

PETER OF ZITTAU

Life and Personality of a High Medieval Chronicler in the Context
of his Narrative Strategies¹

The personality of Peter of Zittau, third abbot of the monastery of Aula Regia in Zbraslav near Prague as well as a chronicler, thinker and at the same time a politician and diplomat of Central European stature active mainly in the first four decades of the fourteenth century, has become the subject of renewed interest among historians in the last few years. This is mainly thanks to the substantial work by Běla Marani-Moravová (2019) as well as the publication of the long-awaited modern edition of what is probably Peter's most important work – the Zbraslav Chronicle (*Chronica Aulae regiae*) – in the *Scriptores* series of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (2022).² Owing in particular to the work by Anna Pumprová, our knowledge of the literary oeuvre of Peter of Zittau has advanced considerably,³ and our awareness of the role played by the Zbraslav Chronicle has been significantly expanded.⁴

However, when we thoroughly analyse recent texts dealing with Peter's personality and his mental world, we can easily conclude that they do not differ much from the traditional concepts established more than a century ago. The focus is still primarily on the abbot's political activity, or on the way in which he portrayed the characters featured in his chronicle.⁵ In this respect, historians have hitherto remained more or less on the level of description without any attempt to reveal the world of the abbot's ideas, motivations, strategies, and value attitudes – in short, without trying to create a profile of his personality as such. This study aims to contribute to a shift in this context by analysing the narrative strategies pursued by Peter of Zittau

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² See Marani-Moravová, Běla: Petr von Zittau. Abt, Diplomat und Chronist der Luxemburger. Ostfildern 2019 (Vorträge und Forschungen 60); *Chronica Aulae Regie. Die Königsaler Chronik*. Ed. Anna Pumprová, Libor Jan with the Assistance of Robert Antonín, Demeter Malaťák, Libor Švanda and Zdeněk Žaludet (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores* 40) Wiesbaden 2022. Further cited as: MGH SS 40.

³ Pumprová, Anna: Svědectví autografu o práci Petra Žitavského s textem Zbraslavské kroniky [An Autograph's Testimony about Peter of Zittau's Work with the Text of the Zbraslav Chronicle]. In: *Časopis Matice moravské* 131 (2012) 239-263; Pumprová: Polishing a Medieval Chronicle. The Author's Proofreading of the Second Book of the *Chronica Aulae regiae*. In: *The Medieval Chronicle* 12 (2019) 148-161; Pumprová: Leben und literarische Tätigkeit Peters von Zittau. In: MGH SS 40, XXII-XXIII (cf. fn. 2).

⁴ See Antonín, Robert: *Chronica Aulae regiae* – an Unsuccessful Attempt to Establish an Official Memory of the Last Přemyslids and the Zbraslav Monastery. In: *The Medieval Chronicle* 12, 1-23 (cf. fn. 3).

⁵ See for example Marani-Moravová: Petr von Zittau 75-103 (cf. fn. 2).

in his chronicle. In doing so, it interprets the narrative strategy as a set of conscious and unconscious intentions of the author that reflect both his mental horizon and his efforts to use the past pragmatically for the explanation and justification of events in his present, or for the creation of a negative or positive image of individual historical agents. In my research on Peter's narrative strategy, I follow the generally accepted procedures of discursive analysis of the narrative field applied to the interpretation of narrative sources, including medieval chronicles.⁶

Between life and death

The main source for understanding Peter von Zittau's life and personality is his work. Up to now, the Zbraslav Chronicle (*Chronica Aulae regiae*) has been considered the most valuable of the sources authored by Peter; this historiographic text still influences our understanding of developments in the Bohemian Crown Lands (and Central Europe as a whole) around the turn from the thirteenth to the fourteenth century. It has also long overshadowed another text by Peter, namely his collection of sermons entitled *Sermones de principalibus festis*, which was recently published in a modern edition by Anna Pumprová.⁷ The chronicle contains a reference to a story about the imperial ambitions of Frederick I of Meissen, known as Frederick the Bitten (1257-1323), with whom Peter apparently became acquainted as a boy; using this reference, historians have dated Peter's birth to the decade between 1260 and 1270. The Zbraslav Chronicle is also the only source indicating that Peter originated in Zittau, which has given rise to the assumption that he belonged to the German burgher class. The events of Peter's life can likewise only be reconstructed on the basis of brief snippets of information that he incorporated into the text of the chronicle.⁸

Until now, modern historiographers have primarily used the autobiographical elements of Peter's text to determine the dates of his birth and death, or to formulate hypotheses about his political activities.⁹ If we were to apply this strategy, our task would be simple: After acknowledging our uncertainty regarding the precise time of

⁶ Cf. White, Hayden: *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore 1978; Scholes, Robert / Pebelan, James / Kellogg, Robert: *The Nature of Narrative*. 2nd ed., Oxford 2006; Chatman, Seymour: *Story and Discourse. Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca, London 1978; see also Lake, Justin: *Current Approaches to Medieval Historiography*. In: *History Compass* 13 (2015) 3, 89-109.

⁷ Pumprová, Anna: *Peter of Zittau. Sermons on the Principal Feasts*. Praha, Ostrava 2020.

⁸ I used the new critical edition "Chronica Aulae Regie" published by MGH SS 40 (cf. fn. 2). – Regarding the discussion on Peter's date of birth, see Novotný, Václav: *Úvod* [Introduction]. In: Novák, Jan V. / Novotný, Václav (eds.): *Kronika Zbraslavská* [The Zbraslav Chronicle]. Praha 1905, XIII-XIV; Marani-Moravová: *Petr von Zittau* 76-77 (cf. fn. 2); Pumprová: *Peter of Zittau* 19-20 (cf. fn. 7).

⁹ Charvátová, Kateřina: *Petr Žitavský, opat zbraslavského kláštera (1316-1339)* [Peter of Zittau, Abbot of Zbraslav Monastery (1316-1339)]. In: *Sborník přátel starožitností* (1991) 2, 279-315; Spěváček, Jiří: *Petr Žitavský a počátky lucemburské dynastie v českých zemích* [Peter of Zittau and the Beginnings of the Luxembourg Dynasty in the Czech Lands]. In: *Mediaevalia historica Bohemica* (1993) 3, 177-197.

Peter's birth into a family that evidently belonged to Zittau's burgher class, we would note the widely shared assumption that he received a good education (though it is not clear where, there are certain indications that it may have been in Italy) and subsequently record that he was present in Prague from 1297 at the latest, entered the Cistercian Order sometime before 1305, and was soon appointed as chaplain to Conrad, his predecessor as abbot of Zbraslav – a position involving certain political activities at the time when the Luxembourgs ascended to the Bohemian throne. We would also mention Peter's election to the office of abbot in 1316 as well as his journeys to Cîteaux to participate in the general chapters of the Cistercian Order. We would note that at some point in time no later than 1319, he became opposed to the conduct and policies of King John of Luxembourg (John the Blind), whereupon his contacts with the king ceased. A further important milestone in Peter's life came in 1330 with the death of Queen Elizabeth of Bohemia, whom Peter was very fond of; he subsequently sank into apathy, becoming disillusioned with his participation in political life. Our brief biographical account would conclude by noting that Peter became politically active once again after 1333, reflecting the hope inspired in him by the return to Bohemia of the heir to the throne, the later King Charles IV. The exact date of Peter's death is uncertain, although we know he died sometime after 13 January 1339 – the last date for which we have explicit evidence that he was still alive.¹⁰

Such a biographical account would provide a summary picture of Peter's life – a picture that can only be added to by combining information from the Zbraslav Chronicle with other types of sources. This account tells us little about Peter's personality, however; the only possible way to find out more is to interpret the narrative strategies he employed in his writing. All authors reveal themselves primarily through their own works, so if we are to gain an understanding of Peter as a person (and thus insights into his inner life), we must turn once again to the Zbraslav Chronicle. Unfortunately, even the text of the chronicle combined with information on Peter's activities as a preacher along with a small number of other documents does not enable us to deduce much about his mental and emotional world as it evolved over the course of time. By the time he wrote the Zbraslav Chronicle, Peter was a mature man – regardless of whether we consider his birth to have occurred in the earliest (1260) or the latest (1270) year of the possible range. A simple calculation indicates that he began compiling the chronicle between the ages of 44 and 54 – which in medieval times was a considerably advanced age and meant that an individual was slowly but surely approaching their final years. This is inevitably manifest not only in Peter's view of the past but, from 1317 onward, also in his evaluation of contemporary developments, which he most likely recorded in the form of various notes that he subsequently (around a year later) adapted to create the text of the

¹⁰ On the final evidence of Peter's activities, cf. *Emler*, Josef (ed.): *Regesta diplomatica nec non epistolaria Bohemiae et Moraviae*. Vol. 4: *Annotum 1333-1346*. Praha 1892, 245-246, no. 636; for a summary of his biography, cf. *Marani-Moravová*: *Petr von Zittau* 75-104 (cf. fn. 2); *Pumprová*: *Leben und literarische Tätigkeit XXII-XXIII* (cf. fn. 3).

chronicle.¹¹ Peter's account of the past draws on his joyful memories of various events during his childhood and youth – although by the time of writing, these memories had become imbued with a sadness stemming from the difficult period he experienced after the extinction of the Přemyslid dynasty, as well as from his mature awareness of the transience of human life. This comes as no surprise: While he was writing the first book of the Zbraslav Chronicle, a number of people close to Peter (or in whom he had invested great hopes for the future) died or reached a very advanced age.

Remaining in the period of the first book of the chronicle, between 1314 and 1317 Peter appears as a moralist and trenchant critic of his era and the behaviour of major historical figures, which he describes and evaluates retrospectively. This moralistic streak becomes even more pronounced in the second and third books. It is important to stress that although Peter came from a German-speaking area and was aware of the tensions between Czech and German ethnic groups in his reflections on the situation in the Czech lands, the problem of the emerging medieval nationality was not a subject he would have dealt with in detail – nor one on which he would have taken a fundamentally critical stance. In general, the monk and abbot of Zbraslav identified with the country and the ruling dynasty.¹² The text of the chronicle, on the other hand, is imbued both with generalized meditations on the functioning of society and with specific instructions on how rulers could govern in a just manner. Peter's approach is critical, sceptical, and sometimes dismissive of anything new and departing from tradition – yet at the same time the chronicle also reveals the joy he experienced when acquiring new knowledge. The text reflects two facets of its author: Peter as an active political figure whose actions helped to co-create Central European history, and Peter as a critic of the current world order, contrasted with

¹¹ On Peter's methodological approach to historiographical work, cf. Bláhová, Marie: *Dílna středověkého historika (Způsob práce Petra Žitavského)* [Working Techniques of Medieval Historians (Methods Used by Peter of Zittau)]. In: Barciak, Antonin/Iwańczak, Wojciech (eds.): *Piśmiennictwo Czech i Polski w średniowieczu i we wczesnej epoce nowożytnej* [Bohemian and Polish Literature in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times]. Katowice 2006, 11–33; Pumprová: *Svědectví autografu* 239–263 (cf. fn. 3); Bláhová, Marie: “Sic et ego ea, que vidi, que certissime cognovi, ruditer conscribere laborabo.” – Zur Arbeitsweise Peters von Zittau. In: Albrecht, Stefan (ed.): *Chronicon Aulae regiae – Die Königsaal-Chronik. Eine Bestandsaufnahme*. Frankfurt am Main 2013 (Forschungen zu Geschichte und Kultur der böhmischen Länder 1) 95–107; Hledíková, Zdeňka: Peter von Zittau. Das Beispiel des Autographs einer schöpferischen Persönlichkeit des 14. Jahrhunderts und Möglichkeiten der Autographenatlanten. In: Golob, Natasa (ed.): *Medieval Autograph Manuscripts- Proceedings of the XVII. Colloquium of the Comité International de Paléographie Latine*, held in Ljubljana, 7.–10. September 2010. Turnhout 2013, 163–180; Pumprová: *Polishing a Medieval Chronicle* 148–161 (cf. fn. 3).

¹² On the topic of medieval nationalism in the work of Peter of Zittau, cf. Graus, František: *Die Nationenbildung der Westslawen im Mittelalter*. Sigmaringen 1980 (Nationes. Historische und philologische Untersuchungen zur Entstehung der europäischen Nationen im Mittelalter 3) 95–97; Nodl, Martin: *Nationalismus und Nationalbewusstsein zu Beginn des 14. Jahrhunderts und Karls Bemühungen um ein konfliktfreies Bild des Zusammenlebens von Tschechen und Deutschen in Böhmen*. In: Albrecht (ed.): *Chronicon Aulae regiae* 201–218 (cf. fn. 11).

his praise for the glorious deeds of past generations. Of course, this dichotomy is influenced to a considerable extent by the genre of the literary work itself. Previous research has shown that Peter was fully aware of the generic conventions of medieval poetics, and that he mostly respected these conventions and rules – including the structure of and ideas expressed in his Leonine hexameters, which he used as a vehicle for his social critiques and ideas about equitable rule.¹³ Nevertheless, his personal stance and intent remain implicitly present behind this generic formalism. His attitude was that of a mature man who metaphorically occupied an ambivalent space between life and death: the life he wished to engage in actively and fully, a quality Peter admired in many of the people he described, and the death which (as he was becoming increasingly aware) could ambush him unexpectedly at any moment. This ambivalent point of view is reflected in Peter's narrative texts tracing the history of his monastery, the Přemyslid dynasty, and the Bohemian Crown Lands; it represents a characteristic feature of his mentality, which as he grew older increasingly gravitated towards a negative evaluation of the present and an idealized vision of the past – especially those chapters of the past associated with the rule of Wenceslas II and the first years after John of Luxembourg's accession to the throne.¹⁴ Simply put, the picture of Peter's personality that emerges if we read between the lines of the Zbraslav Chronicle is that of a mature man who has learned from experience; a man whose attitudes towards the functioning of society were prevailingly conservative, yet who paradoxically had a thirst for new information from other parts of the world, and indeed for knowledge in general.

At the same time, Peter was also primarily a creative writer; his writing was not merely intended to present the factual history of a monastery, a dynasty, or a kingdom but was also a response to an existential intellectual and moral need he felt – a profound inner creative impulse. If we read and consider those passages of the chronicle which (despite their elaborate and extensive use of medieval topoi) clearly reflect the author's core ideas and values as expressed creatively in the text, we can observe a combination of three key aspects that shaped Peter's literary personality and constantly suffused his writing. Firstly, the texts bear witness to their author's natural intellectual curiosity, his desire for knowledge; this is manifested, for example, in his extensive knowledge of the Bible and the writings of ecclesiastical authorities, as well as of certain works by other (not necessarily Christian) authors – writ-

¹³ *Petrů*, Eduard: Vzdálené hlasy. Studie o starší české literatuře [Distant Voices. Studies on Older Czech Literature]. Olomouc 1996, 55-62; *Antonín*, Robert: Die Könige und königliche Macht in der Königsauer Chronik. In: *Albrecht* (ed.): *Chronicon Aulae regiae 123-144* (cf. fn. 11); *Antonín*, Robert: The Ideal Ruler in Medieval Bohemia. Leiden, Boston 2017 (East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450-1450, 44).

¹⁴ MGH SS 40, 476-477 (cf. fn. 2); *Antonín*, Robert: Král Jan a zbraslavský opat Petr. Proměny reflexe Jana Lucemburského ve Zbraslavské kronice [King John and Abbot Peter of Zbraslav. Changes in the Reflection of John of Luxembourg in the Zbraslav Chronicle]. In: *Hlobil*, Ivo / *Rywiková*, Daniela (eds.): Jan Lucemburský. Kultura umění a zbožnost na Moravě a ve Slezsku v době vlády prvního Lucemburka [John of Luxembourg. Art Culture and Piety in Moravia and Silesia During the Reign of the First Luxembourg]. Ostrava 2012, 11-24; *Antonín*: *Chronica Aulae regiae 1-23* (cf. fn. 4).

ings he was capable of deftly incorporating into his own output. This is an aspect of Peter's personality that I will return to below, as it is inextricably bound to his desire to communicate and disseminate the knowledge he himself had acquired. Indeed, this urge to educate and edify his readers was Peter's main motivation for continuing the unfinished text about the foundation of the abbey at Zbraslav begun by his predecessor Otto. However, as part of his effort to disseminate knowledge, Peter expanded the thematic scope of the work to include various other historical and contemporary events and figures – a decision he announced to his readers (adorned with skilfully formulated *topoi* of modesty and several citations, mainly from the Bible) in the preface to the chronicle dedicated to the abbot of Waldsassen, John III of Ellbogen.¹⁵

This desire to spread knowledge is related to the second key aspect of Peter's personality: his wish to rectify the problems of contemporary society (by way of efforts that fluctuated in intensity over the course of time). He hoped to achieve this by influencing the key political figures of his era, and his chronicle thus includes numerous comments on how rulers should govern justly, including explicit recommendations on how to establish and maintain such fair-minded government. In this context, I have previously hypothesized that at least the first book of the Zbraslav Chronicle was intended to be used as an educational text, a *speculum principum* for the young John of Luxembourg.¹⁶ In Peter's view, however, it was not only rulers who had to be influenced if the world was to be made a better place. As one of the most prominent abbots in Bohemia, he was also convinced of the need to improve the conduct of the clergy – both secular clerics and members of monastic orders. This opinion was reflected in his active approach to pastoral work and preaching, in which he focused not only on the members of his monastery but also on the persons living outside its walls. An example of this activity is another work that can be reliably attributed to Peter: his collection of sermons for important feast days (the *Sermones de principalibus festis*).¹⁷

Peter was well aware that the clergy – whether secular or monastic – were failing in their struggle to rescue sinful human souls, and moreover that they themselves were failing to live according to the principles they preached. As a member of a monastic community, he also recognized the discrepancies between ideal monastic life and the real lives of monks. There are a number of passages in the Zbraslav Chronicle addressing this issue. Peter deals with it explicitly, for example, in a fictitious letter written by the novice Peter of Zbraslav that is “inserted” into the chronicle text (chapter 87 of the first book). From a literary perspective, this inserted passage is atypical of the rest of the text, as it is written in stressed rhymed verse with lines of variable length grouped into couplets of identical length – in the manner of a *lai* (*Leich* in German).¹⁸ The “letter” is also remarkable for its content: Although it

¹⁵ MGH SS 40, 5–6 (cf. fn. 2).

¹⁶ *Antonín*: Král Jan 22 (cf. fn. 14); *Antonín*: Chronica Aulae regiae 8 (cf. fn. 4).

¹⁷ Edited and analysed for the first time in *Pumprová*: Peter of Zittau. Sermons (cf. fn. 7).

¹⁸ *Pabst*, Bernard: *Prosimetrum*. Tradition und Wandel einer Literaturform zwischen Spätantike und Spätmittelalter I–II. Wien 1994 (Ordo. Studien zur Literatur und Gesellschaft

cannot be interpreted as a simple biographical account of the author's life in verse form, it is nevertheless a didactic text addressed to novices in the Cistercian Order, and Peter employs certain autobiographical forms in it. As such, we can approach the "letter from the novice Peter" not as a genuine autobiographical text by Peter of Zittau, but rather as a collection of his opinions expressed in an explicit manner, enabling us to reconstruct his ideas and inner world.¹⁹

At the core of the letter is the author's desire to recommend membership in the Cistercian Order, which he considers the best of all the monastic orders. In this context, Peter expresses generalized criticism of other orders, which simultaneously echoes his criticism of the current state of society. Peter begins the letter by criticizing the Minorites for their accumulation of wealth, which in his opinion had led them to abandon their original apostolic ideals and turned them into an order which, although it disseminated knowledge and learning in society, at the same time did not reject any aspect of secular life. He then moves on to defend the Dominicans, emphasizing their erudition. Regarding the Augustinians, he notes that they described themselves as teaching people for a pittance while actually living in a state of abundance. Unlike his explicit criticism of the Minorites, Peter's characterizations of the Dominicans and Augustinians do not question their importance or accuse them of betraying their original ideals; however, as he states in a summary, he objects to these orders' proximity to urban life, which could tempt him (the novice) into vain deeds, as in the case of the Minorites. His reason thus prevented him from joining a mendicant order that was overly tainted by the corruption of the secular world. Similarly driven by reason, the novice decided not to join the Knights of the Cross, even though this order of knights that enjoyed numerous advantages of worldly glory was attractive to him. Peter deals with the Benedictines and Premonstratensians only briefly, with the laconic remark that although he values them, he has no interest in them. This implies that he considered these orders to be traditional congregations that were no longer significant in the contemporary world; having experienced the zenith of their popularity and glory in the first third of the fourteenth century, they had since declined into obsolescence. Only then does the novice letter-writer present a detailed defence of the Cistercian Order. In an attempt to emphasize its exceptional qualities, he lists a number of negative aspects of clerical life which the Cistercians reject: the accumulation of material wealth (*Mammon*), fondness for urban life (cities were repositories of sin), profligacy and extravagance, failure to fulfil monastic duties, drunkenness and gluttony, pride, and idleness – according to the letter, all of these were anathema to the Cistercians, and although the novice's body had begun a journey along the path of a sinful life, his reason would nevertheless prevail, guiding him back to the righteous path of a Cistercian monk.²⁰

des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit 4/2) 964 expresses the opinion that rather than being a lai, the passage is an example of rhymed prose with short cola. However, in the manuscripts the text is written in a manner typical of verse forms, cf. *Pumprová*, Anna: Der Stil. In: MGH SS 40, XXXVI (cf. fn. 2).

¹⁹ Cf. *Marani-Moravová*: Petr von Zittau 80-83 (cf. fn. 2).

²⁰ MGH SS 40, 186-191 (cf. fn. 2).

Peter's criticism represents quite a realistic view of the life of the Bohemian clergy during the first half of the fourteenth century,²¹ even though he exempts the Cistercians from the unflattering picture of immorality that he paints, emphasizing their virtues instead. It is evident that in Peter's narrative strategy, his role as a rational critic takes a back seat to his ideological engagement and desire to produce pro-Cistercian propaganda – a facet of his literary personality that is visible in various parts of the Zbraslav Chronicle.²² Nevertheless, he was also aware of the spiritual and moral weaknesses of his fellow Cistercians – an awareness reflected in the *Sermones de principalibus festis*, which primarily address the importance of struggling against sin and strengthening life in faith, with a particular emphasis on the cultivation of virtues.²³ The evolution of Peter's attitude to the moral life of the Bohemian clergy is evidenced by the manner in which he records an incident that took place in Prague in 1334, when a dispute over the division of responsibilities and powers between priests and mendicant monks (which had been simmering for several years) escalated into open street fighting. This conflict was a direct manifestation of a Europe-wide problem that several popes had tried in vain to resolve – beginning with Boniface VIII, whose attempt to introduce radical changes (to the benefit of the secular clergy) via his bull *Super cathedram* proved unsuccessful not only in Bohemia but also elsewhere in Europe.²⁴ The clash in Prague is described in the third chapter of the third book of the Zbraslav Chronicle, and it is evident that when evaluating the events, which he described as unprecedented, Peter was unwilling to express explicit support for either of the parties; instead, shocked and evidently disgusted by the episode, the ageing chronicler concluded the chapter with moralizing verses that criticized both the priests and the monks, recommending they all return to an exemplary life of piety and service of Christ.²⁵ Peter had already expressed sober criticism of ecclesiastical institutions at the beginning of the 1330s in connection with the return of the Bishop of Prague, John IV of Dražice, from the papal court in Avignon; he complained about the curial practice of trading in ecclesiastical offices, dispensations, and the like.²⁶

The high standards Peter demanded from clerics seem unlikely to have been mere empty moralizing on his part; rather, they resonated deeply with his inner convictions about how a religious life should be led. Peter was not without sin, nor does he attempt to deny his sinful nature in the chronicle. He does not present himself as a moral authority; indeed, he depicts himself as a person who errs and is unworthy of

²¹ Antonín, Robert et al.: Čtvrtý lateránský koncil a české země ve 13. a 14. století [The Fourth Lateran Council and the Czech lands in the 13th and 14th Centuries]. Praha 2020, 253–261; Vlček, Robert: Clerus ludens et bibens. Duchovní coby pijáci a hráči českého středověku [Clerus ludens et bibens. Clerics as Drinkers and Players in the Czech Middle Ages]. In: Časopis Matice moravské 139 (2020) 303–324.

²² Antonín: Chronica Aulae regiae 1–11 (cf. fn. 4).

²³ Pumprová: Peter of Zittau. Sermons 89–90 (cf. fn. 7).

²⁴ Hledíková, Zdeňka: Biskup Jan IV. z Dražic (1301–1343) [Bishop John IV. of Dražice (1301–1343)]. Praha 1991, 128–134.

²⁵ MGH SS 40, 512–514 (cf. fn. 2).

²⁶ *Ibid.* 475.

the tasks entrusted to him – and in doing so goes beyond the standard topoi of modesty, which he obviously knew and was able to deploy.²⁷ Peter saw his own literary production as a way of internally atoning for his sinful and vain life, which he constantly struggled against. Through his writing, as he claims in the brief prologue to the second book of the chronicle, he was able to constantly rectify his conduct.²⁸ The process of creating certain passages in the chronicle represented a form of meditation about the world, about society, and above all about himself. We can witness this in Peter's laments concerning the deaths of the founder of Zbraslav Monastery, Wenceslas II, and his daughter Elizabeth – and above all in his own fictitious will inserted symbolically at the end of the first book. This will is not intended as a real-life testament but rather as an expression of Peter's profound faith; as the newly elected abbot, he states that in order to serve God, he will offer up what he describes as his only true property, which God himself has given him: his soul.²⁹

Everything described in the preceding paragraphs is closely tied to the third main aspect of Peter's personality: the constantly growing anxiety he felt when facing up to the transience of earthly life and the uncertain prospect of salvation, exacerbated by the feeling that his various efforts during his lifetime had been in vain. This third aspect became more noticeable as Peter advanced in years, and its first prominent manifestation is the fictitious will at the end of the chronicle's first book. The inherent motif of the transience of worldly glory, which could be dragged through the dust at random by the unpredictable rhythms of the all-powerful wheel of fortune, is blended here with Peter's own personal experience; we must not forget that he had reached at least middle age by the time he completed the first book. His recollection of the deaths of the much-admired monarchs Wenceslas II and Henry VII is combined with his sadness at the death of his mentor Conrad, who served as abbot at Zbraslav twice and from whom Peter took over the office. Peter's inner world was also undoubtedly affected by the difficult situation in Bohemia and the burgeoning conflict between the king and queen – though it is not until later in the chronicle that he addresses this issue explicitly. Around 1316, all these factors – combined with Peter's advancing age – culminated in a profound shift in his inner world that led him to embrace a deeply felt and demonstratively expressed piety, which he openly proclaimed in the Zbraslav Chronicle and elsewhere.

To offer a brief interim summary at this point, Peter's writings reveal him as a man who erred, yet who repented for his sins; a man who, as he became older, felt his faith and piety grow stronger; a man who strove for the moral rectification of himself, of his fellow clerics, and of society as a whole – yet at the same time, faced with the reality of the world around him, was tormented by an increasing sense of doubt and a

²⁷ Bujnochová (Pumprová), Anna: Ke stylu prologů Zbraslavské kroniky [On the Style of the Prologues of the Zbraslav Chronicle]. In: Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty brněnské univerzity 8 (2003) 93–107; Pumprová, Anna: Zu Sprache und Stil der Königsauer Chronik. In: Albrecht (ed.): Chronicon Aulae regiae 81–88 (cf. fn. 11); Pumprová: Forschungsübersicht – Philologischer Teil. In: MG SS 40, XII–XIII (cf. fn. 2).

²⁸ Ibid. 373.

²⁹ Ibid. 362–370.

feeling that his life's work had been in vain. He was a moralist, a commentator on current affairs, a sentimental memoirist, and above all an author whose writing helped him to understand his own place in God's plan. None of this would have been possible had he not received the requisite education – which leads us to the following considerations.

A man of education and letters

Previous research has already concluded that Peter was an educated man and a skilled writer who incorporated not only Bible quotes and allusions into his work (revealing his detailed knowledge of scripture) but also numerous texts by ancient and Christian authors. Scholars have often commented on his evident familiarity with Virgil, Horace, Seneca, Cato, Ovid, and the German poet Neidhart.³⁰ Thanks to Anna Pumprová's new analyses, our understanding of Peter's knowledge of the literary tradition, his creative work with models, and his own authorial inventiveness has been considerably refined. At the same time, however, Pumprová rightly draws attention to the fact that the use of quotations from a number of other ancient works is not sufficient to prove Peter's knowledge of those works. She has managed to document Peter's employment of selected quotations from Lucan's epic *Pharsalia*, from Martial's epigrams, from Phaedrus' fables, from Statius' *Thebais* and Claudian's poem *In Eutropium*, as well as from Latin translations of Aristotle (*Metaphysica*, *De caelo et mundo*) and other works of ancient authors. In addition, Pumprová has convincingly identified in the works of the abbot of Zbraslav quotations and paraphrases from the sermons of John Chrysostom, the writings of Gregory the Great and Augustine Aurelius, pseudo-Augustinian writings, the letters of Sulpicius Severus, the sermons of Paschasius Radbertus, and above all from the works of Bernard of Clairvaux, Gueric of Igne and William of St. Thierry, from the collection *Legenda aurea*, and from the work of the theologians of the High Middle Ages, including Peter Damiani and Thomas Aquinas. However, as the author of the detailed analysis of Peter of Zittau's text herself states, his knowledge of these works was most likely mediated by various types of compilation manuscripts (*florilegia*).³¹

A full discussion of Peter's knowledge of the literary tradition is not included in this contribution for its own sake. The above overview of texts suffices to provide an insight into Peter's mental world – an inner landscape constituted *inter alia* by his knowledge of literature. This literature formed an important component of the cul-

³⁰ The traditional view cf. Varcl, Ladislav (ed.): *Antika a česká kultura* [Antiquity and Czech Culture], Praha 1978, 43-44.

³¹ See Pumprová, Anna: Ohlasy bible, antických a středověkých autorů v textu Zbraslavské kroniky [References to the Bible, Ancient and Medieval Authors in the Text of the Zbraslav Chronicle]. In: *Graeco-Latina Brunensia* 19 (2014) 81-117; Pumprová: Doleo super te. Literární kontext plánek nad smrtí Václava II. [Doleo super te. The literary Context of the Lamentations over the Death of Wenceslas II.]. In: *Časopis Matice moravské* 133 (2014) 1, 25-51; Pumprová: Peter of Zittau. Sermons 75-95 (cf. fn. 7); Pumprová: Literarische Quellen. In: *MGH SS* 40, XXXI-XXXIV (cf. fn. 2). See also Marani-Moravová: Petr von Zittau 85-90 (cf. fn. 2), who's summary of Peter's quotes from the authors is based on the Pumprová's analyses.

tural context in which he existed and in which his own texts originated. If we wish to achieve a deeper understanding of Peter's personality, one key question that needs answering is where he acquired this extensive literary knowledge. Previous research has not been able to provide a satisfactory answer to this question – and because we know nothing whatsoever about Peter's life before 1297, it is unlikely that our knowledge in this regard will progress any further in the future.³² A potentially interesting lead is offered by recent research documenting the appearance of a short fragment of his verses in one of the Montecassino manuscripts, which may attest to a sojourn in Italy during which he could have acquired his education. This is only one of several hypotheses, however.³³ If we accept that the novice Peter, whose letter recommending the Cistercian Order features in the Zbraslav Chronicle, is (at least in broad outlines) a representation of Peter of Zittau himself, then the assumption that Peter spent time abroad – or at least outside his home environment – is corroborated by the personal statements contained in the fictitious letter. In its opening lines, the novice considers the transience of earthly life and his decision to enter the monastic order – a decision he was subsequently led away from by a great change affecting his life. Using poetic tropes, the novice confides in the reader that his boat was blown by a breeze to the shores of an island full of joy, where he indulged in a worldly life saturated with bodily pleasures and conviviality – though this way of living also caused many difficulties that he preferred to remain silent about.³⁴

It is clear that we must be cautious when equating the life story of the fictitious novice with real events in Peter of Zittau's life. Moreover, we will never know to what extent the verses of the letter merely repeat traditional literary clichés and stencils and to what extent they reveal genuine details of the author's own life. But whatever the reality, Peter must have acquired his knowledge and literary skills somewhere – and at the turn of the fourteenth century, Italy was one of the most popular destinations to which educated individuals from Bohemia travelled to study. At the same time, we should also bear in mind Peter's numerous contacts with the Holy Roman Empire and France – contacts that would have been particularly important for him due to his membership in the Cistercian Order. A further option that merits consideration is Prague; while the city did not yet have a university at the time, its chapter school ranked among the most prominent centres of intellectual activity in its region of Europe. According to contemporary reports, the quality of intellectual life in Bohemia declined after Otakar II's death in 1278 (which caused a crisis of government), but it can be assumed that the restoration of order within the Kingdom of Bohemia after the return of Wenceslas II in 1283 led to a gradual resurgence of learning.³⁵ Since it appears that Peter of Zittau was in Prague during 1297 as an eye-

³² The most detailed account of known facts about Peter's life is presented in *Novotný: Úvod XIII–XXXIII* (cf. fn. 8), see also *Marani-Moravová: Petr von Zittau 75–103* (cf. fn. 2).

³³ *Pumprová: Leben und literarische Tätigkeit XXII* (cf. fn. 3).

³⁴ MGH SS 40, 186–187 (cf. fn. 2).

³⁵ *Admont, Engelbert von: Epistola ad Ulricum. Letter of Abbot Engelbert of Admont to Master Ulrich of Vienna*. In: *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 29 (1962) 298–306.

witness to Wenceslas II's coronation, probably before joining the Cistercian Order, his presence in the city – and hence his possible studies there – can be dated to the final decade of the thirteenth century. This hypothesis is supported by a passage in the Zbraslav Chronicle preceding the description of the coronation ceremony and explicitly stating that Peter saw with his own eyes how Wenceslas II surrounded himself with monks from various orders. Although it is evident that Peter was using the classical topos of an eyewitness account to depict the king as a devout supporter of the Church, the gap in time between the narrated episode and the actual writing of the associated passage leads us to assume that Peter did not include anything in his text that would have discredited his description of the narrated reality. This means that whether or not he actually saw the described monks, he was most likely indeed present in Prague during the 1290s and could thus plausibly have studied there while leading the dissolute life mentioned in the letter by the fictitious novice – a life for which he repeatedly expresses repentance in the text of the chronicle, since writing itself represented a form of penance for him as mentioned above.³⁶

The assumption that Peter spent an extended period of time in Bohemia in connection with the Prague chapter is also supported by his knowledge of older Czech historiography – a discipline whose main centre at the time was the chapter of St. Vitus. Of course, he also could have acquired this knowledge while already a monk (having entered the Cistercian Order sometime before 1305, when he participated in Wenceslas II's funeral as a member of the monastery). Shortly afterwards, Peter was ordained as a priest, and not long thereafter appointed as chaplain to Abbot Conrad, accompanying the latter when he attended negotiations with the Luxembourgs in 1309-1310 regarding their accession to the Bohemian throne. It is evident from Peter's rapid career trajectory that he joined the Cistercian Order when he was already a relatively mature and educated man; this, too, supports the theory that his studies predated his monastic career. Nevertheless, the literary models and sources he employed indicate that he was strongly influenced by authorities whose works were familiar to the Cistercians. Together with the fact that the abbots of Zbraslav and Sedlec whom Peter accompanied to the mentioned negotiations were capable of communicating with a high degree of fluency at the francophone court of the Luxembourgs, this points our search for Peter's education back to France – though evidently not to Paris, a city he admired on one of his later visits in 1334.³⁷ At the same time, Peter's great fondness for the abbot of Waldsassen, John III of Ellbogen (who, like Peter himself, may have written a chronicle of his monastery as well as

³⁶ For Peter's description of the coronation in 1297, cf. MGH SS 40, 117-127 (cf. fn. 2). – With regard to the writing process as penance, cf. *ibid.* 373: "Licet autem labor iste non sit plurimum fructuosus, eo quod studiosus lector possit leccionibus multo devocioribus occupari, si voluerit, tamen michi, ut spero, prodest ad penitenciam liber iste. Laborabo quippe, quoad vixero, finaliter propter eum, qui solus laborem et dolorem considerat intentionemque ponderat, quam propono. Porro pia mens, que novit <sugere> mel de petra, invenire poterit in hiis, que hic legit, aliqua, de quibus ad mundi istius variabilis despectionem et ad Dei stabilis dileccionem aliquantulum poterit incitari."

³⁷ *Ibid.* 514-115.

other literary works)³⁸ suggests that there was a natural exchange of knowledge among different Cistercian monasteries via the lending, borrowing, and copying of works by medieval and ancient authorities. Indeed, Peter himself spent a considerable amount of time at the monasteries in Sedlec and Waldsassen, both of which were closely affiliated with Zbraslav. It should also be kept in mind that medieval students typically spent time at various different schools, and we therefore cannot exclude the possibility that Peter, pursuing new knowledge throughout his life, did not restrict his education to a single location but may indeed have spent time at all the locations discussed above. Whatever the reality, in view of Peter's age in 1297 (prior to joining the Cistercian Order sometime before 1305), we can assume that by this point in his life – aged between 27 and 37 – he had already acquired the majority of his learning.

Peter as monk and abbot

This brings us to another of Peter's roles in life and society. Above all, his chronicle is a text written by a devout monk, even though we do not know precisely when and under what circumstances he joined the Cistercian Order. Here, too, our only source of knowledge is Peter himself: He first mentions his presence at Zbraslav in connection with the funeral of Wenceslas II in 1305.³⁹ But is it not perhaps the case that such references to Peter's personal experience also form part of his narrative strategy, serving as arguments supporting the truthfulness of his account? It is certain that his declaration of being an eyewitness to key events in the life of his central hero Wenceslas II was primarily intended to emphasize the veracity of his historical narrative. Nevertheless, it is likely that when he arrived at Zbraslav as a novice sometime between 1297 and 1305, he was already a mature, educated, and devout man. Moreover, we cannot exclude the possibility that he had already had prior contact with the Cistercians at Sedlec and Zbraslav – perhaps as part of the wider circle of the royal court, to which an educated man like himself would have had access. Quite soon after entering the monastery, Peter appears to have formed a close attachment to Abbot Conrad. This is suggested by the fact that he was appointed as Conrad's chaplain no later than 1309 (though presumably earlier), by his subsequent political activities (which are discussed below), and by the simple fact that he was later entrusted with writing the monastery's chronicle. If we accept this hypothesis, we may also acknowledge the strongly autobiographical nature of the fictitious letter by the novice Peter, who admits that his path to peace and salvation by way of joining the Cistercian Order was a long and winding one, passing through a sinful life and including a careful weighing of the various monastic orders in connection with his education.

If we consider that Peter knew all the original members of Zbraslav Monastery with the exception of the old custodian Dietrich, who was no longer alive when the

³⁸ *Ibid.* 5–6; *Pumprová*: Leben und literarische Tätigkeit XXI (cf. fn. 3).

³⁹ *Ibid.* 159: "Ego autem numquam narrantibus talia credidissem, nisi ego ipse huius tristicie conplorator et mesticie contemplator personaliter affuissem et in gemitu meo tunc carmen subsequens protulissem: ...".

chronicle was written, and combine this information with Peter's detailed knowledge of the historical events pertaining to the monastery in the 1290s, it is evident that the gap between these events and his entry into the Cistercian Order could not have been a lengthy one. The supposition that Peter was a mature man when he joined the monastery is also corroborated by an account stating that when he first served mass with his fellow monk Rudolf of Walderbach (the first Cistercian who died during Peter's time at the monastery), Rudolf predicted that Peter would soon become the abbot.⁴⁰ Whether Peter joined the Cistercians in the 1290s or in the years immediately after the turn of the century, he soon became deeply attached to the life of the monastic community. This was reflected in his approach to Bohemian history: For Peter, the prosperity, well-being, and security of life at the monasteries in Zbraslav and Sedlec came to represent a benchmark for the respective qualities of Bohemian society as a whole. His descriptions of the oppression suffered by the clergy – and especially by the abovementioned Cistercian monasteries – served to express a more general condemnation of the rule of King Henry, the Duke of Carinthia, who is depicted as a tyrannical figure in the Zbraslav Chronicle.⁴¹

The unstable political situation following the extinction of the Přemyslid dynasty affected Peter personally. He provides an account of the tribulations endured by him and eight other monks, who as a result of a lack of funds at Zbraslav were temporarily put up at the monastery in Slapy, where they were besieged by Bavarian mercenaries – though this evidently represented only the tip of the iceberg.⁴² Peter's experience of the extreme fluctuations in living standards that he and his fellow monks had to bear after the death of Wenceslas II is reflected in the text of the Zbraslav Chronicle via the latently present apologia for the Cistercian Order and the elaborately articulated emphasis on the important role the Cistercians played in Bohemian history during the first decades of the fourteenth century. If we accept (in line with previous scholars) the assumption that Peter came from the burgher class, then we must also acknowledge that there are no traces whatsoever of this social origin in the narrative strategies he employed as an author. In fact, quite the opposite is the case: To Peter, the city is a sinful place, and burghers are seen as occupying the same level in society as rough peasants – especially in passages in which he comments on their rivalry with the nobility, which in 1309 culminated in an incident where the burghers of nearby Kutná Hora (Kuttenberg) arrested members of the Bohemian nobility who were spending the night at the monastery in Sedlec.⁴³ Simply put, Peter appears as a staunch defender of the Cistercian Order and the principles of monastic life in his chronicle – a stance which in some cases led him to criticize the pope

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 445.

⁴¹ Razím, Jakub: Der stolze Chärdenaere. Postava Jindřicha Korutanského v dobovém veřejném mínění a na stránkách dvorské literatury [Der stolze Chärdenaere. The Character of Henry of Carinthia in Contemporary Public Opinion and in the Pages of Court Literature]. In: *Mediaevalia Historica Bohemica* 14 (2011) 61-89; Antonín: The Ideal Ruler 305-306 (cf. fn. 13).

⁴² MGH SS 40, 258 (cf. fn. 2).

⁴³ *Ibid.* 184-186.

and other representatives of the Church whose conduct he considered to be at odds with the ideals of a religious life. This criticism – which targets the venality of the curia on a general level, and on a more specific level concerns Peter's opposition to the fate of the Templars, suggesting that he sympathized with the military orders – reflects his monastic worldview, a stance he also maintained during the reawakened dispute between the pope and the emperor, in which he sided with the pope.⁴⁴

While Peter was working on the second book of the chronicle, the “monastic” aspect of his personality became entwined with an increased emphasis on the interests of the abbey itself, since he had become its abbot in 1316 after Conrad's abdication.⁴⁵ As abbot, Peter distinguished himself as a responsible custodian of the monastery who systematically strove to expand and protect its assets. Despite his ostentatious proclamations of modesty in the chronicle, the text also contains both implicit and explicit mentions of his achievements in this role, and his competence as abbot is attested by other sources as well. Peter's own works paint the image of a thoughtful, poetic intellectual with a penetratingly analytical approach to society – yet diplomatic sources reveal him to have been a systematically-minded and pragmatic operator. Surviving documents providing details of Peter's administration reveal his efforts to compile a full inventory of the monastery's assets as well as his enlightened economic management. His activities in this regard appear to have been connected to his attempt to preserve (or restore) the abbey's assets – at least within the parameters granted to it in a privilege by Wenceslas II that was reaffirmed by King John at the beginning of his reign.⁴⁶ The first documented reference to the listing of the monastery's lands and assets dates from August 1317, less than a year after Peter became abbot. This suggests that he decided to actively promote the abbey's material interests very soon after taking office – despite regularly encountering opposition from members of the nobility who sought to exploit the unstable situation and the frequent absence of King John to gain control over royal and ecclesiastical property. Peter continued to pursue this course of action throughout his tenure as abbot. The monastery took efforts to stabilize the boundaries of its estates in 1324-1325 when Queen Elizabeth returned from exile in Bavaria; she helped Peter to obtain John's support for the monastery's property rights.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 332: “Predictus eciam papa illum prepotentem et per totum mundum celebrem ordinem cruciferorum Templariorum asscribens eisdem quosdam errores heresis abrasit de gremio ecclesie totaliter et delevit. Cuius ordinis magister anno Domini MCCCXIII non contradicente papa per regem Francie miserabiliter mense Aprilis Parisius igne crematus est, alie vero eiusdem ordinis persone plurime aut tormenta passe, aut relicto regulari habitu seculum intraverunt. Opinio tamen dictabat plurimum, quod dictum ordinem non pestis heretica, sed ipsorum possessio latissima et malorum hominum avaricia delevisset.”

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 361-362.

⁴⁶ See *Tadra*, Ferdinand (ed.): *Listy kláštera Zbraslavského* [Letters of Zbraslav Monastery]. Praha 1904 (Historický Archiv 23) 12-13, no. 20. – On the development of Zbraslav Monastery in the first half of the 14th century, cf. *Charvátová*, Kateřina: *Dějiny cisterckého řádu v Čechách 1142-1420. II.: Kláštery založené ve 13. a 14. století* [History of the Cistercian Order in Bohemia 1142-1420. II: Monasteries Founded in 13th and 14th Century]. Praha 2002, 187-194.

⁴⁷ *Tadra*: *Listy* 16-17, no. 30; 24-26, no. 45-46; 28, no. 49 (cf. fn. 46).

I will return to the relationship between Peter and Elizabeth later, but at this point it shall suffice to mention that, despite the various conflicts with the king that resonate throughout the pages of the chronicle as well as his criticism of John, Peter nevertheless managed – as had his predecessor Conrad – to secure the king's support. This fact, which was already evident at the beginning of Peter's tenure as abbot,⁴⁸ is also reflected in a privilege granted by John on May 6th 1325 in which he revoked all existing privileges issued by third parties that had impinged upon the original privileges and rights of Zbraslav Monastery in any way.⁴⁹ It should also be pointed out that despite this concession, Peter continued to criticize John's policy towards the cities and monasteries. This hostile stance was evidently rooted both in the king's constant absence from Bohemia, which Peter disapproved of, and in John's conflict with Queen Elizabeth (whom Peter supported), as well as in a long-standing dispute over the Landsberg (Lanšperk) estate, a geographically remote part of the monastery's holdings that was frequently usurped.⁵⁰ As abbot, Peter considered the injustice suffered by the monastery in connection with the Landsberg estate an insurmountable barrier preventing him from viewing John and his policies in a positive light, even though he was fascinated by the king's knightly exploits and retrospectively toned down his intense criticism.⁵¹ Despite these disputes, however, Peter managed to obtain a number of privileges from John that affirmed the monastery's economic and legal status – even after the death of Elizabeth, who was a generous patron of Zbraslav.⁵²

In his position as abbot, Peter was also able to resolve a number of disputes with other ecclesiastical institutions to the benefit of the monastery – as well as securing additional income and rights for Zbraslav without the need for direct intervention by the royal couple. He did so by selling off certain parts of the abbey's assets and acquiring donations as expressions of devotion.⁵³ Peter's activities in this regard had a positive impact at the main location of the monastery, leading to improvements and the construction of new buildings during his tenure: In 1327, a new refectory was completed. Two years later, on May 8th 1329, Peter noted that work on a new church at the monastery had resumed after a long period of inactivity; in his own words, this had been made possible because Queen Elizabeth had granted patronage rights to the rectory in Rouchovany. In 1333, construction of a water supply system at Zbraslav was completed.⁵⁴ At the very end of Peter's life, in 1338, construction of the monastery came to a halt, again due to lack of funds.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 14-15, no. 28; 17, no. 31; 17-19, no. 33-34.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 26-27, no. 47, 28-29, no. 50-51.

⁵⁰ MGH SS 40, 428, 441, 449, 532 (cf. fn. 2); *Tadra*: Listy 35, no. 68 (cf. fn. 46).

⁵¹ *Antonín*: Král Jan (cf. fn. 14); *Antonín*: The Ideal Ruler 220-225 (cf. fn. 13).

⁵² *Tadra*: Listy 30-31, no. 58; 31, no. 60 (cf. fn. 46).

⁵³ *Ibid.* 21-22, no. 41; 22-24, no. 43; 27, no. 48; 29, no. 54; 30, no. 56; 35, no. 67.

⁵⁴ MGH SS 40, 453, 503 (cf. fn. 2).

Homo politicus

Peter's successful tenure as abbot was based on his prior experience and political connections. As mentioned above, very soon (or perhaps immediately) after entering the monastery, he became very close with Abbot Conrad – and evidently also with other prominent members of the Cistercian Order such as the abbots of Sedlec and Waldsassen, who played an important role in the formation of Wenceslas II's policies and attempted to continue exerting influence even after the extinction of the Přemyslid dynasty. It is evident, however, that the Cistercians' role on the political scene between 1306 and 1310 – and subsequently under John's reign – was in fact less prominent than Peter claimed in his chronicle, which promoted and idealized the contribution of the Cistercian abbots to the transfer of the Bohemian throne to the Luxembourgs. Nevertheless, the order did represent an influential political grouping, and Peter was a part of it.⁵⁵

Even considering the fact that the chronicle exaggerates the Cistercians' political role in the period from 1306 to 1310, there is still no doubt that Peter was personally involved in several key events during this time. While serving as chaplain to Abbot Conrad, he stayed at the monastery in Sedlec in February 1309; it was there where burghers from nearby Kutná Hora arrested members of the Bohemian nobility who were spending the night at the abbey – an incident that would ultimately become a turning point in Bohemian history.⁵⁶ In the same year, Peter accompanied Conrad on a journey to the general chapter in Cîteaux. However, the Cistercian abbots from Bohemia met Henry VII in Heilbronn on August 13th – a meeting that was probably mediated by Peter of Aspelt – and subsequent developments strongly indicate that Peter never intended to reach Cîteaux at all; rather, the journey was designed to camouflage the real purpose of his mission, which was to initiate negotiations regarding the accession of the emperor's son John to the Bohemian throne and arrange his engagement with the Přemyslid Elizabeth of Bohemia. Whether Peter was merely a conduit through which part of the Bohemian nobility (closely allied with the Cistercians) implemented their policy or whether he personally contributed to the formation of this plan, the fact remains that it was he who did not complete the jour-

⁵⁵ Antonín, Robert: Der Weg nach Osten. Heinrich VII. und der Erwerb Böhmens für die Luxemburger. In: *Penth*, Sabine / *Thorau*, Peter (eds.): Rom 1312. Die Kaiserkrönung Heinrichs VII. und die Folgen. Die Luxemburger als Herrscherdynastie von gesamteuropäischer Bedeutung. Köln, Weimar, Wien 2016 (Forschungen zur Kaiser- und Papstgeschichte des Mittelalters. Beihefte zu J. F. Böhmer, Regesta Imperii 40) 9–22.

⁵⁶ MGH SS 40, 184–186 (cf. fn. 2); *Musílek*, Martin: Zajištění českého panstva patriciátem v sedleckém klášteře a v Praze roku 1309. Příspěvek k vývoji pražského patriciátu na přelomu 13. a 14. století [Capture of the Bohemian Dominion by the Patriciate in the Sedlec Monastery and in Prague in 1309. A Contribution to the Development of the Prague Patriciate at the Turn of the 13th and 14th Centuries]. In: *Lomničková*, Radka (ed.): Sedlec. Historie, architektura a umělecká tvorba sedleckého kláštera ve středoevropském kontextu kolem roku 1300 a 1700 [Sedlec. History, Architecture and Artistic Creation of the Sedlec Monastery in the Central European Context around 1300 and 1700]. Praha 2009 (Opera Facultatis theologiae Universitatis Carolinae Pragensis – Historia et historia artium 10) 139–163.

ney to France in 1309; instead, he returned to Bohemia bearing a message from the imperial court, which at the time was in the throes of an internecine conflict between the elected King Henry of Bohemia (Duke of Carinthia) and the opposing faction of Henry VII, represented by the Cistercians.⁵⁷

Peter was subsequently involved in the preparations for the accession of John and Elizabeth to the Bohemian throne. Once again, he travelled to meet King Henry with a party of abbots representing the opposition, which set out for the imperial court on July 1st 1310. The negotiations were successful, but the group was unable to return home because Henry had strengthened his position in Bohemia in the meantime and the Cistercians feared his response (evidently with some justification). Peter thus found himself in forced exile for a period, and he spent this time in Nuremberg until Princess Elizabeth fled the country and set out for the imperial court. Peter joined her retinue on the journey, and it was in this role that he was present at her first meeting with the emperor as well as during the subsequent series of events, including Elizabeth's marriage to John and the latter's receipt of the Bohemian Crown Lands in fief.⁵⁸ Although we have no information on the precise role Peter played in John of Luxembourg's accession to the throne in the winter of 1310, it is evident that he was very close to the royal court immediately after the coronation, travelling around the Bohemian Crown Lands as part of the royal couple's retinue. Peter's close links to John's policies are also evident from the fact that he was a member of the military force that gathered in Italy in 1313 to support Henry VII. After receiving news of the emperor's death, Peter did not return to Bohemia, instead accompanying Abbot Conrad to meet their old ally (and perhaps also friend) Peter of Aspelt, the archbishop of Mainz. Together with the archbishop, they went to Koblenz to attend a meeting of the clerical electors of the Holy Roman Emperor; they also attended the electors' meeting the following year. It is highly likely that the Cistercians were representing the interests of the Bohemian King John – and initially also his candidacy, which Peter of Aspelt supported in the first phase.⁵⁹

In summary, at the end of the chronicle's first book and in the opening chapters of the second book, Peter expresses clear support for the political steps taken by John – even though by this time he disapproved of the king's frequent long absences from Bohemia, which meant that Queen Elizabeth had to rule in his place, eventually becoming exhausted as a result of the abrasive political conflicts raging between the crown and the Bohemian nobles (especially Henry of Lipá). Despite these misgivings, Peter remained an adherent and supporter of the king's policies until 1319, and in line with the traditional practice blamed John's failings on his irresponsible and

⁵⁷ MGH SS 40, 195–199 (cf. fn. 2).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 222–241; *Antonín*: Der Weg nach Osten 18–20 (cf. fn. 55); *Bobková*, Lenka. Jan Lucemburský. Otec slavného syna [John of Luxembourg. Father of the Famous Son]. Praha 2018, 42–61.

⁵⁹ In 1311, he was still in the royal couple's favour; they travelled to Brno together, cf. MGH SS 40, 275–277 (cf. fn. 2). In 1313, he was part of John's military party that went to Italy; afterwards, Peter travelled to Koblenz and subsequently to Würzburg with Conrad, *ibid.* 282–283. In 1314, he was in Koblenz again at a meeting of the electors, *ibid.* 349.

treacherous advisors, who were interested only in their own gain. It was thus as a supporter of John that Peter set out in 1317 on his first journey to the general chapter in Cîteaux in the position of abbot – apparently with the aim of finding the young king (who was travelling from place to place) and persuading him to return to Bohemia. Peter eventually managed to achieve this goal in Trier during his return journey.⁶⁰

When John's sister married the King of Hungary at Zbraslav on May 24th 1319, relations between the king and the monastery appear to have still been adequate.⁶¹ However, that situation would soon change – by July of the same year at the latest – as a result of the dispute between John and Elizabeth (and their subsequent separation).⁶² The king launched an attack on Prague's Old Town, where Elizabeth and her court were staying – and Peter was a member of the Queen's court. This event marked a turning point for Peter that led him to abandon his support for the king. His texts reveal, however, that he remained a staunch supporter of the kingdom as an entity in its own right, existing on a higher plane than its personal representatives. Peter's basic political conviction could be characterized as a specific form of Bohemian patriotism combined with the idea of strong monarchic rule supporting the interests of the weaker elements in the social hierarchy, with a primary concern for the monasteries and the clergy as a whole. Given his position, this was a natural stance to take. He viewed the monarch as a guarantor of order, in full accordance with the high medieval royal ideal and with particular emphasis on the sovereign's duty of caring for the religious elements in society.⁶³

In view of the style of government practiced by John of Luxembourg from 1318 onwards and his split with Elizabeth, Peter naturally came to oppose the political course taken by the king – even though it is evident that he still admired John in many respects. In his position as abbot, he undoubtedly exploited his former close

⁶⁰ On the imprisonment of Henry of Lipá, cf. *Ibid.* 355: “Cum igitur fortunatorum eventuum Heinricus de Lypa staret in cacumine amicorum ac famulorum circumfultus valida multitudine, ita quod se putaret falli aut deici non posse, ecce quidam regni magnates, quorum nomina, quia nota sunt, supersedi scribere in hoc volumine, sub cuiusdam fidelitatis velamine regem adeunt dixeruntque: ‘Fraudis dolose vobis, domine rex, Heinricus de Lypa latentes inferre insidias molitur, quibus si non maturius occurritur, a vobis vite sanitas ac regalis dignitas auferetur.’ Quibus suggestionibus occultis ventura non prospiciens regis et regine puritas aures credulas prebuit, et ut oportune Heinricus capiat, uterque consensum apponit.” – On Peter's first journey to Cîteaux, *ibid.* 377.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 387–388.

⁶² *Kopířková*, Božena; Eliška Přemyslovna. Královna česká 1292–1330 [Eliška Přemyslovna. Queen of Bohemia 1292–1330]. Praha 2003, 48–49; *Kubínová*, Kateřina: “Potom král, jako by se už přetrhla otěž rozumu...” Jedno místo z autografu kroniky Petra Žitavského [“Then the king, as if the reins of reason had already broken...” One Passage from the Autograph Chronicle of Peter Žitavský]. In: *Březina*, Luděk / *Konvičná*, Jana / *Zdichynec* Jan (eds.): *Ve znamení zemí Koruny české. Sborník k šedesátým narozeninám prof. Lenky Bobkové* [In the Sign of the Bohemian Crown Lands. Studies in Honour of Prof. Lenka Bobková]. Praha 2006, 538–544; *Antonín*: Král Jan 16 (cf. fn. 14); *Bobková*: Jan Lucemburský 222–236 (cf. fn. 58).

⁶³ Numerous examples of Peter's understanding of the monarch's role in society are discussed in *Antonín*: The Ideal Ruler (cf. fn. 13).

acquaintance with the king while maintaining a critical stance. From 1319 onwards, there are fewer mentions of direct contacts with John's court – and of the Cistercians' statecraft-related activities in general. Once the king's foreign advisors had departed, Peter remained silent on the matter, instead focusing his efforts on developing the monastery complex and completing his chronicle. He maintained his silence despite commissioning reports on John's activities and adventures from various informants, and he met the king in person whenever possible, though more often on his travels outside the kingdom.⁶⁴ Peter's interest in politics was only rekindled when the young Charles IV arrived in Bohemia, and from 1334 onwards he appears to have spent more time in Prague. It seems that Peter reacquired the enthusiasm he had formerly displayed when educating the young and inexperienced King John about the situation in Bohemia and advising him on how to rule justly; this apparently inspired the ageing abbot to re-engage in political life. However, it is doubtful whether the young Charles had much interest in listening to what Peter had to say. It is true that Zbraslav was his first port of call upon his arrival in Bohemia; he visited the abbey to honour the memory of his mother, who was buried there. But the available sources do not indicate that Charles was a particularly strong supporter of Zbraslav – if we disregard the money he lent the monastery in 1338 (and in any case, he took control of the Landsberg estate as collateral for the loan, causing the monastery to lose control of it yet again).⁶⁵ It is evident that he had little interest in the monarchic ideology of the last Přemyslids as it was expressed in the monastery's literary tradition, since this ideology is not mentioned at all in Charles' own historiographic works or works commissioned by him. In this respect, Peter of Zittau thus failed in his political mission to promote the Cistercian ideology.⁶⁶

A loving man

Although Peter began to express his disapproval of King John and his conduct in explicit terms – and sometimes with passionate intensity – in 1319, he later modified and toned down the relevant passages of his chronicle as well as altering various other sections in which he described his own emotions and inner life. This reveals Peter to have been an emotive personality whose anger and other emotions were authentic and sincere. Moreover, as a representative of his monastery and an administrator, manager, and politician, he often had to accept pragmatic solutions to the various problems that life presented in his era. Peter undoubtedly felt frustration when he had to make decisions that were at odds with his moral principles, or in cases when he had to choose the lesser of two evils. Writing the chronicle seems to have provided him with an outlet to vent some of these frustrations.

Judging from the text of the Zbraslav Chronicle, it appears highly likely that Peter's passionate condemnation of John in 1319 was in fact rooted in an emotion diametrically opposed to hatred – an emotion which, is still evident in his texts: He

⁶⁴ MGH SS 40, 489 (cf. fn. 2); *Antonín*: Král Jan 19–23 (cf. fn. 14).

⁶⁵ *Tadra*: Listy 39, 40, no. 73 (cf. fn. 46).

⁶⁶ *Antonín*: Chronica Aulae regiae 11–18 (cf. fn. 4).

obviously felt a very tender affection, admiration, and perhaps even love for Elizabeth. At numerous points in the chronicle, he expresses these feelings for Elizabeth quite explicitly. They resonate in his description of the events of 1309-1310: In Peter's narrative strategy, it is primarily the princess herself who plays the role of the active heir to the Přemyslid tradition, telling Abbot Conrad about her despair over the ruin her brother-in-law Henry, the Duke of Carinthia, had brought to the land. The text describes Elizabeth's inner suffering as a witness to the developments in Bohemia from 1306 onwards, as well as the wisdom that led her to conceal her feelings in the depths of her heart; in Peter's view, this constituted her spiritual beauty. In the subsequent texts up to her death in 1330, Elizabeth is depicted as a royal heroine, a figure portrayed in precise accordance with the widespread contemporary image of the ideal monarch. This not only indicates the positive role she played in Peter's narrative strategy; it also reveals his emotional connection with the young queen. It is highly likely that this emotional bond was not merely present as a symbolic construct in Peter's text but also existed in real life. Beginning with Elizabeth's journey to the court of Henry VII in 1309, Peter often spent time with her as part of her retinue. He accompanied her on her "betrothal journey" to the Holy Roman Empire as well as during her return to Bohemia. As a member of Abbot Conrad's party, he also accompanied the royal couple on their first journey to Moravia (1311), and spent time in Moravia once more as part of Elizabeth's retinue the following year.⁶⁷

Peter remained on relatively intimate terms with the royal couple up until 1315, and continued to spend time in Elizabeth's company even in the subsequent years. The close relations between Peter (and the Zbraslav Cistercians in general) and the royal couple were also manifested in financial and economic matters, as has been noted above. Judging from the text of the Zbraslav Chronicle, relations between the king and the royal monastic foundation were very good. Peter was kept well-informed about developments at the royal court, and also (in the initial phase of John's reign) about the king's plans and ideas. The same applies – perhaps even more so – to his relations with Elizabeth, who, for example, confided to Peter that although nobody else loved her second child (born in 1315) because she was a girl, the queen herself loved her daughter even more intensely for this reason. Similar indications of the close relationship between Elizabeth and Peter can also be found elsewhere in the text of the chronicle. Peter essentially has nothing negative to say about Elizabeth (in this sense, her literary character takes over the role formerly played by Wenceslas II), and in addition to the clichéd representations of monarchs that were in standard use at the time, there are also *topoi* praising her as a woman. Moreover, Peter clearly enjoyed spending time in her company, and he continued to do so during the royal couple's marital crisis of 1319, when he was present at Elizabeth's court.

Peter maintained contact with "his" queen even after her relocation to Mělník following her separation from John and her forced departure for Bavaria in 1321. He

⁶⁷ For a summarized reflection on the depiction of Elizabeth in the Zbraslav Chronicle, cf. *Marani-Moravová*: Petr von Zittau 327-335 (cf. fn. 2).

grasped the first available opportunity to visit her in Bavaria when undertaking his regular journey to the session of the general chapter. Peter's next visit to the exiled Elizabeth in Bavaria took place no more than two years later (1323), when he noted the poor conditions she was forced to live in; he was also aware of the debts she had incurred in connection with her exile.⁶⁸ Peter's account of the queen's return to Bohemia in 1324 features a description of the welcoming ceremony as well as criticism of King John. On the following pages of the chronicle, Elizabeth is portrayed as a noble and devout monarch who suffered from many illnesses. The text does not explicitly mention Peter's participation in day-to-day life at Elizabeth's court, but the numerous acts by the queen (and also indirectly by the king) to the benefit of Zbraslav Monastery indicate that contacts were frequent; it was during the period up to the mid-1320s that a number of new buildings were constructed at the abbey. The queen's own fondness for Peter and Zbraslav is also evident in her final act, through which she attempted to secure a good future for herself in the afterlife: her devout efforts to establish a Cistercian convent for nuns at Újezd in Prague's Lesser Town (Malá Strana). This replaced Elizabeth's original idea for a Dominican nunnery, and it was to fall into the administrative purview of the abbot of Zbraslav.⁶⁹ Whether or not these material benefits contributed to Peter's view of the queen, it is evident that he remained very fond of her, and this affection culminated in his description of Elizabeth's death on September 28th 1330 – and particularly the lament following it. As in the case of his lament on the death of Wenceslas II, this text constitutes one of the pinnacles of Peter's literary production, incorporating quotes from the Bible and authorities combined with Peter's own ideas to create a moving tribute to his beloved queen.⁷⁰

Conclusion

What, then, do we actually know about Peter of Zittau as a person? Summarizing the hypotheses outlined above, we must acknowledge that answering this question requires us to undertake a complex process of interpreting and re-interpreting Peter's own works, drawing on basic tenets of literary theory according to which every author inevitably operates within the boundaries delineated by their own mental horizons – boundaries conditioned by a combination of the author's cultural and social status in the world (including the level and scope of their education), the aims they pursue in writing the specific work, and their awareness of their readers' expectations. It is thus necessary to bear in mind that Peter's personality can only be reconstructed on the basis of an analysis of his texts, and of the Zbraslav Chronicle in particular.

The Peter emerging from the Zbraslav Chronicle is a mature man who expresses his thoughts having reached at least the 44th year of his life; this is naturally reflect-

⁶⁸ MGH SS 40, 414-415, 427-428 (cf. fn. 2).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 480. – Emler, Josef (ed.): *Regesta diplomatica nec non epistolaria Bohemiae et Moraviae*. Vol. 3: 1311-1333. Praha 1890, 658-659, no. 1688; *Kopičková*: Eliška Přemyslovna 108-110 (cf. fn. 62).

⁷⁰ MGH SS 40, 480-486 (cf. fn. 2).

ed in his view of the past and the present. He takes the existential stance of a middle-aged man occupying an ambivalent position between the desire to use his life actively and a fear of unpredictable mortality. This position is the basic underlying feature of Peter's mentality. With advancing age, he increasingly takes a negative view of the present and idealizes the past. This gradually shifts him into the role of a moralist, a trenchant critic of his time and of key public figures, and an intellectual assuming a sceptical and dismissive view of everything new and untraditional – while paradoxically also displaying joy at the acquisition of new knowledge.

At the same time, Peter appears as a creative figure driven by a deep-seated intellectual and moral imperative to write, with a natural thirst for knowledge and a closely related desire to communicate acquired knowledge to others in order to rectify society as a whole, and the clergy in particular. Here it must be emphasized that Peter wished to be seen as a deeply religious and devout Cistercian monk – a man who erred, yet also repented for his sins and sought to live a more moral life. His devotion to the Cistercians led him to act as their ideological standard-bearer and propagandist. He was thus a moralist, a commentator on current events, a sentimental memoirist, and above all an author for whom the process of writing helped him to understand his place in God's plan. In addition to all this, Peter was a highly educated man by the standards of his time who had already acquired his learning before entering the monastery (certainly in more than one location), and his use of literary models and sources reveals a close affinity to the authorities whose works formed part of the Cistercians' intellectual and spiritual milieu.

Besides being a thoughtful and poetic intellectual and social commentator, Peter was also the abbot of Zbraslav Monastery, and in this role he distinguished himself as a systematic and pragmatic manager who was deeply committed to the economic and financial prosperity of the institution entrusted to his care. His pragmatism was manifested in his political activities: Up until 1319, he was a vocal supporter of King John's policies despite disapproving of the latter's lengthy absences from Bohemia. In 1319, however, following John's conflict with Queen Elizabeth, Peter changed course and abandoned his support for the king – though he remained a staunch defender of the interests of the kingdom as an entity. His basic political conviction could be characterized as a specific form of Bohemian patriotism combined with the idea of strong monarchic rule. Finally, Peter's response to the split between the royal couple reveals him as an emotive personality whose anger as well as other emotions, including love, were authentic and sincere. His work is imbued with adoration not only for the founder of the abbey at Zbraslav, Wenceslas II, but especially also for the Přemyslid Queen Elizabeth; he had nothing negative to say about her and clearly enjoyed her company. Simply put, Peter of Zittau was a man of many roles – a monk, an abbot, an administrator, a financial manager, a politician, an intellectual, and an author – but he never ceased to be a human being embodying all the most deeply human qualities.