

JAN ZELENKA
Czech Academy of Sciences
Institute of History
ORCID: 0000-0003-2009-5898

The “foreigner” in Přemyslid Bohemia. Some reflections on the depiction of foreigners in medieval sources

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Research into the theme of the foreigner or the “foreign” depends in general on the basic definition of these terms. In the case of Czech medieval sources, a clue is immediately clear: Claretus’ Glossary, a Latin-Old Czech dictionary in verse, compiled in the second half of the 14th century, provides a contrast to the Latin term *terrigena* — translated into Old Czech as *zemenyn* (“countryman”) — with the term *alienigena* — translated as *czyzozemecz* (“outlander”, literally “one from a foreign country”).¹ On the basis of Claretus’ record, one might consider whether the foreigner in medieval Bohemia did not approach the definition of the sociologist Alfred Schütz, who regarded the foreigner as a person without the graves of his ancestors and shared memories in his place of residence, and thus from the point of view of the local population a person without a history and a past.²

¹ *Glossarius*, VI/1 De homine, 923–924: “Vir muz, terrigena zemenyn sit, femina zena; Masculus est samecz, alienigena czyzozemecz.”

² Schütz 1944, pp. 499–507, esp. 502: “To him [the Stranger] the cultural pattern of the approached group does not have the authority of a tested system of recipes, and this, if for no other reason, because he does not partake in the vivid historical tradition by which it has been formed. To be sure, from the stranger’s point of view, too, the culture of the approached group has its peculiar history, and this history is even accessible to him. But it has never become an integral part of his biography, as did the history of his home group. Only the ways in which his fathers and grandfathers lived become for everyone elements of his own way of life. Graves and reminiscences can neither be transferred nor conquered. The stranger, therefore, approaches the other group as a newcomer in the true meaning of the term. At best he may be willing and able to share the present and the future with the approached

The situation depicted in medieval sources is somewhat more complex, however. On the basis of Anna Aurast's recent comparative analysis of the Czech *Chronicle* of Cosmas and the Polish *Chronicle* of Gallus Anonymous it would seem that the term "foreigner" also encompassed several individuals or groups from their own "homelands". The author has convincingly shown that the definition of "foreigner" was likewise met by persons who, from the point of view of the authors of the studied texts (and their own social groups), did not come other countries, but who displayed certain social, cultural etc. differences.³

Clearly this is not a surprising discovery, but rather a logical consequence of the corporate body of medieval society. Put more simply: it can justifiably be assumed that the more "social bubbles" and thus imaginary "borders" appear in society, the more rapid the multiplication of individuals, phenomena etc. which might under certain circumstances be viewed as "foreigners" or "foreign".

Nevertheless, the brief consideration that follows does not aim to narrow the definition of the "foreigner" in Czech medieval sources or to provide further evidence of the multi-layered nature of the term. The author examines only the question of whether and by what means the issue of "foreigners" might extend into other thematic areas under discussion within the framework of contemporary medieval studies. Historiographic treatises on foreigners in medieval Bohemia regularly point to the Inaugural Diploma of King John of Luxembourg, which the monarch drew up on the occasion of his ascent to the throne in 1310.⁴ In one of the points which the king was obliged to accept by the Bohemian nobility, John bound himself not to entrust to a foreigner any office linked to pension.⁵ In the literature we may come across the opinion that this requirement arose in particular out of the unhappy experiences of the domestic nobility with the developments following the death of King Přemysl Otakar II, i.e. the turbulent period of the Brandenburg administration, when Přemysl's underage son and successor Wenceslas II lived outside Bohemia with his

group in vivid and immediate experience; under all circumstances, however, he remains excluded from such experiences of its past. Seen from the point of view of the approached group, he is a man without a history."

³ AURAST 2019.

⁴ The Inaugural Diploma of King John, cf. BOBKOVÁ 2018, pp. 75–81.

⁵ While the original conception of the stipulation, preserved in the formulary of Bishop Jan IV of Dražice, exhaustively enumerated the ranks, estates and rights that were not to fall into the hands of foreigners ("[...] quod nullum capitaneum, nullum purcravium vel castellanum in castris nostris, nullum beneficiarium vel officiale aliquem in Boemia vel Moravia vel in curia nostra ponemus alienigenam, nec bona, possessiones vel castra, vel officia aliqua alieni genis ipsis in perpetuum vel ad tempus dabimus, nec eos hereditare in regno Boemiae aliqualiter admittemus [...] quod nullum alienigenam vel extraneum in Boemia vel Moravia hereditates, castra, possessiones, bona immobilia vel jura aliquae mere vel empta retinere aliquatenus admittemus." PALACKÝ, p. 333), the final version of the document contained only a general mention of a prohibition on filling offices ("[...] quod numquam alicui [...] aliquod officium suppe comittemus." RBM, III, No. 29, p. 11).

guardian, Otto V of Brandenburg. Sometimes it is seen as a reaction to the brief rule of Henry of Carinthia after the death of the last Přemyslid ruler, Wenceslas III.⁶

Yet similar stipulations can be found from almost the very beginning of the domestic tradition of chronicling. They appear first in Cosmas' *Chronicle*. In 1068 Prince Vratislav II initiated the election of a new Bishop of Prague, putting forward his chaplain of German origin, named Lanc. A section of the noblemen present on the occasion objected to this choice, however. The spokesman for the group argued that the bishopric had been promised to Vratislav's brother Jaromír, and that it was absolutely unnecessary to elect a foreigner, when it was possible to find a range of persons suitable as bishops from among chaplains of local origin. He finished his speech by stating that no foreigner could love the people and wish better for the country than a native. The opposition to the ruler's wish was successful, and Jaromír took the see.⁷ A similar situation was described a century later by the Abbot of Milevsko and chronicler, Jarloch. In 1170 there was again an election for a new bishop. According to the chronicler, however, this was, in fact, not an election, but the wilful imposition of a certain Fridrich, chaplain and relative of Princess Elizabeth, wife of the ruling prince Bedřich. As Jarloch stressed, he would never have been freely elected, as he was a foreigner and could not even speak Czech.⁸

Although both cases relate to a bishop's post, it is entirely clear that the view that important positions should not be in the hands of foreigners had been common in Bohemia long before the experience of the Brandenburg administration and the ascent of John of Luxembourg. What is not clear, however, is whether this fact attests to the Czechs' attitude to foreigners, or whether it has other and deeper roots. At the same time the surviving sources of domestic provenance make it clear that foreigners appeared at the Přemyslid and later Luxembourg courts routinely, often holding important positions as counsellors or diplomats. Moreover, the sources explicitly say that to behave kindly and generously to foreigners was a mark of noblemen and rulers. An unknown chronicler included generosity to foreigners among

⁶ Chaloupecký 1949, p. 98; cf. Starý 2017, p. 22ff; on the situation after the death of Přemysl Otakar II, see Žemlička 2017, p. 43ff.

⁷ COSMAS 1923, II/22, pp. 114–115: “Erat autem tunc temporis in curia ducis quidam Lanczo capellanus, de Saxonia nobili prosapia natus, [...] Aut si tibi displicet frater tuus, cur sordet nostratum clerus non modicus, scientia eque preditus ut iste Teutonicus? O si tot habeas episcopatus, quot cernis capellanos hac in terra progenitos episcopio dignos! An putas, quod alienigena plus nos diligit et melius huic terre cupiat quam indigena? Humana quippe sic est natura, ut unusquisque, quacumque sit terrarum, plus suam quam alienam non solum diligit gentem, verum etiam si quiret, peregrina flumina in patriam verteret. Malumus ergo, malumus caninam caudam aut asini merdam quam Lanczonem locarier super sacram cathedram.”

⁸ GERLACUS 1874, p. 463: “[...] nobilis homo et diues de Saxonia, Fridericus nomine, ignarus omnino boemicae lingue, cognatus et ipse reginae, cuius fauore potius quam iudicio ecclesie factum est hoc in eum; nam sponte sua aduenam et linguae imperitum non eligerent.”

the positive attributes of Přemysl Otakar II in his tribute to the dead king.⁹ We might justifiably ask whether the fundamental problem was the foreigner or the offices and overall form of the administrative structure that they represented.

After all, the sources react similarly to other groups of individuals as to foreigners. Once again we can refer to Cosmas' *Chronicle*, which for the year 1124 records a story about a convert, the Jew Jacob, who was raised above his station and occupied the post of "royal governor" (*vicedominus*) of the prince, which for Christians was a terrible torment.¹⁰ Cosmas also takes a remarkably hostile position with regards to a certain Vacek; while the latter appears in the pages of the chronicle as a "count palatine" with considerable influence, the chronicler mentions with disdain that he was born beneath a peasant mill, and offensively refers to him as a servant of servants.¹¹ It could thus be said that within the Bohemian intellectual milieu there was a fairly clear preconception regarding the broader circle of socially limited individuals (the foreigner, the Jew, the low-born), whom it was simply inappropriate to grant certain ranks and positions.

The problem was, of course, far from over even when a significant post was occupied by an individual from an appropriate cadre. When the Zbraslav Chronicle describes the actual exercise of power held by the South Bohemian nobleman Záviš of Falkenštejn on behalf of the underage Wenceslas II after his return from Brandenburg, it lists among the major shortcomings of his government the filling of the royal offices. Záviš apparently appointed his *familiares* to offices and benefices of the kingdom, and his friends subsequently did as they would.¹² It is not

⁹ *Annales* 1874, p. 337: "Nobilium virorum speciale solatium est quacunque terrarum parte advenientes hospitio recipere et benigne conrectare, et si quis motus zelo pietatis recipiat extraneos, succensus amore caritatis magis fervescit in propinquos." *Annales Ottakariani* 1874, p. 334: "innumera dona dedit extraneis."

¹⁰ COSMAS 1923, III/57, p. 232: "Eodem anno Christi Dei virtus et Dei sapientia cuneta suo nutu gubernans subsistencia hanc terrulam dignatus est sua eruere clemencia a laqueo Satane et eius filii Iacobi Apelle. Cuius picea dextra quecumque tetigerit, inquinat, et oris anhelitus ceu basilisci fetidus, quos afflat, necat; de quo etiam plurimi testantur veridici homines, quod sepe visus sit Sathan in humana effigie eius lateri adherere atque sua obsequia exhibere. Unde eum in tantam suis artibus extulit audaciam, immo demenciam, ut excedens suum modum tam sceleratissimus homo post ducem vicedomini fungeretur officio; quod erat magnum chaos christiano populo."

¹¹ The chronicle describes Vacek as *palatinus comes*. It is not, however, clear whether this was a fixed term for an important court rank or whether it merely emphasised Vacek's influence and position, cf. DVOŘÁČKOVÁ, ZELENKA 2011, p. 51ff. Cosmas adopts a noticeably critical stance towards Vacek, as indicated by the mention of his low origins at the very start of the chronicle, COSMAS 1923, I/35, p. 63: "[...] cum nostris temporibus Wacek sub mola rusticana natus tercium Heinricum, regem potentissimum — o indignum facinus — catena aurea ut molossum traxit in Boemiam; et quod iubet famulorum famulus, paret dominorum dominus atque Borivoy ducem iusti tenacem virum veracem, usque ad genua compeditum rex mittit in custodiā ceu iniquum hominem et mendacem."

¹² "Sewischius [...] familiares in ipsius regni non tam officiis quam beneficiis exaltaret. [...] amici autem ipsius, quos in beneficiis regni sublimaverat, de ipso presumentes, magnas ex tunc ceperunt in terra exercere insanias." *Cronica Aule Regie* 1884, p. 24–25.

at this point crucial to what extent the relationship of the chronicle's author to Záviš is projected into this description; more important is the almost envious attention devoted to the filling of these offices. Nor in this case does the description of Záviš's behaviour differ in form or content from the complaints or indignation provoked by the fact that important offices were held by foreigners or individuals from lower social classes.

The root of the problem can be found above all in the attempt to maintain a certain status quo and at the same time balance in the distribution of power and wealth that accompanied the apparatus of government. This balance could be tilted not only by foreigners and newly-promoted individuals, but also by excessive domination of one noble faction over another. None of these cases were welcome. The resistance to "foreigners" in these offices was thus not conditioned primarily by the fact of their being *czyzozemecze* (outlanders), but above all by their being further competition for limited resources.

At the same time this is no mere repetition of the warning that the Middle Ages and its relationship to foreigners cannot be seen through the nationalist glass established in the 19th century. The evident and uninterrupted continuity of thought from the early to the later medieval period is also worthy of note. The question thus arises as to whether the relationship to foreigners in royal offices does not also attest in some way to the continuity of the importance of power mechanisms. The significance of administrative offices, the division of power between the ruler and the nobility and other related questions have been the subject of continual dispute in Czech historiography since the end of the 19th century. It is hard to find any definitive resolution of the dispute, and its subjects are beyond the scope of this short paper.¹³ In summary, the 13th century is seen as a period of "great changes", not only in legal customs, the foundation of towns and the growing power of the nobility and estates in general, but also in the gradual fading away of earlier administrative structures and their importance. Nevertheless, the privilege of King Wenceslas II issued in September 1291 attests somewhat differently. The king forbids any noble, or anyone else, to claim, during military campaigns, lodgings in the estates of the Bishopric of Prague. Should this prohibition be broken by the holder of an office or benefice (*officialis vel beneficiarius*), they are to be stripped of their rank (*officio et beneficio priuatus*). Should the breach be on the part of someone who held no *officium uel beneficium*, they were to spend twelve weeks in prison.¹⁴

¹³ Cf. accessibly Zelenka 2019, pp. 117–127.

¹⁴ RBM, II, No. 1552, p. 666: "[...] ne aliquis baro, nobilis, vel miles aut alius quisque ad expeditiōnem nostram vel alias quocumque procedens in eundo, stando vel redeundo in bonis ipsius episcopi et episcopatus predicti se recipere seu ibi pernoctare uel morari presumant in eorundem episcopi et episcopatus — grauamen. Si quis autem — contra mandatum nostrum — huiusmodi recipere se in bonis eiusdem seu pernoctare uel morari presumpserit, si talis officialis uel beneficiarius fuerit, extunc ipso factu sit officio et beneficio suo priuatus; quodsi officium uel beneficium aliquod non habuerit, tum per duodecim septimanas in nostro carcere teneatur."

Although the text refers to “barons”, nobles and knights, the fundamental social distinction here is created by the fact of holding or not holding a royal office. The picture of the importance of the administrative hierarchy offered by this document also matches that of far earlier records from the 12th century.¹⁵ There is also, already mentioned, a telling difference between the draft of the Inaugural Diploma for the new ruler from the Luxembourg dynasty and its actual published form.¹⁶ While the Bohemian nobility wanted in the draft to reserve virtually all property titles, offices, ranks and rights only to “countrymen”, in the end they were content with just a general promise not to hand royal offices to foreigners. The preservation of this particular demand can justifiably be seen as evidence that these offices were, along with the other property titles mentioned, of first rate importance to the domestic nobility. Moreover, all of these examples convincingly show that the continuity of power mechanisms remained, throughout all the transformations of the 13th century, more important than researchers have assumed.

It is necessary to remember that it is still particularly difficult to identify “breaking points” in historical development which in a fundamental way reshaped the valid models of behaviour, thought and, for example, the functioning of the administrative apparatus, on the basis of the surviving sources. At the same time, this leaves to one side the question of whether contemporaries were fully aware of the ongoing changes, and thus whether this is reflected in any way in the source records. Essential changes unfolded over the long term at both the theoretical and real levels, however. Moreover, this need not have been a process that someone deliberately prepared and directed; it would be enough for one tendency to predominate over another at a particular moment. The earlier (older) and more “modern” mechanisms may have coexisted for an extended period of time in mutual accord too. The whole problem of the exposition of changes in the 13th century may therefore be purely methodological, and take place partially or even entirely outside the actual reality of social processes in the given period.

If we return to the passages of the Inaugural Diploma of John of Luxembourg, we can conclude that the perception of the foreigner and his possible position within the power structure of the kingdom did not depend solely on the events of the decades preceding John’s rule. At the same time, the understanding of the foreigner in the period was not an isolated phenomenon, but part of a broader complex of phenomena which together formed the contemporary picture of the conceptual and real worlds. The phenomenon of the “foreigner” can thus, under certain circumstances, also be used as a kind of analytical category, which may find application within the framework of what are at first sight distant themes.

¹⁵ Cf. ZELENKA 2019, pp. 147–175.

¹⁶ Cf. note 5 above.

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**The “foreigner” in Přemyslid Bohemia.
Some reflections on the depiction of foreigners in medieval sources**

The medieval perception of the foreigner and the “other” was not an isolated phenomenon, but part of a broader image of the ideological and real worlds, in which people who did not come from a different country but represented some social, cultural and other differences could be regarded as “foreign”. This is not a surprising discovery, but a logical consequence of the structure of medieval society. Thus we can assume that the more “social bubbles” and hence imagined “boundaries” there are in society, the bigger the collection of people, phenomena etc. which in some circumstances may be regarded as “foreign”. However, this brief reflection is not aimed at refining the definition of the “foreigner” in medieval Bohemian sources or at providing further evidence of the multifaceted nature of the concept. It focuses only on the question of whether and how the issue of the “foreigners” is reflected also in other thematic areas of modern medieval studies. Using several source examples, the author seeks to demonstrate how the phenomenon of the “foreigner” can in some circumstances be used as a kind of analytical category in seemingly distant topics.