

## IMAGES OF ANTI-MAJESTY IN HUSSITE LITERATURE

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Majesty was part of an elaborate political superstructure built up in the middle ages by political theorists and kings to justify a ruler's claim to obedience from the people. A person claiming majesty had to be militarily able and valorous, a member of a splendid lineage and orthodox in religion, and overall had to show princely and personal qualities that elicited admiration. The coronation and accompanying regalia embodied before the public the essence of majesty. Although the people had no formal means of withdrawing obedience from the king, implicit in medieval political thought was the idea that the ruler had to retain the respect of those whom he ruled. It is relatively easy to trace the development of official ideology. What is less clear is whether or not common people were convinced of the merits of royal rule or merely coerced into accepting it.

The Hussite revolution of the fifteenth century offers an opportunity to examine popular attitudes to kingship. From 1419 to 1434 peasants, urban commoners and patricians with allies from the nobility kept the heir-apparent from assuming the crown. According to František Graus<sup>1</sup> Hussites were exceptional in that they discarded the notion of the good king corrupted by evil councillors whereas the peasants of the rest of Europe did not challenge kingship as such. The peasants were assisted in their revolt by Wycliffite-Hussite ideas on church office which asserted that unqualified clergy were not worthy of obedience. This principle was easily carried over into secular politics. The most explicit attack on the monarch found in Hussite literature was that of Laurence of Březová, Master of Arts from Charles University. According to his satires, images of majesty had taken root among the common people, hence his efforts to eradicate them. On the other hand, the desecration of the temporary tomb of King Wenceslas IV indicates that some peasants shook off the aura of majesty rather quickly once the king was dead.

The establishment of majesty was part of the strategy of building royal government. Medieval rulers needed to persuade their subjects of their own importance. Bohemian kings were not different. Přemysl Otakar II (1253–1278), a member of a native dynasty, used seals, coins and other objects to carry the symbols of his family and spread ideas of majesty. He had a slogan etched into the pavement of the floor of the chapel of his castle Zvíkov, which identified him with gold, created an image of splendour

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<sup>1</sup> Graus, František: *From Resistance to Revolt: The Late Medieval Peasant Wars in the Context of Social Crisis*. In: *The German Peasant War of 1525*. Ed. by Janos Bak. London 1976, 5.

and sought to transfer God's grace to the ruler<sup>2</sup>. Use of imagery was part of a deliberate propaganda program on the part of Otakar to gain his political ambitions including the loyalty of his subjects by impressing them with images of greatness.

Images of majesty were enhanced even more by Charles IV (1346–1378), a member of the Luxembourg dynasty. His efforts were designed to establish his authority in the German empire as well, but it was his work in Bohemia which was remembered with nostalgia by the Czechs. The political principles upon which Charles built royal power included continuity with the Přemyslid dynasty, linking the Bohemian and Roman thrones, joining the Czech and the Carolingian traditions, establishing an alliance with the Church, and a patriotic identification with the Czech lands, its sovereignty and economic well-being. He also used the feudal hierarchy to centralize his government, he strengthened the charismatic element of the ruler's authority, by supporting culture and learning and he pursued a policy of peace<sup>3</sup>.

Charles IV adroitly glorified his person and dynasty through sacral means and consciously created an ideology of a royal, ruling tradition, based on the pre-Christian Přemyslid and Christian St. Wenceslas tradition<sup>4</sup>. His images of majesty were communicated to the public on wall paintings, in the architecture of royal castles such as Karlstein and in the stone bridge over the Vltava built in 1357. His establishment of Charles University (1348), built for the training of theologians for the empire as a whole, also enhanced the king's authority because its graduates helped him formulate royal legal principles<sup>5</sup>.

His son, Wenceslas IV (1378–1419), named in honour of the country's saint, attempted to follow in his father's footsteps by building up royal government. His misfortune was that he was twice captured by an army led by the Czech nobility, the second time allied with the heir-apparent, Wenceslas's half brother, Sigismund. These defeats not only forced him to give up his plans for a strong royal government, but also seriously undermined his claims to majesty, since a king was expected to be militarily successful. His reputation for drinking wine and frequent drunken states further undermined his claims to the dignity of majesty<sup>6</sup>.

Sigismund had openly declared that he would not tolerate Hussite ideas of reform and that he would lead the campaign to bring Bohemia back into the fold of the Roman church. This situation forced the Czechs to raise questions about the nature of political rule and to come up with alternatives to the monarchy. Some, mostly Catholic in

<sup>2</sup> K h u t a n, Jiří: *Dvorské umění a zakladatelské dílo krále Přemysla Otakara II. ve světle dobového politického myšlení* [Courtly Art and the Founding Work of King Přemysl Otakar II in Light of Contemporary Political Thought]. *Folia Historica Bohemica* 12 (1988) 197–198, 203.

<sup>3</sup> S e i b t, Ferdinand: *Karl IV. Ein Kaiser in Europa, 1346–1378*. München 1978. – S p ě v á č e k, Jiří: *Karel IV. Život a dílo (1316–1378)* [Charles IV. Life and Work. Praha 1979, 261–325.

<sup>4</sup> S p ě v á č e k: *Karel IV. 273–274, 289–290, 321–322*. – S e i b t, Ferdinand: *Hussitenstudien. Personen, Ereignisse, Ideen einer frühen Revolution*. München 1987, 133–151 for the nobility's sense of cohesion.

<sup>5</sup> S e i b t: *Kaiser in Europa 179–185*. – S p ě v á č e k: *Karel IV. 323–324*.

<sup>6</sup> For the reign of Wenceslas, see B a r t o š, F. M.: *Čechy v době Husově 1378–1415* [Bohemia in the Hussite Era 1378–1415]. Praha 1947, 5–230. – K l a s s e n, John: *The Nobility and the Making of the Hussite Revolution*. New York-Boulder 1989, 47–60.

religion, backed King Sigismund and believed in kingship. Another group, mostly moderate Hussites, supported the institution of the monarchy but not Sigismund because they wanted the right to practice the principles of the Hussite reform movement. Laurence of Březová, a university master, who in the Summer of 1420 wrote the satires under discussion attacking King Sigismund's claim to majesty, belonged to this group. Lastly there were the radicals who wanted to get rid of the monarchy because it was part of the old corrupt system. From 1420 until 1434 the Hussites, squabbling intermittently among themselves, kept King Sigismund from claiming his throne. In the course of events they defeated four European invading armies.

Laurence of Březová whose chronicle of the revolution is one of our most valuable sources, is also generally assumed to be the author of the works analyzed here which were collected in the Bautzen manuscript published by Jiří Daňhelka in 1952<sup>7</sup>. *The Grievance of the Czech Crown against the Hungarian King and the Council of Constance* (Henceforth-Grievance) and *The Czech Crown's Rebuke of the Hungarian King, that he accepted the Crown improperly and that he violently oppresses the Czech Kingdom* (Henceforth-Rebuke) deal most fully with Sigismund's kingship. Both were published in Czech and Latin versions. Ferdinand Seibt shows that the Czech text of the *Grievance*, dated 20 June 1420, was intended for the masses who were largely illiterate and was more scathing than the Latin text written in July 1420. The *Rebuke* was written just after Sigismund's curtailed coronation, probably in August or September. The Latin editions were meant for the educated and European wide public. Furthermore, the Hussites had defeated the crusaders on Vítkov Hill between the Czech edition and the second Latin one (The first Latin edition disappeared). The moderate Hussites believed the royalists were prepared to negotiate and so they wanted to build, not tear down, bridges. Hence the criticisms of Sigismund were moderated in the Latin<sup>8</sup>.

Ferdinand Seibt and Jiří Kejř point out that on one level the satires wanted to justify and legitimate the people's resistance to their crowned king by using the legal and political arguments<sup>9</sup>. For example the cities had not given their approval to the coronation. On another level, perhaps more important, the message with its graphic descriptions of the king's anti-majestic character and behaviour was addressed to the simple folk whose implicit support for a successful monarch was essential. Political theorists knew that without the support of the peasants the head or ruler could not govern effectively<sup>10</sup>. Communicating with the common people before the invention

<sup>7</sup> Daňhelka, Jiří (ed.): *Husitské skladby Budyšínského rukopisu* [Hussite Compositions in the Bautzen Manuscripts]. Praha 1952, 23–40. Latin versions, *Satira Regni Boemie in Regem Hungarie Sigismundum* and *Corona Regni Boemie Satira in Regem Hungarie Sigismundum*, 168–178. The Bautzen manuscript collection includes two other satires, one of which addressed the lay nobility and another the burghers of Kutná Hora.

<sup>8</sup> Seibt: *Hussitenstudien* 19–23.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*-Kejř, Jiří: *Husité* [The Hussites]. Praha 1985, 105–106.

<sup>10</sup> For example, the twelfth century, John of Salisbury: *The Statesman's Book* of John Salisbury. Tr. by John Dickenson. New York 1963, reissue of 1955 and 1927 editions, 66. – Machiavelli affirmed the need for popular approval as well. Cf. *The Prince*. Tr. by Harvey C. Mansfield Jr. Chicago 1985, 40–41, 87. – See also Kern, Fritz: *Kingship and Law in the Middle Ages*. New York 1970, 53.

of the printing press was largely through the spoken word although rebels also used visual art to make their case. Thus the student reformers in Prague combined words with brilliantly coloured pictures illustrating what they considered papal and ecclesiastical abuses. Wide use of this "hybridized media"<sup>11</sup> through woodcuts as in the sixteenth century had to await the invention of the printing press. Despite the Bohemian people's reputation for literacy, most common people would have heard these satires read in church, tavern or open meetings. Speakers and writers hoping for the ears of the common people used concrete and graphic images. Abstractions and generalizations were less effective in persuading them. Vivid portrayals of actions and clear unambiguous characterizations of the good or the evil, which characterize Laurence's satires, promised better results in getting the attention of an audience still largely illiterate<sup>12</sup>.

The Czech editions, then, had as their goal nothing less than the total annihilation of Sigismund's claims to dignity and majesty in the public mind. They pulled no punches in attacking Sigismund's character and used standard medieval images of royal majesty as well as some notions specific to Bohemia's history and turned these upside down.

Laurence satirized Sigismund's military failures contrasting them to models of chivalry, valour and honour. He reversed the king's claims to sacral character and turned him into a demonic figure. He hinted that Sigismund's birth might not be legitimate and hence his claim to participate in the splendour of royal dynasties of Bohemia was invalid. He was not one with his people. He was a man without princely qualities, indeed with attributes the exact opposite of kingliness. Sigismund's coronation made no difference, because no amount of holy oil could change the anti-majestic character of Sigismund and make him into a king, worthy of the people's obedience.

### *Monarch's Military Ability*

Czech monarchial traditions followed closely those of the rest of Europe. Přemysl Otakar II in the thirteenth century strove to build up royal power at home and abroad and developed an ideology of royal power modeled on the knightly culture of western Europe. One of his more ostentatious coins showed the figure of the king with crowned head, riding on a horse and holding an outstretched sword. The other side had the words *REX OTAKARVS*. Such glorification of courage and of knightly skills was tied to the idea of the king as defender and guarantor of the peace<sup>13</sup>.

Laurence compared Sigismund with his father, Charles IV in his first satire. Charles was better known for his policy of seeking to resolve disputes peacefully and he kept Bohemia free from invasion by enemy forces for forty years. His friends said that

<sup>11</sup> Scribner, Robert: *For the Sake of the Simple Folk*. Cambridge 1981, 3–4. See also Howard Kaminsky and others: *Nicholas of Dresden and the Dresden School in Hussite Prague*. Introduction to *Master Nicholas of Dresden, the Old Color and the New*. In: *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, N. S. 55, part 1. (1965) 5–28.

<sup>12</sup> Gurevich, Aron: *Medieval Popular Culture. Problems in Belief and Perceptions*. Cambridge 1988, 16–17.

<sup>13</sup> Kuthan: *Dvorské umění* 205–206.

even his victories came peacefully because God visited death upon his rivals so that he did not need to raise armies for battle. He put down internal feuds by force and because of his peace and order his people were free to pursue their goals and the activities of their livelihood<sup>14</sup>. His image as a chivalrous knight and courageous warrior was intact and Laurence, speaking for the Crown of the Czech kingdom and as the spouse of the monarch lauded Charles by using gender based images. Charles was "... a man flourishing with the lively manliness of verdant strength, yes even, as I am convinced, a living picture of manly virtue, ..." <sup>15</sup> He had exalted the dignity of the Czech crown by extending its border so that among Europe's kingdoms, Bohemia appeared in the diplomatic pavilions of Europe as an exalted queen living in peaceful prosperity.

In contrast Laurence satirized what he saw as Sigismund's military weakness and cowardice which he gave feminine character. In the *Rebuke* he described two of the king's recent military encounters; one against the Turks and the other with the Hussites. In the battle against the Turks, defeat came because of Sigismund's weakened state after spending time with harlots. Laurence drew attention to the Apostle Paul's words that not one will be crowned unless he has proved himself in battle. He completed the imagery of gender oppositions by describing Sigismund as one feminized or weakened because before his battle with the Turks he had cavorted with prostitutes or immoral females:

... you became so greatly effeminated/weakened [a pun in Czech] through the lustful pleasure of mere harlots, that you dared not put on your armor nor did you see the enemy hosts, but ... you fled with a most shameful flight<sup>16</sup>.

Laurence saw the feminine as on the one hand frail but also as strong and threatening to men. It was through women that men were disabled.

He then turned to a more recent incident, Sigismund's attack on Prague, specifically the battle for Vítkov Hill on a July evening in 1420. On this hill were some 20–30 defenders including two women and a girl. In anticipation of the attack a wall had been reinforced and a number of wooden huts or cabins had been built<sup>17</sup>. He lampooned the king as one who could not even break the flimsy wooden slats, let alone fortified walls and castles:

You arranged your army for war, advancing gloriously towards her wooden huts, built with slats of wood meant for a sheepfold, and here attacked with bold hand, having a thousand troops for each defender of the hut. You were frightened, perhaps by the scary sound of of a dry leaf or perhaps by the snap of the harvest flail, you shamefully fled and lost the bravest part of your great following, ...<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Seibt: Kaiser in Europa 189. – Spěvák: Karel IV. 324–325.

<sup>15</sup> Daňhelka: Husitské skladby 24. In Latin: „ipse nimirum vir, virtutis vivo virore virescens, imo ut arbitror, omnium virtutum viva imago, ..." 168.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 38. (jediné Ženky vilným kocháním taks velice byl zžeňal) Latin: scorti oblectamento adeo effeminatus (176).

<sup>17</sup> Tomek, W. W.: Dějepis města Prahy [The History of the City of Prague]. Vol. 4. Praha 1899, 78–80. – Bartoš, F. M.: Husitská revoluce [The Hussite Revolution]. Vol. 1. Praha 1965, 99–100. – Macek, Josef: Tábor v husitském revolučním hnutí [Tabor in the Hussite revolutionary Movement]. Vol. 2. Praha 1955, 212–214.

<sup>18</sup> Daňhelka: Dvorské umění 38.

Laurence taunted Sigismund for his defeat at the hands of peasants and commoners including women and children who made up much of the Hussite armies. Nine years later Sigismund's aristocratic allies would chide him for his defeat at the hands of peasants<sup>19</sup>. His shameful flight in the darkness when confronted by these new warriors was no knightly defense. Laurence continued by comparing him to a rabbit whose best defense was to turn his back in flight.

O most mad of mad princes, [to think] that these just described deeds could make anyone worthy of my crown, whoever makes this mistake is like a hare among most ferocious animals, who being by nature without any defense and chased by ferocious dogs, for a defense has nimble flight and oftentimes shows his back to his pursuers. [Such a one] would not merit coronation<sup>20</sup>.

He portrayed him as a bricklayer who does things upside down. His professions is to build walls and houses but instead he hires himself out for a small wage and destroys walls, houses and castles. This phrase summarizes Laurence's approach to Sigismund's right to the throne. He is a person called to one task but performs its opposite. In his claim to build majesty he has in fact destroyed it.

### *Sacral Character of Majesty*

From the early middle ages, European rulers overlooked the disagreeable ramifications for behaviour of Christ's death on the cross and strove to identify themselves with the ruler of heaven. This is true also of the Czechs. Přemysl Otakar II sacralized rulership by identifying royal splendour with the relic of the cross of Jesus and his passion. He had a cross made with the words *REX OTACARVS ME FECIT* carved on it. Thus the Přemyslids identified their own dignity and persons with the making of this cross. The connection of a king with the crucified Christ reflected a ruler's claim to be his representative on earth<sup>21</sup>.

Charles IV also encouraged the people to identify his kingship with that of God by linking himself with Charles the Great who received the gift of a divine sword. He built a chapel in the imperial residence in Nieder-Ingelheim on the Rhine, at the supposed birthplace of Charles the Great, consecrating it in memory of the saint by that name and of St. Wenceslas. According to ancient legend an angel of God gave Charles the Great a sword which later became part of the group of holy objects protected here. Dedicating the crown of St. Wenceslas, the imperial jewels and sacred objects to Charles the Great reinforced the inviolability and saintly character of the symbols of the Czech state and at the same time the majesty and sacral power of the one who wore them<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Kejř: Husité 156–157. – Klassen, John: Women and Religious Reform in Late Medieval Bohemia. *Renaissance and Reformation* 5 (1981). – Kejř, Jiří: Zur Bauernfrage im Hussitentum. *Jahrbuch für Geschichte des Feudalismus* 7 (1983) 65.

<sup>20</sup> Daňhelka: Husitské skladby 39. In the dialogue between Prague and Kutná Hora he added that if Sigismund had had feathers he would have flown away (p. 139).

<sup>21</sup> Kuthan: Dvorské umění 197–198.

<sup>22</sup> Spěvák: Karel IV. 296–298.

In keeping with the mind set of his day, Charles developed the charismatic element of his authority through the use of popular piety and took advantage of the potential for monarchical dignity which popular belief in the supernatural and the sacred offered. The Church helped his efforts by emphasizing the sacred character of his person and of the crown of St. Wenceslas. To Charles IV himself the holy fragments of the cross may have been more important than the crown<sup>23</sup>. He put his own piety to profane ends and publicly paid respect to the cult of a number of saints, collected their relics and displayed the imperial holy objects and went on pilgrimages. His piety, in order to play its political role, had to be placed on public view.

In contrast to this popular image of the sacral and pious Charles, Laurence showed Sigismund as the enemy of Christ, inspired by the devil, and a malefactor. In *The Grievance*, having described Sigismund's violations, abuse and murder of priests, widows, women and orphans, Laurence wrote:

This is certainly not a human, created by your loving hand, if I may have your permission to say so, but rather the most murderous poisonous viper's offspring, who at his birth wants to lacerate not only his mother's womb but destroy the whole body. He is, I think, the horrible dragon seen by your beloved apostle, red, with seven heads, ten horns and crowned with seven crowns and with ten stars, who lures the glorious woman and with gluttonous lips strains to murderously devour her noble fruit born in pain<sup>24</sup>.

The pope had sent his nuncio, Fernandus, to advise and encourage Sigismund in his crusade to extirpate Hussitism. Laurence wanted to show that the counsel he gave Sigismund came not from the apostolic seat, but from the devil. Here again Laurence took the papacy's claim to represent Christ and turned it upside-down. Fernandus, he said, was not the ambassador of the apostles, but rather of him who was a murderer from the beginning of creation, of him who caused the first murder between brothers, a liar and false father, in short, of the devil<sup>25</sup>.

In *The Rebuke* Laurence similarly deprived Sigismund of his claim to holiness. Because he had violated the law and blasphemed eternal truth he was not entitled to the sacred ointment of holy chrism. In his words: "And what activity has Christ with Belial, what friendship virtue with sin and holy oil with the shoulders of the ugliest of all sinners?"<sup>26</sup> The language was clear and unambiguous and referred to Biblical incidents and characters familiar to the average person.

### *Distinguished Lineage*

Bohemia's royalty claimed a proud lineage. Otakar II had used the cult of ancestors to enhance his majesty by pointing to the continuity, legitimacy and venerableness of the family. The triumphal arch of the Church of the Holy Saviour in the monastery of the Blessed Anežka shows idealized sculptures of the preceding five Czech kings,

<sup>23</sup> Seibt: Kaiser in Europa 191-192. - Spěvák: Karel IV. 322. - See also Gurevich: Medieval Popular Culture 377ff.

<sup>24</sup> Daňhelka: Husitské skladby 25.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 28. This passage has been omitted from the Latin.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 33.

and wives, ending with Otakar II. In order to strengthen his rule over the Austrian lands Otakar assimilated themes from the coat of arms of their rulers as well<sup>27</sup>.

Charles tied the new Luxembourg dynasty to the venerable and Slavic Přemyslid including its pre-Christian roots. His mother was Queen Eliška Přemyslovna, a fact continuously emphasized in royal documents. His claim to honourable ancestry was also tied to the transference of the crown of the Great Moravia kingdom to Bohemia under Vratislav. The Luxembourg's Slavic character and tie to the Moravian empire was propagated in the legend of St. Procop which connected it to St. Wenceslas. According to this, prince Bořivoj and princess Ludmila were baptized by Archbishop Methodius in the cathedral of St. Vitus in Velehrad thus cleverly joining that sanctuary to the metropolitan St. Vitus cathedral in the Prague castle. The point was to show that both Luxembourg Roman emperor and Czech king came from long standing Czech dynasties according to the female lines<sup>28</sup>.

He also encouraged the pre-Christian tradition of Přemysl Oráč (plowman) whose relics were associated with Vyšehrad castle so that it became the object of pilgrimages and he granted the village, where Oráč had stopped, freedom from taxes. More important was his cultivation of the Christian Wenceslas in support of his conception of the Czech state.

The chapel of St. Wenceslas was built upon the grave of the saint in the Cathedral of St. Vitus in Prague castle. A new crown of the Czech kingdom was made of gold and transferred into the protection and possession of St. Wenceslas. At the same time he raised the chorale of St. Wenceslas to an importance similar to that of a national anthem<sup>29</sup>.

Charles's identification of the Czech and the Carolingian traditions, whose religious purposes we saw above, was also designed to enhance the Luxembourg kings. In Bohemia the link to Carolingians was symbolized in the Chapel of the Holy Cross in the royal castle of Karlstein which was to be the center of the empire and the world. Here he placed the imperial crown jewels, holy objects and relics from all over Europe, to be protected by the saint of Charles the Great. The prestige of both Přemyslid and Carolingian traditions were tapped to add lustre to the Luxembourgs.

Although he respected the first three Luxembourg kings, in his satires Laurence showed a preference for the native Přemyslid dynasty. When referring to Wenceslas III, the last male of the family, he says "my very own ancestor and most beloved spouse" and when referring to John, the first of the Luxembourgs, he wrote: "He [John], although a foreigner, held me in loving favour and diligently promoted my glory." Charles, as we have seen was described in glowing terms and even Wenceslas IV, he portrayed positively as "the illustrious prince of pious memory, ... a kind guardian, although better described as a humble friend, as a gentle manager and a loving comrade. I rested in quiet peace under the shadow of his wing, gifted with overwhelming joy and the abundant fruitfulness of all that is good."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> K u t h a n: Dvorské umění 200–203.

<sup>28</sup> S p ě v á č e k: Karel IV. 290–292.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 297.

<sup>30</sup> D a ň h e l k a: Husitské skladby 24.

On the other hand Laurence contrasted Sigismund's character to the illustrious forebears and cast suspicion on his legitimacy. Referring to Charles he added the line, "and as I suppose, the father of the said Sigismund."<sup>31</sup> To emphasize his lack of grandeur, Laurence referred to Sigismund, not as a branch, but as a twig of a foreign noble root, diseased and covered with dung. The imagery is again one with which the ordinary person could identify, whether artisan fertilizing a small garden in town, or cottager his or her toft. According to Laurence, Sigismund's abandonment of John Huss at Constance deprived him of any claim to royal blood and character and he placed him at the bottom end of the medieval social hierarchy. As he put it: "... it would exceed the highest of all kindness, ... to take as husband this ignoble serf [*nešlechtník*]." Appealing to the heavenly judge, Laurence added, "Knock down this sickly head from this sinful house, there, not native born, but through following his own bad ways."<sup>32</sup> Thus the lineage is to come to an end when its member is unworthy.

### *Monarch's Tie to his People*

The ruler's tie to his people and his actions on behalf of their overall welfare was an important medieval principle. Otakar II knew that royal power and glory went hand in hand with a healthy and large population. The founding charter of the town Polička in 1265 acknowledged that a large population reflected the glory, honour and power of royal majesty and of the realm. It was God's will and in the ruler's and the people's interest to enhance living conditions<sup>33</sup>.

Charles IV too recognized the importance of a strong economy for his people's prosperity and well-being. His economic measures were part of his strategy to build up royal power. He tried to shift the main European east-west trade route through Bohemia. He removed obstructions, such as weirs, on the Vltava. He regulated sluices and floodgates for rafts and boats, built a fleet of ships for the Elbe, removed numerous duties from river traffic, built a port in Prague and established a special court to deal with disputes involving river traffic<sup>34</sup>.

His own mentality was more French than either German or Czech. Yet his identification with the Czech character of his people was important to them and they believed he was one of them. At his funeral Vojtěch Raňkův used the term *pater patriae* to describe Charles' identification with the land and with dynastic or Přemyslid patriotism. Charles expected the clergy to know the Czech language and established monasteries exclusively for the Czech speakers. The Golden Bull of 1356 made Czech one of the official languages of the Empire by requiring that the children of the imperial electors learn Czech and Italian from the age of 7 to 14. He felt that the more people could understand them and be understood by them the more the subjects' needs would be met and in this way "contribute to imperial majesty."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 23.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 27, 30. See also 40.

<sup>33</sup> Kuthan: *Dvorské umění* 199.

<sup>34</sup> Spěvák: *Karel IV.* 307–314.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 305–306.

Laurence described Sigismund as one who had repudiated his tie with the Czech people both in destroying their economy and trying to suppress their culture. In *The Grievance*, Laurence began by describing the Crown of Bohemia as the mother of Sigismund, having nursed him, taught him morals and trained him in princely ways. One of the king's ungracious responses had been to maltreat Bohemia's native sons. He criticized Sigismund for the plundering and murdering that accompanied the capture of Procop, margrave of Moravia, two decades earlier. He blamed him for the deaths of Bohemia's beloved sons, John Huss and Jerome of Prague at Constance and for the death of the Prague merchant, John Krása in Wrocław in the spring of 1420.

In contrast to Charles' identification with the Czech people, Laurence accused Sigismund of deceitfully spreading stories that the nation was made up of disgraceful, base and outrageous sinners in an effort to destroy its reputation. Then in a passage omitted from the Latin, he wrote that Sigismund wanted to "... obliterate the venerable family of the Czech race from the land and working to plunder it with all his strength, money, cunning and energies; ..." <sup>36</sup> Laurence asked the heavenly judge whether there was anyone less grateful than this ungracious ingrate, using terms describing the antithesis of majestic qualities such as grace and honour. He took resources meant for the common defense and used them "to destroy me and my children ... [he] burns the land [*vlast*] under my dominion, with tremendous fires, plunders the orchards and fields, adulterously ravishes all kinds of towns, soaks them with the blood of the innocent, ..." <sup>37</sup>

In *The Rebuke*, Laurence asked why Sigismund wanted to be the Czech king (*český král*) since the land was soiled by a heresy which he is trying to wipe out. As such he ought to distance himself from the land as one would from a sick person. He added, "If you want to be called the Czech king, you ought not so awfully to vilify the Czech language." <sup>38</sup>

### *Princely and Human Qualities*

The Church had extensively described the qualities of an ideal Christian prince. John of Salisbury (1120–1180) represented them well. The Christian prince held a religious office even though inferior to a priest. He served, not his own justice, but God's and in his quest after equity compared all things rationally. He was sexually chaste and generous. He should know the Law of God if he was himself illiterate, he would take the counsel of men of letters and then his affairs would prosper rightly. A prince's humility should be rooted in his fear of God. He must be prepared to punish wrongdoers severely but should prefer moderation. He should be friendly and kind for "A pleasant address and gracious tongue will win for him a reputation of benignity." <sup>39</sup> His reward shall be a long reign for himself and his dynasty.

<sup>36</sup> Daňhelka: Husitské skladby 28.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> The Statesman's Book 38, 48. See also 6, 16 for justice, 19 for chastity, 24–31 for learning the Law of God, 32–36 for humility and 37–42 for standards of punishment.

Laurence described Sigismund in terms totally antagonistic to these accepted ideals. He frequently strung together a number of opposites such as:

... he has clothed himself in the appearance not of an heir, but of a murderer, not of a spouse, but of an enemy, not of a caretaker, but of a destroyer, not of a defender, but of an assailant; and has shamefully changed himself from his natural human qualities into the passions of a wild animal ... with an unprecedented wild fury he rages against me, a deserted widow but also a mother and well-known benefactor, and strives to cast into the loathsome dust the famous majesty [*výsost*] of my glory<sup>40</sup>.

The author insisted that the Crown retains majesty even when the king has lost it. He then proceeded to describe what he calls Sigismund's most characteristic evil deeds. These include attacking exactly those whom the Church had called on kings to protect: clergy, virgins and children, and destroying livelihoods rather than enhancing economic life. Addressing the "eternal Bishop", he asked rhetorically,

How many virgins have been violated – and many of these have been shamefully abused to the point of death! How many honourable unsullied marriage beds have been sullied! How many widows have had their beauty shamefully seized! How many widowers, widows, how many orphans, and how many childless, poor, needy, wretched and distressed has his evil hand destroyed ...<sup>41</sup>

Laurence also portrayed Sigismund not as human, but as an animal, a favorite ploy among propagandists in the late middle ages<sup>42</sup> and as one deprived of reason which according to contemporary Italian humanists was the fundamental characteristic of the human being<sup>43</sup>. He described him alternately as a deaf snake, as dog-like, as a rapacious fox, a greedy wolf and as an "ass placed next to a stand, not comprehending the violin, ..." as the musician plays it. He describes him as a monster of unreasonableness, blinded by an enormous fascination to deface, rob and destroy the Czech crown's glory, property and health. Because he has forgotten her generosity he is a shameless rascal [*nestydatého hanebníka*]<sup>44</sup>.

John of Salisbury promised a prince who ruled according to Christian principles a long reign and peaceful succession<sup>45</sup>. To illustrate that Sigismund is no Christian prince, Laurence asked God to "Knock down this sickly head from this unloving house, there not native born." In other words by ending the Luxembourg dynasty in the person of Sigismund, God would show to all how unworthy he was of majesty. The dynasty's rule in Bohemia came to an end in 1458 with the death of Sigismund's grandson, his daughter's son.

<sup>40</sup> Daňhelka: Husitské sklady 24.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 25. In the Prague-Kutná Hora dialogue, he also added the killing of pregnant women, (p. 138).

<sup>42</sup> Scribner: Simple Folk 74–77.

<sup>43</sup> See Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's *Oratio on the Dignity of Man*. Tr. by Robert Caponigri. Washington 1956, 10, 20, 29.

<sup>44</sup> For animal references, see Daňhelka: Husitské sklady 32. – See also the Prague-Kutná Hora dialogue 137, 140, 141.

<sup>45</sup> The Statesman's Book 45–47.

## Coronation

The common people saw majesty most visibly in the coronation, specifically the tangible rite of consecration. In this ceremony they saw the King exalted into office. The ceremony was to seal his authority over them and to show them he was worthy of their obedience. Abstract ideas and disputes of priests and royal officials over the superiority of princely or churchly office held little importance for them<sup>46</sup>. Coronations were normally an occasion for public celebration and feasting and had the character of a patriotic holiday.

In contrast, Sigismund's coronation was a subdued affair because of his inability to conquer the city of Prague and because much of the land refused to recognize him. Just after his failed attempt to take Vítkov Hill in June 1420 Sigismund had himself crowned in the Prague Cathedral in the Castle by the archbishop. Present were a number of imperial princes, Hungarian barons and Czech nobles. The coronation took place with little if any public participation. A number of persons were knighted, as was customary, to the amusement of the Prague people who said they were not real knights, only painted ones who had not performed any deeds for the common welfare<sup>47</sup>.

Laurence focused on the irregularity, and almost private nature, of the coronation, which for him meant that Sigismund lacked the knightly and royal qualities of bravery. He could not even be crowned in the presence of his own subjects.

Tell me I ask, O famous prince, ... By what right have you deceitfully and slyly sneaked into my Prague castle, ... [by what right] have you instructed yourself to be anointed with holy chrism through some kind of foreign bishop, ... and [by what right] have you seated yourself bravely on the throne of my dignity [*duostojenství*], and have received the crown of my beauty for your shameful head, from several lords who were harmfully beguiled by your tricks; not publicly but clandestinely, not openly but secretly, irregularly, not having taken the necessary oath ...?<sup>48</sup>

With a series of rhetorical questions Laurence claims that sacred ointment does not belong to Sigismund, and the golden crown, the symbol of majesty and glory which he took with so much hope will bring shame and abomination instead.

He continued by arguing the classic Wycliffite-Hussite case. The trappings of office do not make the occupant qualified. The person has to be suitable and he has to be properly and lawfully installed. Sigismund, he said, was lacking on both counts. He concluded with popular Biblical imagery of the sheepfold into which the enemies of Christ try to break and steal from the true shepherd.

And should the coronation though illicit, o stupid prince [*ó bezumé kneže*] make you indeed king, why could not a guard or a thief reach for your crown and putting it on his head, not be king? Surely you do not think or assume that because of this action of an irregular coronation you would be called the king of the Czech lands<sup>49</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> Kern: Kingship 53.

<sup>47</sup> Tomek: Dějepis města Prahy IV, 86. – Bartoš: Husitská revoluce II, 102.

<sup>48</sup> Daňhelka: Husitské skladby 32–33.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* 39.

He accused the king of not taking his oath fearlessly as a shepherd by the doors, but as a thief and a scoundrel who broke into the sheepfold. In an address to the Czech nobility, on the subject of the coronation, Laurence made the point even more clear when he suggested an ass does not cease being an ass, just because he is anointed and crowned with a crown. This is the reverse of Shakespeare's comment in *Richard II* "Not all the water in the rough rude sea, Can wash the balm off from an anointed king."<sup>50</sup>

In sum, Laurence's satires were graphic and incisive portrayals of Sigismund's character and behaviour in terms totally opposite to the idealized behaviour of a person with the title of majesty. He wanted to destroy Sigismund's claims to the kingdom by showing him to have traits opposite to those of a good king. He turned the world of majesty upside down by accusing him of behaviour that contradicted royal values. Although there was no explicit criticism of majesty as such or of the monarchy, Laurence's assault was so scathing that it brought into question a system which legitimated Sigismund's claims to the crown of Bohemia. His words were addressed to those among the ruled who accepted the king as majestic and thus worthy of obedience.

There were others among the simple people who were more skeptical of the king's claims to special status. Evidently some saw the king, when no longer able to command soldiers and guards, as a harmless if not laughable fellow. A year after King Wenceslas IV's death in 1419 his dignity and majesty had completely faded from the minds of some of his subjects who saw him less as their ruler and more as a drinking comrade. This can be seen in the words of some Taborites, most of whom were peasants when they, in 1420, attacked the Zbraslav monastery where King Wenceslas had been temporarily buried. After they had drunken abundantly from the wine, they reputedly dug up the corpse of the king, placed him on the altar, gave him a crown from the grass and poured beer down his throat, saying: "Of course if you were alive you would gladly join us in drinking."<sup>51</sup> In this incident peasants showed respect neither for the dead nor for holy sites nor for royalty. It also shows peasants with a somewhat macabre, but wry sense of humour.

The people of Bohemia in 1420 were unsure about many things. Was God so disenchanted by contemporary society that he would bring about the final judgement? Should they leave all and seek a new life in the recently established settlement of Tábor? If one chose to stay in the old order, could one find a good king, a man with princely qualities of long standing acceptance? Was a king crowned, always king who could unquestioningly command his subjects' obedience? To many, legal arguments surrounding the justified resistance or war and the rights of the land, the nobility, the towns, in other words of the estates were important. To others the king's violation of what they understood to be Christian values settled the issue. Many however thought on a

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* 69. – Shakespeare is quoted by Kern: *Kingship* 58.

<sup>51</sup> Tomek: *Dějepis města Prahy IV*, 94. An Austrian chronicler claimed the Hussites knocked the head and body of the king about. – See also Macek: *Tábor II*, 233. – Peasants in eleventh-century Saxony were not above desecrating royal graves. On the other hand, the lower classes of Speyer in 1106 venerated the coffin of King Henry IV even while still on unconsecrated ground. See Horst Fuhrmann: *Germany in the High Middle Ages c. 1050–1200*. Cambridge 1986, 63, 86–87.

simpler level. They had been to a large extent mesmerized into obedience by images of majesty which had long standing acceptance. Laurence expected that his scathing satire would destroy the hold that majesty had on the popular mind when it came to Sigismund. The effects however went beyond what he wanted.

In 1420 a number of beliefs vied for acceptance. The Chiliasts tried to persuade others to join them in a terminal struggle that would instal Christ's reign and rid the world of the old social, political and economic institutions and of all evil at the same time. Others wanted to also establish a new order, where recognized authorities, chosen by God with the help of his faithful, would keep the peace. Still others simply wanted a reformed church retaining the medieval system of estates headed by a king, although not Sigismund. In their midst was also Peter Chelčický, who argued that Christians had to reject all forms of coercive power. Laurence wrote his satires in this context and was influenced by them and in turn influenced others.

Although he continued to think of the monarchy as the only conceivable form of government, Laurence's words implicitly attacked the monarchical system<sup>52</sup>. His graphic and extreme language denouncing Sigismund, the man who wanted to be king, clearly had its effect on Hussite opinion helping to turn it away from the monarchy as an institution. His language certainly did nothing to dampen the convictions of the Chiliasts who for some time had predicted a Judgement day in which the whole world would be destroyed. His words also supported the radical clergy of Tábor, most of whom had rejected Chiliasm by September 1420<sup>53</sup>. The majority of Taborites believed the country would thrive without any king, a country where the faithful laity would rule themselves through their priests and military captains. Why should a radical such as John Čapek cooperate with people who sought negotiations with representatives of the old order? Laurence gave them ammunition for their case. In their eyes the monarchical political system itself was undermined when it continued to uphold the rights to the Bohemian crown of a man whom Laurence had so well described as unfit.

The interplay between Laurence and Peter Chelčický is also evident. In his tracts *On Spiritual Warfare* and *On the Triple Division of Society*, anticipating Machiavelli and Hobbes, Chelčický described the secular power, or the Prince, if not in demonic terms, certainly with unchristian characteristics. The secular power keeps people orderly and the strong from suppressing the weak through violence and force. The prince is incapable of practicing the virtues expected of a Christian prince. If he wants peace in society he has to be cruel and punish with violence. Peter was in Prague in the spring and summer of 1420 trying to make up his mind on important questions of religion and politics<sup>54</sup>. He was most likely involved in debating the various alternatives. He may have given Laurence some ideas or he may have received some from him. In any case Chelčický took the characteristics of Sigismund as Laurence portrayed them

<sup>52</sup> Kaminsky, Howard: *A History of the Hussite Revolution*. Berkeley 1967, 378–379, n. 38 for a brief summary of the literature on Laurence.

<sup>53</sup> Kaminsky: *Hussite Revolution* 343. – Macek: *Tábor II*, 55–60. – Most recently, Šmahel, František: *Dějiny Tábora [History of Tabor]*. 2 vols. České Budějovice 1988–1990, 245–306.

<sup>54</sup> Kaminsky, Howard: *Peter Chelčický: Treatises on Christianity and the Social Order*. *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 1 (1964) 114–115, 119, 140.

and applied them to all princes and to all who exercised secular power<sup>55</sup>. He concluded that all kings, princes and even his own Hussite countrymen as they attempted to establish political peace and social order, used methods which to the victims or the subjects seemed identical to those practised by Sigismund. The peasant from whom the lord or the city of Tábor collected taxes or who had to work in the hot sun or freezing rain for a lord basking in comfort, or who found himself or herself charged with breaking the law easily recognized in his or her own lord people such as Laurence's words showed Sigismund to be.

Overall Laurence's poems suggest that images of majesty were deeply enough embedded in popular mentality that they warranted an unrestrained attack. The history of the Hussites shows that these images were not so solidly anchored in the peoples' minds that they could not be eradicated through the preaching of religious values and the vivid language and anti-majestic imagery of Laurence's satires.

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<sup>55</sup> Chelčický referred to the same passage of St. Paul about fighting rightly in battle if one wants the crown. He did not refer to the battle at Vítkov as did Laurence, but some of his words are similar to those of Laurence: "He will not be recompensed [crowned] unless he is brave and wise in battle, striking his blows energetically and not running away, nor spreading fear and confusion to others in battle." *Ibid.* 118.