

ABSTRACTS

THE LONG SHADOW OF THE GLORIOUS FATHER

Wenceslas IV and Charles IV in the eyes of their contemporaries

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Under the rule of Wenceslas IV (1363–1419), idealization of his father, Emperor Charles IV (1346–1378), quickly established itself. It was the result of political instability, the weakening of royal authority, and the strong opposition to Wenceslas. The idealized image of Charles IV was based on the official court propaganda and had already been disseminated during Charles' own lifetime by way of numerous texts created in the environment of the Prague court. Over time, it gradually became an effective instrument for expressing criticism of the contemporary situation within the Empire and the Kingdom of Bohemia. Wenceslas IV was subsequently often directly contrasted with his father: He was considered a politically passive and incompetent ruler, while Charles was portrayed as a wise, pious, and worthy monarch. The criticism of Wenceslas focused on his character flaws – especially his violent temper, his cruelty, and his proclivity for alcohol. Charles' rule was idealized as a golden age of peace and order that had supposedly ended with Wenceslas' accession to the throne. Thus Wenceslas IV stood in his father's shadow during his own time and beyond, which significantly influenced his negative image in history.