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The Bohemian Nobility and Foreign Policy in the Middle Ages

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The broad framework of the topic given in the title comprises two basic levels — we can define the first of these as the role of the nobility in the foreign policy of the Kingdom (or the Kings) of Bohemia, and the second as the “foreign policy” of noble families, i.e. their private contacts abroad. These two levels are naturally interconnected — contacts based on their roles in foreign diplomacy were inseparable from personal and family ties. The common denominator here was not just a geographical framework going beyond the “border forest”, but also the specific phenomenon of (foreign) travels, cultural inspiration and exchanges in a wider sense, reflected in the environment of the royal court and also in the private courts of the nobility. The social status of individual noblemen and families was still determined by ties to the environment milieu and by participation in regional structures and hierarchies, including cross-border ties, which amongst the Bohemian nobility date back mainly to the 13th and 14th centuries. Rituals, ceremonies, and the means of expression of the nobility’s self-presentation were fundamentally identical in the Bohemian and foreign (Central European) environments, and thus represented a common social capital “understandable” to all. Furthermore, there was also a specific bond between the Bohemian and foreign nobility in the form of partial contacts, shared interests and family ties.

An essential condition for foreign contacts were travels — of the Bohemian nobility abroad, and of foreign nobility to Bohemia. In recent decades the issue of travelling, also in the Middle Ages, has been a key focus of Central European historiography from various perspectives, and as for many other topics, here for a certain level of knowledge the issue of the meaning and evidential value of different typologies is essential, or rather categorisation, which historians always focus on in one way or another both consciously and subconsciously. In this regard journeys and travelling are illustrative for our research focus: different working categorisations of travels also demonstrated that in fact we would find only a few cases where a journey could be clearly categorised. A pilgrimage could have a diplomatic mission, as

could crusades or “knightly” expeditions, while failed diplomatic trips could become military expeditions and “cavalier” trips (or Grand Tours) could end in recruitment to the ranks of mercenary forces. In addition, especially as the era progressed, every pilgrimage also involved a degree of sightseeing and education.¹ What are the consequences of this? It is difficult to tie down not just journeys and travelling, but also the broader framework of foreign contacts (for the Bohemian nobility), to clearly define criteria characterising the subject of interest.

Described like this, however, the topic is in danger of becoming open-ended — and so it is a good idea to define the **core issues, which are the focus of the following considerations**. The primary focuses are the levels (areas) in which the Bohemian nobility applied themselves in the foreign diplomacy of Bohemian kings, including in transformations of their roles; secondly, the cultural and historical framework of these travels: their link to the court alongside foreign experience allowed the Bohemian nobility to keep up with their foreign counterparts across the whole spectrum of means of symbolic communication at their time, while their educational horizons were also generally identical, and the mutual contacts of Bohemian and foreign noble families had a whole range of forms (this applies in particular from the era of Charles IV’s rule within a territorial framework of the Lands of the Bohemian Crown).² Finally, there is the issue of the type of nobleman-diplomat and whether this can even be spoken of in late medieval Bohemia: if so, then what basic characteristics can we ascribe to these people (in terms of their assets, social and educational background, nature of relations to the court, the issue of social advancement)?³ A notional fourth point, which will not be focused on separately, but which will be present in all the previous aspects, is the comparative level: the nobleman’s role in the context of foreign sovereign policy is a supranational phenomenon in the Middle Ages (and also in subsequent centuries). The core topics here apply generally: levels and methods for utilising the mobility on the one hand, and the social, cultural and historical context of their (diplomatic) contacts with foreign circles (and unavoidably also the royal court) on the other.

¹ E.g. PÁNEK 1993 distinguishes six basic categories: 1. Handelsreisen; 2. politische und diplomatische; 3. militärische; 4. religiöse Reisen; 5. Studienreisen; 6. künstlerisch motivierte Reisen (meaning: artistic creative trips, not trips to find out about art: these were study trips). HLAVÁČEK 1998 presents an overview of types of journeys which members of all social classes (monarchs, noblemen, burghers and the clergy as well as peasants) undertook in terms of the purpose (type) of journey and their geographical framework. This focuses in particular on the nobility PÁNEK, POLÍVKA 2005.

² See literature in note 29.

³ This aspect will be elaborated on using the example of Bořita of Martinice († 1478) — a less well-known holder of court offices and a diplomat whose name is linked to the social advancement of the House of Martinice and the beginnings of their residence in Smečno.

THE BOHEMIAN NOBILITY ABROAD

We can find documents on the journeys of Bohemian nobility abroad as far back as in the 12th century — and it is no surprise that some of the first were **pilgrimages**, whose destination was the Holy Land or one of the renowned European pilgrimage sites. A broad category incorporates crusades, and “knightly” expeditions — which had in common a journey undertaken under the sign of the cross (i.e. Christian symbol), and over a longer timescale of the 12th–14th century, the view of these journeys underwent changes (or deformation, or even degeneration) to the knightly ideal. The European “alternative” to the crusades is commonly referred to as the “**Prussian Crusade**” — in which instead of expensive and risky expeditions to free the Holy Sepulchre, much more comfortable and safer expeditions were made, their objective being to convert the pagans, in this case the Prussians and Livonians, to the true faith. Bohemian noblemen regularly took part in these expeditions, many times alongside their kings, Ottokar II of Bohemia and John of Bohemia. Even the young Charles IV took part in one such crusade led by John of Bohemia in 1337. The composition of those taking part in the expeditions led by the Bohemian kings was a clear reflection of the relations of those with power from amongst the nobility to the court centre, and more broadly links between domestic and foreign policy, and so the role of the nobility in diplomacy at the time.⁴

Bohemian noblemen also accompanied their king abroad a number of times on **military expeditions**. Again, their close association with the diplomacy of the period is logical — as is the international impact of the outcome of military conflicts. Leading Bohemians marching alongside Duke Vladislaus to come to the aid of Frederick I, in particular during the Siege of Milan (1158), became an integral part of the Bohemian nobility’s collective memory. The heroism they displayed in this battle gave rise to a coat of arms for many of them, and the event held a firm place in the beginnings of the family history. If we take a look at famous battles with the participation of Bohemian kings with the nobility alongside them, then the most renowned are undoubtedly the Battle of Kressenbrunn (1260), Battle on the Marchfeld (1278) and Battle of Crécy (1346). The Bohemian noblemen were regularly involved in battles against the Turks – alongside Emperor Sigismund at Nicopolis (1396) and alongside Louis II at the Battle of Mohács (1526). Some battles later became a firm component of Bohemian nobility’s collective memory, while others did not — and even battles which were lost could be used as propaganda. The House of Šlik (or Schlik), counts which came from Cheb burghers, declared their loyalty to the ruler through the memory of Štěpán Šlik, who fell in the battle against the Turks

⁴ A factual look at the Prussian Crusades was given in: TADRA 1897, pp. 134–144; GOLL 1897; KNAP 2009 (Ottokar II’s two Prussian expeditions and their political context including a revised view on the founding of Königsberg).

at Mohács alongside King Louis II in 1526 — the fact that this was not particularly relevant to the new successor, Ferdinand I, is another story, however.⁵

A specific phenomenon of the post-Hussite period, culminating in the 1440s-1470s, then gradually disappearing over subsequent decades, was the **mercenary work of Bohemian noblemen**. This was almost exclusively done in foreign lands (mainly Saxony, Bavaria as well as Austria, Hungary, Poland and Prussia — the Teutonic Order). This is one way the Bohemian nobility jointly shaped “Central European history”, although here the links to the policy of the Bohemian kings and the interests of the land were somewhat looser and varied from case to case.⁶

We now arrive at **diplomatic journeys** in the narrow sense — i.e. those in which noblemen could perform a dual role: 1. members of the ruler’s entourage, at least at first sight passive or with only partial discussion with persons involved; 2. representatives of the ruler — the Bohemian king in whose name they acted. The Bohemian nobility accompanied Bohemian kings twice on their journeys to be crowned King of the Romans — in the first case for the coronation of Charles IV, Bohemian and Roman King and from 1355 also Emperor, and in the second case for the coronation of Frederick III, who will be mentioned further. A number of leading Bohemian noblemen accompanied Charles IV on both his journeys to Rome (1354/1355, 1368). The first of these especially, his coronation journey, documented in detail in both diplomatic and narrative sources, reflects the role of diplomatic journeys in the process of creating (restoring) social relationships between the ruler and the noblemen, and their power structure support. Similarly, Charles’ journey to Avignon in 1365 (at the invitation of Pope Urban V and expressing, according to Charles, his willingness to resettle in Rome) as well as his very last foreign journey, an almost symbolic trip to France, the land of his youth (1377–1378); the latter of even greater attraction as the subject of historical interest due to the extraordinary source documents, incorporating images as well as words.

A major figure of foreign policy during the rule of Charles’ son, Wenceslaus IV, was Bořivoj of Svinaře — he travelled to Bavaria, Swabia and Alsace as Wenceslaus’ envoy and confidant. He was also present, alongside other Bohemian lords (such as Petr of Vartenberk and Konrad Kraiger of Kraigk), during the journey of the young Anne of Bohemia (1366–1394), sister of King Wenceslaus, to England via Brussels (1381), where Anne was married to King of England, Richard II.⁷

⁵ Memory of battles amongst the Bohemian nobility ŠIMŮNEK 2013, pp. 306–316. Comprehensively on the Battle of Mohács VYBÍRAL 2008 (with bibliography); the declaration of the House of Šlik’s loyalty to the Bohemian kings based on Štěpán Šlik: FAJT 2005; TRESP 2014.

⁶ The phenomenon of the Bohemian nobility doing mercenary work was recently looked at in particular by U. Tresp, and of his work I would highlight the synthesis TRESP 2004 (with an extensive bibliography); for the image of the Bohemian mercenary-Hussite as one of the traditional stereotypes of how others are seen ŠIMŮNEK, TRESP 2016.

⁷ French trip ŠMAHEL 2006; Bořivoj of Svinaře RŮŽEK 1989.

Three foreign journeys in which noblemen took on the role of both royal escort and diplomatic messengers took place during the short reign of Ladislaus the Posthumous (1453–1457). The first was a coronation journey to Rome — not Ladislaus' but rather King of the Romans, and from 1452 also Emperor, Frederick III, who was also Ladislaus' guardian. At the diet in Benešov (1451), where Enea Silvio informed the Bohemian lords that the Emperor planned to take King Ladislaus with him to Italy, a promise was made to send young noblemen (“*ex nobilitate primarios iuvenes*”) to accompany and serve the Emperor on his journey to Italy.⁸ Bohemian noblemen also accompanied King Ladislaus on his oath-taking journey to neighbouring crown lands in 1454 — the journey itself reflects one of the forms of demonstrating sovereign power and political ties between Bohemia and its neighbours (if *de iure* part of the crown and under the Bohemian kings' rule), instilling the power hierarchy through ceremony.⁹ Finally, the third foreign diplomatic journey of Bohemian noblemen linked to Ladislaus the Posthumous — Magdalena, daughter of French King Charles VII was to be his wife. A delegation, headed by Zdeněk of Šternberk, was sent to France and was to return to Bohemia with the bride. However, the young king died before the marriage could even take place.¹⁰

During this period, Bohemian noblemen feature more commonly as representatives of the ruler in international diplomacy. This continued to be the case subsequently. We have some extraordinary sources available to us — travel reports of direct participants — in the case of two diplomatic missions led by Bohemian lords on behalf of Bohemian King, George of Poděbrady (who had also grown up as a member of the nobility). These involve two to three renowned texts — about a diplomatic expedition to France (1464) and, in particular, those of Václav Šašek of Bířkov and Gabriel Tetzl, who documented the course of the “journey from Bohemia to the end of the world”, a diplomatic mission led by the king's brother-in-law, Lev of Rožmítal (1465–1467). These texts do not just give a general outline of both expeditions, but also reflect the educational and cultural horizons of their authors, and those on the journeys: the matter-of-fact style they speak of a large number of ceremonial moments and customs gives the impression they were not unfamiliar to them.¹¹

There was a specific historical context behind the sending of a Bohemian (nobility) mission to Frankfurt to elect the King of the Romans in 1486 — the fact that the Bohemian King Vladislaus II was not invited to the election was not a diplomatic error, but a simple reflection of the fact that the Kingdom of Bohemia was no longer

⁸ SILVIO 1998, p. 202; for context, see URBÁNEK 1918, pp. 505–514.

⁹ BOBKOVÁ 2009.

¹⁰ URBÁNEK 1924, especially pp. 115–119.

¹¹ 1464 journey — diary BABOUČKOVÁ, BOUBÍN 2015 (*ibidem* literature). The journey 1465–1467 is documented in the diary of Václav Šašek of Bířkov (URBÁNEK 1940, including interpretation of context and maps) and Gabriel Tetzl (TETZEL 2003). In terms of symbolic communication, the mission during the stay in Brussels is illustrative (HUESMANN 1999). For period context BOUBÍN 2008.

considered a part of the Holy Roman Empire, and not even a fairly large and representative mission of Bohemian lords changed the fact that the chessboard of imperial policy no longer considered the Bohemian King one of the electors.¹²

Diplomatic contacts abroad, however, could also be more long-term in nature — Bohemian noblemen, holders of offices abroad, were thus direct representatives of the Bohemian King abroad. A determinant in this regard was naturally the foreign policy of the particular monarch, who sought territorial acquisitions and endeavoured to hold on to them and bind them to the Bohemian Crown: there are documents, mainly from the Austrian lands, available to us in the context of Ottokar of Bohemia's policies, although the Bohemian nobility come into play more strongly in occupying offices in neighbouring lands of the Bohemian Crown under the reign of Charles IV. We can encounter Bohemian noblemen in official posts in New Bohemia (Neuböhmen, the Bohemian Palatinate), Upper and Lower Lusatia and in Silesia. Contacts with foreign nobility and through them local noble courts became more extensive with their penetration into Bohemia.¹³

A specific type of “noble foreign diplomacy” is **contacts with the Curia**, from roughly the mid-13th century. This was a result of the fact that the Bishops of Prague (from 1344 archbishops) were exclusively of noble origin from the early 13th century until the early 15th century. Jan IV of Dražice (1301–1343) lived for many years in Avignon, and Jan of Jenštejn (Archbishop of Prague 1379–1396, whose quarrel with Wenceslas IV was dealt with by the Curia) died and was buried in Rome. As we do for secular offices, we can also find Bohemian noblemen holding foreign ecclesiastical positions, for example as bishops.¹⁴ In the post-Hussite period secular noblemen were more commonly entrusted with dealing with the Curia — King Vladislaus II of Bohemia, for example, sent Půta Švihovský of Rýzmbek and Supreme Judge Jan Hasištejnský of Lobkovice to Pope Innocent VIII in Rome.¹⁵

THE BOHEMIAN NOBILITY'S CULTURAL HORIZON

If we look at the **geographical range** of diplomatic and other foreign journeys, and the Bohemian nobility's contacts in the Middle Ages, we come to a not unsurprising conclusion. In terms of territory, they covered almost the whole of Europe — in this context, Scandinavian countries and south-east Europe played a marginal

¹² VOREL 2016 describes the political context of the time and reconstructs the composition of those taking part in the Bohemian mission.

¹³ See literature in note 29.

¹⁴ Jan IV of Dražice HLEDÍKOVÁ 1991. Arnošt of Pardubice HLEDÍKOVÁ 2008. Jan of Jenštejn BLECHOVÁ, DOLEŽALOVÁ 2021. A lot of factual minutiae is collected in TADRA 1897, pp. 104–114; the material making clear the spectrum of contacts between the Czech clergy and the Curia — in particular during the 14th century.

¹⁵ FAJT 1995, p. 28.

role, but (logically) the most extensive ties are seen within Central Europe, including the German and Austrian lands as well as Silesian duchies. Personal ties to the Hungarian kings (beginning with Sigismund of Luxembourg) significantly furthered links to Hungarian territory, particularly intensively after 1490, when Vladislaus II moved from Prague to Buda. A number of Bohemian and Moravian noblemen were also in contact with the court of Vladislaus' opponent of many years, Matthias Corvinus.¹⁶

Diplomatic tasks *eo ipso* required not just a knowledge of the issue which was the subject of discussion, but also a certain general **perspective and education**. We can leave to one side considerations about literacy, which was nowhere near as exceptional as used to be thought. On the other hand we should have no illusions as to the intensity of foreign university studies, which were more frequent from the late Middle Ages as part of sightseeing trips to Western and Southern Europe. One issue, however, is worthy of note: language skills and the use of interpreters (referred to as “řečníci” or “speakers” in Old Czech) in contacts abroad (in particular, diplomatic contacts). Yet their involvement did not always mean that the parties could not make themselves understood without them — just the fact that all taking part could speak their mother tongue represented a symbolical declaration of equality. A number of Bohemian noblemen could speak German at a basic level at the very least, and some even came from bilingual families. Knowledge of other languages, including Latin, was unusual.

Talking of education, it is preferable to consider here knowledge of “**symbolic communication**”, common in Central (and likely also in Western to some extent) Europe — undoubtedly this is evidenced by the number of Czech participants in the international enterprise of the so-called “Prussian Crusade” campaigns of the 13th and 14th centuries, and the journey by John of Michalovice, undertaken towards the end of the 13th century, to Paris. The only source which relates to this expedition is the epic poem by Heinrich von Freiberg — which teeters on the edge of the indistinct border between reflecting the general chivalric idea and actual reality, and one can thus only speculate that Jan, a member of Wenceslaus II's court, symbolically represented his king at French arenas.¹⁷ As the period progressed, the “Prussian Crusade” campaigns grew ever further away from the ideals (if only theoretical) of the crusades to the Holy Land. From the 13th century onwards their political power context was already clear: their projection of imperial interests and papal policies, expressed in the expansion of the Teutonic Order. The headquarters of the Grand Master, the castle in Marienburg (Malbork) was not coincidentally the destination of a number of “Prussian Crusade” campaigns. A unique response, although it does have a number of interpretational issues, is the hall at the Jindřichův Hradec castle, portraying the legend of St George and including a lower strip of coats of arms.¹⁸

¹⁶ MACEK 1992, pp. 226–262; KALOUS 2008.

¹⁷ KRAUS 1888; IWAŃCZAK 1995; FREIBERG 2005.

¹⁸ Most recently RŮŽEK 2016 (with an overview of research into room paintings, interpretations of this space, and in particular the coat of arms gallery there).

All journeys were a **school of life**, whether they involved diplomacy message, service for one of the foreign courts, or were study trips, pilgrimages or sight-seeing tours. It is frequently difficult to clearly differentiate these types of journey, because travelling, especially to a renowned and, from the perspective of the Bohemian Kingdom, distant pilgrimage site automatically involved a voyage of many weeks, during which travellers could not fail to expand their spiritual horizons with many impressions and discoveries about life in nearby and more distant lands, while prominent pilgrims included court visits along their route into their travels. They were able to compare much of what they saw and experienced on their travels with what they knew from home — and this was reflected in their travel reports. They were also present — either as (joint) participants or mere spectators — in a number of rituals, many of which had a stereotypical nature, and despite their possible local specificity they could hold the same basic framework of meaning. They understood it and were able to transfer its external forms to their homeland — the moment of confrontation of the new with engrained stereotypes of perception was strong in this regard.¹⁹

The noblemen brought back different objects from their foreign travels depending on their interests, including manuscripts and later printed books. They were also able to bring foreign designs in the field of architecture and art into their domestic residences. Bishop Jan IV of Dražice, who lived in France in the 1320s, invited builders to Bohemia from France, while Lev of Rožmitál, head of a diplomatic mission to Western European sovereign courts (1465–1467), may have also been inspired by foreign models, when he decided to paint the interiors of his residential castle in Blatná.²⁰ Builders, artisans and artists who were born abroad but worked in Bohemia also brought foreign designs with them.

NOBLEMAN-DIPLOMAT

Proximity to the royal court as the focus of power was a barometer for relations between the ruler and individuals / families — this mechanism applied under the Přemyslids and later. The political subtext of the Bohemian nobility's ties abroad was linked to the interests and ambitions of individual families in relation to the court. We could find one or a number of people around each of the Bohemian Kings who were very close to the king and his policies — occasionally these could be one of the major noble families, such as Vok I of Rožmberk under the rule of Ottokar II, at other times they could be people whose proximity to the ruler stemmed from their noble or knightly status, or they may have come from amongst the burghers: an example here could be the Lords of Velhartice under Charles IV, Bořivoj of Svinaře under

¹⁹ For a reconstruction of the spectrum of symbolic communication means of expression which Czech noblemen came into contact with in various contexts, ŠIMŮNEK 2014.

²⁰ HLEDÍKOVÁ 1998. For the social context of representation through architecture and art in late medieval Bohemia, see KUTHAN 2010, 2013.

Wenceslaus IV and Kašpar Šlik under Sigismund of Luxembourg.²¹ With the end of the interregnum (1439–1453), the opportunities for social advancement in relation to the royal court returned to normal. An anomalous case is the social advancement of the sons of George of Poděbrady — the Count of Glatz (Kłodzko) and the Duke of Münsterberg (Ziębice) — as one of the phenomena accompanying Poděbrad's masterful Central European policy.²² There are also other cases of extraordinary social advancement of well-travelled and educated noblemen-diplomats during this period. Politicians such as Albrecht of Kolovraty († 1510) and Zdeněk Lev of Rožmitál († 1535) were not lacking in drive, while the life of Ladislav Černo-horský of Boskovice († 1520) can serve as an example of the connection between a foreign university education, travelling and a diplomatic career.²³

A much less well-known figure is Bořita of Martinice († 1478). A man of relatively modest circumstances, he was gifted in multiple areas: an official and diplomat in the service of three Bohemian kings, conscientiously building up his family residence in Smečno (Central Bohemia). It was Bořita who was behind his family's rise, with its members honoured with the title of Count a few generations later.²⁴ His life deserves closer examination — as a case study of social advancement.

Bořita of Martinice, the son of Markvart of Martinice, becomes a focus of written sources from the beginning of the rule of Ladislaus the Posthumous (King of Bohemia 1453–1457). He is described as holding the office of Marshal of the Royal Court (1453–1461) and later Royal Hofmeister (1463–1465), which even of itself suggests his close ties to the court and the kingdom's political leaders back in the early 1450s. In 1454, King Ladislaus sent Bořita of Martinice on a diplomatic mission to the King of France, Charles VII — which demonstrates not just the king's trust in him, but also Bořita's diplomatic skill. The fact that he remained in his post even after Ladislaus's death and the succession of George of Poděbrady (King of Bohemia 1458–1471) is not surprising for an experienced diplomat (which we can see in, for example, Bořita's involvement in negotiations on the Treaty of Cheb / Eger, in 1459) and in the fact that Bořita was one of the participants in the renowned diplomatic mission to West European royal courts led by Lev of Rožmitál (1465–1467). Involvement in at least two prestigious diplomatic expeditions is also evidence of his formal, and also undoubtedly informal, authority.

Bořita's co-operation with George of Poděbrady continued — evidenced by his position as governor of the castle in Most (one of the outcomes of the above-men-

²¹ Vok I of Rožmberk WAGNER 1962; Burchard of Hardegg KAVKA 1992; Lords of Velhartice DOLEŽALOVÁ 2015; Bořivoj of Svináře RŮŽEK 1989; there are extensive writings on Kašpar Šlik, including whether he was a forger (HEINIG 1988), but no less noteworthy is the place which the Šliks — originally burghers from Cheb — took up over the course of the 15th century (TRESP 2009).

²² FELCMAN, FUKALA et al. 2008, especially pp. 72–106.

²³ ŠMERAL 2009.

²⁴ ŠIMŮNEK 2012 (ibidem bibliography and citation of sources on Bořita's biography).

tioned negotiations in Cheb in spring 1459 was the return of Most and other Saxon pledges in the Ore Mountains foothills to the Bohemian Crown), which Bořita held in the very difficult (for the Bohemian King) years of 1467–1471/1474. Loyalty to the “heretic” king was helpful to Bořita both in the interdict period and multiple times subsequently in organising military funds from amongst those connected to the Most castle. Bořita was active until the day he died — in 1473, he was involved in tripartite Bohemian-Polish-Hungarian negotiations in Opava, and he was regularly to be found in around the mid-1470s amongst the assessors of the Chamber Court, and in 1477 held the office of Chamberlain to King Vladislaus II (King of Bohemia 1471–1516). Two documents from autumn 1477 demonstrate how much the king valued Bořita’s military and political experience.

In parallel with his official and court career, Bořita also focused on building his residence, i.e. Smečno. He inherited it from his father, and over roughly two decades, he transformed it substantially. The pillars of the profane and the sacred are fundamental in his concept for the new family residence: he replaced the former manor (of unknown appearance) with a castle, the central focal point of which was the castle chapel presbytery, built on the castle bastion and with a tower stretching upwards (dated on an inscription plate incorporating the coats of arms of Bořita and his wife to 1460). The parish church at the forecastle was expanded (while preserving part of the older structure), and became the family necropolis. Bořita died in 1478 and was buried in the family necropolis he had set up in the Smečno church: the fragment of his tombstone remains preserved.

The subsequent Bořita of Martinice generations (the first name Bořita becoming a family surname) built on Bořita’s concept — at the start of the 16th century their residence acquired an improved status twice (in 1510 Smečno was elevated to the status of a small town, for the occasion of which it was renamed Muncifaj, then it became a town in 1515), and the town was given an emblem and the right to build walls (the construction of which never progressed beyond an early stage). Over the course of the 16th century a town hall was added, located at the town gate in the lower part of the sloping square, and a Renaissance-styled deanery was built near the church and castle. Smečno is a textbook example of a location where the work of its founder was built on by his successors, with the design of the town of the ruler’s residence further elaborated over time.

The memory of Bořita as founder of the tradition of building Smečno into a residential seat, became a firm part of the Martinice family tradition. His first name, Bořita, became a firm aspect of the family identity of the Lords of Martinice, and when the family grew more influential after the Battle of White Mountain (1620), the House of Martinice turned again to its famous ancestor: claiming he was a member of the Order of the Golden Fleece (he was meant to have acquired this during the course of the diplomatic mission led by Lev of Rožmitál, specifically at the court of the Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good, at the turn of January and February 1466), something which was completely impossible in the 15th century, but

historical memory is short and it would seem that nobody at the time took on the role of carefully administering records of the Order's members. Jiří Adam Bořita of Martinice (1602–1651) thereby implied that his ancestors had long been members of this elite society (with an exclusive tie to the Habsburgs — whom, however, the Order did not find favour in the 15th century). Yet his route to joining the Order was long and despite close contacts with the Habsburg monarchs, we know only incidentally of the effort he put in to getting the Golden Fleece and the means he used to do so. What is clear, however, is that he was the first in his family who was able to boast of holding the Order's insignia (1647).²⁵

CONCLUSIONS

Ondřej of Dubá's law book from around the year 1400 states eloquently in its sub-heading: "The Law of the Bohemian lands has long been laid down, since paganism and in particular the time of the ploughman Přemysl and the lords who lived at that time."²⁶ It is significant that this formulation was written by a nobleman — it declares not just the antiquity of the legal tradition (which Ondřej describes in his legal book), but also the integral connection between the ruler and the nobility in administering the land and creating the legislation. This model — i.e. the separation of powers and the resulting necessity of a compromise between those with power, whose specific traits related to the prevailing situation, is characteristic of the Middle Ages. This period comprised centuries where the Přemyslid, Luxembourg and Jagiellonian dynasties alternated on the Bohemian throne, and once the king even came from amongst the nobility themselves (George of Poděbrady). Contacts between the Kingdom of Bohemia and neighbouring countries took a number of basic courses over the centuries, with the borders between them often pervious or at least blurred — in terms diplomatic and military (often closely related), economic (i.e. mainly involving trade) and cultural (incorporating a wide field of adopting designs in architecture and art, but also symbolic communication and lifestyle). **The crucial role of the nobility in foreign policy is a characteristic trait of the Middle Ages**, as were aspects closely related or connected. Cross-border contacts of the Czech nobility were diplomatic and cultural in nature, and overlapped with a wide range of other issues: the composition of regional noble courts and holders of court offices, helping to shape royal policy, and social advancement in the Late Middle Ages. These are all general topics which can be looked at within a comparative Central European framework. We can outline it in loose relation to three topical fields creating the basic structure of the article.

²⁵ ŠIMŮNEK 2014a.

²⁶ ČÁDA 1930, p. 123.

It is not difficult to come across records of foreign (diplomatic) travels of noblemen in medieval Bohemian written sources.²⁷ They are mentioned repeatedly, sometimes retrospectively, or in the form of a statement of fact that a particular person was here or there. In this regard the names of witnesses of royal charters (one of many levels of close ties to the court and the ruler) remain a core starting point. This also applies to documents issued in the interest of noblemen themselves. In this point it can be seen how apparently passive involvement in the ruler's entourage was such an important factor of social communication. The documentary evidence is also a fundamental source for putting together itineraries as key support for the study of social, geographical and time aspects of travelling. Not only number of people, but also, for example, the number and colours of horses played a role in symbolic communication — it is generally true that today's historians can only in some cases reconstruct more closely what was obvious to contemporaries.²⁸ An analogy here are chronicles, where we also encounter a number of laconic or detailed reports about diplomatic travels. It is not true, however, that the monarch automatically overshadowed members of his entourage, as many times it is these chronicles which provide extra information on events and the involvement of noblemen in them, in an noteworthy manner (in terms of providing both invaluable information and interpretation). Even in all these cases, however, it is hard to overcome the chasm between more or less indubitable facts on the one hand and their interpretation on the other. This is a fundamental question: are we even able to penetrate the fabric of informal relations within diplomacy, and how were the borders between messenger and diplomat, between member of the (royal) entourage and shaper of policy, determined? It is often complicated and somewhat hypothetical to find answers to these questions.

Over the centuries the bidirectional links between Bohemia and foreign countries intersected at the **royal court**. This was not just because it was here that the threads of foreign policy converged and anyone who wanted to make a mark in the field had to have ties to the court. It was also important domestically — the court, for example, mediated in the introduction of the Western European feudal system into Bohemia (and there is an evident predominance of families with close links to the court, and thus offering potential support to the monarch, in the recipients of fiefs). The case is similar for the integration of foreign families through feudal and marriage policy, with the direct support of the Luxembourg kings; although noble families of foreign origin did not integrate in Bohemia to a larger extent until the post-Hussite period.²⁹

²⁷ For an overview of the role of the Czech nobility in the context of foreign diplomacy see ŠIMŮNEK, DVORÁČKOVÁ-MALÁ 2020 (ibidem also bibliography).

²⁸ On the importance of itineraries in the study, see: HLAVÁČEK 1998; ŠMAHEL 2002.

²⁹ A core work on the issue of adopting the feudal model remains, see KAVKA 1990. For more on foreign nobility making purchases in Bohemia, see: BOBKOVÁ 1992; PAUK 2007; PLAČEK 1997; PAUK 2012; in the case of Charles IV in particular, we can see deliberate attempts at integrating foreign nobility within Bohemia at the level of feudal policy and also noble marriage policy (TRESP 2011; TRESP 2013; VELIČKA 2014).

Relations between the nobility and the king comprise one of the key axes of interpreting the country's political history, but they also have a broad impact in terms of the social and cultural history of the nobility: in terms of their assets, ties to the court and the holding of court offices and (informal) hierarchies, personal and family careers, and so social advancement. The court regularly opened the doors to a career — in the 13th, the 15th and later centuries. Court offices, diplomatic missions and property and social advancement represent a model which we continue to see in various forms. There are two core perspectives here: 1. individuals' career (we could demonstrate this model in detail using the example of the career and social advancement of the nobleman-diplomat Bořita of Martinice, although there are other similar cases),³⁰ and 2. the continuity and/or discontinuity of persons and families around the royal courts, or in diplomatic service as one of the segments.³¹ The political power specificity of the period is reflected in both these areas: an example here would be the court of Sigismund of Luxembourg, whose contacts with the Bohemian nobility date back to long before he became King of Bohemia (1420/1436–1437), specifically to the time he was King of Hungary. Some Bohemian noblemen fought alongside Sigismund in the Battle of Nicopolis (1396); personal ties intersected at Sigismund's court, where one can (logically) come across Moravians for the most part, but also a surprising number of Bohemians. In some cases we are able to reconstruct social ties to the Hungarian nobility with connections to Sigismund: in the late 14th and early 15th centuries many Bohemian and Moravian noblemen were in contact with Stibor Sr. and his son Stibor Jr. of Stibořice — some were even in his direct service, whether in the military or as officials (the Stibors had a number of estates in Moravia). The court of Stibor Sr. († 1414) in particular evidently copied the royal court in terms of the people who made it up.³² Sigismund was the very first King of Bohemia who symbolically tied his loyal followers to him in a way which was coming into fashion at the time: with his own order, in his case the Order of the Dragon. Some of its members included Bohemian noblemen such as Čeněk of Vartenberk, and the Order's emblem was also used to decorate stove tiles.³³

³⁰ See the literature in note 21; from an earlier era (the second half of the 13th century), one can also note PAUK 2008.

³¹ Issues studied at the court of John of Bohemia were given in some detail, but less comprehensively for his successors within the Luxembourg dynasty — see ABDULLAHI 2013. The issue of the people comprising John's court has been looked at in a number of Z. Žalud's studies (comprehensively ŽALUD 2006, where foreign families are also examined — the Lords of Colditz, Bergau and others). The research potential of Charles IV's court is reflected in a brief summary given in BOBKOVÁ, ŽALUD 2012 (with bibliography).

³² Battle of Nicopolis (1396) most recently VOJTÍŠEK 2016. Sigismund of Luxembourg ELBEL 2009, ELBEL 2012. About the Stibors family, see DVORÁKOVÁ 2003, their relations with the Bohemian and Moravian nobility especially pp. 112–115, 118.

³³ GRAUS 1996; LÖVEI 2006; HAZLBAUER 1999.

The cited passage from Ondřej of Dubá's law book about the perception of the nobility's role at the time in the context of law making — and in a broader sense thus their involvement in administering the land — may have a counterpart in a declaration from the ruler. While within domestic policy the nobility were often opponents of the ruler, and frequently rivals, and compromises and *modus vivendi* had to constantly be sought out, in contrast to this they stood by his side within foreign policy.³⁴ We can find this idea captured in symbolic form in the renowned heraldic gallery at the Lauf Castle (approx. 1360) containing the coats of arms/emblems of secular families, (arch)bishops, noblemen and burghers, in which the monarch primarily declared the symbolic construct of the Bohemian Crown and St Wenceslas as its patron; this was also Charles' demonstration of his claim to power on the path to the Empire.³⁵ We come across this numerous times from various perspectives and in different contexts. This is evidenced in Bohemian noblemen accompanying their monarch on foreign expeditions, and into battle, representing the Bohemian King ad hoc (diplomatic missions) and over a longer period (foreign offices). Even cases where domestic political problems overlapped with the international field, this changed nothing in regard to the global perception of the Bohemian nobility as supporting the Bohemian rulers.

The court played an absolutely central role in a number of respects: it was a political (and diplomatic as well) and also cultural focus point; as such **the royal court represented a model for the nobility.**³⁶ The education of young noblemen at regional courts was not just linked to adopting the routines of court etiquette and aristocratic behaviour, but also represented an opportunity to acquire a broader cultural perspective and education, and contact from the youth could be built on in future. Travel, perspective and experience *eo ipso* legitimised the holding of important offices. Dalimil's complaints about adopting new models from abroad, cited many times in literature, in particular tournaments, claimed to have been brought to Bohemia by Hoger von Freiberg, are the proverbial tip of the iceberg.³⁷ And they reflect the reality of the cultural transfer which affected the means of expression of the noble representation, their mass culture and also art (litera-

³⁴ Even the traditional motif of betrayal of the king (Ottokar II of Bohemia), which has stuck to some domestic noblemen in relation to the Battle on the Marchfeld (1278), is far from unambiguous in justification — see: JAN 2009; REITINGER 2010.

³⁵ The castle in “New Bohemia” — before Nuremberg (on the route from Bohemia) with a statue of St Wenceslas on its façade (hence Wenceslas Castle) — represented an obvious symbol of power and ideology when seen from outside. The most detailed information on the coat of arms gallery is given in RŮŽEK 1988 (with a catalogue of emblems and coats-of-arms accompanied by thorough commentary); for an interpretation of its importance see: NOVOTNÝ 2006, pp. 149–150; TRESP 2011, pp. 96–103. The context of Charles' policy in New Bohemia (the Bohemian Palatinate) BOBKOVÁ 2007.

³⁶ ŠIMŮNEK 2013a.

³⁷ On the beginnings of tournaments as one of the traditional forms of cultural transfer, see JAN 2005.

ture, visual arts). A specific issue was the reception of literature — the nobility's patronage of literature in the 13th century was a declaration of social status merely by *imitatio* of royal patronage.³⁸ (Elsewhere we note Heinrich von Freiberg's writing on John of Michalovice's journey to France.)

Contacts with foreign nobility became more extensive in relation to their penetration into Bohemia — from the 14th century at the latest noble families from abroad (in the vast majority of cases the immediate neighbours of the Bohemian Lands) made purchases in Bohemia, initially mainly in the border regions, and from the post-Husite period also further inland.³⁹ Individual families (their Czech branches) did not break their links to their homeland, and it was through them that local families too were able to establish contacts abroad. One could make a long list of Bohemian and foreign noble families who connected through single and also multiple family relations. They included the houses of Rožmberk, Šternberk, Kravaře, Lobkovice, Vartenberk and, of course, Poděbrady on the Bohemian side, while foreign families included the houses of Bieberstein, Schauenburg, Maissau, Leuchtenberg, Hardegg, Burggrafen von Dohna, Eulenburg, Schönburg and others.

The relevance of the **(mother) language as a criteria for ethnicity** and identification with the Bohemian Kingdom is too broad an issue for us to deal with in this context — we would add only that Dalimil's nationalism, reflected in the early 14th century in his versed chronicle intended for the Bohemian nobility, represents just one possible approach. The diverse range of cross-border contacts clearly demonstrates how the language (nationalist) issue did not play a major role in establishing social ties amongst the nobility in the 14th and 15th centuries, including in the context of court and regional structures. Some families in Bohemia who originally came from abroad had become so naturalised that they even used Czech forms for their names (an example of this is the family Kraiger of Kraigk / Krajř z Krajku). Beginning in the late Middle Ages, the number of members of foreign families who were awarded with so called *inkolát* (affiliation to the "land nobility") increased (which at least in earlier periods required, amongst other matters, a knowledge of Czech from applicants).⁴⁰

And finally, we would add another optic by which we can view the issue. We often perceive contacts abroad as one-directional, from the perspective of "our" country, which is the centre of our interest, and this is necessarily a narrow view. It is therefore right to formulate a following question: **How did Bohemians see foreign lands, and how did foreign lands see them?** This question is also relevant for

³⁸ BEHR 1989.

³⁹ The wide spectrum of ties — from political to cultural and familial — between Bohemians and Austrians during the Přemyslid rule is reflected in the proceedings in BLÁHOVÁ, HLAVÁČEK et al. 1998. Foreign families making purchases in Bohemia is investigated in BOBKOVÁ 1992 (there are no analogous studies for other parts of the land, although it is true that the situation in North Bohemia was somewhat anomalous); for case studies of individual families, see e.g.: JIRSÍK 2015; TERŠLOVÁ 2001.

⁴⁰ There is a fairly extensive range of works written on the that issue, recently ADAMOVIČ 2012.

the Middle Ages, no matter how much harder it is to find an answer to it than in later centuries. The traditional clichés in the form of the reputed dominant traits attributed to different ethnicities were only beginning to take shape and so impressions were determined on the basis of the individual experience of particular authors who may have had only a partial perspective, or perhaps they may have been almost irrational in substance. While Guillaume de Machaut (1300–1377) created the myth of John of Luxembourg as the “Good King of Bohemia”, even though he experienced much danger, fatigue and discomfort at his side, Eustach Deschamps (1346–1406) with the exception of his admiration for Prague was disparaging of the Bohemian Kingdom — he did not like the weather, the food or the standard of hygiene. Johannes Butzbach (1477–1516) was far more rational and comprehensive in his assessment of Bohemians (and how they were different from Germans), having been an itinerant scholar at the end of the 15th century in Bohemia for a number of years, mainly against the background of rural towns and the minor nobility. Admiration — but fear above all — were the feelings that Bohemians evoked abroad, in particular as warriors, as invincible “Hussites” (it is no coincidence that Bohemian mercenaries were the most in demand in the post-Hussite period); upon learning that Bohemian heretics were staying in her inn, one Geneva innkeeper flatly banished them. It mattered little to her that these Bohemians were envoys of the king (1464).⁴¹

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⁴¹ NEJEDLÝ 2004; DVOŘÁK 1975; TRESP 2004 (with records of a number of preparatory analytical studies); for more on Czech mercenaries in the context of Bohemian-Bavarian relations in the second half of the 15th century and “perceptions of the other”, see ŠIMŮNEK, TRESP 2016; Geneva: BABOUČKOVÁ, BOUBÍN 2015, p. 234.

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The Bohemian Nobility and Foreign Policy in the Middle Ages

The subject matter comprises to basic topics: the first is the role of the nobility in the foreign policy of the kingdom (or of the Bohemian kings), and the second the actual “foreign policy” of noble families, that is their private international contacts. They were interlinked — contacts stemming from the fact of holding an office in overseas diplomacy were inextricably connected to personal and family ties. The common denominator was not only geographical reach beyond borders, but also the unique phenomenon of (foreign) travel, inspiration and cultural exchange in a broad meaning of the term, reflected in the royal court milieu as well as private courts of the nobility; the social status of a nobleman and a noble family depended equally on ties to the royal court and on the involvement in provincial structures and hierarchies, including cross-border links, which among the Bohemian nobility date largely to the turn of the fourteenth century. The rituals, ceremonies, settings and means of expressions used for the purpose of self-presentation of the nobility were basically identical in the Bohemian and the foreign milieus, and as such they constituted a social capital that was universally accepted and “understood” by all. To this we should add the links between the Bohemian and foreign nobility in the form of partial contacts, shared interests or family ties.

An important question is that of foreign travels of the Bohemian nobility in the twelfth-seventeenth centuries reflecting the nobility’s overseas contacts. We find Bohemian noblemen in the entourage of the monarch and as direct representatives of the monarch — the king of Bohemia, on whose behalf they appeared at the courts of secular and ecclesiastical rulers. Territorially, foreign travels (and contacts) of the Bohemian nobility encompassed almost the entire Europe, with the focus being on the neighbouring German lands, Austria and, of course, Silesian duchies. The horizon of Central Europe went beyond pilgrimages and educational travels. Another phenomenon was late medieval military (mercenary) activity of the Bohemian nobility.