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The pretended miracle or the battle of Chlumec in 1126

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THE PRETENDED MIRACLE OR THE BATTLE OF CHLUMEC IN 1126

As the time and place of the play have been stated in the title of the present paper one should introduce the characters without delay. Of course we will limit ourselves to presenting only the protagonists, that is to say, the three most important persons: the German king Lothar and the two rivaling Bohemian princes Sobieslav and Otto the Black.

Let us discuss Lothair¹ first. After the death of the childless Emperor Henry V in 1125, a power struggle in Germany broke out immediately. The two most influential prince families, the Swabian Stauf family and the Supplinburgs of Saxony, became the main opponents. The emperor's nephew Frederick Stauf, the duke of Swabia at that time and the heir to vast estates in south-western Germany, received Henry V's deathbed designation as his successor on the throne. The majority of German princes, who safeguarded their political and economic interests, rejected this candidate. They supported the Saxon duke and margrave of Meissen and Lusatia Lothair of Supplinburg. Two factors seem to have influenced their choice. Firstly, he was already the leader of the anti-imperial opposition. Lothair had become the leader of a rebellion against Henry V, who had attempted to levy universal taxes in central Lotharingia and Saxony ten years before. The armed conflict ended in the defeat of the emperor, who had lost the battle of Mansfeld. Secondly, Lothair was elected German king because his financial and political position was much weaker than the other candidate's, which was considered as very important by many of his supporters. The ultimate decision was taken in Mainz in the summer of 1125, where the convention of the German princes ruled in Lothair's favour. The Saxon duke owed Adalbert, Archbishop of Mainz, a debt of gratitude. Lothair stressed his pro-papal attitude when he approached the head of the Roman Catholic Church to approve of his election. Naturally, the opponents did not surrender their weapons and, as a result, a ten-year ruthless civil war broke out in the south of Germany. Faced with

those internal struggles, Lothair, who had just come to the throne, desired spectacular successes and this is why he engaged in the Czech „row”, which soon afterwards ended at Chlumec.

A contemporary anonymous author, the so-called Canon of Vysehrad, wrote a characterization of the second protagonist, Sobieslav². After Sobieslav's death in 1140, he wrote, „Alas! I cannot describe how depressed and outraged Bohemia was at that time. It was right to worry if it had lost such a protector and father. /The prince/ loved his homeland so much that he looked after his subjects and was ready to die struggling for the freedom and honour of his people. This is why he avoided sensual pleasures, which had exhausted many a man, by any available means. Prince Sobieslav was a brave man, an outstanding personality, a kind interlocutor, a warrior of courage, a far-sighted counselor, a generous benefactor... This honourable, virtuous and eminent prince suddenly met his death on 14th February”³. This description is, to a large extent, a stereotype falling into the category of works called „prince mirrors” (*specula principum*). It does, however, contain some elements of historical realism. The Canon of Vysehrad praises Sobieslav for his deeds and characteristics, but the prince's life was difficult, full of hardships and it was not a success story. Sobieslav, who was the youngest son of the first Bohemian king Vratislav II and his third wife, Svatava, was first mentioned by written sources in 1107. He was a good example of the political chaos that reigned in Bohemia at the beginning of the twelfth century. The country was a scene of rivalry and conflict as different members of the Premyslid dynasty engaged in a power struggle.

² For more information on the chronicle cf.: A. B a c h m a n n, *Beiträge zu Böhmens Geschichte und Geschichtsquellen II. Der erste Fortsetzer des Kosmas*, „Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung”, XX, 1899, pp. 39 seqq.; XXI, 1900, pp. 209 seqq.; V. N o v o t n ý, *Studien zur Quellenkunde Böhmens I. Der erste Fortsetzer des Cosmas*, ibidem 24, 1903, pp. 531-552; A. B a c h m a n n, *Der erste Fortsetzer Kosmas*, „Zeitschrift des deutschen Vereines für die Geschichte Mährens und Schlesiens”, X, 1906, pp. 301 seqq.; V. N o v o t n ý, *Zur böhmischen Quellenkunde I. Der erste Fortsetzer des Cosmas*, „Vestník královské české společnosti nauk”, VII, 1907, pp. 1-114; F. L i n k, *Astronomické zprávy v Kronice Vyšehradského Kanovníka*, „Československý Časopis historický”, 9, 1961, pp. 559-571.

³ *Kanovník vyšehradský*, [in:] *Fontes Rerum Bohemicarum II*, ed. J. Emler, Praha 1874, p. 233; the Polish version after: *Kronikarze czeszy. Kanonik Wyszehradzki. Mnich Sazawski (Czech Chroniclers. The Canon of Vysehrad. The Monk of Sazawa)*, ed. M. Wojciechowska, Warszawa 1978, p. 100.

¹ The characteristics of the reign of this ruler in: W. B e r n h a r d i, *Lothar von Supplinburg*, Berlin 1879; E. W a d l e, *Reichsgut und Königsherrschaft unter Lothar III (1125-1137). Ein Beitrag zur Verfassungsgeschichte des 12. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 1969; W. P e t k e, *Lothar von Süpplingenburg (1125-1137)*, [in:] *Kaisergestalten des Mittelalters*, hrsg. von H. Beumann, 3. Aufl., München 1991, pp. 155-176; J. L a u d a g e, *Symbole der Politik – Politik der Symbole. Lothar III. als Herrscherpersönlichkeit*, [in:] *Heinrich der Löwe und seine Zeit. Herrschaft und Repräsentation der Welfen 1125-1235*, II. Essays, hrsg. von J. Luckhardt und F. Niehoff, München 1995, pp. 91-104.

Sobieslav spent a few years in Poland but never had good relationships with his brother Vladislav I, who from 1109 onwards, ruled over Bohemia. Sobieslav's participation in Bolesław the Wry-Mouthed expedition to Bohemia against Vladislav in 1110 proves that he had personal animosity towards the Czech king. Mutual relationships remained hostile, but there were some more peaceful periods as well. Sobieslav governed part of Moravia for a few years, because he had received the districts of Znojmo and Brno. Vladislav I deprived his brother of the lands, for some reason in 1123. Sobieslav reacted in the well-trying way and fled to Poland again. As soon as he had learnt of his brother's illness, he returned to Bohemia at the turn of 1124. He was, however, afraid to arrive in Prague and traveled throughout Bohemia trying to find supporters, who would back him as the successor on the Czech throne after his brother's death. Eventually, their mother, Svatava, solved the conflict by asking the two brothers to forgive each other. They met in a palace in Vysehrad on Maundy Thursday 25th march 1125 and Vladislav approved of Sobieslav as his official successor. Vladislav died on April 13th 1125 and Sobieslav became King of Bohemia. He did not, however, enjoy his position for a long time, because there appeared the third protagonist of our story, Prince Otto the Black.

Prince Bretislav I's grandson was the prince of Moravia, but he wanted to seize the Czech throne as a member of the Premyslid dynasty (mutual relationships between the Bohemian and Moravian princes were very complexed). Otto met his first great chance during Prince Świętopełk's expedition to Poland in 1109. Świętopełk was treacherously murdered and his faithful supporter Otto was proclaimed the new ruler. However, this way of electing the monarch did not follow Czech tradition, where the opinion of the most important magnates had always been respected. Consequently, the decision was cancelled in Bohemia and the son of the first Czech king Vratislav, Vladislav, sat on the stone throne of the Premyslids. Otton's original animosity towards the new ruler (as a result of which he even spent three years in prison at Křivoklat Castle) gradually turned into a friendship, especially when the two men became brothers-in-law. Therefore one should not be surprised that when at the turn of the year 1124 rumours were going around that Vladislav was ill (see above), after the disappointing episode which took place fifteen years ago, Otto expected to finally come to the throne. He arrived in Vysehrad to spend the last hours with the dying monarch in order to keep his finger on the pulse. His expectations were in accordance with the rules of contemporary Czech succession law. In his chronicle of the beginning of the twelfth century Kosmas, the canon and dean of the chapter of Prague⁴, associates the law with Sobieslav's grandfather, Bretislav I. In Kosmas' opinion, after gathering all the leaders of the

Czech magnates, he made them obey the rule stating that always the eldest member of the Premyslid dynasty should be elected King of Bohemia⁵. Unfortunately, that rule, meant to solve potential problems, brought about numerous conflicts, because obviously every successive ruler desired to save the throne for his firstborn son, who might not have been the eldest male member of the dynasty alive. It may also be noted that traditionally an elite of magnates was to supervise the lawful execution of the succession law. The elite had a say in electing and approving of a new monarch. Before his death Kosmas, who wrote his chronicle to the year 1125, managed to mention that the wise, generous and kind-to-everyone Sobieslav came to the throne, that he

mezi starou epikou a kronikami, „Strahovská knihovna”, 11, 1976, pp. 123-151; P. H i l s c h, *Herzog, Bischof und Kaiser bei Kosmas von Prag*, [in:] *Geschichtsschreibung und geistiges Leben im Mittelalter. Festschrift F. H. Löwe zum 65. Geburtstag*, hrsg. von K. Hauck und H. Mordeck, Köln – Wien 1978, pp. 356-372; R. N o v ý, *Dvoji redakce Kosmovy Kroniky Čechů*, „Acta Universitatis Carolinae, Philologica et Historica”, 1981, 2, „Studia historica”, 21, pp. 93-123 (published in 1983).

⁵ *Cosmae Pragensis Chronica Boemorum*, ed. B. Bretholz, „Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum”, Nova Series, vol. II, Berolini 1923, pp. 101-102: „Dux Bracizlaus ... convocat eos qui forte aderant terre primates, quibus astantibus verbis fatur talibus: Quia me mea fata vocant et atra mors iam pre oculis volat, volo vobis assignare et vestre fidei commendare, qui post me debeat rem publicam gubernare. Vos scitis, quia nostra principalis genealogia partim sterilitate partim pereuntibus in inmatura etate me usque ad unum fuit redacta. Nunc autem, ut ipsi cernitis, sunt mihi a Deo dati quinque nati, inter quos dividere regnum Boemie non videtur mihi esse utile, quia omne regnum in se ipsum divisum desolabitur. Quia vero ab origine mundi et ab initio Romani imperii et usque ad hec tempora fuerit fratrum gratia rara, testantur nobis exempla rata. Nam Cain et Abel, Romulus et Remus et mei attavi Bolezlaus et sanctus Wencezlaus si spectes quid fecerint fratres bini, quid facturi sunt quini? Hos ergo quando potiores ac potentiores intueor, tanto mente presaga peiora augurior. Heu mens semper pavida, genitorum de incertis fatibus natorum. Unde providendum est, ne post mea fata aliqua inter eos oriatur, discordia propter obtinenda regni gubernacula. Qua de re rogo vos per Dominum et obtestor fidei vestre per sacramentum, quatinus inter meos natos sive nepotes semper maior natus summum ius et solium obtineat in principatu omnesque fratres sui sive, qui sunt orti herili de tribu, sint sub eius dominatu. Credite mihi, nisi monarchos hunc regat ducatum, vobis principibus ad iugulum, populo ad magnum deveniet damnum”. On the principles of succession in the Premyslid dynasty see: J. L o s e r t h, *Das angebliche Senioratsgesetz des Herzogs Břetislav I. und die böhmische Succession in der Zeit des nationalen Herzogthums. Ein Beitrag zur altböhmischen Rechtsgeschichte*, „Archiv für österreichische Geschichte”, 64, 1882, pp. 1-78; O. B a l z e r, *O kształtach państw pierwotnej Słowiańszczyzny zachodniej (On the Shape of the Original West Slav States)*, [in:] *Pisma pośmiertne O. Balzera (The Posthumous Works of O. Balzer)*, III, Lvov 1937, pp. 124-154; R. S c h m i d t, *Die Einsetzung der böhmischen Herzöge auf den Thron zu Prag*, [in:] *Aspekte der Nationenbildung im Mittelalter*, hrsg. von H. Beumann, W. Schröder (Nationes I.), Sigmaringen 1978, pp. 439-463.

⁴ For information on the chronicle and its author cf.: D. T ř e š t í k, *Kosmova kronika. Studie k počátkům českého dějepiscetví a politického myšlení*, Praha 1968, by the same author, *Kosmas*, Praha 1972; J. B. Č a p e k, *Kosmova kronika ve svetle vztahů*

became King of Bohemia and that Czech people gave their consent to this. Moreover Kosmas claimed that the decision was taken according to the succession law⁶. This statement, however, was not true, because the eldest member of the Premyslid dynasty was Otto the Black. Nonetheless, after Sobieslav's succession to the throne the disappointed Otto was left with no choice but to leave Prague. Being aware of the fact that the struggle was not over yet, the new ruler decided to weaken his opponent by depriving him of the district of Brno and letting him keep only the district of Olomouc. As a result, Otto desired to take revenge. He did, however, worry about his future and this is why he did what Czech princes had often done before, that is to say, he approached the German king to support him.

The events that followed culminated in the battle of Chlumec. Many Czech and German accounts and mentions provide information about the ensuing situation. Naturally, they differ and are inconsistent. Let us, however, attempt to reconstruct the basic skeleton of the storyline⁷. In November 1125 at the meeting of the Diet in Regensburg Otto

⁶ *Cosmae Pragensis*, p. 238: „Regnante domino nostro Iesu Christo, trino et uno omnipotente Deo, uti supra retulimus, duce Wladizlao ex hac luce subtracto frater eius Zobeclus etate quidem iunior, sed maturis sapiencia maturior, manu largus, civibus acceptus, plebi utriusque sexus et etatis gratus omnibus Boemiis insimul hereditibus, XVI. kal. Maii iure hereditario in principatus solio elevatus est avito”.

⁷ The basic corpus of sources mentioning the battle and the circumstances: *Annalista saxo*, [in:] „Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum”, VI, ed. G. Waitz, Hannoverae 1844, p. 763; *Gesta Fiderici I. Imperatoris auctoribus Ottone et Ragewino praeposito Frisingensibus*, [in:] ibidem XX, ed. R. Wilmans, Hannoverae 1868, pp. 361-362; *Annales Patherbrunnenses. Eine verlorene Quellenschrift des 12. Jahrhunderts. Aus Bruchstücken wiederhergestellt von Paul Scheffer-Boichorst*, Innsbruck 1870, p. 148; *Kanovník vyšehradský*, pp. 203 seqq.; *Letopisy hradištsko – opatovické*, [in:] *Fontes Rerum Bohemicarum*, II, ed. J. Emler, p. 393; *Mnich sázavský*, ibidem, pp. 253 seqq.; Helmsold, *Cronica Slavorum*, [in:] „Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptorum rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum”, ed. B. Schmeidler, Hannoverae 1909, p. 98; *Regesta Imperii, IV. Regesten des Kaiserreiches unter Lothar III. und Konrad III. Teil I: Lothar III. 1125/1075/- 1137*, ed. J. F. Böhmer, neubearbeitet von W. Petke, Köln 1994, pp. 76 seqq. The most important works on the battle: C. Höfler, *Böhmische Studien I. Der Sieg der Böhmen über die Deutschen bei Kulm 1126*, „Archiv für österreichische Geschichte”, 15, 1854, pp. 305-317; J. Válek, *Kronika sázavská a zpráva její k r. 1126*, „Časopis Matice moravské”, 17, 1893, pp. 238-246, 309-317; D. Schäfer, *Lothars III. Heereszug nach Böhmen 1126*, [in:], *Historische Aufsätze K. Zeumer zum 60. Geburtstag dargebracht*, Weimar 1910, pp. 61-76; V. Novotný, *České dějiny*, I, 2, Praha 1913, pp. 574 seqq.; W. Wegener, *Böhmen und das Reich im Bericht des sogen. Mönchs v. Sazawa zum Jahre 1126. Mit einigen Hinweisen auf die Quellen zu A. Stifter „Witiko”*, [in:] *Festschrift für K. G. Hugelmann*, II, hrsg. von W. Wegener, Aalen 1959, pp. 787-813; P. Choc, *S mečem i štítem. České raně feudální vojenství*, Praha 1967, p. 389; *Vojenské dějiny Československa (do roku 1526)*, I, Praha 1985, pp. 90 seqq.; P. Čornej, P. Bělina, *Slavné bitvy naši historie*, Praha 1993, pp. 12 seqq.

the Black meets Lothar and makes his complaints. He accuses Sobieslav of seizing the throne illegally and tries to convince him to organize an expedition to Bohemia in order to restore him to power. He assures Lothar that the task is extremely easy. Otto was of the opinion that the Czech magnates would abandon the usurper and follow the rightful ruler, accompanied by the German king, as soon as German forces had arrived in Bohemia. It is said that the king did not hesitate long. It should be noted that Sobieslav, who had had good relationships with Lothair, failed to obey an old, traditional custom. A new Czech ruler coming to the throne had always paid the emperor or king of the German state a visit and had been enfeoffed with Bohemia. The difficult inauguration of his reign totally absorbed Sobieslav's attention and he did not carry out the ritual. Otto took advantage of the situation. The German king had every reason to back Otto. Firstly, he had an opportunity to place a ruler who would be totally obedient to him on the Czech throne. Secondly, as I have mentioned before, faced with a very difficult internal situation in the German state, Lothair needed a spectacular success that would strengthen his authority. After receiving the ruler's consent, Otto visited the most influential Saxon magnates and promised them a fortune if they took part in the expedition. A small and quickly mobilized army consisting mainly of Saxon warriors coming from eastern Saxony set off for Bohemia at the turn of 1125.

Many contemporary sources mention that the winter was very severe. There was frost and snow and vast areas in many European countries were flooded, which resulted in poor crops and famine. Flanders, Lotharingia, France and England suffered from „fames gravissima”. Despite those unfavourable conditions, Lothair decided to embark on the expedition in the winter, because he had no reason to distrust Otto and expected it to end soon. Besides, he had other plans for the summer of 1126.

On 16th February 1126 the snow started to thaw. Lothair may have been waiting for this, because he crossed the Meissen-Czech border two days later. The frost was not so keen, but the journey was hazardous. Streams of water and heaps of wet snow hindered the army. Most of the horsemen dismounted and some of them took off their armour. A detachment commanded by Otto went in front to look for the road and reconnoiter in case the enemy turned up. The army went along narrow forest roads. The soldiers were divided into several groups and formed long columns. Even Otto, who knew the area really well, lost his way, because of the hard conditions. Besides, Lothair's army did not take any security measures and wanted to surprise Sobieslav's forces. The latter, however, had ordered obstacles to be erected in the forest and reconnoitred the movements of the enemy. The garbage and little objects carried downstream are said to have given their position away. Thus Sobieslav knew much enough to try to fight and win only one decisive battle. He divided his army into three groups. Two of them accompanied Lothair's troops, forcing their way through the wet snow along a ravine, on the flanks while the third group was to wait in front of the

enemy army. The decisive battle was fought at Chlumec at the foot of the Ore Mountains on 18th February 1126. Now it is time to say a few words about the place where the fates of the three protagonists were decided.

This little stronghold belonging to the Premyslid dynasty and situated near the border, 9 kilometres to the south-west of Teplice, was built to gain control of an important mountain passage. The so-called Serbian road, connecting Prague with Meissen, ran there in the early Middle Ages. After crossing the Czech lands border, the northern part of the road ran through the lands inhabited by Serbian Slav peoples⁸. It was a trade route used by traders and by enemy forces as well. The interesting thing is that the stronghold or motte at Chlumec is frequently referred to in all sorts of chronicles and documents, but its exact location remains unclear. The chronicler Kosmas, mentioned above, writes that the castle is erected where there is a passage connecting the frontier forest and the Czech lands⁹. The structure might have been built on Horka Hill near Ustí nad Labem, where numerous pieces of pottery vessels dating back to the eleventh and twelfth centuries have been found. Unfortunately, no remnants of fortifications have been discovered on this site, which made the researchers attempt to look for another location¹⁰. The stronghold discussed here was probably built at the end of the tenth century and it was part of the defensive system of the Czech lands. This initiative of the Premyslids took advantage of the thick forests with which the Czech lands were ringed. There were only narrow paths in those forests and frontier strongholds, which performed mainly military functions, were built in the open areas. Chlumec was one of them. The battle of 1126 was not the first battle fought in the vicinity of this fortress. Kosmas says that Chlumec played a major role in the war between the German king Henry III and the Czech prince Bretislav I in 1040¹¹. It was then that the governor of the stronghold was paid not to close the gates of Chlumec. Thus he let the attacking Saxon troops step on the Czech lands. His betrayal did not, however, determine the outcome of the campaign as Bretislav managed to defeat the main German army, which was trying to get from Bavaria to Bohemia, on the Sumava¹².

In 1126 the decisive battle was fought near Chlumec, for a change. We do not know exactly where the battlefield was, but the encounter might have taken place in the valley of the Jilovsky Stream (this place, however, is situated far away from Chlumec)¹³. Subsequently, the strategic importance of Chlumec declined, from the military point of view.

⁸ I. V á v r a, *Srbská cesta*, „Historická geografie”, 17, 1978, pp. 369-432.

⁹ *Cosmae Pragensis*, p. 95.

¹⁰ Cf.: M. Z á p o t o c k ý, *Slovanské osídlení na Ústecku*, „Archeologické rozhledy”, 30, 1978, pp. 264, 294.

¹¹ *Cosmae Pragensis*, pp. 98 seq.

¹² For the most exhaustive description of the events see: B. K r z e m i e ň s k a, *Boj knížete Břetislava I. o upevnění českého státu 1039-1041*, Praha 1979.

¹³ J. K u r k a, *Územní vývoj severních Čech a Dečinska a vztahy k jejich sousedství od konce 10. do počátku 14. století* [in:] *Z minulosti Děčinska*, 2, 1974, p. 10.

What really happened on February 18th 1126? Sobieslav and his army, divided into three parts, launched an unexpected assault on the enemy forces, crowded into the narrow ravine, and slaughtered them. The first detachment led by Otto the Black must have suffered the heaviest losses, but many Saxon magnates were killed too. There are no reliable statistics for the number of deaths in the battle. Czech and German sources give different figures but one can get their picture of the battle. The number of soldiers who were involved in the battle must have been considerable, though only *Annales Patherbrunnenses* give approximate figures and estimate Lothar forces at 3000 men and the Czech forces at 20000 or over 20000 warriors¹⁴. Thanks to above data the defeat did not seem so shattering. But, on the other hand, Lothar's troops cannot have been very numerous, because the expedition had been expected to be easy and effortless. Besides, Sobieslav, who had been informed about the situation, was able to mobilize a sufficient number of warriors. Fortunately, we have at our disposal some information on the losses suffered by both sides. Undoubtedly, the number of deaths in the Saxon army was much larger than the number of deaths in the Czech army. The Canon of Vysehrad writes that besides the shielded warriors killed 500 German magnates and 3 Bohemian magnates lost their lives in the battle¹⁵. German sources agree that Lothar's army suffered heavy losses, mention deaths in the Czech army, but do not give any figures. Even if we assume that the Canon of Vysehrad faked the figures and used them to the Czechs advantage, the fact that many a German warrior died cannot be questioned. The widespread hatred towards the Czechs observed in Saxony after the defeat seems to be confirmation of the above supposition. Otto the Black, who had inspired the Germans to mount the expedition, did not escape death either and the list of victims in the Saxon army is very long. Let us mention the most outstanding personages: Count Milo von Ammensleben, Gebhard von Querfurt, Berengar von Quenstedt, Walter von Arnstedt, Berthold von Achim, Count Adolf von Schaumburg's elder son, Hartung. Among others Albrecht the Bear and Ludwig von Lohra were taken captive.

Whereas the course of events in the first phase of the battle and the clear victory of the Bohemian side cannot be questioned, the situation that followed, particularly the final stage, seems to be much more mysterious. Accompanied by his most faithful men Lothar, climbed a nearby hill or hillock in order to attempt to repulse the enemy. He soon realized the place was ringed by enemy troops and he was doomed to lose the battle. This is why he decided to enter into negotiations. Different sources contain different accounts of this stage of the battle. The interesting thing is that the differences do not depend only on the nationality of the author of a piece of writing. Different German authors also held different points of view. Their opinions depended on their political orientation regarding the conflict between Lothar and the Stauf family taking place in

¹⁴ *Annales Patherbrunnenses*, p. 148.

¹⁵ *Kanovník vyšehradský*, p. 203.

Germany at that time. Otto von Freising, who was one of the most outstanding chroniclers, was not fond of Lothar. As a result, the very structure of his account makes the reader wonder about the situation, though the chronicler does not say anything openly. He says that the king with a handful of his most faithful men fled on a hill, from where he watched the events that followed. It was then that Heinrich von Groitzsch, the nephew of Sobieslav, set off on a mission, entered into negotiations and signed a truce agreement. On seeing that the Czech prince threw himself down onto the ground, begged him for forgiveness, vowed to be loyal and faithful, returned the captives and was enfeoffed with the Czech state¹⁶. Indeed this scene looks like a scene in a poor play. To the audience's amazement, the victorious Sobieslav humiliates himself before the king after the latter had fled the battlefield in a panic. Otto von Freising, who supported the Stauf family, did not depict Lothair as a hero. Other authors, who were well-disposed towards the Saxon family, did not mention Lothair's escape up the hill. According to those authors, the happy ending of the story was a result of the ruler's heroic attitude.

Let us compare the above description with the account of the final phase of the battle found in the work by the so-called Monk of Sázava. This monastery chronicle, probably written in the 1170s, is the first Czech source of this type¹⁷. The chronicle says, „After being heavily defeated, the king sent envoys to Prince Sobieslav. He told, ordered and asked him to come to him. The prince was not afraid of anything. He took a few magnates and approached the king. Standing before him, he said, „The best of kings! We were not made to harm You by the impudence of our recklessness nor by our proud insolence and desire to murder your officials. We did not mean to harm Your image, but as our envoys had told You before, we do not intend to take on the heavy burden of the new law, of which our fathers did not approve either. Now God's judgment has given us proof of justice and has eradicated any cause of a useless misunderstanding between both sides. Let us forget the causes of our hesitation for the sake of concord. We are

¹⁶ *Gesta Friderici I*, p. 362: „... tandem Heinrico Saxoniae marchione, qui de sorore ducis natus cum rege advenerat, mediante ad pedes imperatoris satisfactionem offerens humiliter dux venit hominumque sibi cum sacramento fidelitatis exhibens ducatum ab eo suscepit, captives reddidit; sicque princeps, portatis secum eorum qui nobiliores errant funeribus, cum multo merore rediit...”

¹⁷ The characteristics of this chronicle in: A. B a c h m a n n, *Beiträge zu Böhmens Geschichte und Geschichtsquellen*, „Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung XXI”, 1900, pp. 229 seqq.; V. N o v o t n ý, *Studien zur Quellenkunde Böhmens II. Der Mönch von Sazava*, ibidem XXIV, 1903, pp. 552-579; A. B a c h m a n n, *Das Geschichtswerk des Klosters Sazawa*, „Zeitschrift des deutschen Vereines für die Geschichte Mährens und Schlesiens”, XIII, 1909, pp. 25-59; V. N o v o t n ý, *Zur böhmischen Quellenkunde II. Der Mönch von Sazawa*, „Vestník královské české společnosti nauk 1910”, V, pp. 1-124; E. P r a ž á k, *Kosmas a Sázavský letopis*, *Slavia* 55, 1986, pp. 19-38.

ready to fulfill any just duty that had been fulfilled by our ancestors. Both our possessions and we are at Your complete disposal at the (right) time and in the (right) place, Your Majesty”¹⁸. The king replied, „If Prince Otto had not begged us to object to the whole enterprise, we would never have thought of letting any of the princes lay a finger on You. With God's kind permission, I would like You to enjoy the possession of Your lands and Your father's throne. Let us be linked by bonds of friendship and mutual love for the sake of the whole kingdom”. On saying this he presented the prince with a flag displaying the insignia of the principality. Then the two rulers kissed each other and together with his happy men, the glorious and honourable prince Sobieslav returned to his sweet capital to sit on the throne for sixteen years¹⁹.

The Czech chronicler's attitude is easy to understand, but one should pay attention to some characteristic facts. The author does not mention Lothair's escape, but he admits that the king was „heavily defeated” and sent envoys to Sobieslav to begin talks. Sobieslav, however, is depicted as a thoughtful and brave man. Such a way of portraying outstanding men followed the principles of the popular medieval topos of „fortis et sapiens”²⁰. The prince was not afraid to face the king, though he was accompanied by only a small group of magnates. Then he made an elegant and diplomatic speech. He mentions God's judgment and considers the battle the realization of the Creator's plans. The battle also strengthened Sobieslav's position as the successor on the throne (he won the power struggle with Otto the Black). It may only be noted that not all Czechs considered Sobieslav the rightful ruler. A few years later, in 1130, a plot was hatched to overthrow him²¹. The prince's sensible behaviour at Chlumec as well as the fact that he did not take full advantage of his victory over the German king and that he did not humiliate him profited Sobieslav a lot in after years. He did not triumph over his opponent and received the throne as a reward for this. Sobieslav died on 14th February 1140 only 4 days before the anniversary of the victory of a lifetime. After the battle of Chlumec Sobieslav had good relationships with Lothar and the Czech prince frequently assisted the king, and from 1133 onward, the Holy Roman emperor, during internal struggles in the German state and during the monarch's expeditions to Italy.

Sobieslav swore allegiance to Lothair at Chlumec. This ceremony was a manifestation of the traditional bond that linked successive Czech and German rulers. This situation

¹⁸ *Mnich sázavský*, p. 256; the Polish version after: *Kronikarze czescy (Czech Chroniclers)*, p. 174.

¹⁹ *Mnich sázavský*, p. 257; *Kronikarze czescy (Czech Chroniclers)*, pp. 174-175.

²⁰ Cf.: E. R. C u r t i u s, *Literatura europejska i łacińskie średniowiecze (European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages)*, Kraków 1997, pp. 178 seqq.

²¹ See: J. Ž e m l i č k a, *Hyšhrad 1130: soud, nebo inscenace? (K „nekosmovskému” pojetí českých dějin)*, [in:] *Husitství – Reformace – Renesance. Sborník k 60. narozeninám Františka Šmahela*, vol. I, ed. J. Pánek, M. Polívka, N. Rejchrtová, Praha 1994, pp. 47-68.

is, of course, a fragment of a broader and highly controversial issue, exhaustively described in the scientific literature. We shall not discuss it in detail here. We shall only pay attention to some forms of political actualization and interpretation of the events of the past, which can easily be noticed in the case of the battle of Chlumec. While describing Otto the Black's negotiations with Lothar that took place before the armed conflict, the above-mentioned Monk of Sázava cites the following conversation between the two men. Otto tried to persuade Lothar to intervene in Bohemia. He said among other things, „Of course we know that we should fulfill all Your orders, Your Majesty...” Lothar, in turn, „... set the prince's mind at rest and reassured the prince in front of all the Saxon dukes, „As we learn from our ancestors, Bohemia has always been ruled by the Holy Roman emperor and no prince has ever been chosen or elected ruler of the land without the emperor's initiative, support and approval. Therefore it becomes clear that anyone who had the courage to violate this order deprives us of our dignity and shows disrespect for Your and our authority as well disrespect for the whole kingdom, which must not be patiently tolerated²². The general tone of this statement corresponds to the historical reality of the 1170s, when, and not in the third decade of the twelfth century, the Monk of Sázava probably wrote his work. Although successive rulers of Bohemia had long been considered dukes of the German state and from at least 1114 onward, they were also cupbearers to the emperor, the election of rulers remained Bohemia's internal event²³. Besides taking into consideration the above-mentioned dynastic links the magnates had to approve of each new monarch and finally he was enfeoffed with his land by the Holy Roman emperor of Germany. In the time of Sobieslav the ruler of the German state could not yet decide who would sit on the Czech throne, but in the 1170s Frederick Barbarossa dealt with the problem in a less ceremonial way when he changed the Czech ruler a few times in a row. V. Novotný argues that while discussing the events that accompanied the battle of Chlumec half a century later, the Monk of Sázava intended to warn Barbarossa against doing so by reminding him that such practices had once ended in tears²⁴. The dependence of the Czech state on the German state was quite complex and many tendencies and political interests influenced the situation. For example, there were quite serious political circles who were against the complete integration of the two countries and wanted Bohemia to remain a dependent country „outside” the German state. The author of the collection of laws entitled *Sachsenspiegel*

Eike von Reggow took this view. While enumerating the officials who had the right to elect the emperor in the first half of the thirteenth century, he did not agree to include the Czech king in the noble group, because „he was not a German” („her nicht dudisch nis”)²⁵.

Finally, one should explain the real and obvious causes of the outcome of the battle of Chlumec, from the point of view of a medieval chronicler. Again let us quote the Canon of Vysehrad as saying, „Oh, mothers and fathers! I have no intention of concealing the truth from you. I hear both the armies witnessed the assistance of Almighty God. On that day, before the battle was fought between the Saxon and Czech armies an eagle was flying over the Saxon troops, croaking noisily and foretelling their death. A bell was also heard tolling. Furthermore, when almost a hundred Czech magnates and clergymen gathered around and defended Saint Wenceslas' spear, one of them, an honest clergyman called Vitus, who came from a noble family and who, as was the custom, was clad in armour and a helmet, like Achilles, wept with tears of joy and shouted to his fellow warriors, „Oh, comrades! Oh, brothers! Be persistent! I can see above the head of the spear Saint Wenceslas, riding on a white horse and dressed in white, fighting on our side! You can see him too!” The other men stared in amazement but could not see anything, because not everybody but only the ones who deserved to see God's miracle could see it. They cried and worried, and begged God to help them, and looked up and lifted their hands above their heads and sang the *Kyrie Eleison*. Finally, Almighty God won a victory over our enemy through His mercy and His saint envoy, our protector, Wenceslas. Amen. On doing this Prince Sobieslav sent his priest, who knew everything, to a village called Vrbčany, where he found the flag of Saint Bishop Adalbert on the church's wall. The flag was attached to Saint Wenceslas Martyr's spear in the battle with the Saxon troops, where God defeated them. Amen”²⁶.

This description contains an impressive collection of supernatural phenomena. They are quite common in medieval accounts, but such an accumulation of unusual incidents in a piece of writing is rare. The eagle performs a function which is typical of contemporary *topoi* and hagiography, but it is also a characteristic attribute of the Czech rulers. The bell that is tolling and reminding the warriors of the nothingness of a man's worldly existence, the priest resembling Achilles, Saint Adalbert's flag, an finally Saint Wenceslas' spear are all omens foretelling the Czechs' victory. Saint Wenceslas, dressed in white and riding on his white horse, fights on the right side and determines the

²² *Mnich sázavský*, pp. 256 seq.; *Kronikarze czescy (Czech Chroniclers)*, pp. 170 seq.

²³ Cf.: Z. F i a l a, *Vztah českého státu k německé říši do počátku 13. století (Podle kritiky pramenů)*, „Sborník historický”, 6, 1959, pp. 23-95; ; M. B l á h o v á, *Die Beziehung Böhmens zum Reich in der Zeit der Salier und früherer Staufer im Spiegel der zeitgenössischen böhmischen Geschichtsschreibung*, „Archiv für Kulturgeschichte”, 74, 1992, pp. 23-48.

²⁴ V. N o v o t n ý, *Studien*,..., p. 567.

²⁵ *Sachsenspiegel*, I. L a n d r e c h t, „Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Fontes iuris Germanici antiqui”, Nova series I, ed. K. A. Eckhardt, Hannover 1955, p. 127; cf.: H. H e r k o m m e r, *Eike von Reggows „Sachsenspiegel” und die „Sächsische Weltchronik”*, „Jahrbuch des Vereins für Niederdeutsche Sprachforschung”, 100, 1977, pp. 7-42.

²⁶ *Kanovník vyšehradský*, p. 204; *Kronikarze czescy (Czech Chroniclers)*, pp. 39 seqq.

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outcome of the battle. The motif of a saint assisting an army in a battle can be found mainly in medieval hagiography. F. Graus²⁷ argues that it is occasionally present in chronicles. A saint is sometimes the protector of a throng of believers gathered in a town, church or monastery or engages in a battle and assists one of the sides. That was the case with the battle of Chlumec. Saints are usually involved in battles with pagans and set off on missions and crusades, where they represent the Church as an institution. In the battle of Chlumec, which is not the only instance of Saint Wenceslas' participation in a battle, one can observe a *casus* that is relatively rare in medieval tradition. The main patron saint of the Czech state defends „Saint Wenceslas retinue”²⁸, the Czechs, that is to say, of course, the aristocracy, which could be considered the „nationalization” of the saint's participation in the battle.

Translated by Zuzanna Poklewska-Parra

²⁷ F. G r a u s, *Der Heilige als Schlachtenhelfer – Zur Nationalisierung einer Wundererzählung in der mittelalterlichen Chronistik*, [in:] *Festschrift für H. Beumann*, hrsg. von K. – U. Jaschke und R. Wenskus, Sigmaringen 1977, pp. 330-348.

²⁸ For further literature cf.: J. Ž e m l i č k a, „*Omnes Bohemi*”: *od svatováclavské čeledi ke středověké šlechtě*, „*Mediaevalia Historica Bohemica*”, 3, 1993, pp. 111-133.