

## Abstract

### The world of Cosmas.

### The image of political nation in the oldest Czech chronicle

This work focuses on the image of the political nation in the oldest Czech chronicle – *Chronica Boemorum* (*The Chronicle of Czechs*) by Cosmas, “the first Czech historian” [Robert Bartlett, University of St Andrews: “Bohemia made a spectacular debut in this respect with Cosmas of Prague, whose vivid prose style, gifts of powerful characterization and ability to convey action, and the occasional personal touches he allows (such as the yearning picture of his long-gone student days) make him not only a vital historical source for the Premyslid lands but also one of the great writers of the Middle Ages. He initiated a tradition which continued, with peaks and plateaux, throughout the Premyslid period, and this was important, for a native historical tradition was one of the marks of a Latin Christian society.”]

Cosmas’ Chronicle (*The Chronicle of Czechs*) is part of the context of “national history”. Cosmas wrote a scholarly, entertaining, but also politically committed work, presenting a “national program” of sorts. This was no Czech specialty – when we think of Europe in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century, we see a garden of sprouting new nations, the medieval “spring of nations”. The first national states, with clear territorial and institutional character, as opposed to states as personal pacts, have their own historians, naturally.

The core of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century nationalism was the birth of “political nations” justified through history. Created images of historic events conformed to the current nationalist needs. In the past, the ideal relationship between the king and aristocracy was sought; nation should work in unity, yet the aristocracy and the king slowly disconnected from the nation and found their place in closed, isolated institutions. National saints and patrons play an important role; the process ends with the ruler being no longer the embodiment of the nation, changing into the greatest, yet private entity. “Res publica” shifts towards aristocracy, representing “the nation”, “the land”. Historians become ideologists who serve “national interests”. “All Czechs”, in reality the powerful élite, are defined by the author of the chronicle as the *political nation* via a common ancestor, but, more importantly, via the relation towards the duke and the ruling dynasty.

“Sort of political sociology, an inherited disease of Czech scholars” (D. Třeštík), or, in other words, political propaganda – the unifying myth being the legend of the Přemyslid

dynasty, and others, too... It is clear that our exploration of Cosmas' legends is just at the beginning, proven by the recent valuable findings of Slovak literary historian Martin Golem who had exceptional results in his analysis of the Maiden's War. Significant interpretational possibilities are also offered by the often marginalized Luckan War.

The main tool of propaganda is the unifying legend and the recognition of the common enemy. Cosmas' idea of the "chosen nation" ("political Augustinism") stresses the importance of St Vojtěch (Adalbert) as the "medium" of God's grace. S. Vojtěch along with St Wenceslas symbolizes the stronger bond between the divine and the mundane in Prague, and also the unity of the Czech nation. The unity, however, isn't perfect: the „treacherous, hateful and evil" members of the Vršovci clan are Kain's brood. This, however, is a fact based on the unified decision of all the other dukes and *all Czechs* and certified by Vojtěch's "holy words". "The struggle of the Přemyslids against the double-faced Vršovci clan forms one of the key lines of Cosmas' narration." In fact, we are looking at a purely Czech version of a collective enemy, the concept of the Enemy. No positive ideas (no matter how "holy" or "divine") can work without a negative counterpart.

The core theme of Cosmas' world is the relation between the duke and "all Czechs". In their personal relations and acts, these protagonists are those who determined politics and the fate of the land. In the early Middle Ages, politics usually revolved around succession and the election of the duke. Succession was not only an abstract law, it was a set of particular, albeit model "political plays". In any case, we look at this world and its rules through a polyvalent, complex work that needs to be seen as a genre in its own right.

It seems that Cosmas' ideas and images are best interpreted using the tools of Dumézil's comparative mythology (D. Třeštík, J. Banaszkiwicz, M. Golema), as well as "political anthropology" of European Middle Ages (G. Althoff, Z. Dalewski et al.).

**Key words:** medieval studies – medieval historiography – national history – Cosmas, ca. 1045–1125 – Cosmas' Chronicle (*The Chronicle of Czechs*) – political nation – legends (myths)