



Václav Žurek

CHARLES IV
Portrait of a Medieval Ruler

KAROLINUM

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INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

Today, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Bohemia Charles IV of Luxembourg (1316–1378) represents an untouchable monument in Czech history, carved into the marble of admiration and clichés.

Charles's governmental achievements, his foundational and endowment activities in the arts and architecture, as well as monuments devoted to him, to this day constitute an inseparable part of the Czech historical consciousness and identity. The current identity of the inhabitants of the Czech Republic is strongly anchored in medieval history, in particular that of the Kingdom of Bohemia, with which the contemporary republic, which arose in 1993, openly identifies on the basis of geographical similarity as well as linguistic and cultural tradition. In view of this identification, medieval history plays a fundamental role in the construction of the master narrative of Czech history. One of the key points of this narrative is precisely the period of Charles's reign (1346–1378). Charles's presence in the contemporary life of the Czech Republic is substantial – his name is borne by the country's oldest university, the famous medieval stone bridge in Prague, as well as by several castles and the spa town of Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad). In short, the trace of Charles in the historical memory is omnipresent. And this trace is constituted by the recollection of a great and successful ruler connected with the cultural, economic and political blossoming of the medieval Czech Lands.

Meanwhile, it may have seemed that the young prince Wenceslas (Václav), who only first received the name of Charles in Paris at his confirmation after his uncle, French King Charles IV, the Fair, was not born into a favourable period. As the chronicler Peter of Zittau narrates, the year 1316 was accompanied by a terrifying sign (a comet), an extremely rainy summer, and the Kingdom of Bohemia as well as the surrounding countries in Central Europe were threatened with famine.

‘The year of the Lord 1316 contains in itself so many pestilential blows and suffering that the ear avoids listening to them and the mind shudders. In this year, as we recounted above, a comet appeared and, directed by God, it prognosticated very many dangers. Because in the summer, on account of the unending rain in contrast to the natural character of that time of year, such enormous floods occurred that in numerous places buildings, walls and castles were overturned as in a deluge. [...] This deluge of water flooded the plains and the valleys, it destroyed hay and corn, and washed away with it a great many things which it had overwhelmed. Immediately afterwards there came a piteous dying of people, and this dying spread out so very much that in many villages and towns they dug deep pits in order to cover the massive number of corpses together like carcasses. Corn and hay were in short supply, pasture was also in short supply, and so people and also cattle began to starve and perish.’¹

When we add to this further phenomena of crisis that accompanied the following decades of Charles’s life, for instance the biggest floods of the millennium in 1342, the outbreak of the Black Death after 1348, a swarm of locusts that destroyed the harvest and other unfavourable climatic phenomena, it is almost surprising how it came about that precisely Charles IV, or to put it better his image, is virtually unproblematically positive in the current era.²

Therefore, one of the fundamental questions of this book is in what way and on what basis his legacy as a ruler has been formulated. Primarily, this is a case of questions concerning how much this image is influenced by the literary production at Charles’s court and his own performance of government, and how much it is a case of later reflection, whether in the later Middle Ages or in the modern period.

The book has the ambition of explicating the actions of Charles IV in the context of his period, and therefore individual chapters concentrate on fundamental and characteristic topics from the period of his government. The framework of the first half of the book represents a chronological description of his life, which enables the topics analysed to

¹ *Cronica Aule regie*, 360.

² For the environmental context of his reign see Bauch, ‘Jammer und Not.’

be placed in the more broadly conceived history of the Luxembourg era. The second half of the book offers a closer look at Charles's rulership style and also focuses on phenomena which, in our opinion, reveal more about the conception of his performance of power and also enable a better understanding of the reign and historical legacy of Charles IV in the Czech and European context.

History represents a constant dialogue between the past and the present, and it is precisely in this context that it is necessary to perceive the current picture of Charles IV, who is regarded by specialists and by the general public as a very successful statesman. Especially in connection with the writing of the history of art in the 14th century as a story of culture radiating from the centre – that is, from the Prague court – in recent years researchers have demonstrated a tendency to present this ruler from the Luxembourg dynasty in an unequivocally positive light and in essence in an unproblematic way. This book, on the contrary, endeavours to critically assess this relatively established conviction and to draw aside the veil of the various forms of Charles's self-representation, which to this day considerably influences the popular and also the specialist explication of the history of his period of rule.

An advantage of examining the life and rulership of Charles IV is the fact that a large quantity of documents from his period have been preserved. These are primarily works compiled at his court or at his personal order, which not only reflect Charles's stances and political opinions, but chiefly openly express the ideology of his royal court. We have at our disposal a larger number of sources about Charles IV and his reign than in the case of other contemporary Central European kings, which is advantageous for a historian, but at the same time naturally suspicious and urges us to cautiousness. It is in fact evident that many of these sources arose precisely in order to persuade their readers of the exceptional role of Charles IV in history. Therefore, we should examine them with the greatest caution and meanwhile attempt to reveal what the intention was behind their compilation.

This book is not merely a new biography of the medieval ruler, but rather represents a deeper analysis of the fundamental themes of Charles's governance which can reveal a lot to us about the ideas on which his rulership programme was based. However, we should not

forget that Charles's reign was not merely a chronicle of triumphs and successful political steps. Many times the ruler failed or was forced to change his strategy in order to achieve his aims. Therefore, the book focuses in detail on the most characteristic expressions of his performance of the ruling function – on his rulership style.

The axis of this explication is Charles's government and its symbolic dimension, which encompasses both concrete ordinances as well as very subtle nuances of his public self-representation which gave the necessary effect to his politics. For better understanding we place our deliberations about Charles IV as emperor and king into the context of an explication of his life and government, because it is precisely this perspective that enables us to reveal the sources and various accents of Charles's government. Perhaps in this way this book will contribute to a better understanding of the environment from which the idealized image of Emperor and King Charles IV arose and the intention behind this image – an image which still surrounds us to this day.

In the regional context research about Charles IV has a long tradition. Expert treatments of his life are available in many versions, both older and relatively recent. However, in English, apart from the outdated book by Bede Jarrett (1935), there is no modern biography of this ruler, whose rule nevertheless influenced a substantial part of Europe.³ In spite of the fact that he achieved the highest secular rank, when 100 years after Frederick II he renewed the imperial title of Holy Roman Emperor as the head of Western Europe, and ruled a multilingual Empire which included parts of a whole number of current-day states (Czech Republic, Poland, Germany, Switzerland, France, Luxembourg and Italy) in the pan-European context he tends to be rather neglected.⁴

This is also partly true of the entire dynasty of the Luxembourgs, who for 100 years not only dominated Central European politics, but also left behind a significant trace in the cultural history of the European Middle Ages. One of the reasons for this is the linguistic diversity of the sources, but also the geographical fragmentation and division of the medieval heritage among several contemporary states. Apart

³ Jarrett, *The emperor Charles IV*.

⁴ We must of course mention here the book by Seibt, *Karl IV*. from 1978 and also the recent biographies of Monnet, *Charles IV* (2020) and Rader, *Kaiser Karl der Vierte* (2023).

from the Czech Republic, Charles IV and his dynasty are hardly present in the national historical memory of these states. Meanwhile, the Kingdom of Bohemia was far from being the only place ruled by Charles IV, even though it did constitute the economic foundation of his rule. Continuing the territorial policies of his father, Charles IV incorporated Silesia, Lower and Upper Lusatia, and later also Brandenburg under the rule of the King of Bohemia. In 1348 he thus established a personal union under the dominance of the King of Bohemia which he called the Lands of Bohemian Crown, which also contained the territories mentioned above. Moreover, in addition to these territories, which he ruled directly from his position as King of Bohemia and immediate ruler, he was also ruler of the Holy Roman Empire (covering the area of current-day Germany, northern Italy, and parts of France, Austria and the Low Countries). First of all he was elected and twice crowned as King of the Romans. Crowned in Rome in 1355 he became Holy Roman Emperor – that is, the highest secular ruler of Latin Europe. From this position he played a leading role in European politics for many years, maintaining peace and encouraging the Pope to return from Avignon to Rome. By his contemporaries Charles was called the new Constantine, Solomon, the embodiment of the legacy of Charlemagne, and father of the homeland (*pater patriae*). The fact that one of the key figures of the late Middle Ages remains overlooked primarily in Anglophone scholarship is partly also due to the inaccessibility in English of the sources and primarily the specialized literature. This book aims to contribute to correcting that deficiency.

This book, originally written in Czech, was first published by Nakladatelství Lidové noviny in Prague in 2018 as a response to the jubilee of the 700th anniversary of Charles IV's birth in 1316 and the various forms of his commemoration as it was recollected and present in Czech public life and in specialist discussion in the jubilee year. The footnotes have been completely reworked for the English version, although references have been limited to the most relevant sources.

I would like to thank the Karolinum Press for the preparation of the publication of this book and translator Ian Finlay Stone for his translation of the Czech text into English.

Prague, Spring 2024

NOTE ON USE OF PERSONAL AND LOCAL NAMES

In this book preference is given to current names over historical German/Latin/archaic names.

As far as it is easily possible, Christian names are anglicized (Charles, Elizabeth, John, Ernest, Peter), while place names are only anglicized in accord with contemporary usage (Prague, Vienna, Munich). Otherwise, place names used are the contemporary ones of the country within whose borders that place is currently situated (Wrocław, Olomouc, Pardubice, Karlštejn). We try to distinguish between the use of Bohemian in the territorial sense and Czech in the ethnic and linguistic sense for the medieval period. However, this is not always clear-cut, and tradition also plays a role, hence Czech lands in the spatial sense, but Lands of the Bohemian Crown denoting a political entity.

I THE FAMILY ORIGIN OF YOUNG WENCESLAS

‘I desire therefore it not remain unknown to you that the Roman Emperor, Henry VII, begat my father, named John, from Margaret, the daughter of the Duke of Brabant. He in turn married Elizabeth, the daughter of King Wenceslas II of Bohemia, and obtained the Kingdom of Bohemia through her, because the male line in the royal family of Bohemia had died out. He expelled Henry, Duke of Carinthia, who had married the older sister of his aforementioned wife. (This sister later died without heir.) Henry had obtained the Kingdom of Bohemia before John by virtue of this sister’s position. All of this is more fully contained in the chronicles of the Bohemians. This same John, King of Bohemia, begat through Queen Elizabeth his first-born son who was named Wenceslas in the year 1316 on the fourteenth of May at the first hour in Prague.’⁵

With these words Charles IV in his own biography known under the title *Vita Karoli* briefly summarized his family origin, which he perceived as an important part of his identity, and outlined the circumstances of his own birth. The use of his Přemyslid origins, in an effort to make them of present relevance, was one of the marked features of Charles’s politics and an inherent part of the picture that the Czech ruler built up during his period of rule. The marriage of John of Luxembourg and Elizabeth of Bohemia and the alliance of their families played a fundamental role in the political standing of the Luxembourgs. In view of the fact that Charles himself devoted a relatively large amount of attention to ancestors from both lines, it will not be amiss to start his portrait by sketching how the Count of Luxembourg came to the Kingdom of Bohemia, as well as the political and social situation into which his first-born son Wenceslas (later Charles) was born in 1316.

⁵ *Vita Karoli*, 21, 23.

The murder of the young King Wenceslas III on 4 August 1306 in Olomouc represented a very unpleasant shock even for a developed country with stable social relations and political structure such as the Kingdom of Bohemia was at the beginning of the 14th century. The dying out of the Přemyslid dynasty by the sword changed the political situation in Central Europe, but primarily the internal relations in the kingdom. The family, which over the past few generations had not only intensely supported the economic development of the Kingdom of Bohemia, but had also attempted to expand its power territorially into the Austrian Lands (Ottokar II of Bohemia; r. 1253–78), Poland (Wenceslas II; r. 1278–1305) and Hungary (Wenceslas III; r. 1305–06), suddenly disappeared from the scene, leaving behind an exceptionally attractive inheritance.

The person with the best starting position for obtaining this Přemyslid inheritance was the husband of Wenceslas III's oldest sister Anna, Duke of Carinthia Henry, whom the deceased king himself had nominated as the kingdom's administrator in his absence. However, Henry most probably did not have good relations with the Bohemian nobles, which had a fundamental effect on his standing on the Bohemian political scene. Members of the upper nobility, who already in the period after the death of Ottokar II partially deputized for royal power and more and more regarded themselves as a part of society without whom the kingdom could not be administered, also intervened decisively in the situation immediately after the extinction of the dynasty. King of the Romans Albert I of Habsburg also entered the political disputes over the succession and declared the Kingdom of Bohemia as an escheat imperial fiefdom, which he had allocated to his sons. This would most probably have not played any role, but the members of the domestic nobility were not united and so some of them did not acknowledge Henry's claim and rather supported the new candidate, Albert's son Rudolph of Habsburg. In order to strengthen his claim, this aspirant for the throne even concluded a marriage with Wenceslas' II widowed queen, Elizabeth Richeza of Poland. However, shortly afterwards in 1307 he died during the campaign for his recognition, and so entered the annals of Czech history mainly through his nickname of 'King Porridge' for his thriftiness.⁶

⁶ Spěvácěk, *Jan Lucemburský*, 113–114.

*Bust of Elizabeth of
Bohemia on the triforium of
Cathedral of St Vitus recalled
Charles's Přemyslid origin*



After Rudolph's death, Henry of Carinthia returned to rule the kingdom with the support of a relatively substantial part of the nobility. Nevertheless, he evidently failed to sufficiently fulfil the expectations of a section of the secular and spiritual elites, and therefore a new plan for how to overthrow him was hatched which involved installing another king on the throne through marriage with the younger sister of the murdered Wenceslas III, Elizabeth. By coincidence in 1308 an opportunity arose to make use of a change on the imperial throne and the election of Count of Luxembourg Henry VII as King of the Romans. If we can believe the description of Peter of Zittau, author of the Zbraslav Chronicle, Heidenreich of Sedlec and Conrad of Zbraslav, the abbots respectively of two important Bohemian Cistercian monasteries in Sedlec and Zbraslav, conducted negotiations in the name of an influential group of Bohemian nobles. They addressed the King of the Romans with an offer to connect the Luxembourg dynasty with

the Bohemian throne and he agreed to the marriage of his only son John with the potential heiress of the Bohemian throne.⁷

This was an insightful decision and fitted in well with the picture of the dynamic rise of Henry VII and his family on the political map of Europe. The count's family controlled a substantial territory on the border between the German and French cultural environments. Luxembourg was a part of the Holy Roman Empire, but also under the strong influence of Francophone culture and its counts traditionally gravitated towards contacts with the Paris court. In the course of the 13th century the influence of French courtly life, culture and literature grew there. The chivalric way of life spread from the south, bringing with it models of behaviour and new artistic forms. In the case of Luxembourg counts this influence already made itself apparent during the rule of Count Henry VI (d.1288), who introduced French as the official language of his office and started to issue decrees in it. His successors, primarily Emperor Henry VII, continued this trend.

The moment when Henry VII became Holy Roman Emperor in 1308 represented a pivotal point in his effort to strengthen his dynastic position. Meanwhile, 20 years earlier it had seemed that the entire dynasty was on the verge of extinction, when a whole generation of the male members of the Luxembourg family fell in the Battle at Worringen in 1288. The dispute, which originally broke out over the attractive Limburg inheritance, gradually grew into a wider conflict over control of the region to the west of the Rhine. In the battle Duke John I of Brabant with his allies won a clear victory and the Luxembourg side suffered a defeat. Of the entire family Henry VI's widow, Beatrice d'Avesnes, remained, and hope was thus represented by her five children. Paradoxically, the victor of the fateful battle, Duke John I of Brabant, also contributed to maintaining the position of the Luxembourg family in the region. Thanks to the mediation of Guy, Count of Flanders (Guy of Dampierre), and also French King Philip IV the Fair, in the end the mutual negotiations on the conclusion of peace were sealed by the marriage of the Brabant bride Margaret and the eldest Luxembourg scion Henry, which was the first step leading to the family's ascent.

⁷ *Chronica Aule regie*, 195–199; on the chronicle see Marani-Moravová, *Peter von Zittau*; Cf. Šusta, *Král cizinec*, 94–99; Bobková, *Jan Lucemburský* 13–24, 42–68.

The Luxembourg brothers Henry VII and Baldwin entered the world of grand affairs already in their youth at the French court, under the protective wing of King Philip IV the Fair. However, their political rise is connected with the Holy Roman Empire. Baldwin was first of all elected and installed as the Archbishop of Trier, thus becoming not only one of the highest ranked church dignitaries in the Empire but also a prince-electoral – an elector of the King of the Romans. He very quickly made use of this rank for the benefit of his own dynasty, when in 1308 he helped achieve the election of his older brother Henry as King of the Romans.

In his new position Henry wasted no time and made efforts to quickly assert his power, which was relatively shaky. Henry, therefore, placed all the more emphasis on supporting his legitimacy on the basis of ceremonial acts. Less than two months after his election, on Three Kings' Day (Epiphany, 6 January 1309) he was crowned King of the Romans along with his wife Margaret in Aachen and set out on the traditional tour around the Empire. During this journey he was met at Heilbronn by the two aforementioned Cistercian abbots from Bohemia, who negotiated with Henry in the name of the nobles of the Kingdom of Bohemia. They tried to persuade him to drive out Henry of Carinthia and install his own son on the throne. According to contemporary accounts, King Henry hesitated for some time and offered his younger brother Walram for the Bohemian throne. However, the abbots feared that Bohemian interests would be side-tracked and they did not want to even countenance the foundation of a Luxembourg secundogeniture cadet branch. In the end Henry yielded and agreed with the marriage of his only son John with Elizabeth of the Bohemian royal family of the Přemyslids.⁸

From the beginning Henry of Luxembourg showed himself as a man of grand politics and not as a diffident count. At the imperial Diet in 1309, in an attempt to strengthen his position, Henry declared that within a year and a day he would set out on a journey to Rome for the imperial crown. The decision was somewhat surprising, in view of the fact that since the death of Frederick II in 1250 no one had dared

⁸ *Cronica Aule regie*, 210–213; see also the recent volumes on this union *A royal marriage; Johann und Elisabeth/Jean et Elisabeth*.

to undergo an imperial coronation in Rome. For a few years already not even the Pope had been resident in Rome, having recently taken up residence in the border area between the imperial and French frontiers at Avignon. However, Henry succeeded in persuading the Pope and also the French King to support his coronation journey. Before his departure for the south King Henry succeeded in resolving another Bohemian question: in concord with some leading imperial counts he declared the claim of Henry of Carinthia as invalid and announced an *acht* (imperial curse) over him. He awarded the Kingdom of Bohemia in fief to his son John, whose claim he strengthened through the marriage with Elizabeth of the Přemyslid family, held in Speyer on 1st September 1310.⁹

Following that, King Henry with his wife Margaret set out for Italy. His army was not very numerous; it is estimated at around 5,000 men. In view of the political situation in northern Italy, which was afflicted with minor conflicts between individual towns, he was welcomed by many as a saviour. Some scholars and poets, including the famous Dante, dreamed of a return of a strong imperial power which would put an end to the constant fighting and bring peace and unity. However, when Henry had crossed the Alps with his army, he did not proceed as easily as he had assumed. At the beginning things went well and in January 1311 he was already crowned with the Iron Crown of Lombardy in Milan. However, the ground in Italy became more and more uncertain for him and he was forced to fight at every step, which constantly slowed down his progress. Many city communes did not have any interest in any form of imperial overrule and thus they did not welcome him as a unifier of Italy, but on the contrary stood in resistance to him. In May 1312 Henry finally fought his way to Rome and on 29 June he was crowned Emperor by cardinals sent by the Pope in the Lateran basilica of St John, because St Peter's Cathedral remained closed to him as it was in the power of his opponents. After more than 60 years, in the person of Henry VII the Christian world once again had a Holy Roman Emperor. A man who a few years ago had been a mere Count of Luxembourg had achieved the highest

⁹ Antonín, 'Der Weg nach Osten'.

secular title. Henry, enthused by the imperial crown, had an encyclical sent to important rulers of Europe in which he emphasized the idea of an imperial universal rule, which however contrasted sharply with his actual political situation. Henry did not even have the city of Rome under his control. Primarily, French King Philip IV the Fair rejected the Luxembourg's claims of universal rule, contending that in his opinion the Holy Roman Empire and France had an equal standing. Henry then started a campaign against King of Naples Robert the Wise. However, on his journey south he died after a few days fever at Buonconvento not far from Siena.

Emperor Henry of Luxembourg left a significant mark in history, especially through his Italian campaign, which stirred the blood in the veins of savants longing for a strong and united Italy under an imperial government. Thirty years later, Charles IV would have to come to terms with this legacy, to which he also laid claim. However, at the moment of Henry's death the Luxembourgs had quite other concerns.¹⁰

Already since autumn 1310 John of Luxembourg had been trying to assert his authority on the Bohemian royal throne. Although his father Henry had given him the kingdom in fief, arranged his marriage with one of the inheritors of the Přemyslid claim to the throne and also equipped him with advisors, Henry had then once again devoted himself to his Italian campaign. For the journey, John received an accompaniment, including primarily advisor Peter of Aspelt, who was not only Archbishop of Mainz but who also in his role of the former chancellor of King of Bohemia Wenceslas II had an excellent knowledge of the local situation in the Kingdom of Bohemia from his time spent at the court. In addition, he was also a skilled negotiator who helped John enormously over the next few years.

The biggest obstacle for John was the fact that Henry of Carinthia with his wife Anna, the oldest daughter of Wenceslas II, continued to reside in Prague and to act as the King of Bohemia. With the support of Meissen units in the fortified town Henry evidently felt safe. John, therefore, did not head directly for Prague. However, when towns Kutná Hora and also Kolín did not open their gates to him, in the

¹⁰ *Vom luxemburgischen Grafen zum europäischen Herrscher; Rom 1312. Die Kaiserkrönung Heinrichs VII.*

continuing winter he nevertheless proceeded to the biggest city. Thanks to subterfuge and the opening of one of the gates, on 3 December 1310 John's troops succeeded in occupying the Old Town of Prague. Henry hid in Prague Castle, but in the end, he conceded and left the country. King John now controlled Bohemia, but the nobility was not unanimously on his side, and the new king therefore had to gain its favour with the help of concessions and promises. In the uncertain times after the death of Wenceslas III the nobility had gained great power, which they were disinclined to give up to the benefit of a 14-year-old youth and moreover a foreigner. At the hastily convoked Diet, King John confirmed the role of the nobility in the kingdom's administration and also continued in his attempt to strengthen his position. Formally, the accession of the royal pair was confirmed, and thus Peter of Aspelt was able to crown him already on 7 February 1311 in Prague. After this, John hurriedly proceeded to negotiations with the Habsburgs, which led to the repurchasing of Moravia from its mortgage to them. In the summer of the following year the royal pair were thus able to visit Olomouc and Brno and receive homage there from the local nobility. In Moravia also the king issued a so-called inaugural diploma, which confirmed the claim of the nobility to participate in the country's administration. This calmed the situation temporarily, but it was also a clear confirmation of the influence that the nobles had acquired. The dispute over the relative share of power between the nobility and the king was a significant factor in John's entire rule and was the cause of many quarrels. King John surrounded himself with advisors whom he had brought with him and who contributed significantly to the results of negotiations with the Bohemian nobles. In addition, without these advisers he would not have got by in imperial politics, which he did not intend to give up. In contrast, the Bohemian nobles were not overjoyed at the foreigners around the king and from the beginning they endeavoured to get rid of them.

At the moment when Henry VII died in Italy on 24 August 1313 and thus the imperial throne became vacant, John's situation was relatively complicated. Naturally, he tried to put forward his claim to the Roman royal title, but it soon became apparent that this was not going to be possible. One of the candidates, Frederick of Habsburg, had not in any

way given up the possibility of influencing government in the Kingdom of Bohemia and he still had Henry of Carinthia in reserve, who had not given up his claim to the Bohemian throne. Even though John along with Peter of Aspelt and his uncle Baldwin had three of seven votes at his disposal, he had to give up the Luxembourg candidacy and in the end supported Louis of Wittelsbach, the Habsburg's opponent, in the election. At the end of 1314, a disputed election of both Louis and Frederick occurred and consequently also a dual coronation. King John's support for Louis influenced his position in the future. He succeeded in gaining many concessions and the title of Imperial Vicar, though at the same time he committed himself to assist the King of the Romans militarily.



Gravestone of King Přemysl Ottokar I in St Vitus Cathedral created by Peter Parler.

This was a thorn in the eye to the Bohemian nobles, who had no wish to financially support John's foreign policy, and very soon after his return to Bohemia disputes started to occur. The situation in the kingdom was complicated by the rivalry between two camps of nobles led respectively by Henry of Lipá and William Zajíc of Valdek. John did not incline unequivocally to one side or the other, but nevertheless through his interventions he considerably influenced the situation. First of all, he rewarded Henry of Lipá with the office of Vice-Chamberlain. Later, however, he listened to Henry's enemies and Queen Elizabeth and had the powerful magnate imprisoned in Týřov Castle. The dispute, which threatened to escalate into a civil war, was in the end smoothed out through negotiations. Nevertheless, it complicated the king's situation, which rather required peace in the kingdom so that he could concentrate on the affairs of West European diplomacy.

In this situation, in spring 1316 a first male offspring was born to the royal pair, who was named Wenceslas (Václav) after the last two kings of the Přemyslid dynasty and the main patron of the Czechs. However, not even the fact that the Bohemian throne had acquired an heir calmed down the unruly political relations. Tensions grew constantly between the domestic nobility and the man who was supposed to represent a king, but who spent much of his time outside of the kingdom. In the period of the king's absence, the disputes reached a culmination. Peter of Aspelt left the country and a part of the nobility even plotted against King John in Vienna. The disagreements became so acute that John requested assistance from King of the Romans Louis who was supposed to play the role of mediator. At a meeting in Domařlice in 1318, an agreement was reached, which was not however in any way advantageous for King John, because the nobility defended its share in the kingdom's administration. John, who in the meantime had evidently matured personally and correctly perceived the situation, in future devoted all the more energy to foreign policy, in which he manoeuvred with a nimbleness that few could match. However, his position in the kingdom was also complicated by his relationship with Queen Elizabeth. She gradually lost influence over the political decisions of her husband and it is possible that, precisely because of this, she attempted

to act behind his back ever more frequently. At least John believed this. When he learned that the queen with her children had made their way to Locket Castle in west Bohemia, he set out for the castle with an army. In the end the garrison surrendered, but as a security measure King John separated the mother from their first-born son Wenceslas, whom he left at Locket, while ordering Elizabeth and the other children to the dowry town of Mělník in Central Bohemia in order to isolate her. However, he was not successful in this, and shortly afterwards the queen left Mělník in order to support the uprising by the Prague patricians and a part of the nobility against the king. This time also, King John succeeded in reaching agreement at the negotiating table, but the queen had to leave Prague once again, while the young heir to the throne remained at Locket. After 1319, when King John gained into his possession the strongly fortified castle of Křivoklát, which was close to Prague, he had the young Wenceslas moved there under the protection of the loyal Oldřich Pluh of Rabštejn.¹¹

Ever since the start of John's reign, Elizabeth had tried to intervene in political affairs. Within the framework of the long-lasting dispute between the camps of Henry of Lipá and William Zajíc of Valdek, she gave unequivocal precedence to the second of these and it was precisely on account of her influence that Henry of Lipá found himself in the king's disfavour. If we are to believe the Zbraslav chronicle, according to contemporary observers one of the sources of Elizabeth's dissatisfaction was evidently the standing of her stepmother and twice widowed queen, Elizabeth Richeza. The former queen resided on her dowry estates, but was also present at court, and Elizabeth of Bohemia had most probably taken a dislike to her already in her childhood. The chronicler Peter of Zittau described their relationship as one of 'exceptional hatred'. It was precisely the rivalry felt towards her stepmother and her lover Henry of Lipá that further reinforced Elizabeth in her inclination towards William Zajíc of Valdek, and all the more unequivocally did she then favour his group in the dispute between the two noble camps. Queen Elizabeth received partial satisfaction when in 1318 Henry of Lipá withdrew from political life into seclusion and

¹¹ On the first decade of John's reign in detail Spěvák, *Jan Lucemburský*, 135-297 and Bobková, *Jan Lucemburský*, 69-129.

settled together with the former king's widow Elizabeth Richeza in Brno, outside of the oversight of the royal court.

At the beginning of the 1320s, the royal married couple reconciled for a time; perhaps John's injury sustained at a tournament in Prague, from which he had to recover, also contributed to this. In this period three children were born to the couple: son John Henry (1322) and twins Anne and Elizabeth (1323). However, the almost concurrent birth of illegitimate son Nicholas suggests a somewhat dubious family idyll, as does the departure of the pregnant Elizabeth to her daughter Margaret, the wife of Duke John of Lower Bavaria, at Cham. Out of spite to John, Elizabeth did not return to Prague from her sojourn in Bavaria until 1325 and in further years she turned her attention in another direction than politics. She maintained the memory of the Přemyslid dynasty primarily through her care of the family necropolis at the Cistercian monastery in Zbraslav, to which she also had brought the remains of her brother Wenceslas III, the last King of Bohemia of the Přemyslid dynasty. Quite isolated from political affairs, she then devoted herself even more to personal piety and started to collect relics to a greater extent. Elizabeth of Bohemia died in 1330 and was also buried at Zbraslav.¹²

As far as we can judge from the sources, it is not at all possible to ascertain the relationship of the young prince to his mother. The infant Wenceslas was taken away from the court for the first time already at the age of four months and he remained at Křivoklát Castle under the protection of Zbyňek Zajíc of Valdek for a whole half year. When he was three years old, following the dispute at Loket in West Bohemia, the prince was left at this castle, and it is very probable that he never again met his mother. In his own autobiography he comments laconically on his return to the Kingdom of Bohemia that he only here learned for the first time that his mother had died.¹³ Regardless of the improbability of the Luxembourg prince being so poorly informed, we must understand this sentence rather as a reflection of the very small role that, according to Charles himself, Queen Elizabeth of Bohemia played in his life. While his father John appears in the entire autobi-

¹² Kopiczková, *Eliška Přemyslovna*, 91–119.

¹³ *Vita Karoli*, 66–67.

ography constantly, among others reasons in order to serve as a figure in contrast to whom Charles can continually define himself, Elizabeth is mentioned only in the introductory overview of Charles's origin and precisely in connection with his return to Bohemia.¹⁴

The young Wenceslas left the Prague royal court at the age of three and later he also left the kingdom. However, it is not appropriate to overstate the impact of his separation from his parents and succumb to psychological analyses of historical actors, bearing in mind the fact that in the context of the upbringing of children at royal courts a major role was played primarily by instructors and tutors, as well as by the group of contemporaries among whom they usually grew up. Our information about Charles's early childhood up until he left the Kingdom of Bohemia is very fragmentary and of later date. Charles's own autobiography *Vita Karoli* does not speak about this period at all, and the French episode is also summarized in a part of one chapter that covers the first 14 years of his life. We should read the account offered by Beneš Krabice of Weitmil of the imprisonment in the dungeon at Loket Castle primarily as, on the one hand, a stylized narration about a difficult childhood and, on the other hand, as a description of the disorderly relations in Bohemia during King John's rule – a Bohemia which later experiences a great ascent when Charles comes to power.¹⁵

¹⁴ Kavka, *Karel IV.*, 19–21.

¹⁵ *Vita Karoli*, 18–31; *Cronica ecclesiae Pragensis Benessii Krabice*, 475–476.

II YOUTH (1323-1346)

In the case of the Luxembourg prince childhood advanced into youth relatively early, most probably already at the moment when his father took him away from Bohemia to France – that is, to a country that King John looked up to and at whose royal court he felt at home, but also a court at which already his father Henry VII had been brought up. The young Wenceslas was thus supposed to continue in the family tradition.

However, King John certainly had more reasons for this step. The decision concerning the relocation was made shortly after the negotiation of the heir's marriage with Margaret, known as Blanche, from the family of Valois. Foresightedly, John found a bride for the future King of Bohemia in one of the most significant families in the close favour of the royal dynasty of the Capets. The bride's father Charles of Valois was not only a powerful person at the court of the last kings of this dynasty, but was also himself related to the Capets: he was the brother of King Philip IV the Fair and also a grandson of St Louis. John's foresight was comprised in the fact that he most probably guessed that in the case of the death of the last Capet Philip the Fair without an heir the French nobility would choose as its king precisely a member of the Valois family, to whom it would give precedence ahead of the English King Edward III, whose mother Isabella was a sister of the last Capet. In 1328, Isabella's claim was indeed denied on the basis that women did not have the right to inherit the royal title and Philip VI of Valois ascended to the throne.

Concerning the transfer of the Bohemian prince to Paris, neither can the fact be underestimated that John was trying to limit the influence of Queen Elizabeth on his first-born son and primarily the influence of the Bohemian nobles in her milieu on him. Not only Bohemian history offers examples of when an heir to the throne became a political

card in the hands of the opposition to the current ruler. John correctly presumed that Paris was sufficiently distant from Prague that this move would entirely restrict the prince's contact with the Bohemian environment. Moreover, he had political plans for his son and he presumed that an education and social preparation at the most famous court in Europe would assist his successor in his future endeavours. Formally, the prince was received at the court of his aunt Marie, since autumn 1322 the wife of French King Charles IV the Fair, to whom Charles devoted a fond recollection in his own autobiography.¹⁶ At the same time, he was brought up at a court among whose members was the family of his betrothed, in contrast to the more usual praxis in which princesses were sent to the courts of their future in-laws in order to acquaint themselves with the local customs and to become accustomed to court morals. However, John of Luxembourg pursued this praxis also in the case of his sons. Just like the small Wenceslas, his younger brother John Henry was also brought to the court of his future wife in the Tyrol.

Shortly after Wenceslas' arrival in Paris, on Sunday 15 May 1323, the marriage of the seven-year-old prince with the similarly old Blanche took place. The date was not chosen accidentally. The papal dispensation was already prepared and one day earlier Wenceslas had reached seven years, the age essential for a legally valid engagement. The concluded marriage was not, however, merely a formal alliance. It was a case of a so-called symbolic marriage with property law significance. However, the two continued to live separately: the prince at the court, and Blanche went back to her family. It is not clear whether she then maintained any contact with her husband, but she evidently did not join the court permanently until 1328, when her half-brother Philip became French King. The marriage could only be physically consummated after the attainment of legal majority, which in the case of boys was 14 years and in the case of girls 12.

On the same day, on Whitsun Sunday 1323, the coronation of his aunt Marie as French Queen took place in the Sainte-Chapelle. On this day, her nephew, Prince Wenceslas of the house of Luxembourg, also

¹⁶ *Vita Karoli*, 18-31.

received his confirmation and the name of his godfather, French King Charles IV the Fair. After this, he used this name as his only name in all situations. As attested by the accounts of the Paris court, he was officially known by this name already in autumn of the same year. The symbolic significance of the first medieval emperor, Charlemagne, was only recalled much later, when Charles IV of Luxembourg had already ascended the Roman throne and formulated the principles of his policy. Later, Charles declared his original Christian name only in situations when he wanted to emphasize his association with the Czech patron St Wenceslas.¹⁷

Charles remained at the Parisian court for seven whole years. However, we know little about his stay. His own biography is very brief on the matter. Our main source of information about the specific conditions of his stay are the accounts of the French Royal Chamber and of the office responsible for the financing of the court's operation and of the households of members of the royal family. From here, we know that Charles had at his disposal a seven-member retinue – in addition to three valets, also four servants – and he regularly received new clothing.¹⁸

The expenses for his education were also taken over by the Royal Chamber, which we can interpret as a gesture of good will on the part of King Charles the Fair, but it is also very well possible that this was a part of the agreement with King John. At the court Charles absolved education side by side with the domestic princes and, as well as languages, he perfected himself in chivalric morals and in combat skills. It seems that one of the most marked features of the young prince's upbringing was an emphasis on education. In his own recollections Charles himself recalls in particular the spiritual dimension: 'From this I learned to read the hours of the glorious blessed Virgin Mary, and once understanding them a little I read them daily during my youth with great pleasure, because instructions had been given to my overseers by the king that they should encourage me in this.'¹⁹

¹⁷ Schneider, 'Karolus, qui et Wenceslaus'.

¹⁸ Mezník, 'Berichte der französischen königlichen Rechnungen'; the prince's stay in Paris vividly described Šmahel, *The Parisian Summit*, 25–33.

¹⁹ *Vita Karoli*, 25.

He also learned Latin, even though the comment by chronicler Beneš Krabice of Weitmil that Charles visited the university in Paris certainly does not correspond to reality. Studies at a medieval university were arranged in such a way that a young prince would not have had any great positive benefit from them. Therefore, all the greater was the contribution made by the tutors and private teachers recorded in the mentioned accounts.²⁰

However, the festive and ceremonial life at the court had no small influence on the young prince. He was a witness of many significant events, coronations, funerals and also the election of a new ruler, namely the ascent of the new Valois dynasty to the French throne. In this case he had the possibility of following from close up how the staging of the French royal ideology functioned in the public space within the framework of the demonstration of royal power connected with rituals and ceremonies. Reflections of this influence appeared to no small extent in Charles's policy later on. Similarly, the conviction of the exceptionality of the 'most Christian of kings', as the French kings called themselves, made an impression on him. This conviction was supported by an emphasis on the sacred essence of royal power founded on the anointment with sacred oil coming – according to legend – from heaven and also containing the ability of the anointed king to heal the illness called scrofula with the touch of his hand. Only later was this complex of customs compiled and named the 'religion of royalty' (*religion royale*).²¹ However, already in the 1320s Charles was able to imbibe inspirations that he was later to use when building up his own royal ideology.

In his autobiography, Charles mentions the ascent of the new dynasty to the throne in the person of his brother-in-law Philip VI, in particular with a view to Philip's alleged parsimony and lesser interest in the Czech prince in comparison with the preceding king. This evaluation in the autobiography is most probably misleading. It cannot be assumed that the French court paid for the stay and education of the royal prince Charles as a good deed. It was certainly a part of an agreement and

²⁰ *Cronica ecclesiae Pragensis Benessii Krabice*, 498.

²¹ For more information on the concept of French 'religion royale' in Middle Ages see Barbey, *Être roi*, 187–192; Brown, 'The religion of royalty', 131–149.

a question of maintaining good relations with the King of Bohemia John, who was a close ally of his French counterpart. This was also true in the case of the last member of the Capet family, to whom King John promised his sister. John also maintained a significant position after the ascent of the Valois dynasty. Not only did his son marry the French King's half-sister, Blanche, but he also strengthened the alliance through the marriage of the French King's son John the Good with his daughter Jutta, known in France as Bonne.

John of Luxembourg was not only a political ally, but also a significant advisor of the aforementioned French kings – with both of them he received the cross and swore an oath to go into battle against unbelievers. John later fulfilled his oath by a campaign against the pagan Prussians. Philip, in view of the danger from the side of the English who were casting doubt on his claim to the throne, was forced to entirely give up the idea of a crusade. We also know that John presided over the proceedings of the royal court that had to resolve the affair of the falsification of documents in the ranks of the most elevated French nobles. John's significant position at the court is also attested to by the fact that Philip VI sought John's favour already in his position of the kingdom's regent, when in February 1328 he donated to John the Nesle Palace inside the walls of Paris not far from the royal seat of the Louvre, which was then known for many years as the Hotel de Bohême.²²

It is precisely in this light that we must view the educational stay of the young Bohemian prince at the Paris court. In the first place it was a case of building up contacts at the royal court, which King John regarded as the most significant ally of his dynasty, but a role was also played by an attempt to provide his successor with an upbringing that would enable him to acquaint himself with the most sophisticated royal ideology in Europe at that time. Chronicler Beneš Krabice of Weitmil is, therefore, not far from the truth when he recalls that Charles was primarily 'educated in French morals and virtues and also in the liberal arts'.²³ After Charles's return to Bohemia, chronicler Peter of Zittau evaluated his stay in France in these words: 'However, at God's instiga-

²² Benešovská, 'Les résidences du roi Jean de Bohême'.

²³ *Cronica ecclesiae Pragensis Benessii Krabice*, 498.

tion this youth of good talent was sent to France, in order to learn there wisdom and a proper way of living; for it is true that now we recognize this in him from experience, when for someone of his young age we see him as quite diligent and adorned with good morals.²⁴

As far as concerns the personal contacts acquired, Charles himself later emphasizes from this period primarily his acquaintance with Benedictine Abbot and Bishop Pierre Roger de Rosières, the future Pope Clement VI (1342–1352), who was later to play a fundamental role in Charles attaining the imperial throne.²⁵

The stay in France ended in 1330, when Charles, who had now reached the age of legal majority, together with Blanche were recalled to Luxembourg by his father and most probably started to live as a married couple for the first time. However, not long after, already in January 1331, at his father's command Charles set out for northern Italy, where John was trying to build a domain under the overlordship of the Luxembourgs. He made use of the somewhat chaotic situation of the mutually inimical city-states and also the (unauthorized) cover of the authority of the Roman Emperor Louis in order to conduct negotiations and also minor military expeditions. Gradually, he succeeded in building up a so-called *signoria* – a territory acknowledging his rule. However, John could not afford to endanger his central and western European policy by a long absence and therefore he sent for Charles, whom he made his representative in his Italian holdings.

In April 1331, Charles arrived in Parma, which represented the main seat of Luxembourg power in northern Italy, and immediately took up his role. However, with only a small amount of ready funds and in dependence on local allied cities, the task of controlling such cities as Pavia, Bergamo, Parma, Lucca, Cremona, Modena, Reggio and some others which made up the Luxembourg signoria was not at all easy. His standing and authority were far from being unshakeable and soon he had the opportunity to acquire his first knightly spurs. On the pages of his autobiography he describes how, on the Feast of St Catherine in 1332, he had to fight a battle against an opponent in which his forces were outnumbered. According to his account, in the course of the battle

²⁴ *Cronica Aule regie*, 508.

²⁵ *Vita Karoli*, 27–28; Anheim, *Clément VI au travail*, 73–88.

his life was threatened and he emerged alive and well only thanks to the intervention of this saint.²⁶

In spite of this and other minor successes, the position of the Luxembourgs in northern Italy was not sustainable in the long term. One of the reasons was that holding this area only made sense if the Luxembourgs had also controlled Carinthia and Tyrol and were not isolated from northern Italy. However, for the meanwhile the fate of the Tyrol inheritance was not very clear, and neither was Louis the Bavarian enthusiastic about the prospect of Luxembourg gains on the other side of the Alps. In the meantime Charles took up residence especially in Lucca, one of the Tuscan towns that he controlled and where he built a castle and township nearby in his own honour, called Montecarlo.²⁷

The two challenging years in the Italian environment had a formative influence on Charles's personality, or at least a large part of the *Vita Karoli* autobiographical document (chapters IV–VII) which is devoted to this period tries to persuade its readers of this. Here we will examine two incidents that well illustrate the overall tendency of this literary work, which has a fundamental influence on our perception not only of Charles's youth, but also of his entire personality.²⁸

Immediately after his arrival in Italy, Charles took up residence in the Monastery of the Augustinians in Pavia, where he spent the Easter holidays. Here, on Easter Sunday, one of Charles's retinue was poisoned. He himself writes about this: 'I myself escaped only by divine grace. Because the High Mass lasted a long time and I had intended to take communion, I did not eat before mass. When I did eventually go to dine, I was told that my retinue had suddenly gotten sick, in particular those who had eaten something before the meal. I sat at the table, not wishing to eat, and we were all alarmed.'²⁹ He further continues his account, according to which he noticed a suspicious man among the servants who pretended to be mute, but after three days of interrogation accompanied by torture confessed to having poisoned the food at the order of Duke Azzo Visconti. Finally, Charles does

²⁶ *Vita Karoli*, 42–43.

²⁷ *Vita Karoli*, 44–45.

²⁸ For the Italian experience see Kavka, *Karel IV.*, 46–65.

²⁹ *Vita Karoli*, 37.

not forget to emphasize his contribution to the renewal of the famous monastery, which preserved the remains of St Augustine.

It is evident that in this passage Charles's biography starts to build a picture of a chosen king who is under God's protection, which manifests itself in that he escapes many traps and dangers. In this case, it is his piety that protects him, because thanks to this he does not neglect to attend the great Easter mass on Sunday and therefore he is also fasting, which means that he avoids the poisoned food. Piety is a characteristic that is emphasized in many places in Charles's biography.

The *Vita Karoli* also attests in several more passages to Charles as being God's chosen one, or respectively to his being in God's favour in the course of his Italian adventures. For instance, when representatives of towns inclined towards the Luxembourgs came to an agreement with their enemies and were just about to confirm their agreement by an oath made on the host, suddenly the church went dark and a strong wind blew the host off the altar and in front of the feet of the leader of the conspiracy: "Then everyone cried out with a single voice, "What we have resolved upon does not please God". And thus giving up the matter, each returned to his own home."³⁰ In this case also God is supposed to have stood on Charles's side and the incident was supposed to underline God's protection of his actions.

Another moment that is colourfully depicted in the *Vita Karoli* is the dream that Charles had when together with his father he spent the night in the town of Terenzo near Parma on the holy day of the Ascension of the Virgin Mary (15 August 1333):

"That same night, after we had fallen asleep, a vision appeared to us. An angel of the Lord stood beside us in the left side of the bed where we lay and struck us on the side, saying, "Rise up and come with us." We responded in spirit, "Lord, I do not know where or how I may go with you." And taking us by the hair of our forehead, he lifted us with him into the air and over to where a great battle array of armed knights were standing before a fortress prepared for battle. He held us in the air above the troops and said to us, "Watch and see." And behold another

³⁰ *Vita Karoli*, 47.



Tirol Castle. Seat of the Dukes of Carinthia, from where Margaret, Countess of Tyrol, drove out her husband John Henry.

angel descended from heaven bearing a fiery sword in his hand, and he struck a man in the centre of the battle line, cutting off his genital organ with the sword. He seemed to be mortally wounded, and sat there on his horse in agony. Thereupon, still holding us by the hair, the angel said, “Do you know the person who has been struck by the angel and mortally wounded?” Then we said, “Lord, I do not know; neither do I know this place.” He said, “Know then that this is the Dauphin of Vienne, who because of the sin of debauchery has been struck down by God in this way; now therefore take care, and you may tell your father that he ought to avoid similar sin, or even worse shall happen to you.” We were filled with compassion for the Dauphin of Vienne.³¹

There is a justification for the inclusion in the autobiography of the description of the admonitory dream. On the one hand, through the dream Charles indicated that after this incident he thereafter led a restrained and god-fearing life. He used the popular motif of a conversion – that

³¹ *Vita Karoli*, 61; cf also Odložilik, ‘The Terenzo dream of Charles IV.’; Monnet, ‘Le roi d’un rêve.’

is, a fundamental change in the morality of his way of life, which was part of the usual literary approach in the writing of the lives of saints. The very fact alone that Charles had a dream in Terenzo that warned him against a dissolute life, but primarily revealed to him an event about which he could have no idea, was supposed to suggest to readers that Charles was endowed with the great favour of God. When Charles's father John learned of the dream, he warned him against believing dreams. However, when it became apparent that the Dauphin was really dead, John was truly amazed at this dream. John's reaction here underlines even more the exceptional nature of Charles's vision.³²

In view of the fact that it is precisely Charles's autobiography that substantially influences the traditional account of his youth, it is not amiss to devote a little bit of attention to this text. In any case, this is a very exceptional literary work. In the Middle Ages, kings were not accustomed to write their memoirs and even in the case of educated rulers this happened only rarely. It can be said that modern historiography when dealing with precisely the period described in the *Vita Karoli* has been very strongly influenced by the form of its rendition in this account. The author's suggestive style, supported by a narration in the first person plural, easily persuades the reader that this is a case of – so to speak – diary records of Charles's youth. However, it is deceptive to succumb to this approach, because it is evident that this is rather a case of a very complex and thoroughly elaborated narration, which was aimed primarily at celebrating its author and emphasizing that precisely he had been chosen to take on the imperial and also the Bohemian thrones.

Vita Karoli contains a relatively detailed account of Charles's youth – that is, the years from 1323 to 1346. It is not clear who wrote this work, but if we are to believe the fundamental framework of the narration, then the first 14 chapters were written or dictated by Charles himself. However, the text is very precisely written, and so it is not possible to rule out that someone edited it for him. The remaining six, brief chapters (around three times shorter) were written by a different author. In these chapters, Charles appears in the third person. The events are here written rather in the form of analytical records which were supposed to

³² Nodl, 'Svár obrazu s textem'.

extend the text up until the key moment of Charles's youth – that is, his election as King of the Romans – with which the entire biography ends as the culmination of the narration of Charles's youth.

It is through the prism of these observations regarding the specific nature of the biography and the strategy of its author or authors that we must also interpret the events contained in the work, which to an overwhelming extent determine the picture of Charles's youth, but also of his personality. The dating of the document is still a matter of dispute. This question is also connected with the supposed motivation for writing the biography. The most probable date appears to be the period around 1350, and this is the dating to which Eugen Hillenbrand, German expert and editor of the text, inclines.³³ Other authors favour a date around 1374 and see in the text a legacy written for his successor, precisely as the introductory sentence of the work states.³⁴

The *Vita Karoli* is an exceptional literary text for which in essence comparisons in its period can be sought only with difficulty. This is not only because it is a work written in Latin which gives the impression of an authentic text written by a governing ruler, but moreover the text is also somewhat exceptional in its content. It does not offer the history of a ruler's period of rule or a description of his great deeds, but rather a biographical account of the youth of a future king in the period before he had acceded to the throne. Some formal specifics of the work are also worthy of attention: for instance, that it is written in the first person plural, thereby imitating the diction of the official documents written in the royal Chancery.

In the chronologically conceived account Charles included not only several theologically stylized explications, but also descriptions of dreams or unusual experiences through which readers are supposed to understand the exceptionality of the main hero – King of the Romans Charles. Homiletic passages resembling preaching (chapters I, II, XI, XII and XIII) represent a relatively large part of the text and most probably have the task of emphasizing the fact that the author and main protagonist of the work was an exceptionally educated ruler,

³³ Hillenbrand, 'Die Autobiographie Karls IV'.

³⁴ Alternative datings are reported by Bláhová, *Kroniky doby Karla IV.*, 560–562; cf. also Spěváček, 'Karel IV. a jeho Vlastní životopis', 170–178.

who was not only capable of writing his own autobiography in Latin, but moreover was capable of understanding and commenting theological problems.³⁵ The overall tendency of the text reveals a stylization supporting the feeling of being someone chosen by God, about which Charles was convinced and which feeling was strengthened precisely by events connected with his youth. This impression is confirmed by the frequent mention in the work by Charles of God's mercy; interventions in storylines concerning significant events in Charles's life are already attributed to this mercy.

When the situation in northern Italy became unsustainable for the Luxembourgs, and John realized that he was not capable of further continuing with the campaign, he allowed Charles to leave in summer 1333 for Merano, where he met with representatives of the Bohemian nobility and then headed for the Kingdom of Bohemia in their accompaniment. We know that on his way to Prague he stopped at the grave of his mother in the Monastery of Zbraslav. Even though this scene is usually interpreted as an expression of Charles's political manifesto based on emphasizing his Přemyslid blood and the commemoration of his Přemyslid mother, it is appropriate to note that this was more likely an expression of respect for his mother.³⁶ From the sources, it is not clear whether they were in contact after John's intervention at Loket Castle in 1319 and it is not, therefore, possible to evaluate their relationship in any way.

Shortly after his return to the Kingdom of Bohemia, Charles received from his father the title of Margrave of Moravia, an integral part of the Kingdom of Bohemia, and in this way his position was clarified at least formally. In his autobiography, the young Luxembourg describes the situation in the kingdom somewhat dramatically. In spite of the fact that, within the framework of the entire narrative, the figure of John is presented positively, at this moment Charles was forced to describe the wretched and ruined state of the kingdom, which he then raised up, as long as his father or his intriguers did not stand in his way. It is precisely in the light of this authorial intention of the autobiography that we must perceive with great reserve the description of the desolate

³⁵ Hergemöller, *Cogor adversum te*, 233–253.

³⁶ Spěvácěk, *Karel IV.*, 104.

kingdom, in which nothing belonged to the king any longer, as a part of the idealization of Charles and his rulership abilities.³⁷

Nevertheless, the description of the situation was not entirely imaginary; it was rather somewhat exaggerated. This is partly confirmed by chronicler Peter of Zittau, who in his Zbraslav Chronicle captured the first years after Charles's return to the Kingdom of Bohemia.³⁸ According to him, many castles had been mortgaged and Charles repurchased them. Charles also set about renovating Prague Castle, where already in summer 1334 he was able to welcome his wife Blanche of Valois. From the account in the autobiography, it is evident that shortly after his return Charles styled himself in the role of a ruler who was interested in the Kingdom of Bohemia, and that this interest expressed itself in an attempt to strengthen the position of royal power by buying up significant castles and also in the care he showed for the traditional seat of the Přemyslid kings at Prague Castle.

The following years for Charles were a period of seeking his place in Luxembourg politics, but still however constantly in the shadow of his father. King John led diplomatic negotiations at the highest level and it was first and foremost thanks to him that the kingdom was in safety. However, in this case John had to devote considerable attention primarily to relationships among the rulers of surrounding countries and their families. John, and along with him gradually Charles also, had to pay attention mainly to maintaining the balance of forces in Central Europe between Polish King Casimir and Hungarian King Charles Robert, respectively later between Hungarian King Louis and the Habsburgs. Neither can we forget Louis the Bavarian, who on the contrary attempted to destabilize the region, to weaken the Luxembourgs by his support of mutual disputes, and primarily to strengthen his own position.

A major theme of King John's policy was the possible inheritance from Henry of Carinthia. Already in 1324, the fathers John and Henry had concluded an agreement on the marriage of their scions. A key part of this agreement was a clause stating that in the case that Henry of Carinthia did not have any male heir, his territories – that is, primarily Carinthia and Tyrol, but also Carniola and the Windic Mark – would

³⁷ *Vita Karoli*, 68-71.

³⁸ *Cronica Aule regie*, 508-510; Cf. Bobková – Bartlová, *Velké dějiny IV.a*, 143-146.

be inherited by his daughter Margaret and her husband John Henry of Luxembourg. King John was very committed to this project, and therefore in 1327 he sent his five-year-old son to the court of his future wife so that he could become accustomed to the environment and acquaint himself with the language and customs of the territories that he was supposed to rule in the future. In 1330 a symbolic wedding was held (that is, a kind of symbolical intercourse by placing the children side by side to create the notion of a corporal consummation of the marriage) of the eight-year-old John Henry with the twelve-year-old Margaret, later known as Margaret Maultausch (Bag-Mouth).³⁹ It should immediately be emphasized that this nickname was given to her at a later date and refers rather to the impudence and independence with which she got rid of her husband than to her physical appearance or even her alleged passionate sensuality. King John was well aware what a substantial prize Henry's inheritance was, but nevertheless he did not succeed in preventing complications.

When on 2 April 1335 Henry of Carinthia died, according to the marriage contracts John Henry of Luxembourg and his wife Margaret were supposed to inherit the Duchy of Carinthia and the County of Tyrol. However, Emperor Louis the Bavarian did not agree with this and he came to an agreement with the Habsburgs to divide up the inheritance so that he would receive the Tyrol, while Carinthia would go to them. Emperor Louis acted. He declared the territories in question as an imperial fief which was forfeit as escheat after Henry's death and which he divided up between himself and the Austrian dukes. The Habsburgs quickly took control of Carinthia, but the Tyrolean nobility did not want to submit to Louis and remained loyal to Margaret. This situation must certainly have appeared very problematic to the Luxembourgs. However, in the first moment they tried to retain at least the Tyrol. John Henry, who not yet reached the age of legal adulthood, had limited possibilities for imposing his authority. Several times he had to rely on his brother's help, whether political or military. Over the following years, Charles himself travelled to Tyrol in order to assist in suppressing minor and major rebellions.

³⁹ Nodl, 'Royal weddings and divorces', 67.

For some short periods he even ruled in the country on behalf of his brother. Within the framework of seeking peaceful coexistence with their southern neighbours, the Luxembourgs soon gave up on Carinthia and left it to the Habsburgs. Their main aim was to ensure a firm position for John Henry in Tyrol.

King John maintained good relations with the Capetian kings also in the 1330s, and so it is no surprise that he found a new bride precisely at their court, Beatrice of Bourbon. He chose her from the wider family of King Philip VI, who also organized a wedding for them in 1334 in Paris. John brought his new wife to Prague at the beginning of January 1336. The sources speak about her not being able to accustom herself very well in Prague, and not even the presence of another French princess – and moreover her cousin Blanche of Valois – helped her. We do not learn much about this, but all the indications are that these records are at least partially correct. A year after arriving in Bohemia, Beatrice gave birth to a son, named a little surprisingly Wenceslas after the Bohemian patron saint.⁴⁰ However, Beatrice was evidently not very happy in Prague. She endured until 1337, when she was crowned Queen of Bohemia, but neither did this ceremony take place with any great pomp. According to chronicler Peter of Zittau, the coronation did not take place ‘with such great festive ceremonial display as we have been accustomed to see on other occasions in earlier times during such coronations, and during the ceremony King John stood without his crown and without his royal robe’.⁴¹ Not long afterwards, Queen Beatrice had had enough of the country and the not overly friendly environment. After an only 18-month stay in Bohemia, she left the country and never returned. She apparently left the young Wenceslas temporarily in Prague in the care of a wet-nurse and a nanny. It is usually considered that one of the reasons for Beatrice’s dissatisfaction in Bohemia was precisely the popularity of Blanche of Valois, which contrasted sharply with the almost inimical approach towards the new queen. However, there are no concrete reports on which to base this interpretation and it is also difficult to imagine how precisely this approach could have been demonstrated. Nevertheless, the fact that shortly afterwards King John

⁴⁰ Fantysová-Matějková, *Wenceslas de Bohême*.

⁴¹ *Cronica Aule regie*, 439.

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