

THE *CHRONICLE OF THE SO-CALLED DALIMIL* AND ITS CONCEPT OF CZECH IDENTITY

Pavλίna Rychterová*

The *Chronicle of the So-Called Dalimil* (further: *Dalimil Chronicle*), written in verse, is the first medieval historiographical work written in the Czech language. It was composed by an unknown author¹ between 1308 and 1314. There are fourteen manuscripts and fragments of the chronicle extant. As the relations between these are very complicated, the editors of the critical edition of the work published in 1988 decided to forgo providing a *stemma codicum*.² The history of the oldest extant copies of the work has many lacunae. For example, the provenance of an important manuscript from the middle of the fourteenth century, today preserved in the library of Trinity

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¹ The question of the author of the anonymously transmitted chronicle has been discussed in modern Czech historiography and literary studies from the nineteenth century onwards. The chronicle was linked to the hypothetical figure of the canon Dalimil of Mezeříčt by the early modern chronicler Václav Hájek of Libočan. Although contemporary research regards this person as an invention of Hájek, the title of the work as *Chronicle of the So-Called Dalimil* (of Mezeříčt) prevailed. See on this Daňhelka, *Die altschechische Reimchronik des sogenannten Dalimil*, pp. 7–37, here p. 13. For the sake of readability, the work will be referred to simply as the *Dalimil Chronicle* in this article.

² See the description of the extant manuscripts and an analysis of their respective texts of

Pavλίna Rychterová, vice-head of division Historical Identity Research, Institute for Medieval Research, Austrian Academy of Science, works on late medieval vernacular theologies, Central European lay religiosities, and multilingual catechetical texts.

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College in Cambridge, is completely unknown,³ as well as the provenance of the equally important manuscript from the end of the fourteenth century, now in the Austrian National Library in Vienna. According to the editors, this manuscript contains the text closest to the hypothetical authorial version of the work.⁴ The chronicle is extant in two clearly distinguishable redactions transmitted in, respectively, four and three complete or almost complete copies. The second redaction contains several additions and revisions of the original text mirroring the sociopolitical situation in Bohemia in the second third of the fifteenth century, shortly after the end of the Hussite Wars and during the struggle for the future political and ideological orientation of the Bohemian kingdom.⁵ The following analysis will concentrate on the first redaction of the work. The basis for the analysis is the reconstructed hypothetical authorial version of the text, which is the result of critical scrutiny of the extant material presented in the critical edition of the work.

In the authorial preface of this reconstructed original version, the text is explicitly declared as a historiographical work concerning the land of Bohemia and its *gens*:⁶

Many [people] look for fame,⁷ and in this they act well and prudently. But they do neglect their own land, and with this they charge their own *gens* with simple-mindedness. If they expected honour and glory from them, they would have books about their own land, and they would learn from them all about their own *gens* and where they came from. I always look for such books and always ask that some wise [person] take on the task of bringing together all Czech deeds. I have asked till now, until I finally realized that nobody wants to do it, and therefore I have to take on this task myself.⁸

the chronicle in *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 14–44.

³ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 29–30.

⁴ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, p. 32.

⁵ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, p. 36.

⁶ In some extant copies it is called ‘chronicle’ or ‘Czech chronicle’, in other copies no title is transmitted. See *Staročeská kronika*, III, ed. by Bláhová, p. 162.

⁷ Unfortunately, this is only one of two possibilities of how to translate the medieval Czech word *pověst*, which means also ‘story’ or ‘tale’. An alternative meaning of the respective passage could thus be: ‘Many people look for tales to read, and that is good and prudent, but they neglect their own land, etc.’. Nevertheless, in this case *pověst* has traditionally been translated as ‘fame’. It was already interpreted in this way by the authors of the medieval German translations of the work. See on this Lehár, *Nejstarší česká epika*, p. 74.

⁸ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 85–88.

The author then enumerates the sources on which he has relied. He complains that there is no historiographical work on his topic (the history of Bohemia and of its *gens*) available that would contain an overall narrative up to his own time (the second decade of the fourteenth century) because the ‘scribes’ were lazy, distracted by particular interests, and unable to maintain the balance of their narratives.⁹ He nevertheless

found a chronicle owned by an old priest in Stará Boleslav, better than all the others; this [chronicle] will tell me about the fights of the homeland.¹⁰ It recounts a lot that is unknown. If you read the chronicle of Břevnov or of Prague, you may be sure that it tells less although it has more words. The [chronicle] of Opatovice errs often although it tells more, but it deceives you. The [chronicle] of Vyšhrad I liked least. The best one was in Boleslav. You all [readers] should know that I will follow this [chronicle from Boleslav]. [...] I aim at skipping any empty talk but I will preserve the sense, so that everybody may learn and strive more for [his] own language.¹¹

The chronicle in the possession of ‘a certain priest in Stará Boleslav’ very probably refers to the *Chronica Boemorum* written in the first half of the twelfth century by Cosmas of Prague.¹² Very interesting in this respect is the author’s statement about how he intends to approach his chronicle — to leave out any ‘empty talk’ but to preserve the ‘sense’, in order to animate the reader to love his ‘language’. It is probable that the word for ‘language’ is used here in the sense of both ‘language’ and ‘people speaking the same language’. The two meanings of

⁹ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 89–90.

¹⁰ The Czech word here is *vlastiny*. This could be translated as ‘the fights of Vlasta’ (the name of the chieftain of Bohemian Amazons, described in the chapters 9–16 of the chronicle, see below, pp. 181–82) or as ‘homeland’. The critical edition chooses the interpretation ‘homeland’, although a considerable number of extant copies use the personal name ‘Vlasta’. See Pasáčková and Spěváčková, *Staročeská kronika tak řečeného Dalimila*, I, 339. Interesting in this respect is the choice of the proper name ‘Vlasta’ for the chieftain of the Amazons. The author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* invented this figure as well as her name. It is very probably intentionally homonymous with the noun *vlast* (‘homeland’). *Vlasta* is stylized in the chronicle as the (self-declared) successor of Libuše, who indeed is the personification of the homeland (see below, p. 179). The extant copies of the chronicle prove that these passages (as well as many others) were open to different readings and interpretations.

¹¹ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 90–94.

¹² See Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz. Attempts to identify the sources that the author enumerates in his preface have kept scholars busy from the beginnings of modern historical research onwards. For a summary of different opinions on that matter see *Staročeská kronika*, III, ed. by Bláhová, pp. 170–74.

the word *jazyk* can sometimes be distinguished from each other only by their semantic context. The use of *jazyk* and its two meanings point to a concept of *gens* and its identity based on the shared language of the Czech native speakers.¹³

Following his declared purpose, the *Chronica Boemorum* must have appeared to the author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* as the most suitable source for his work. It contains the only Bohemian *origo gentis* narrative available in Bohemia at the time the *Dalimil Chronicle* was written and thus provided the material that the author wanted. Nevertheless, he did not simply translate the text of Cosmas's chronicle; instead, he significantly extended and reinterpreted the individual stories in it, so that they would better fit his concept. He also left out many passages of the *Chronica Boemorum*, and by no means only those containing 'empty talk'.

Strategies of Identification I: Language, gens, and Land

The author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* changed Cosmas's narrative already at the very beginning.¹⁴ In the chapter 'On the Babylonian Tower and the Seventy Languages/Peoples', he extended the biblical story on the building of the Tower of Babel and changed Cosmas's geographical focus. The latter starts with the description of the area 'called Germania', part of which is a 'land surrounded by the mountains', completely empty and waste. Then 'a man came into this land,

¹³ Besides 'language' and 'people talking in the same language', the word *jazyk* also has several other meanings in medieval Czech, but only these two are relevant in the *Dalimil Chronicle* and for its interpretation. Both meanings and their cohabitation represent a grave problem for the interpretation of the text. Czech research usually translates the word *jazyk* in the chronicle as 'nation'. See on this Pečírková, 'Staročeská synonyma jazyk a národ', pp. 126–30, and especially Graus, *Nationenbildung*, p. 174: 'bei Dalimil ist der *jazyk český* [...] ein Zentralbegriff, allerdings erscheint die Bezeichnung überwiegend im Sinn von "böhmischer Nation"'. Cf. Pynsent, 'Die Dalimil Chronik als polymythischer Text', pp. 199–231. The use of the word *jazyk* in the chronicle was questioned by Toman, 'The Question of Linguistic Nationalism in Medieval Bohemia', pp. 349–56. According to Toman, *jazyk* is always used in the chronicle in the sense of 'tribe', whereas the word *řeč* ('speech') means 'language'. Nevertheless, no such division is possible. In most cases it is necessary to take both meanings of the word *jazyk* into account, and it is impossible to distinguish between them clearly. The translation as *národ* — 'nation' does not respect the ambivalent character of the word and its semantic context.

¹⁴ In the chronicle's early printed edition of 1620 (the so-called edition of Pavel Ješín from Bezděží) the work is divided into 106 chapters. This division was subsequently taken over by most researchers. The authors of the critical edition of the work, however, were able to reconstruct a division into 103 chapters in the text's original version. See *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 12–13. I will follow their division here.

be it anybody, unknown with which retinue', who was pleased and settled there. This unknown man, called 'chieftain' by Cosmas and *Bohemus* by his people, speaks to his entourage with the words God spoke to Moses, promising a land to his people. Then he addresses the land that now has to nourish his people in exchange for being acknowledged by them as the land promised to them by God: 'Hail, destined land, sought by us through countless prayers, empty of people since the time of the Flood, keep us unhurt and multiply our offspring from generation to generation as memorials of mankind'.¹⁵ In the *Dalimil Chronicle* the respective passage has a completely different tenor. The author starts with the Babylonian confusion of languages, mentioned only very briefly by Cosmas, and stresses that all the men punished by God with the confusion of languages fled from the unfinished tower. Each of them then chose a land that was to bear their names until the present:

God did not like their work and he confused their languages so that brother did not understand brother, but each of them had his own language. They ceased their work, left each other and wandered away. Each of them established his homeland and from them arose various morals [and customs]. They acquired these lands [made them their own] as these lands each bear their own name.¹⁶

This passage is crucial for the concept of the relationship between land, people, and language that the author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* held. All these three elements are inextricably intertwined, so that, depending on the situation and context, one could stand in for the other(s). The same word, *jazyk*, represents the language and the people, and may also refer to the land, as the author explains further:

Among others the Serbians settled at the sea where the Greeks live. They proliferated till [they reached] Rome. In the Serbian *jazyk* [in the sense of people speaking the same language] a *land* is located which bears the name *Croatians*.¹⁷

The word *Charváti/y* is the plural of *Charvat* (a name of a person: 'Croatian'). The land bears then the name of the *gens* 'the Croatians'.¹⁸ That means that

¹⁵ Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz, p. 7: 'Salve terra fatalis, mille votis quesita nobis olim diluvia tempore viduata homine nunc quasi monumenta hominum nos conserva incolomes et multiplices nostrum sobolem et progenie in progenies.' For the English translation of the passages from Cosmas's chronicle see Cosmas of Prague, *Chronica Boemorum*, ed. by Bak and Rychterová, here p. 15.

¹⁶ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 102–04.

¹⁷ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 104–07.

¹⁸ The only evidence for this specific form of the country name is the quoted passage

the Croatian land is 'in' a people (the Serbians), and its name is that of a people (the Croatians). Then, one man in this land (*země* — here an unambiguous term was chosen) committed a murder and thus lost his right to his land. The author drew here on Moses who had to leave the land after committing murder¹⁹ and reinforced thus the parallel between Moses and forefather Czech outlined by Cosmas of Prague. Having no land (and expelled from his people and language), he wandered through forests with a small entourage given him by his former family until they came to a mountain and spent the night at its foot. This is a moment of great crisis; the homeless group laments its fate, and its leader expresses his regrets:

Alas of my deed, and that you are so much in need because of me, and your home are only thick forests.²⁰ And Czech said to his group: Let's go under this mountain. The children and the livestock may rest there and hopefully we will be freed from *túha*.²¹

The chieftain keeps vigil alone on the top of the mountain, and in the morning he comes back to his people as a new Moses, the leader of the people seeking the Promised Land, and the lawgiver in the desert: 'It was as it would be in the desert, they looked at the land and nothing hindered their view'.²² The emphatic comparison of the forefather Czech with Moses points to the approach the author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* pursued. Cosmas borrowed from the Bible only the speech on the Promised Land pronounced by God to Moses. Furthermore, he described the people explicitly as following no law. Cosmas portrayed an idyllic but unmistakably lawless community, destroyed by the greed for personal property — the law is implicitly bound to the fall of man. The author of the *Dalimil Chronicle*, by contrast, used the same characteristics

from the *Dalimil Chronicle*. In medieval Czech, there was also another word for 'Croatia' — *Charvacie* (see <<https://vokabular.ujc.cas.cz/hledani.aspx>> [accessed on 24 February 2019]).

¹⁹ Exodus 2.11–15.

²⁰ In Czech medieval texts, legends about 'forests' often replace the 'deserts' of their Latin models. See on this Rychterová and Sichálek, 'Lost and Found in Translation', pp. 321–42.

²¹ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 109–10. Note the word *túha* — 'worry' (also 'sadness', 'longing for home': all these meanings are expressed by the word). Interestingly, the same phrase is found in the prologue where the goal of the chronicle is made explicit: 'to free [the reader] from his longing ("worry", "sadness") by learning from this chronicle to care more for his language/people'. Both phrases are allusions to Proverbs 1.5 — incidentally, the only biblical quotation in the whole chronicle. That means the 'sadness' ('worry', 'longing') is in both cases connected to the language/people.

²² *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 112–13.

to describe an ideal, more or less communist social order of the first Czechs with their own laws. He simply skipped the caesura that Cosmas made in his story between the lawless idyll and the beginnings of the law rooted in human egoism and greed:

These people were all of them true [truthful, loyal], they had every property in common; if anybody was lacking anything, he could use somebody else's as his own. They had one bad habit — they did not [have the institution of] matrimony. [...] They did not have any judges because they did not steal. If there was any strife, the oldest one had to give counsel to provide justice and to recompense the damage to the rightful one. Many years have passed since this custom was held by this people.²³

In the narrative of the *Dalimil Chronicle* already the first 'Czechs' are an accomplished community — virtuous, generous, honouring their own laws and customs. The reign of the chieftain Krok and his daughters discussed in the following chapter of the chronicle is therefore to be regarded as an integral part of this epoch, not as a next step on the way from the lawless idyll to a society structured by the logic of basically violent authority and power, as it is portrayed in Cosmas's *Chronica Boemorum*.²⁴

The next section of Cosmas's narrative reinterpreted by the author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* is the story about the origin of princely rule in Bohemia. The author very briefly renders Cosmas's narrative of Krok and his three daughters, Kazi, Teta, and Libuše, and proceeds directly to the story of the judgement of Libuše, on two landowners who, unsatisfied with the decision of a female ruler demand a masculine rule wherefore the princess assigns Přemysl the Ploughman, the founder of the Přemyslid dynasty, as ruler. Here, Dalimil introduced many changes, some of them quite amusing — as, for example, the ribald expression Cosmas put in mouth of one of the quarrelling landowners: 'Femina rimosa virilia iudicia mente tractat dolosa' (loose-tongued woman with

²³ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 114–17.

²⁴ The story of the forefather Czech has been the focus of Czech national historiography from its beginnings. A summary of individual opinions may be found in the essay of Třeštík, *Mýty kmene Čechů (7.–10. Století)*, pp. 59–61. Třeštík makes many important observations in his essay, especially concerning the picture of the social order of Czech's community drawn by Cosmas and Dalimil, respectively, and the differences between their narratives. His conclusion was nevertheless very speculative: according to him, the narrative of Dalimil contains the 'original' version of the 'myth of the arrival of Czech and his people', which was deliberately changed and abridged by Cosmas because it did not fit his concept. See *ibid.*, pp. 63–72. See also the short résumé of older research in Mühle, *Die Slawen*, p. 384. Mühle emphasizes Dalimil's 'fanatischen Deutschenhass', a judgement which ignores the complexity of the narrative.

her wily mind passes judgements that belong to men),²⁵ which was rendered in the *Dalimil Chronicle* as follows: 'the woman may better stitch than judge over men';²⁶ an expression which is different but no less ribald.

Libuše answers the offending words by considering the necessity of male rule, because obedience can only exist where fear is. In the Cosmas's *Chronica Boemorum*, Libuše communicates this to the representatives of the community of the Czechs, obviously understood as consisting of all the male landowners. Then she performs some magic together with her sisters, which reveals the name and occupation of the future ruler. In Dalimil's narrative, Libuše summons the general gathering and complains about the insult she received from the quarrelling landowners. The yeomen then laugh about her, and unanimously insist on male rule and order. They ask Libuše to use her prophetic abilities and tell them from which land they should take the prince, 'because we do not have a suitable [man] in our own [land]'.²⁷ In contrast to Cosmas's narrative, then, it is the assembled male Czechs who take the initiative, not the prophetess herself. The last sentence, which also differs from Cosmas, lays the ground for the central message of the chronicle in the following chapter, describing the speech of Libuše. At first, the prophetess praises the community and its importance for each individual member of it — only a community is able to defend its members, while anyone deprived of his community cannot avoid harm. In the next step the prophetess warns the assembly against male rule. Here Cosmas's text is summed up only briefly — it obviously did not fit the basic concept of the *Dalimil Chronicle*. In the respective passage in Cosmas's work, the ruler is depicted as the sole owner of the land — he may give or take it, he may turn all his subjects into servants, it depends only on his will. This stands in direct contrast with the concept of the *Dalimil Chronicle*, where people sharing a particular language are the owners of the land. The last part of Libuše's speech in the *Dalimil Chronicle* (not present in Cosmas's narrative) consists of a very grave warning against a foreign ruler:

If a foreigner will rule over you, your language [in the sense of language and people] will not be able to last long. Everybody is sad under foreigners, and a sad [man] will find consolation among his acquaintances. Everybody rules through his friends, and nobody who is wise takes council with foreigners. He [the foreign ruler] will take people of his language with him, he will always look to do you harm, he will

²⁵ Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz, p. 12. Cf. Cosmas of Prague, *Chronica Bohemorum*, ed. by Bak and Rychterová, p. 23.

²⁶ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, p. 122.

²⁷ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, p. 128.

always consider your people guilty and will give your villages to his own [people]. You should comb your own [heads] also if they are scabby, do not let a foreigner into your own Czech head! A womanly head teaches you this: where one [and/or joint] language is, there is glory.²⁸

Remarkably, this warning comes as an answer to the request of the yeomen. They are ready to accept a foreign ruler although they are the owners of the land. Only the intervention of Libuše prevents this — apparently disastrous — step. In this respect, the role of Libuše has to be reconsidered. In the *Dalimil Chronicle*, she is not the ruler, but rather the personification of the unity between land and people, which is far removed from her role in the Cosmas's *Chronica Boemorum*.²⁹ The warning against foreign rule recurs repeatedly in the *Dalimil Chronicle*, most emphatically at the very end of the chronicle, in the chapter concerning the enthronement of John of Luxembourg in 1310. He, of course, was just the foreigner Libuše had warned the community of Czechs against. Thus the last verses of the chronicle run as follows:

Teach him, Lord, that he loves his land lords and that he has Czech lords in his council. With them he may reach honour, without them he cannot satisfy the land. Either he will trust his land lords or honourably leave the land. I advise the lords to be wise and make peace wherever they can. It is better to make peace in your land than to let your enemies judge over you. [...] I advise you to use your reason, do not let foreigners into the land [...] I advise you, if any election comes upon you, do avoid to go through the [border] forest to seek for crooked wood. What I mean herewith you should know: choose from your own language, let the foreigner be. Remember what Libuše taught who never erred in her speech.³⁰

The self-referentiality of the community is here emphasized again as the only means to retain stability and integrity. But there is one key obstacle that keeps this concept from working: although the community of the yeomen who share the Czech language is the owner of the land, it does not rule over it. The yeomen ask for a foreign ruler, but they get a peasant, a man completely outside their communicative and identification networks — a foreigner indeed. He

²⁸ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 133–35.

²⁹ This implicit role of Libuše in the *Dalimil Chronicle* led Treščík to conclude that it contained the original version of the 'Přemyslid myth', telling the story of the marriage between ruler and the land. But I am convinced that the *Dalimil Chronicle's* concept of Libuše's role is perfectly understandable from the author's own sociopolitical setting as a creative rewriting of Cosmas's story. It does not need to be a pre-Christian, ancient myth in the sense of George Dumézil, for which Treščík argues.

³⁰ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 543–47.

does not own the land in the sense the yeomen do, he is rather a part of it as Libuše is. The identification narrative of Cosmas is reinforced effectively by the author of the *Dalimil Chronicle*.

Strategies of Identification II: The Ruler

The first meeting of the envoys (Libuše's envoys in Cosmas's version, the yeomen themselves in the version of Dalimil) with their future ruler, the ploughman Přemysl, proceeds in both chronicles with significant differences. Some of them can simply be regarded as Dalimil's updating the stories to fit with events in his own time.³¹ Other changes point to the changed overall concept of Czech identity and past. For instance, in the version of Cosmas, the envoys address Přemysl with a formal speech:

Hail, o duke, hail, with great, most reverend praise! Dismiss the oxen, change clothes, and mount the horse! [...] Our lady Libuše and all the people command you to come at once and accept the realm destined for you and your offspring. All that we have and we ourselves are in thy hands. We choose you as our prince, our judge, our governor, our protector, and our only lord.³²

This speech is missing in the Dalimil version, and no formal enthronement is depicted, except for the short notice that after Přemysl and Libuše wed, the yeomen gave Přemysl their presents and 'made him prince'. This means that he does not become prince by marrying Libuše, as he does in Cosmas's version. Furthermore, the acclamation by the common people is also missing in the *Dalimil Chronicle*. Přemysl and Libuše then establish the law of the realm, as they also do in Cosmas's *Chronica Boemorum*. This chapter in the *Dalimil Chronicle* is rather inconsistent as a narrative at first sight, but actually consistent with the work's logic: as the yeomen are owners of the land, but not its rulers, Přemysl is their ruler, but his rule is limited. The narrative of the so-

³¹ One example of this is the change of Přemysl's prophecy concerning the rule of his dynasty: in the time of the *Dalimil Chronicle*, the Přemyslid dynasty had died out, and its last ruler, Wenceslas III, had been assassinated. The author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* added these events to Přemysl's prophecy, and omitted any reference to an unbroken dynastic succession.

³² Cosmas of Prague, *Chronica Bohemorum*, ed. by Bak and Rychterová, p. 31; Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz, p. 16: 'Salve dux salve, magne dignissima laude! Solve boves, muta vestes, ascende caballum! [...] Domna nostra Lubossa et plebs universa mandate ut cito venias, et tibi ac tuis nepotibus fatale regnum accipias. Omnia nostra et nos ipsi in tua manu sumus, te ducem, te iudicem, te rectorem, te protectorem, te solum nobis in dominum elegimus.'

called Dalimil then turns to the story of what is known as the 'Maidens' war', which the *Chronica Boemorum* narrates as a playful version of fertility rituals with which matrimonial dependence of wives on their husbands is introduced into society: 'Et ex illa temptestate post obitum principis Lubosse sunt mulieres nostrates virorum sub potestate'³³ (And ever since the time after princess Libuše's death, our women are subject to men).³⁴

In the narrative of Dalimil, the story is completely different. Cosmas's playful teasing between boys and girls is transformed into a regular war, in which the women claim their sovereignty and after some peripety almost achieve it. Only one person does not involve himself in the war, and indeed repeatedly warns the men not to underestimate the women — Prince Přemysl himself, who also delivers a prophecy on this occasion: 'I saw in my dream a maiden drinking blood and running through the whole land as if she were rabid'.³⁵ His reticence to participate in the war he explains as follows:

This [war] would do harm to my family line, because I know that you will not evade women's stratagems and that you have to be killed by them. If they were to defeat me in the first fight, my family line would be beaten by the enemies very soon. Thus I do not want to go with you and I dissuade you from fighting with them.³⁶

And indeed, only after the men have suffered heavy defeats and are completely on the defensive does Přemysl take over command. As a first step, he has the castle of Vyšehrad in Prague built (the first in the Czech lands, and at the time of the *Dalimil Chronicle*'s production the symbolically charged princely seat of Bohemia). But only when the female leader Vlasta presents herself as sovereign and formulates her own laws for the land does Přemysl intervene in person. He holds an assembly at which all yeomen swear loyalty to him; this loyalty secures the final victory of the men in the subsequent battle and in the war. Cosmas's ritual copulation of the maidens with the boys is here depicted as rape, which makes the women unable to fight and provides the men with a decisive advantage in the final battle, in which the rebellious women are slaughtered.

The Dalimil version of the story is extremely bloody, merciless, and misogynistic.³⁷ It serves to show the princely ploughman as prudent, valiant, righteous,

³³ Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz, p. 21.

³⁴ Cosmas of Prague, *Chronica Bohemorum*, ed. by Bak and Rychterová, p. 41.

³⁵ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, p. 171.

³⁶ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 184–85.

³⁷ On the misogynistic character of the story used as a main interpretative key of the narrative, see Thomas, *Anne's Bohemia*, pp. 50–62.

but also — if necessary — merciless towards transgressors. In short, Přemysl displays here for the first time his princely virtues as they were defined in the high Middle Ages and elaborated and internalized in the late Middle Ages. As a result of this demonstration of ability to rule according to the standards described in the mirror-of-princes literature he is formally enthroned: 'They [the yeomen] installed Přemysl on the throne and destroyed the Maidens' castle'. The opulent Dalimil narrative has almost nothing to do with Cosmas's, except for the basic idea. It is also the most elaborated narrative in the chronicle, although the majority of the stories of wars and battles in the chronicle are of high literary quality.³⁸ Most of them are also completely invented. The question then is why Dalimil used Cosmas's story about the introduction of marriage into society as his cue for a narrative of war in which the new ruler has to prove himself. He could surely have been able to invent any kind of war narrative with a colourful and attractive enemy. One reason could of course be that he adhered to his source — he declared his book a history, not a fable. More probably, though, he also followed another model — the story of Alexander the Great, which he surely knew in Latin or German, or in the Czech version that was written at roughly the same time that he wrote his chronicle.³⁹ He transformed Cosmas's maidens into the *gens* of the Amazons fighting against the *gens* of the Czechs under their legendary ruler, the 'Czech Alexander'. At the end of the thirteenth century, Alexander the Great was generally accepted in Europe as the personification of princely virtues. His wars with the Amazons are actually mentioned in Dalimil's narrative of the Maidens' war: 'They [the Amazons] fought bravely against Alexander, they dared to fight with other kings and this brought them honour and glory in the whole world'.⁴⁰

This quotation, taken from the speech of the women's leader, Vlasta, shows that in the *Dalimil Chronicle*, the maidens take the Amazons as their role model. They establish their *gens* in several steps — they leave their former homes and families, they kill the members of their families, build a castle on chosen ground, gather there, swear loyalty to each other, choose a leader, and issue their own laws. This is very similar to Dalimil's description of the Czech

³⁸ There is consensus among researchers that the author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* knew the chivalric epic of his time well and was able to render its qualities in his own language quite skilfully. See Lehár, *Nejstarší česká epika*, pp. 12–76.

³⁹ The affinity between the *Dalimil Chronicle* and the Czech version of the *Alexandreis* has been discussed repeatedly by scholars. For the most comprehensive analysis see again Lehár, *Nejstarší česká epika*, pp. 12–76.

⁴⁰ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, p. 192.

gens arriving into the Bohemian Basin — their forefather Czech left his former home, family, and *gens* after murdering one of its members. These parallels mean that, in the eyes of the *Dalimil Chronicle's* author, this was the proper way to build a new community — a *gens*.

Unlike Cosmas, the author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* indicates no caesura between 'mythical' and 'historical' ages. Cosmas had written:

Since these things are believed to have happened long ago, we leave it to the reader to judge whether they are fact or fiction. Now our pen, blunt but devoted, sharpens itself to recount the things worth remembering that are vouchsafed by the report of trustworthy people.⁴¹

By contrast, the absence of such a caesura in the *Dalimil Chronicle* means that all the stories about the forefather Czech, the prophetess Libuše, the Maidens' war, etc. are regarded as part of historical time — the formation of seigneurial authority based on the triangle *gens*, land, and language is already achieved during this time. The subsequent stories repeatedly refer back to this definition of authority. The first of these is the story of the marriage of Prince Oldřich (r. 1012–34).⁴² In Cosmas's version, Prince Oldřich, childless because of his wife's sterility, had a remarkably beautiful son with a woman named Božena, the wife (or daughter or other relative) of a certain Křesina: 'He [Ulrich] had no child of a legitimate marriage because of the infertility of his spouse, but of some woman called Božena of Křezina, he begat a son of striking beauty, and named him Břetislav'.⁴³ Interestingly, the sentence is borrowed from the chronicle of Regino of Prüm, where it describes the conception of the Roman emperor Arnulf of Carinthia, the illegitimate son of King Carloman.⁴⁴ It is not quite clear whether Prince Břetislav I (r. 1034–55) is here in fact compared

⁴¹ Cosmas of Prague, *Chronica Bohemorum*, ed. by Bak and Rychterová, p. 61; Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz, p. 32: 'Et quoniam hec antiquis referuntur evenisse temporibus, utrum sint facta an ficta, lectoris iudicio relinquimus. Nunc ea que vera fidelium relatio commendat, noster stilus, licet obtusus tamen devotus, ad exarandum digna memorie se acuat.'

⁴² Cosmas's story of Prince Oldřich and Božena and its interpretation in the *Dalimil Chronicle* was analysed by Graus, *Lebendige Vergangenheit*, pp. 229–31, from the point of view of the 'nationalization' of the 'myth'.

⁴³ Cosmas of Prague, *Chronica Bohemorum*, ed. by Bak and Rychterová, p. 121; Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz, p. 65: 'Huic [Oldřich] ex legitimo matrimonio non est nata soboles propter infecunditatem coniugis, sed ex quadam femina nomine Božena que fuit Křezine filium prestantissime forme suscepit quem Bracizlau apelari fecit.'

⁴⁴ Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz, p. 65 n. 4.

with Arnulf, who appears in the *Chronica Boemorum* as a victorious ruler who joined Bohemia and Moravia.⁴⁵ The subsequent story is Cosmas's invention:

For once he was returning from a hunt through some peasant village, he saw the above-mentioned woman washing clothes in a spring. He had a good look at her from head to heel and was inflamed by an immense glow of love. For her body was of splendid form, her skin whiter than snow, softer than a swan, shinier than old ivory, more beautiful than a sapphire. At once, he took her with him without dissolving the old marriage, because at that time men were allowed to have two or three wives as they pleased. Neither was it forbidden for a man to take away somebody else's wife or for a wife to marry somebody else's husband. What is perceived today as a virtue was back then a great shame: for a man to live content with one wife or for a woman with one husband. Indeed, they lived like brute animals, sharing their marriages.⁴⁶

Above all, Cosmas's contextualization of the concubinage of Oldřich is remarkable here. Cosmas interprets it as belonging to the pre-historical, lawless age on which he focused in the first chapters of his chronicle. In the *Dalimil Chronicle*, however, this interpretation is gone, and the story changes its emphasis. In the narrative of Cosmas, the focus lies on the prince's offspring, the actual hero of the chronicle: Prince Břetislav. By contrast, in the *Dalimil Chronicle*, Božena herself moves into the centre of the narrative: the respective chapter bears the title 'On the Peasant Princess Božena'.⁴⁷ Dalimil first very briefly renders the story as described by Cosmas, leaving out the childless former wife of the prince and the child Břetislav (the only reason for the new marriage in the Cosmas's version). According to the *Dalimil Chronicle*, the apparently single prince is out hunting when he sees a very beautiful half-naked young woman, the daughter of a peasant, washing her gown in the river. She shows pleasant manners, and the prince, inflamed by love, takes her for his wife: 'The princess was noble

⁴⁵ Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz, p. 32.

⁴⁶ Cosmas of Prague, *Chronica Bohemorum*, ed. by Bak and Rychterová, p. 121; Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz, p. 65: 'Nam quadam die de venatu cum rediret per villam rusticanam, hanc, quam prediximus, feminam ad puteum lavantem pannos vidit et intuitus eam a vertice usque ad talos hausit pectore ignes amoris non modicos. Erat enim corporis eius habitudo insignis, nive candidior, mollior cigno, nitidior ebore antiquo, pulchrior saphiro. Hanc continuo mittens dux tulit in sua nec tamen antiqua solvit contubia, quia tunc temporis, prout cuique placuit, binas vel ternas, coniuges habere licuit; nec nefas fuit viro rapere alterius nubere marito. Et quod nunc ascribitur pudori, hoc tunc fuit magno dedecori, si vir una coniuge aut coniunx uno viro contenti viverent; vivebant enim quasi bruta animalia conubia habentes communia.'

⁴⁷ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, p. 494.

and graceful, she was called Božena'.⁴⁸ Thus ends the first part of the story. Then the second part starts, completely invented by the so-called Dalimil: Božena's origin causes a conflict between the prince and the nobles. The latter reject the mésalliance, and the prince reacts with disdain. He puts their own pedigrees into perspective by referring to the uncertain conditions of social status:

My lords, please hear me! Peasants⁴⁹ become nobles and nobles often have peasants for sons. [...] We all originate from one father, and only he regards himself noble whose father had lots of silver. And when nobility is mixed with peasantry in such a way, Božena will be my wife!⁵⁰

It is not quite clear if the father 'from which we all originate' here refers to God,⁵¹ to Adam or the forefather Czech, or even to the ploughman Přemysl. The second or third possibilities are most probable. The conflict between Oldřich and the nobles parallels the conflict between Libuše and the yeomen longing for male, foreign rule. In Oldřich's argumentation, he only uphold the laws of his forefathers as described in the story of their ascent to power. His challenge of the noble status of his critics should therefore not be read as a general social critique but as embedded in the overall logic of the narrative. It indicates that the Přemyslid ruler stands above the group of the nobles because of his very special pedigree. His loyalties differ from theirs; in fact, he is not a member of their social network. Furthermore, Oldřich justifies his decision with the same argument Libuše used against foreign rulers:

I rather want to marry a noble Czech peasant's daughter than have a German queen as my wife. The heart of each human being burns for their own language. Therefore a German [woman] will side less with my folk. A German [woman] will have German attendants, she will teach my children the German language. She will bring a division of language/people [here, the word *jazyk* is very probably used in the sense of *gens*] and immediate destruction to the land.⁵²

⁴⁸ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, p. 494.

⁴⁹ The *Dalimil Chronicle's* author uses the word *chlapi* in the sense of 'chaps' or 'blokes', a more or less pejorative expression denoting a person of low social status, low manners, and no literary education. The usage of the words *chlap* (plural *chlapi*) in the chronicle represents one of the arguments that its anonymous author was of noble status and treated the members of lower social strata with great contempt — burghers and peasants. The passage concerning the marriage of Oldřich nevertheless contradicts this opinion.

⁵⁰ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, p. 493.

⁵¹ So Graus, *Lebendige Vergangenheit*, p. 232.

⁵² *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, p. 493.

In this speech the unity of language, *gens*, and land is explicitly defined in the sense that the introductory chapters of the chronicle stipulated. The well-being of any one side of the triangle language — *gens* — land is the necessary condition of the well-being of the other two.

We can find the same strategy in the narrative on the rule of Prince Soběslav II (r. 1173–78), some twenty-five chapters further on. Soběslav is the actual hero of the chronicle, and the story of his rule in many respects represents its narrative peak. In the chronicle, he is the son of Prince Vladislav II (r. 1140–72), a ruler who had accepted the royal dignity from the ‘German’ emperor and was therefore chased from the land by the Czech noblemen.⁵³ The hero of Cosmas of Prague’s narrative, by contrast, was Prince Břetislav I, whom Cosmas styled the ‘Bohemian Achilles’. In the *Dalimil Chronicle*, Soběslav plays this role: he is depicted as a larger-than-life figure endowed with supernatural powers, whose mere glance can kill a blasphemer:

Soběslav did not speak during the Mass and he also never welcomed envoys. The envoy [of one German count], longing to get rid of the task very quickly, started to talk to him during the Mass. The prince only gasped, sighed to God and the German scurried away at once. [...] The emperor wanted to declare war on the Czechs. He could not find any envoy until one brave knight went with that message to Bohemia saying: ‘Who would here scare me with fear? I managed to put ten of them to flight. If he [Prince Soběslav] will be going to do anything to me, I will fight with him.’ As the envoy saw the prince he stood horror-stricken as a donkey. The prince approached him closely and the envoy scurried away.⁵⁴

Compared to all other battles in the chronicle, Soběslav’s victory over the German invaders is the most formidable one. The Czech troops are utterly outnumbered — the chronicler enumerates all the German *gentes* taking part in the campaign, from the empire’s north to south and back again: Brabantians, Frisians, Rhinelanders, Swabians, Bavarians, Thuringians, Saxons as well as Flemings. Nevertheless, the Czechs win and all the German princes and the emperor himself lose their lives (none of this has anything to do with historical reality, of course). The blood flows for three days because before the battle Prince Soběslav ordered that they should ‘not spare anybody, poor or rich, do not take anybody captive [...]. Killed was the emperor, the god of

⁵³ The figure of Prince Soběslav in the *Dalimil Chronicle* clearly refers to Prince Soběslav II, who ruled Bohemia from 1173 to 1178. However, the events described as having taken place during Soběslav’s rule are entirely fictitious. See on this *Staročeská kronika*, III, ed. by Bláhová, pp. 367–69.

⁵⁴ *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 189–91.

Germans.⁵⁵ On his deathbed the triumphant prince advises his sons, who had been raised at the court of the emperor ‘who ordered them to learn German and did not release them until they knew but little Czech’,⁵⁶ to always care for their own *gens* and land:

I bequeath the land to you, I recommend your language/people to you, that you let it grow in number and not let Germans into the land. If the language/people of the Germans rises in Bohemia, then the honour of our lineage will come to an end. They will betray the land as well as its princes, and our crown will be taken to Germany. The Germans are tame at first, but when they increase in number, they stop revering their lord and look for a lord from their own land. When I should learn, and be it from a little bird, that you chum with the Germans, I would order to put each of you in a leather bag and let you drown in the Vltava River. I would get over that more easily than being alive or dead to mourn the disgrace of my own language/people.⁵⁷

The Crisis of Identity and How to Deal with It

These are strong words indeed; no wonder František Graus described them as an expression of Czech chauvinism.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, if we replace the words ‘German’ and ‘Germans’ with ‘foreigner’, the word which Libuše uses in her prophetic warning, it is clear that the hatred is not directed against Germans as such but against any foreigners, in this instance represented by the Germans.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 194–201. The naming of the emperor as ‘German god’ is very interesting here. It stands in symbolic relation to the victorious Soběslav, who is endowed with ‘real’ supernatural powers in the narrative.

⁵⁶ *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 210–11.

⁵⁷ *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 212–16.

⁵⁸ Graus, ‘Die Bildung eines Nationalbewußtseins’, pp. 5–49, here p. 23. Later Graus, *Nationenbildung*, p. 93, characterized the so-called Dalimil as one of the ‘Herolden des Nationalismus’ (heralds of nationalism). This expression makes clear that Graus regarded and interpreted the chronicle from the point of view of the history of modern nationalism. Cf. Graus, *Nationenbildung*, p. 92: ‘Bei Dalimil taucht bereits die für den neuzeitlichen Nationalismus so bezeichnende “nationale Wertung” der Vergangenheit auf, die aus der Geschichte ein verbindliches Postulat für die Gegenwart und die Zukunft ableitet.’ This approach made it possible to define the *Dalimil Chronicle* as one of the early examples of nationalistic historiography, but it did not explain the narrative strategies the author employed in his work. The narrow interpretation of Graus prevails up to today in the research, which does not bring it into question. See Mühle, *Die Slawen*, p. 384, Sobiesiak, ‘Czechs and Germans’, pp. 322–34.

⁵⁹ The equation of ‘Germans’ with ‘foreigners’ can be found, for example, in chapter 48

This interpretation is supported by the fact that the author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* often does not include the anti-German expressions present in the *Chronica Boemorum* in his own narrative.⁶⁰ But the concentration on foreigners (as rulers, invaders, or fellow citizens) is not without purpose. It is the most powerful strategy of distinction that the *Dalimil Chronicle's* narrative employs, and as such it represents a sort of conceptual backbone of the text.

Soběslav's speech is quite an accurate rendering of Libuše's warning, Soběslav speaks of land, *gens*, and language as joined entities. After he has talked to his sons, he commands the magnates present to choose a new ruler in case his foreign-educated sons should betray his legacy:

I thank you by the true faith because you have been faithful to me without measure. Please, do have the same faith towards my children, if they will hold with their [people]. If they will not love theirs, do not care for them, you can dispense with

concerning the rule of Prince Spytihněv, whom the chapter title already announces as an 'enemy of the Germans'; see *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, p. 554: 'he weeded all the Germans from the land as well as all other foreigners, like nettles from the garden' (ibid., p. 556). Chapter 63 makes the same explicit connection (ibid., pp. 137–39). Graus, *Nationenbildung*, p. 92 states that 'die Feinde der Böhmen sind die Fremden, insbesondere die Deutschen und die Bürger' (the enemies of the Bohemians are the foreigners, especially the Germans and the burghers). The depiction of Poles in the chronicle is of interest in this respect. Although several conflicts with the Poles are described in the chronicle, the Poles never serve as a personification of a 'foreign' power threatening the identity and existence of the Czech language, *gens*, and realm (Graus, *Nationenbildung*, p. 92 n. 39, states without further analysis that 'der sog. Dalimil war auch auf die Polen nicht gut zu sprechen'). Very probably the similarity of the languages plays the decisive role here, as well as the fact that there was much more immigration from German-speaking areas to Bohemia than from Poland/Polish areas. The last two Přemyslid rulers were also Polish kings, though the personal union came to an end after the death of Wenceslas III in the year 1306. The author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* nevertheless differentiates clearly between the two languages, as, for example, in chapter 44, *Staročeská kronika*, ed. by Daňhelka and others, I, 518–19: 'Then the prince [Břetislav] longing to avenge his grandfather, marched against Mieszko, the prince of Poland. Mieszko marched powerfully against him; Mieszko died in the battle. From Bohemia to Hlohov, no Polish word could be heard because all the land was turned into ashes.' It is noteworthy that no relationship between the Czechs and Poles based on language (or blood) is stressed in the chronicle. This indicates that no linguistic interest as such stands behind the emphasis on the (Czech) language, in other words, that it was not the language as such but only in conjunction with the particular *gens* defined by the land (and vice versa) that was the basic frame of identification and the determining principle in the narrative. It also indicates that the creation of a 'new' concept based on contemporary sociopolitical settings was not the aim of the chronicle.

⁶⁰ On the attitude of Cosmas of Prague towards Germans see Graus, *Nationenbildung*, pp. 60–61.

your loyalty. Take for yourself a new prince, a ploughman. Rather will a ploughman be a good prince, than a German would align himself with the Czechs.⁶¹

It is obvious that this ploughman symbolizes the new beginning, a going back to the roots, the history of the Bohemian duchy being reloaded.⁶² The dying prince does not even consider the possibility that the new ruler could be chosen from among the assembled nobility. The well-being, even the very existence, of the realm depends on maintaining the original constellation of which the ruler is here regarded as an integral part. That means that the triangle language, *gens*, and land is in fact a quadrangle: language, *gens*, land, and the lineage of the mythical peasant founder of the duchy. There is no other constellation expressed in the chronicle which would secure the future well-being of the land (as well as of its *gens* defined by language).

This seems to be the central message of the chronicle, which was written just at the moment that this particular set of strategies of identification emphasized by the author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* was no longer available.⁶³ The chronicle was written between 1308 and 1314.⁶⁴ The death two/eight years before in 1306 of the last Přemyslid king, and the subsequent dramatic destabilization of the realm likely frightened not only the author of the *Dalimil Chronicle*.

⁶¹ *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 212–16.

⁶² Very interesting information on this is extant in the chronicle of Beneš Krabice of Weitmille, written in the first half of the 1370s, according to which during the debate on the election of Henry of Carinthia as king of Bohemia (1307), 'camerarius regni, dominus Thobias de Bechina, cum eo tempore pateretur in pedibus infirmitatem, in ipso electionis tractatu iacebat in lecto episcopali in camera secreciori, ubi omnes una cum episcopo congregati fuerant, aperiens os suum dixit: "Ex quo de principe eligendo concordare non possumus, expedit, ut unus de rusticis ville Stadicz, unde Przemisl, primus dux Bohemorum ortus erat, a nobis in principem eligatur et Elizabeth virgini, filie regis Wenceslai matrimonio copuletur." Displucit hic sermo multis eo, quod super ipsos rusticus regnare deberet. Et unus ex nobilibus, cui nomen Crussyna accurrens ad lectum prefatum dominum Tobiam letaliter vulneravit. Et hoc facto, licet multi in foribus starent armati, illesus evasit.' (Beneš Krabice of Weitmille, *Cronica ecclesiae Pragensis*, ed. by Emler, pp. 465–66). Cf. *Staročeská kronika*, III, ed. by Bláhová, p. 369. Whether this story refers to some real incident or to the *Dalimil Chronicle* is not quite clear.

⁶³ Crucially, the author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* was the first medieval chronicler to change Cosmas's narrative on the history of Bohemia. Cosmas's *Chronica Boemorum*, still extant in fourteen manuscripts, remained the only history of Bohemia for more than 250 years (until the second decade of the twelfth century) and, as mentioned above, provided the only narrative of the Czech *origo gentis*. Although the surviving individual copies extant from the thirteenth until the fifteenth centuries originated in various social milieus, they contain almost no textual variants. See Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz, pp. lxxxix–xciv.

⁶⁴ *Staročeská kronika*, III, ed. by Bláhová, pp. 280–81.

Moreover, the governance crisis came at the moment of an unprecedented socio-economic boom of which the German immigration was the most visible part. This boom had winners but also losers, losers who were not confined to a single social stratum. Furthermore, we do not have to consider only 'real', that is, economic-political losers but also — and very probably especially — the people whose ambitions and expectations had soared high during the previous decades of economic and political conjuncture, that they would have been difficult to fulfil even under stable and more suitable conditions.

The animosity of the author towards the German settlers has to be regarded in the context of the overall concept of the chronicle, as a specific strategy of distinction. For example, in chapter 86, which is usually quoted as proof of the author's xenophobia, the German settlers actually play a very complicated role in the narrative. The main topic of the chapter (it bears the title 'On the Violence the King Did to Czech Nobles')⁶⁵ are the events surrounding the Battle of Dürnkrut in 1278. The narrative opens by describing the great famine that Bohemia had suffered from 1264: 'Great hunger was in the whole land, many people in the land died, the majority of them from Plzeň'. According to the chronicle, King Přemysl Ottokar II reacted as follows: 'Then the king started to neglect his [people], he started to give villages and towns to the Germans. He started to defend the Germans with walls and to do violence to the nobles.'⁶⁶ The invitation of German settlers is here described as the reason for the conflict between the king and the nobles. The latter (paradoxically) seek support from (German) King Rudolf of Habsburg, saying: 'It is better to have deserted villages than to have Germans in them by the order of the king'. In this chapter, the betrayal of one's own 'language' (here in the sense of 'language' as well as *gens*) is depicted as the reason for the heavy defeat of Ottokar's troops (more Germans than Czechs take part in the campaign) at the Battle of Dürnkrut, in which the king himself loses his life.⁶⁷ In this story, the German settlers are never themselves the focus, they merely help the chronicler to interpret the conflict between the king and the nobility within the logic of the triangular concept of identity (language — *gens* — land) constructed at the beginning of the chronicle. In the whole story the nobles do not act as defenders of the realm, they act solely destructively. The focus of the story remains on the king, who betrays the legacy of Libuše, Oldřich, and Soběslav II, drives the realm into an existential crisis and pays the highest price for it. According to the

⁶⁵ *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, p. 406.

⁶⁶ *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 406–07.

⁶⁷ *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 416–20.

Dalimil Chronicle, the nobility takes an active part in this development. Later, when they have to decide on a new ruler after the murder of the last Přemyslid king in the year 1306, they repeatedly make fatally wrong decisions. The nobles exercise their right to choose the ruler and opt at first for 'their own murderer, enemy of the Czechs' Rudolf of Habsburg.⁶⁸ Their second choice falls on Henry of Carinthia, who is 'completely unsuitable for the task. This man did not have any other interest than to fill his stomach.'⁶⁹ The nobles thus repeatedly fail to restore (or to maintain) the order and stability of the realm.

Strategies of Identification and their Dialectic

From the start, modern research on the *Dalimil Chronicle* considered its main concerns to have been the interests and claims of the nobility, defined with the help of (proto-)nationalistic rhetoric.⁷⁰ I would nevertheless argue against the interpretation of the chronicle as an artistic rendering of the political programme of the Czech-speaking nobility⁷¹ or as a political tract defending 'the rights of this nobility'.⁷² The author does not particularly extol the virtues of

⁶⁸ *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, p. 94.

⁶⁹ *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, p. 95.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Graus, *Nationenbildung*, p. 93. The interpretation of Šusta, *Dvě knihy českých dějin*, II, 31–34, was very influential. He formulated the hypothesis that the chronicle was written as a reaction to the conflict between the urban 'German' patriciate of Prague and Kuttenberg and the Bohemian-Czech nobility in 1309 (see, for example, Lehár, *Nejstarší česká epika*, p. 51; cf. Lehár, 'Monografie o Dalimilově kronice', pp. 627–32, here p. 628). In the course of this conflict, the burghers captured some members of the nobility and released them only after they had got a promise that the noble families would marry their children to the children of the rebellious burghers (on the conflict see most recently Musilek, 'Zajetí českého panstva patriciátem v sedleckém klášteře a v Praze roku 1309', pp. 139–63). The incident is described in chapter 98 of the *Dalimil Chronicle*. The story of the incident is nevertheless embedded in the narrative of the deteriorating morals of the nobility after the death of the last Přemyslid king. Their bad morals are described as the actual reason for the conflict. The nobles' imprisonment by the burghers is interpreted as evidence of a time 'out of joint': 'Precarious are these times! Today they [i.e. the burghers] give the silver [i.e. lend money], tomorrow they will maybe be murderers' (*Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, p. 511).

⁷¹ *Staročeská kronika*, III, ed. by Bláhová, p. 287.

⁷² The current consensus among researchers is that the *Dalimil Chronicle* was written in the first decade of the fourteenth century to express the political interests of representatives of the Bohemian-Czech nobility who feared the loss of positions due to competition from incoming (international) newcomers seeking career chances in the dynamically developing realm's administration, both in the Church and at court. In the chronicle, these newcomers (courtiers as well

the nobility in the chronicle except the ecstatic descriptions of 'Czech' military skills and luck (here indeed the members of the nobility play an important role) and a small amount of heraldic information. The chronicle's main concern clearly is the defence of language, *gens*, and land understood as a unity; the nobility may act in the interest of this unity or against it.⁷³ The main virtue of the nobility is loyalty to the prince and loyalty to the land, *gens*, and language. As several stories in the chronicle teach the reader, if these loyalties come into conflict with one another, the loyalty to the land, *gens*, and language should be chosen above the other. The nobility usually acts as the collective defender of the land, *gens*, and language in cases when the ruler betrays this imperative and starts to be too friendly with the foreigners. We find an example of this in chapter 67:

Then the noble Prince Soběslav died and after him his son Vratislav was the prince. He did not follow his father, he was a friend of the German language [here in the sense of language and *gens*, very probably]. He did not show any bravery, only made friendship with the emperor.⁷⁴

Prince Vratislav accepts the crown and royal title from the emperor. On his return to Bohemia, he ridicules the Czechs (very probably here referring to the nobles alone): 'Do you believe now that I could reach honour without you?'

as bureaucratic and economic professionals) are usually summarized as one group of 'denomination Germans' (which alone nevertheless has a more differentiated background than it may seem at the first sight). Some of the author's additions to the narratives of his sources, above all to Cosmas's *Chronica Boemorum*, concern the nobility's right to elect the (Přemyslid) ruler. But to interpret this as a political programme of the respective group may be too far-fetched: the nobility already had the right to elect the ruler at the time that the chronicle was written, and this right was not in danger. It did not need to be defended with the ferocity the chronicle shows from time to time. The many passages on it may be only mere actualization — the nobility had attained the right to elect the king of Bohemia by the end of the thirteenth century, thus it appears also in the chronicle in retrospect (as several other occurrences do, too). Beside the interpretations formulated in this article, see on this also Mezník, 'Němci a Češi v Kronice tak řečeného Dalimila', pp. 3–10.

⁷³ In this, my reading of the chronicle differs from the reading of previous researchers who worked with the term and concept of the *Landesgemeinde*, which they thought to be the key term for each interpretation of the *Dalimil Chronicle*. What exactly this *Landesgemeinde* is supposed to be in the chronicle, however, remains completely unclear. The prevailing interpretation is that it represents the Czech nobility (which probably did not include all the nobility in Bohemia at the time). The arguments are summarized by Lehár, 'Vznik České literatury', pp. 18–39, here 24; cf. Uhlíř, 'Pojem zemské obce v tzv. Kronice Dalimilově jako základní prvek její ideologie', pp. 143–66.

⁷⁴ *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 171–78.

Vratislav's son, however, dislikes his father's speech and turns to the nobles. These try to bring the king to reason:

'Who pressed you that you lowered your power and honour? We fought for the crown with our lives together with your father and with our lives we got rid of the power of the emperor. How did you dare to take the crown in Germany without us, when you could have taken it in Prague without [owing] any gratitude to anybody? If you want to rule with the Germans, how do you want to be called Czech king? The king did not allow the speaker to continue and started to threaten [the nobles] with the emperor. They wanted to kill the king immediately, the king had to hide and leave the land.'⁷⁵

As in this case, in the *Dalimil Chronicle's* narrative it is very often a member of the Přemyslid family who corrects an apostate ruling relative or who turns against him and with the help of the nobles takes over the rule. We may interpret all these passages as evidence for the thesis that Přemyslid rule has no alternative in the concept of the chronicle. Another example of this can be found in chapter 63: 'When Bořivoj was the prince, he did not fulfil his promises given to the nobles and started to accept Germans into his council. Wherefore his brother Vladislav started to be angry at him.'⁷⁶ At first, Vladislav tries to talk to his brother but to no avail, Bořivoj again invites the Germans into the land:

When Vladislav heard this, he said to the nobles: 'Alas! It cannot be, he [Bořivoj] himself has to go to Germany!' Vladislav took council with the nobles, dethroned Bořivoj, and ordered him to go to Germany, saying: 'Brother, you cannot be without them, so go with them to the Rhine, brother, you will conquer the empire with them!'⁷⁷

Vladislav then anticipates the words of Prince Soběslav:⁷⁸ 'I would rather witness the death of my entire lineage than the disgrace and shame of my innate language [here indeed in the sense of "language"]'.⁷⁹ This sentence, used twice by Přemyslid rulers, should probably be understood as one of the chronicle's key messages: the ruling family may sacrifice itself for the sake of the language and *gens*. However, the *Dalimil Chronicle* proposes no plan as to who should take over in such a case, apart from making it clear that the nobility is out of the running.

⁷⁵ *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 171–78.

⁷⁶ *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 136–37.

⁷⁷ *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, p. 137.

⁷⁸ See above, pp. 186–87.

⁷⁹ *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 144–46.

In the chronicle's account, the nobles frequently act against the ruler, against the stability of the realm, and therefore against the basic prerogative of stability, the conjunction of land, *gens*, and language. Significant in this respect is the role of members of the (noble) family of Vršovci, who appear as the internal 'enemy of the state' already in the *Chronica Boemorum* of Cosmas of Prague.⁸⁰ In Cosmas's account, their first action is to abuse the young Přemyslid prince Jaromír (r. 1004–12, 1033/34), represented by Cosmas as the son of Boleslav III (r. 999–1002/03):

Meanwhile, the domestic and familiar enemies of Prince Boleslav — the Vršovci, a hateful tribe and *an evil generation* — carried out such an abominable crime, as never heard of in ages past. Their leader and a kind of head of all iniquity was Kochan, a most nefarious man who was the worst of all wicked men. He and his relatives, hateful people, came with the prince's son Jaromir to a hunting place called Veliz, and when they heard the rumour of what had happened to the prince in Poland, said: 'Who is this little man, worth less than seaweed, who should be above us and be called our lord? Can there not be found one better among us who is more worthy to rule?' Oh, what a wicked mind and wicked soul! What they ponder when sober, they do openly when drunk. When their viciousness became heated and aroused by the drinking horns, they seize their lord, bind him cruelly, and, naked on his back, fasten his arms and legs to the ground with wooden pegs. Then they jump in a war dance and on horseback over the body of their lord.⁸¹

⁸⁰ The speech of Prince Jaromír in chapter 42 represents a sort of summary of the Vršovci's role in the *Chronica Boemorum*. In it, Jaromír forgoes the throne after the death of his brother Oldřich in favour of his nephew Břetislav. See Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz, p. 79: 'Ast illos, qui sunt Wrisovici, iniquorum patrum neuam filii, nostri generis hostes domestici, familiares inimici, ut cenosam rotam devites et consortia eorum declines, quia nobis numquam fuere fideles. Ecce me innocentem et suum principem inprimis ligaverunt et diversis affecerunt ludibriis, post sibi innatis versuciis et fraudulentis consiliis id egerunt, ut frater fratrem me hisce privaret oculis. Habeas, fili mi, semper in memoria sancti Adalberti preconia, qui eorum ob facta crudelia, ter ut fiant super eos excidia, sancto ore confirmavit et excommunicavit eos in ecclesia. Que nutu Dei iam bis sunt facta, tercio ut fiant, adhuc sunt sollicita facta.' (Cosmas of Prague, *Chronica Bohemorum*, ed. by Bak and Rychterová, p. 147: 'But those who are the Vršovci — despicable sons of iniquitous fathers, domestic foes of our kindred, familiar enemies — avoid them as a muddy wheel and eschew all dealings with them since they were never faithful to us. Look, how they bound me, innocent and their ruler, and mocked me in every possible way. Then with their innate craftiness and wily counsels, they induced my brother to gouge out my — his brother's — eyes. Always bear in mind, my son, the prediction of Saint Adalbert who because of their cruel deeds confirmed with his holy mouth that destruction shall thrice fall upon them and excommunicated them in church. That has with God's will happened twice already and whether it happens a third time hangs on Fate').

⁸¹ Cosmas of Prague, *Chronica Bohemorum*, ed. by Bak and Rychterová, pp. 114–15;

In the *Dalimil Chronicle*, the incident is narrated with significant changes and additions. In this version, the Vršovci conspire with the Polish prince Mieszko against their own lord:⁸²

As they saw [that] Mieszko⁸³ [was] strong in the land, they took an unwise decision saying: 'We will erase the princely family! With this deed our family will make itself famous. We will play with princes like with chess [pieces] and take presents from everybody. Foreign princes will fear us, or, if we want, we can present a prince from ourselves, or, if we want, we can be without prince. Therefore we will not allow the princely lineage to arise.'⁸⁴

Thus, in the *Dalimil Chronicle* as in the *Chronica Boemorum*, the Vršovci are represented as responsible for the lethal conflict between the princes Oldřich and Jaromír, the latter of whom was blinded and castrated by his brother in order to eliminate his chances of becoming the ruler.⁸⁵ Whereas in the *Chronica Boemorum* the Vršovci's motivations are unknown (they are simply undifferentiated 'evil'), in the *Dalimil Chronicle* their actions are the result of their constant struggle to destabilize the realm and to eradicate the ruling family. The leading member of the Vršovci family therefore advises the Polish prince Mieszko:

Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz, p. 61: 'Interea ducis Bolezlai domestici et familiares inimici, gens invisa, generatio mala, Wrisovici operabantur abhominabile malum et antea retro seculis inauditum. Quorum primus et quasi caput tocius iniquitatis erat Kohan, vir sceleratissimus et omnium malorum hominum pessimus. Hic et sui propinqui, homines iniqui, ducis cum filio Jaromir venientes venationis ad locum, qui dicitur Veliz, postquam referente fama perceperunt, que facta sunt de duce in Polonia, Quis iste est, inquiunt, homuncio alga vilior, qui super nos debeat esse maior et dominus vocari? An non invenitur inter nos melior, qui et dignior sit dominari? Ah mala mens, malus animus! Quod ruminant sobrii, palam faciunt ebrii. Nam iniquitas eorum ut incaluit et assumpsit cornua mero, capiunt dominum suum et crudeliter ligant atque nudum et resupinum per brachia et pedes ligneis clavis affigunt humi et saltant saltu ludentes militari, saltantes in equis trans corpus sui heri'.

⁸² The chapter bears the title 'On the Perfidy of the Evil Vršovci'. The family is characterized as 'the most powerful in the land' (*Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, p. 423).

⁸³ The 'Polish Prince Mieszko' is an invention of the author of the *Dalimil Chronicle*, based partly on the work of Cosmas of Prague. The events depicted took place in fact (according to Cosmas) during the rule of the Bohemian Princes Jaromír and Oldřich, the kings of Poland at the time were Bolesław I the Brave and Bolesław III. See on this *Staročeská kronika*, III, ed. by Bláhová, pp. 342–43.

⁸⁴ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 424–25.

⁸⁵ Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz, p. 65.

If you want the Czech principedom, you first have to decapitate Oldřich. Only then will you have peace in Bohemia. Some take hope in him and do not adhere to you. But if he is not anymore, all our hope will be in you.⁸⁶

In the *Dalimil Chronicle* the Vršovci family embodies all the destructive powers the nobility as a social group were able to unleash if stability and order were at stake, mostly in times of foreign military intervention and weakened princely power (such as when the ruler was still a minor). The chronicler puts the final message in this respect into the mouth of a member of the Vršovci, this time a certain Kochan, who appears in the chronicle as the initiator of several actions against Přemyslid rulers. Prince Oldřich, remembering Kochan's role in the conflict with his brother Jaromír (finally killed by a member of the Vršovci family), sentences him to death.⁸⁷ As he is being tortured before his execution, Kochan delivers a speech:

Kochan, as he strode around the column and pulled his intestines from himself, started to grieve because of his family and to talk to the people: 'Do nobody put hope in your great family or in deep reason. The prince achieves everything in his land little by little, my own evil comes rightfully back to me. I meant to kill all the princes and for this now my retribution was given to me.'⁸⁸

The detailed description of Kochan's extremely cruel death is an invention of the author, as is Kochan's final warning. The addressees of this warning are unmistakably the members of the nobility and the target their — in the eyes of the chronicler — unhealthy longing for power. The same message is repeated in chapters 56 and 57,⁸⁹ where the chronicler retells Cosmas of Prague's account⁹⁰ of the slaughtering of all male members of the Vršovci family. The *Dalimil Chronicle* adds here an Aesopian fable on frogs which were discontented with the rule of a rotten log in the pond. They therefore elect a stork for their ruler, who of course goes on to eat all of them, the biggest and fattest first. The moral of the fable aims at the nobility's (supposedly) fatal inclination to choose foreign and ruthless rulers. Interestingly, in this specific example, this foreign ruler is not some German but a Moravian Přemyslid prince. The Vršovci

⁸⁶ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 441–42.

⁸⁷ The *Chronica Boemorum* only notes: 'Anno dominice incarnationis MIII. Hic interfecti sunt Wrissovici' (Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz, p. 68).

⁸⁸ *Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 491–92.

⁸⁹ *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 43–72.

⁹⁰ Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz, pp. 190–93.

support him against his brother, the prince of Bohemia, and they pay for this disloyalty with the eradication of their whole family ordered by the very ruler they supported. Cosmas, influenced heavily by classical historiography, and by its elaborate discourse on tyranny depicts the mass execution of the members of the Vršovci family with a certain ambivalence: the head of the family, Mutina, is wrongfully accused of treason, and bears his fate with great dignity (his person stands in direct contrast to the raging prince). Cosmas's chilling narration of the execution of the youngest family members, children calling for their mother on the scaffold, belongs to the most effective literary passages in the *Chronica Boemorum*. In the *Dalimil Chronicle*, only traces of Cosmas's masterful narrative are extant, its message is unambiguous: 'Božej [the family member who supported the Moravian prince] would have done better not to take the silver and let the benign prince rule over the land.'⁹¹

After the eradication of the family of Vršovci no other personification of the 'dark side' of the nobility as a social group appears in the *Dalimil Chronicle*. Instead, the nobility itself moves into the narrative's focus. The destructive powers inherent in it are depicted as self-destruction in the course of general moral (and physical) deterioration:

The Czechs have beaten all their enemies. They frightened their neighbours so much that the people started to say across the whole of Germany: 'Only he who does not want to live, fights with the Czechs.' But then they became addicted to great delights and they stopped paying attention to their good name. The old ones started to grow fat like hogs, the young ones started to hunt with their dogs. From this time the nobles were interested in what earlier the stable boys had as a task. Formerly they had put the dogs in a separated house together with the stable boys and their own home they kept clean. [...] Now the nobles themselves became stable grooms and lived in one house together with greyhounds. They accepted it as a pleasure and honour to talk only about their greyhounds. That was the reason why their estates declined and they died early from the beastly reek.⁹²

These and similar passages critical of the nobility have been read by many modern scholars either as literary topoi or as the personal opinion of a rather conservative author who despised imported courtly novelties, elaborate hunting culture, tournaments, fashionable clothes, courtly love, and other forms of distraction.⁹³ However, they make more sense as part of one of the authorial strat-

⁹¹ *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, p. 71.

⁹² *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 290–94.

⁹³ *Staročeská kronika*, III, ed. by Bláhová, pp. 231–32. Šusta, *Dvě knihy českých dějin*,

egies to explain the breakdown of an important element of collective identity, the presence of the indigenous ruling family:

After that [the assassination of Wenceslas III and the nobles' bad choices of his successors] the nobles adhered to bad habits. They played dice to distract themselves. That which they formerly disapproved of in the case of scoundrels they now practised themselves. [...] They do not pay attention to their language/*gens* and consider it honourable to play dice.⁹⁴

The highly ambivalent role of the nobility in the *Dalimil Chronicle* probably mirrors the claim of the nobility very probably shared by it internally as by a group, a claim which represented it for the external observer, the claim to be the 'owner' of the land. But it was a claim that the nobility actually did not fulfil and the *Dalimil Chronicle* bears remarkable witness to that.

The Discursive Choice

Considering the fact that the so-called Dalimil represents a focused discursive rendering of identification strategies present in Bohemian-Czech society at his time, the role of St Wenceslas in the chronicle may at first appear surprising. According to František Graus (and later Dušan Třeštík),⁹⁵ the cult of St Wenceslas was strongly tied to the idea of a Bohemian-Czech 'state' from its beginnings, at least after the translation of the saint's mortal remains to St Vitus church at Prague Castle shortly after his death.⁹⁶ St Wenceslas represented, according to Graus:

the institution's immortality. Each individual ruler was only a temporary representative of the land of Bohemia; Bohemia's 'eternal' lord was the saint, just as bishops or abbots represented their dioceses or monasteries only temporarily; the true 'owners' of these institutions are their holy patrons and protectors. The transfer of

pp. 31–32 characterized these passages as containing the 'real and deep mental shock' of a man who 'realized the consequences of quick wealth of the realm for the nation and its language'.

⁹⁴ *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 501–12.

⁹⁵ The results of this research were recently summarized by Třeštík and others, *Přemyslovci*, pp. 281–82.

⁹⁶ The veneration very probably began soon after his death, promoted by the local clergy. At the end of the tenth century, St Wenceslas belonged to the well-known saints of Central Europe. In the eleventh century, he gained a special status as the patron of the land. This is attested by his image appearing on coins, the earliest surviving examples of which date from the first decade of the eleventh century. The saint was also given a prominent position in the so-called 'Coronation Gospel Book' from Vyšehrad, made in 1086 for the first king of Bohemia, Vratislav I, in the year of his coronation. See on this Graus, *Lebendige Vergangenheit*, pp. 159–66.

this ecclesiastical symbolism and concept into the 'secular' sphere in the eleventh century gave the cult of Wenceslas importance as symbol of the state.⁹⁷

The extant sources support this hypothesis, although they are by no means numerous. Particularly significant is the presence of the saint on the seals of Bohemian princes in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Written sources from the same time, above all the historiographical works, at times reflect the meaning of the cult as a symbol of the eternal governance. In Cosmas of Prague's *Chronica Boemorum*, St Wenceslas is repeatedly called *patronus*. The first continuator of Cosmas's chronicle, the so-called 'Canon of Vyšehrad', talks about the people of Bohemia as *familia Sancti Wenceslai*.⁹⁸ The saint appears already in the *Chronica Boemorum* as a helper in the battle, he stands by his people in conflicts with foreign enemies; he, together with St Adalbert, intervenes in the duchy's/kingdom's internal conflicts. The first continuator of Cosmas reinforced this role of the saint,⁹⁹ and later *continuatores* from the thirteenth century developed it further.¹⁰⁰

During the twelfth century, the saint gradually became, according to Graus, the patron of the Bohemian nobility. The main argument for this is a seal with which the Bohemian barons sealed the charter concerning the peace between King Přemysl Ottokar I (r. 1197–1230) and Bishop Ondřej of Prague (r. 1214–24). The barons used the seal of the kingdom of Bohemia: *sigillum commune regni Bohemie, videlicet s. Wenceslai*.¹⁰¹ From this and other (relatively scarce) sources Graus concludes:

Thus Wenceslas had, by the 13th century, become a symbol of the Bohemian nobility independent of, or even de facto in opposition to the king. Saint Wenceslas was the true lord of the Bohemian people, that is, the true lord of the community of nobles, the true keeper of the law, and the king only his temporary representative, accountable to the saint and the community, even subordinated to them.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Graus, *Lebendige Vergangenheit*, pp. 166–67: 'die Unvergänglichkeit der Institution. Der jeweilige Herrscher war nur zeitweiliger Repräsentant des Landes Böhmen; sein "ewiger" Herr war der Heilige, ähnlich wie ein Bischof oder ein Abt nur zeitweilig seine Diözese oder sein Kloster repräsentierte; die wahren "Eigentümer" dieser Institutionen sind ihre heiligen Patrone und Beschützer. Durch die Übernahme der kirchlichen Symbolik und Auffassung in den "weltlichen" Bereich erlangte im 11. Jahrhundert der Wenzelskult "staatsymbolische" Bedeutung.'

⁹⁸ See below, n. 104.

⁹⁹ *Canonici Wissegradensis continuatio Cosmae*, ed. by Emler, pp. 203, 216.

¹⁰⁰ *Annales Ottakariani*, ed. by Emler, p. 318.

¹⁰¹ Graus, *Lebendige Vergangenheit*, p. 172.

¹⁰² Graus, *Lebendige Vergangenheit*, pp. 172–73: 'Damit war im 13. Jahrhundert die

If this is correct, and if the *Dalimil Chronicle* is to be read as some sort of political programme of the Bohemian-Czech nobility (a hypothesis I do not share), the absence of St Wenceslas in his role as a patron of the land and its 'eternal ruler' is completely incomprehensible.¹⁰³ This is true the more so if we consider that the author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* relied heavily on his sources — Cosmas of Prague and the works of the first and second *continuatores*. We have to assume that he excluded their narratives on St Wenceslas as patron and helper on purpose.¹⁰⁴ However, the *Dalimil Chronicle's* author did include

Wenzelssymbolik zum Symbol der böhmischen Adelsgemeinde geworden, unabhängig neben, de facto sogar gegen den König. St Wenzel war der echte Herr des Böhmenvolkes, d.h. der Adelsgemeinde, der eigentliche Wahrer des Rechtes, der König sein zeitweiliger Statthalter, dem Heiligen und der Gemeinde verantwortlich, geradezu untertan.' Graus argued that King Přemysl Ottokar II's change to the Bohemian king's personal seal in the second half of the thirteenth century (he replaced the image of St Wenceslas with his own equestrian portrait) was caused by the nobility's 'usurpation' of the saint.

¹⁰³ According to Graus, 'Die Bildung eines Nationalbewußtseins', p. 29, by the beginning of the fourteenth century not Wenceslas but the Czech nobleman stood at the centre of the emerging national consciousness. The only proof he offers for this is the saint's absence in the *Dalimil Chronicle*.

¹⁰⁴ A short comparison of the relevant passages in the *Chronica Boemorum* and in the *Dalimil Chronicle* proves this beyond doubt. Whereas in Cosmas's account St Wenceslas was the saint who delivered Prince Oldřich from prison, in the *Dalimil Chronicle* it is John the Baptist (see Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz, p. 64; *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 439–45). The account of the end of the war between King Vratislav I and his relatives in Moravia, Cosmas's substantial story about the mediating roles of St Wenceslas and St Adalbert, is rendered by Dalimil only very briefly; the story's potential as an identification narrative focusing on language and *gens* remains completely unfulfilled (Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz, pp. 147–48; *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 8–19). In Dalimil's account of the enthronement of Břetislav II, the description of the celebration of the feast of St Wenceslas is missing (Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen*, ed. by Bretholz, pp. 160–61; *Staročeská kronika*, II, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 21–31). The fact that the author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* replaced St Wenceslas with John the Baptist in at least one key story led Josef Jireček and František Michálek Bartoš to conclude that the author belonged to the order of the Knights of St John (see on this *Staročeská kronika*, III, ed. by Bláhová, pp. 284–85) and therefore wanted to emphasize the role of his order's patron at the expense of St Wenceslas. It is indeed so that St John the Baptist is the only saintly helper mentioned in the chronicle in the story of the abuse of Prince Jaromír by the Vršovci (*Staročeská kronika*, I, ed. by Daňhelka and others, pp. 423–37) and in the subsequent chapter on the deliverance of his brother, Prince Oldřich. The stories added by Cosmas's first and second *continuatores* are missing altogether from the *Dalimil Chronicle*. In this respect, the depiction of Soběslav I and his rule in the chronicle of the Canon of Vyšehrad is extremely interesting. In the opening chapter of this work, the narrative concentrates on the Battle of Chlumec

in his work the legendary narrative on St Wenceslas which Cosmas omitted because, as he (Cosmas) said, the matter was widely known in detail — which was indeed true in the case of Cosmas's targeted readership, the church hierarchy in Bohemia.¹⁰⁵ In Dalimil's extensive and detailed narrative, nothing is said on the role of this saint as 'symbolizing of the state' (*staatssymbolisch*), and nothing is added on his attitudes regarding the Czech language (and *gens*). In the individual narratives on the other Přemyslid rulers, the ruler's care for the language and *gens* is crucial. The stories of St Wenceslas's duel with Radslav of Zlicko or of the saint's arrival at the imperial convention in Quedlinburg (both rendered in detail in Cosmas's chronicle) offer excellent material for being rewritten in this sense, i.e. with strong emphasis on *gens* and language. But the author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* did not use this opportunity.¹⁰⁶ Why?

The problem has to be viewed on several levels. First of all, the absence of St Wenceslas as 'symbol of the state' in a chronicle supposedly aiming decisively at the construction of a discourse of state symbolism (if we decide to call it that) raises doubts about the hypothesis that St Wenceslas had a particular *staatssymbolische* meaning in Bohemia at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Furthermore, it calls into question the prevailing interpretation of the *Dalimil Chronicle* as a political programme of the nobility. And finally, it contradicts the hypothesis of the nobility's 'usurpation' of this saint from the middle of the thirteenth century onwards.

It is possible that the bond between the saint and the ruling dynasty was actually so strong at the beginning of the fourteenth century that after the death of the last representative of the Přemyslids, the saint lost any identifica-

in 1126, in which Soběslav I defeated the troops of the German king Lothar III. The victory is depicted by the chroniclers in the most shining colours. The central role is played by a miracle performed by the lance of St Wenceslas, who reportedly fought at the side of his people, named here the 'familia sancti Venceslai' (*Canonici Wissegradensis Continuatio Cosmae*, ed. by Emler, pp. 203–04). Nothing of this sort appears in the *Dalimil Chronicle*. But it is possible that the prominent position of the miracle-narration in the chronicle of the Canon of Vyšehrad influenced the concept of the *persona* of Soběslav in Dalimil's work. Here the Přemyslid ruler himself is the bearer of supernatural powers, not the dynasty's patron St Wenceslas.

¹⁰⁵ It is certainly possible that Cosmas had different reasons for this decision than those he mentions. The rendering of the legendary narrative on St Wenceslas would most likely have destroyed the structure of his chronicle: the saintly ruler and martyr would likely have overshadowed all the merits of subsequent Přemyslid rulers, including that of Břetislav I, whom Cosmas had chosen as the hero of his narrative.

¹⁰⁶ Graus, *Nationenbildung*, p. 92 n. 41, states without further explanation that the patron saints of the realm, St Wenceslas and St Adalbert, did not play a significant role in the *Dalimil Chronicle*.

tion potential beyond the dimension of general religious Christian practice. This could be the reason why the house of Luxembourg was able to incorporate St Wenceslas into its own dynastic representation — because the saint did not figure in strategies of identification shared by other important political players in the realm. The architect of the concept of Luxembourg representation, Charles IV, was actually descended from the Přemyslids and he used this fact very skilfully to build up the narrative of the continuity of indigenous rule in Bohemia.¹⁰⁷ We should therefore regard Charles IV as the actual creator of the idea of St Wenceslas as the eternal ruler of Bohemia, although he has built on older ideas of Wenceslas as patron of the realm.

Besides, the author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* very likely regarded the legendary narrative of Wenceslas as belonging to a different discourse, not to the *origo gentis* issue that he discussed so deeply in his text. This may be why the histories of ecclesiastical institutions and church representatives never play any significant role in his chronicle. For example, the author never discusses the attitudes of the individual bishops of Prague to the Czech language (and *gens*).¹⁰⁸

Cosmas of Prague had regarded the discourses of the *origo gentis* and salvation history as separate, too. He explicitly divided his narrative into mythical time (to which the *origo gentis* narrative belongs) and historical time, which starts with the first baptized ruler of Bohemia, the Přemyslid Bořivoj.¹⁰⁹ Thus Cosmas encapsulated the *origo gentis* discourse in the mythical narrative. The *Dalimil Chronicle's* author suspended Cosmas's division and remained in the *origo gentis* discourse throughout his work, leaving the Christian historical discourse aside. Apparently, he was not able to harmonize the two so that his message would persist — a message we may describe as a response to the breakdown of a discursive set of identifications present in Bohemia at his time: the indigenous ruling lineage as an important (possibly the most important) identification strategy disappeared. The chronicler turned to the *origo gentis* narrative of the Přemyslid dynasty and rewrote it by reinforcing those chosen strategies of identification already present in Cosmas's narrative. He presented the separate strategies of identification attached to language, *gens*, and land as one single strategy, and indeed the most important one. He emphasized the distinctions:

¹⁰⁷ See on this recently Žurek, *L'usage comparé des motifs historiques*.

¹⁰⁸ The absence of information on church matters was discussed in research only from the point of view of the search for the author of the chronicle. Some authors regarded this as proof that the author was a lay nobleman. See on this debate *Staročeská kronika*, III, ed. by Bláhová, pp. 295–98.

¹⁰⁹ See on this above, p. 183.

only under constant threat from foreigners could the language, *gens*, and land be narrated as a non-separable unity. This probably also explains why only the Germans, and not the Poles, appear in the role of this foreign enemy. The Polish threat could not be interpreted as a threat to the Czech language because of the great amount of commonalities, whereas this was obviously different in the case of the German language. The crucial role of the indigenous ruling family is in his narrative relevant only in how it relates to the triad of language, *gens*, and land.

Identities for the Time Being

The number of extant manuscripts of the *Dalimil Chronicle* proves that its discursive approach to the problem of a breakdown of the previously available set of identifications after 1306 was successful — or that there was just nothing else. The narrative was an isolated shot. We have to go as far back as the early Middle Ages to find works that offer similar identification narratives to the *Dalimil Chronicle's*, for example, the works of Jordanes or Paul the Deacon. The 'early medieval' character of the so-called Dalimil's narrative, despite its formal borrowings from the then fashionable chivalric epic, may make the solitary position of his work within the contemporary Bohemian literary production more understandable. Assessing the *Dalimil Chronicle's* unique position in Czech written culture,¹¹⁰ the literary scholar Jan Lehár argued that no extant literary work can be regarded as inspired by the chronicle and/or as following the same literary discourse, except the three short additions to the chronicle that extended its narrative until 1325 and the so-called *Nota od pana Viléma Zajíce* from the year 1319, both probably written by the author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* himself.¹¹¹ The chronicle was, according to Lehár, an 'unproductive' type of historiographical work.

¹¹⁰ Lehár, 'Vznik české literatury', p. 32 characterizes the author of the *Dalimil Chronicle* as child of a half-barbaric milieu, both in terms of his mentality as well as his education. The main feature of his nationalism is brutality, the main feature of his poetic expression rudimentarity. Lehár, *Nejstarší česká epika*, pp. 94–98, claims that there are two works slightly similar to the chronicle in their anti-German aspect, the Czech *Alexandreis* and the apocryphal Czech *Legend of Judas*. But the interdependencies between these works are only hypothetical. Both of them also reveal a different literary context. However, a completely different opinion, from the point of view of a historian, was expressed by Graus, *Nationenbildung*, p. 94 n. 57. Graus did not regard the literary historical facts as relevant. For him, the so-called *Nota od pana Viléma Zajíce* proved that the *Dalimil Chronicle* stood at the beginning of a rich literary tradition (which extant works he meant except the *Nota* remains unclear).

¹¹¹ Lehár, 'Vznik české literatury', pp. 32–33.

Lehár argues from the point of view of literary studies. He ascribes the chronicle's exceptionality to a rapid change in literary taste and in literary genre in the first half of the fourteenth century.¹¹² However, the problem might also have been the specific identification narrative the chronicle represented. After a new dynasty took over the kingdom in the year 1310, this narrative was no longer reproducible. In the following decades, the house of Luxembourg managed to stabilize the realm and to formulate its own 'Czech' identity by selective incorporation of older identification strategies related to the Přemyslid family.¹¹³

Why did an early fourteenth-century author in a politically and economically well-developed land turn to early medieval discourses to address his contemporaries with a proposal how to solve a crisis of collective identity? Would it not have been more logical to write some sort of a consolatory tract, emphasizing God's mercy and displaying confidence in the support of the holy men and women that Czech-speaking Bohemia had given to Christianity? Here, very probably, many factors played a role, the majority of which we are no longer able to reconstruct. One of them surely was the existence of Cosmas of Prague's *Chronica Boemorum* with its enormously flexible identification narrative. Others may have been the everyday experience of Czech-German bilingualism in cities and the enormous speed of economic development and resulting social change in some parts of the realm. Further, the economic boom of the last decades of the thirteenth century was followed by an unprecedented political expansion that came to an unexpected and abrupt end in 1306. It is quite possible that the cultural process of coming to terms with the present and the challenge to reinterpret the past prompted particularly perceptive contemporaries to seek consolation in the mirror of the past in which things may look reassuringly clear and simple. But the impression of clearness and simplicity that the *Dalimil Chronicle* offers at first sight (or first reading) is an illusion. The chronicle is a result of highly complex, always ambiguous narrative strategies. The majority of these will likely stay closed to us forever, or at least do so for the time being. The chronicle offered a number of identificational options. Some of them may seem remarkably modern to us. But it is quite possible that exactly these were, on the contrary, remarkably old.

¹¹² Lehár, 'Vznik české literatury', pp. 32–50.

¹¹³ See on this Rychterová and Žůrek's article in this volume, pp. 225–56.

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LITERARY REMINISCENCES IN THE CHARACTERIZATION OF THE BOHEMIAN KING WENCESLAS II (1283–1305) AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES IN OTTOKAR FROM THE GEUL'S *STYRIAN RHYMED CHRONICLE*

Václav Bok

The *Styrian Rhymed Chronicle*, compiled in the first two decades of the fourteenth century by Ottokar 'from the Geul' (*Otacher ouz der Geul*, also known as Ottokar from the Gaal or Ottokar of Styria) is the longest rhymed chronicle of the German high Middle Ages, and at the same time the one of the greatest importance for medieval as well as literary history.¹ Ottokar came from a wealthy Styrian family of liegemen from Strettweg and was a vassal of the Styrian Lichtensteins. He lived roughly between 1265 and 1320. Nothing certain is known about his youth. Whether he was active as an itinerant poet is just as open to question and unprovable as the possibility that he may have been the *Odacker de Stiria* who can be shown to have studied law in Bologna in 1291. It is likely that he visited Bohemia several times, probably for the coronation of Wenceslas II in 1297 and perhaps again in 1301; in the autumn of 1304, he

¹ Critical edition of the chronicle: Ottokar, *Österreichische Reimchronik*, ed. by Seemüller, v.1–2 (this edition is quoted in this article); the most important discussions of Ottokar and his work are: Loehr, 'Der Steirische Reimchronist her Otacher ouz der Geul', pp. 89–130; Liebertz-Grün, *Das andere Mittelalter*; Weinacht, 'Ottokar von Steiermark (O. aus der Geul)', cols 238–45, 1157–58; Knapp, *Die Literatur des Spätmittelalters*, pp. 371–82.

Václav Bok, Professor emeritus at the Institute for German Studies, University of České Budějovice, works on medieval German literatures and medieval multilingual cultures.