a whole, doesn't display a very high quality, and it only deserves admiration for being composed with proper routine skill to a murderous deadline.

The last mention of the film music comes from the autumn of 1930 when the film was again screened in Prague. It was made by Křička (*Národní politika*, October 3, 1930), and it is a kind of public accusation: "The national feature film 'Saint Wenceslas' has been screened in several Prague cinemas this week. The film posters, in two cases, or at least the credits announced that the original music was composed by O. Nedbal and me. Having been informed of a contradiction, I discovered that the 'Národ' cinema indeed plays – with minor

modifications – the original film music. The other cinemas mostly played different compositions, more or less suitable (also various German romances, mixtures, etc.), everything titled as our original music. The rental office should have either supplied the music in time, or cut out the relevant credit announcing the original music. I protest, at least subsequently, – also for the absent Nedbal – against this trick on the audience, to our detriment, and against the striking disrespect for the work of Czech authors. It is enough that they have not received the agreed pay yet.”

There are two later reviews worth mentioning: one by A.M. Brousil, and the second by Antonín Matzner and Jiří Pilka. In his study for the collection *Music and Nation* (Hudba a národ, Prague, 1940), Brousil believed that it was Křička who composed the music, and Nedbal who only orchestrated it; he was convinced that the music for *Saint Wenceslas* improved the level of Czech film music. Matzner and Pilka

probably only knew the negative review in *Lidové noviny*, otherwise they couldn't write that the music hadn't received positive contemporary reviews (*Czech Film Music* [Česká filmová hudba], Prague, 2002).

Without any doubt, the most relevant review was written by Jan Kučera, the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra's conductor, who recorded, for the film's new release, its complete musical accompaniment in music studio A of Czech Television in May 2010. He refused the opinions that the music was patched, inorganic, superficial, and without ethical greatness. In contrast, he stressed the opposite of these statements. The music's solemn character can be felt from the first notes, displaying links to Smetana's heritage in Czech music. The music is, in the positive sense of the word, very descriptive, and this can be heard in the first bars of the Prologue, which is conceptualized as a free development of ideas in the same style as the suite – e.g. Wenceslas's birth is accompanied with a “lullaby”, the meeting with Byzantine

merchants is enriched with oriental exotic insertions, the Old Slavic scenes (e.g. the small lake scene, Bořivoj's christening, hair cutting) are combined with a very archaic music enhanced with a composition of the Old Slavic spiritual hymn "Lord, Have Mercy on Us". Although it was tempting to compose the music for certain parts in a polyphonic way, e.g. the Old Slavic scenes, or parts including the Saint Wenceslas hymn (the spiritual hymn "Saint Wenceslas"), and the spiritual hymn "Jesus Christ, the Large-Hearted Ruler" (Jezu Kriste, ščedý kněže), Křička and Nedbal didn't choose this technique. They stayed anchored in the expression of the late 19th century, keeping the archaic impression of the whole composition. The composers concentrated on the places and actions, rather than on the acting persons: the march accompanying Wenceslas's army doesn't sound aggressive and terrifying, but it gives the opposite impression of a desire for justice, dignity, and an effort to solve disputes in a peaceful way. The Saint Wenceslas hymn is first used

in the fights between Wenceslas and Radslav, and the composers used it several times later, e.g. when Wenceslas becomes a duke. The flow of music composed for the scene of marching German troops and the scene in which Ludmila is murdered at the Tetín castle is terrifying and dark. The musical characterization of the individual characters is primarily revealed at the moments when Wenceslas and Boleslav appear on screen together – the composers managed to fill the music with a permanent tension.

There are relatively numerous influences by other composers, probably intentional, present in the music – for example, the scene with the Czech messengers following a very ceremonial sounding accompaniment of the truce between the Czech and German armies displays Smetana's influence. The influence of Russian films on the visual aspect of the film was transferred into the music too, which is documented by the Russian tone in the scene with Radmila in a birch grove. The scene of the Quedlinburg assembly is very

rich in citations: first, there is a citation from Wagner's opera *Lohengrin*, and then there is the hymn "Lord, Have Mercy on Us", when St. Vitus's remains are handed over. The scene with a singing old man and the music accompanying the feast in Stará Boleslav are very impressive too. In order to simulate a storm after Wenceslas is murdered, a very unusual instrument, "macchina soffiante", was incorporated into the score. The end of the film is accompanied by a mighty Saint Wenceslas hymn.

The preparation of the score for the 2010 recording revealed a little secret: due to the lack of time, Křička gave the orchestration of some parts to his colleagues, namely to the composers Pavel Dědeček, Mottl (probably Alois Mottl), and Jaroslav Řídký. It should also be added that Křička later adapted and shortened the music for the film *Saint Wenceslas* as a suite for a smaller symphonic orchestra. This version has been played on the radio several times.

Conclusion

When reviewing the film *Saint Wenceslas*, it is not possible to focus only on what the audience can see within two hours. On the contrary, it is necessary to take into account the film's history. Primarily, it is the first and the only completed feature film about Saint Wenceslas. During the Protectorate period, the preparations of the film *Duke Wenceslas* (*Kníže Václav*) were started, but the film crew and actors did all they could to delay the preparations, and they were successful: due to "material shortage", the project was stopped two years later. It was the only project initiated by the Nazi occupants, aiming to present Wenceslas as a ruler who was the first to understand that Czechs were unable to rule themselves, and they needed help from the German Empire. This film is further documented in the preserved materials and newspaper articles. It is worth mentioning that one of the actors was supposed to be Zdeněk Štěpánek, Wenceslas was supposed to be played by Karel Höger, Drahomíra by Marie Glázrová, Ludmila by Jiřina Štěpničková, Boleslav by Vítězslav

Vejražka, the monk by Miloš Nedbal. The direction was given to František Čáp; the screenplay was written by František Čáp, Alžběta Birnbaumová, and Zdeněk Štěpánek, hired also as an actor.

The Saint Wenceslas theme as presented in film was dealt with by Petr Kopal in his study *Saint Wenceslas (1930) – The Peace with Germans Failed with the Audience* (Svatý Václav (1930) – mír s Němci u diváků propadl; magazine *Cinepur* from October 9, 2009), but there are no other films with Wenceslas as a central character. The oldest modern film version is a two-part television film, *Pilgrimage of Kings* (Poutí králů), from 1982. It is a film adaptation of three plays by Jaroslav Vrchlický: *Drahomíra, Brothers* (Bratři), and *Dukes* (Knížata). The director Václav Hudeček chose Petr Svojtka for the role Wenceslas, Jiří Štěpnička for the role of Boleslav, Jana Hlaváčová for the role of Drahomíra, and Dana Medřická for the role of Ludmila. In 1995, František Filip turned J.K. Tyl's play, *Bloody Christening* (Krvavé

křtiny), into a film, featuring Lukáš Vaculík. In 1994, the film *Good King Wenceslas*, directed by Michael Tuchner, was released. Several documentaries about the Saint Wenceslas tradition were made by Czech Television. The last documentary is a short film, *Saint Wenceslas – Saint, Duke, Legend* (Svatý Václav – světec, kníže, legenda), directed by Martin Suchánek, which was created for the renewed premiere of the film *Saint Wenceslas* in 2010. Containing parts of the film *Saint Wenceslas*, the documentary captures the preparations of the renewed premiere, generally focusing on the perception of the Saint Wenceslas tradition at present, i.e. at the beginning of its second millennium.

The film *Saint Wenceslas* from the turn of 1929/1930 was in many aspects innovative, because Czech cinematography before 1929 had very little experience with historical films. The big mistake was the loss of sound judgment concerning the costs (we would be more benevolent if the high costs were

visible in the film). Both the film crew and the commissioner of the film apparently succumbed to the desire to make a film of unprecedented parameters. They wanted to realize it at all costs, i.e. even without the secured funding, at the time when films with sound were being introduced, and after the main event for which it was actually planned. This is what led it into a blind alley – haste and the lack of a detached view are present everywhere. However, the film was a good experience for Czech actors, providing them with direct contact with outstanding contemporary European actors

The “fight for the film” has been described on many pages in the previous chapters. Although conceptualized in Masaryk’s sense of the Saint Wenceslas tradition, and enriched by the romantic plot, i.e. a certain sop to the audience, the film was criticized before it was even finished – but also after the premiere – for being clerical and reactionary. The authors attempted to capture more aspects of the Saint Wenceslas

tradition than the film was able to bear. It couldn’t be a culturally-educational pseudo-documentary and an adventurous film able to compete with foreign productions at the same time. It was impossible to combine the theme of Czech-German relations with the primarily anti-German atmosphere of the First Republic in a satisfying way. The combination of the romantic motif with the medieval legends wasn’t well handled either, and there are more similar parts in the film.

The expectations connected with film distribution abroad were most frequently mentioned by the *České slovo* editor J.V. Šmejkal, who had numerous contacts abroad. It was planned to distribute the film in England, Germany, Poland, France, Slavic states in the south, Italy, and expatriate communities in North and South America. There were negotiations with the French company Omega, the English company Astra National Film Limited London, the Italian state company L.U.C.E. Millenium-Film’s archive materials contain mentions of help

from the US consulate, which suggested co-operation in selling the film to the USA. It appears that the film never left the republic, which foiled the planned return of 2 million Czechoslovak crowns. When screened in Czechoslovakia, the film was unsuccessful, not because of its own weaknesses, but owing to a lack of interest from the general public, tired of the Saint Wenceslas subject. One weakness of the film was aptly described by *Národní osvobození* on April 6, 1930: “The aim was not to make a good film, but to embody a part of Czech history, the film technology only being a means to achieve it.” The film *Saint Wenceslas* was occasionally screened after 1948, primarily to demonstrate the clerical-bourgeois elements within Czech cinematography. It can be partly viewed as “the last chance” – both for Kolár, who became an actor of smaller parts, and later an archivist in the Czechoslovak Film Archive, and the Saint Wenceslas subject in film.

In what other respects is the film innovative? It was, for example, the first film to obtain

state financial support. Furthermore, it brought new ideas into scenic design: it enjoyed an unrivalled position in Europe, primarily by building castles. What should also be mentioned is its social dimension. Its high costs were often criticized, but there were also mentions that the production provided many jobs. Let’s include several figures – there were, on average, 130 people working on the buildings at the stadium from October 1929, approximately 50 assistants (e.g. mechanics, lighting technicians), and 40 needlewomen sewing clothes for the protagonists.

The film *Saint Wenceslas* can be, as the Saint Wenceslas tradition, discussed endlessly. However, both supporters and critics agree on one point: the translation of Saint Wenceslas’s life into film remains to be a difficult, thankless, and maybe even unsolvable challenge for Czech cinematography.

Facts and technical data concerning the film Saint Wenceslas

Created by / Libretto: Jan Stanislav Kolár, Josef Munclinger

Screenplay: Jan Stanislav Kolár, Josef Munclinger, František Horký

Director: Jan Stanislav Kolár, Josef Munclinger

Technical supervision: Jindřich Brichta

Cinematography: Karel Kopřiva, Jan Stallich, Otto Heller, Václav Vích, Jindřich Brichta

Architects: Bohumil Heš (realization), Ludvík Hradský (designs)

Artist: J. M. Gottlieb

Costumes: František Kysela

Original Soundtrack: Oskar Nedbal, Jaroslav Kříčka

Made by Elektajournal (Karel Pečený, František Horký) in 1929 for Milenium-Film Praha

Distribution: Gongfilm

Premiere on April 4, 1930

The film was reconstructed in 1971 by František Balšán, under the direct supervision of the director, Jan Stanislav Kolár.

Cast

Jindřich Edl _____ chief of the Czechs
Theodor Pištěk _____ Košvan, high priest from pagan times
Bohumil Heš _____ Duke Svatopluk
Jan Stanislav Kolár _____ Bořivoj, Duke of Bohemia
Josef Rovenský _____ Barbar, prisoner in Velehrad
Gustav Svojsík _____ Saint Methodius
Zdeněk Štěpánek _____ Saint Wenceslas
Jan W. Speerger _____ Boleslav, brother to Wenceslas
Dagny Servaes _____ Drahomíra, mother to Wenceslas
Vera Baranovskaja _____ Ludmila, grandmother to Wenceslas
Josef Loskot _____ Thane Skeř
Máňa Ženíšková _____ Radmila, daughter to Skeř
Jiří Steimar _____ Duke Vratislav, father to Wenceslas
Anita Janová _____ Soběslava
Emil Focht _____ Podiven, castle warden
Jindřich Lhoták _____ Priest of Boleslav
Josef Novák _____ Thane Hněvsa
Jan Marek _____ Česta
Vladimír Majer _____ Tyra

Václav Vydra, Sr. _____ Henry I, King of Germany
Karel Schleichert _____ Duke Arnulf
Raymond Guérin _____ Gero, nephew to Henry I
Otto Zahrádka _____ Radslav, Duke of Zlič
Vladimír Slavínský _____ Thane Vojemír
Jaroslav Vojta _____ Bishop of Regensburg
Alois Charvát _____ fortune-teller
Jaro Hykman _____ groom from Tetín
Emil Dlesk _____ Gomon, murderer at Tetín
Přemysl Pražský _____ Tuna, murderer at Tetín
Eduard Šimáček _____ beggar
Jaroslav Marvan _____ Slavic duke
Věra Hladká _____ a member of Ludmila's entourage
Růžena Gottliebová _____ a member of Ludmila's entourage
Ludmila Dostálová _____ a member of Ludmila's entourage
Nája Reti _____ Přibyslava (sister to Wenceslas), a member of Ludmila's entourage
F.X. Mlejnek _____ a member of Boleslav's entourage
Fred Bulín _____ thane

Saint Wenceslas DVD

The project of providing the film with the soundtrack, as well as the film's renewed premiere on September 28, 2010, was conducted in collaboration with

The Office of the Government of the Czech Republic

Czech Radio

Czech Television

The National Film Archive

Made in co-operation with: Radim Kolek, Martin Suchánek, Viktor Velek
and Lucie Wittlichová

Score reconstruction and adaptation _____ Jan Kučera
Concert Master _____ Vlastimil Koblre
Conductor _____ Jan Kučera
Music Director _____ Milan Puklický
Sound Director _____ Karel Fisl
Music Copyist _____ Lívía Posádková Krátká
Graphic Design _____ Matouš Havránek

Music recorded by the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra at the Czech Television music studio on May 4–6, 2010.



4:3

titulky pro
neslyšící



Saint Wenceslas – Saint, Duke, Legend DVD

Written by _____ Martin Suchánek and Viktor Velek
Directed by _____ Martin Suchánek
Cinematography by _____ Richard Špūr
Edited by _____ Filip Issa
Produced by _____ Kateřina Špůrová
Sound Mixer _____ Tomáš Bělohradský
Translated by _____ Radek Blaheta
Graphic Design _____ Matouš Havránek

Special thanks to

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus, the Collegiate Chapter of St. Cosmas and Damian in Stará Boleslav, Barrandov Studio, the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, the Office of the President of the Republic, the National Archive

Archive materials kindly provided by

The National Museum Library, Uniqa pojišťovna, the Sládeček Museum of Local History in Kladno, the National Museum, the National Library, the National Gallery, the National Film Archive, the Roman Catholic Parish in Roztoky, The Museum of Central Bohemia in Roztoky



THE FIRST CZECHOSLOVAK HISTORICAL EPIC FILM

Author of the text: Viktor Velek

Photographs kindly provided by the National Film Archive, the Czech Museum of Music, the National Theatre Archive, the National Museum Archive, the National Museum Library, the Sládeček Museum of Local History in Kladno

Editor: Lucie Wittlichová

Translation: Radek Blaheta

Proofreading: Leigh Mitchell

Graphic design and typesetting: Fineart Film & Design

1st edition

Published by © The Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2010

ISBN 978-80-7440-031-5



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