

THE IDEAL OF STATE SOVEREIGNTY IN CHRONICLES WRITTEN DURING THE REIGN OF CHARLES IV, HOLY ROMAN EMPEROR (1316–1378)

Piotr Goltz, Ph.D. student

Department of Medieval Studies, Institute of History, Faculty of History,
University of Warsaw
Warszawa, Poland

Abstract

The paper will be a summary of comparative-and-critical analysis of four interesting chronicles that have survived till the present day as Latin manuscripts — codices. The outcome of the research are select portions of chronicles supplying proof of Charles's conscious striving to present himself as a sovereign ruler, but one limited not only by the divine right but also the rights of his subjects in whose interest he was to act. The ideal of the sovereignty of the state shall be illustrated on the basis of chronicles compiled upon Charles's order. This refers to the: Chronicon Bohemiae by Přebík Pulkava z Radenína (?–1380); Chronicon by Francis of Prague (1322–1371); Chronicon Bohemiae by Giovanni di Marignolla (Jana Marignola) (1323–ca. 1362); Chronicon Bohemiae Beneš Krabice z Veitmile (?–1375). Paper belongs to the current of research into changes to theoretical reflection and political praxis of the latter part of the High Middle Ages. It is worth looking into chronicles from Charles's reign also due to recurrent themes of sovereignty that are marking their presence in this era of creation and definition of the pan-European project.

Keywords: sovereignty, Middle Ages, politics, Charles IV, chronicles.

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Introduction

Underpinning all discussion here are the political goals of Charles IV, Holy Roman Emperor (1316–1378). That remarkable ruler — on the scale of the entire Middle Ages — beyond any doubt on the one hand pursued an imperial policy that was in the best interests of the House of Luxembourg. On the other hand, however, his mother was a Bohemian (Elisabeth of Bohemia, daughter of Wenceslaus II), and he made Prague his *de facto* capital. As a king of Bohemia he singled it out by establishing the Crown of the Kingdom of Bohemia. The lands of the Bohemian Crown were to remain an indivisible whole — even should the House of Luxembourg fail. I will illustrate the ideal of the sovereignty of the state on the basis of chronicles compiled upon Charles's order. This refers to the: *Chronicon Bohemiae* by Přebík Pulkava z Radenína (?–1380); *Chronicon* by Francis of Prague (1322–1371); *Chronicon Bohemiae* by Giovanni di Marignolla (Jana Marignola) (1323–ca. 1362); *Chronicon Bohemiae* Beneš Krabice z Veitmile (?–1375).

Corona Regni Boemiae — like-minded concepts were formulated also in Poland and Hungary — as more important than and superior to the ruler, found two uses. On the one hand the subjects were able to put a limit on the monarch's claims and make sure that their rights were respected. On the other hand the ruler took the role of the first servant to the Crown and presented his actions as care of its welfare. It was on this basis, among others, that the ideal of state sovereignty made headway — the ideal of a sovereign responsible in theory solely to God but not the Emperor and the Pope. That was one of the testimonies borne to a new way of thinking about the state. It was no longer the patrimony of the ruler or the ruling dynasty to be disposed of at will. The state came to mean a contract by and between the monarch and the subjects, whereby the former became public authority tasked to act for — another concept gaining a foothold in the middle ages — the common good.

Body of paper

This will be a summary of comparative-and-critical analysis of four interesting chronicles that have survived till the present day as Latin manuscripts — *codices*. The outcome of the research are select portions of chronicles supplying proof of Charles's conscious striving to present himself as a sovereign ruler, but one limited not only by the divine right but also the rights of his subjects in whose interest he was to act.

Conclusion

Charles relied on historiography to reinforce his hold of Bohemia and borrow legitimacy for his monarchy in Europe. His vision of history was characterized by a favourable light being cast on himself and his dynasty, as well as acceptance of uninterrupted continuity of Bohemian statehood back from the time of Great Moravia and the custody of a series of Bohemian saints, including... Saint Charles the Great (Charlemagne) (!), whose *cultus* has still not been universally recognized by the Church.

The key matter to discuss here is the concept of sovereignty as it shows itself from the sources, well known from the later centuries, though firmly grounded in the Middle Ages. My writing here belongs to the current of research into changes to theoretical reflection and political *praxis* of the latter part of the High Middle Ages. It is worth looking into chronicles from Charles's reign also due to recurrent themes of sovereignty that are marking their presence in this era of creation and definition of the pan-European project.

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Brief biography: Born in 1985 in Warsaw. MA obtained in 2010. MA dissertation devoted to the myth and dynastic tradition of the Piasts and the Přemyslids on the basis of Gallus Anonymus' and Cosmas' chronicles. October 2008-February 2009: semester at the Charles University in Prague (ERASMUS programme). PhD student since October 2013. Planned doctoral thesis devoted to national sovereignty in the theoretical thought and practice of the medieval state (supervisor: Prof. Wojciech Fałkowski). On 10-month scholarship in Prague since October 2015, founded by International Visegrad Fund, under guidance of Prof. Marie Bláhová. Interests: medieval mentality, history of ideas in the Middle Ages.