This sketch of art history in the Czech and Slovak Republics starts by following the trajectory of newcomers to the field. Entering the system by enrolling for art history at university, about three quarters of the students will be women, but women remain rare amongst those who succeed in acquiring tenured and senior positions. Young people attending university will have been born during the last years of what was Czechoslovakia between 1918 and 1992 (with a hiatus during the war years of 1939–1945). While educated Slovaks can read and understand Czech fairly well, young Czechs will have much more difficulty in understanding Slovak. Since the two nations split into separate states in 1993, mutual language competence has declined—a far cry from the 1920s, when the idea of a single Czechoslovak nation served as the foundation of the state created on the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The historical memories of Czechs and Slovaks emerged from quite different historical backgrounds. Historically, Slovakia was part of Hungary, while the land that eventually became the Czech Republic had a long history as an important kingdom within the Holy Roman Empire, consisting of Bohemia, Moravia and extensive regions of Silesia and Lusatia (now parts of Poland and Germany) from the tenth until the eighteenth century. These facts of history, together with the mixed ethnic character of both parts of Czechoslovakia, informed their art-historical traditions. The history of art in Slovakia was subsumed within that of Hungary up to 1918, when a completely new system of art-historical institutions was programmatically designed and implemented by the Czechs, who assumed the role of ‘elder brother’ in the common state. Their own art-historical traditions and institutions, having their beginnings in the middle of the nineteenth century, have been strongly influenced by the presence—and,

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1 I would like to express my thanks to Dušan Buran (Bratislava) for the help with the Slovak facts and perspective and to Tim Juckes (London and Vienna) for advice on language.
after 1945, enforced absence—of a German-speaking intellectual and cultural environment.²

Czech or Slovak students of art history normally do not go far from home. Art history is taught at universities, art academies and polytechnics, although only the major universities (Prague, Brno and Olomouc; Bratislava and Trnava) have post-graduate programmes and the right to appoint new professors. It is also taught in new regional universities, established in the 1990s, in Ostrava, Opava, Ústí nad Labem and České Budějovice. In the Czech Republic, about 2,000 young people apply each year to study art history, with fewer than 25% accepted for Bachelor’s studies; approximately 100 students then continue on to undertake Master’s degrees. In Slovakia, the numbers are close to fifty students accepted every year for Bachelor’s study, and twenty for Master’s. Of the universities, only Charles University in Prague predates the 1920s and, accordingly, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, art history was developed only there. The university, founded in 1348, split into separate Czech- and German-speaking institutions in 1882. Art history was first taught in 1846 by Professor Johann E. Wocel (1802–1871) in the Department of Archaeology, and the first Chair of Art History was given to Alfred Woltmann (1841–1880) in 1874, Prague having one of the first seven chairs in the discipline in German-speaking countries before 1880.³ Wocel sided with the Czech national emancipation movement, while Woltmann, a co-founder of the first professional art-historical journal, *Reperatorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, was a decided German nationalist. His public lecture on ‘German art in Prague’ provoked street riots, and his claim that the Slavic names of supposed Czech medieval painters were fabrications, initiated a long-running topic in Czech art history, namely the national, ethnic or even racial origins of local artists.

Attention to the issue of nationality also provides a means of tracking changes in predominant methodologies. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the topic was pursued in terms of linguistic analyses of individual personal names recorded in written sources. When students

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³ Johann E. Wocel, *Grundzüge der böhmischen Altertumskunde* (Prague, 1845).