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A Comparative Analysis of the First Depictions of London in Czech Literature

The aim of this study is to analyse the first depictions of London in Czech literature, namely in the travel records of the medieval author and traveller Wenzel Schaseck of Birkov and the German patrician Gabriel Tetzel of Gräfenberg and Nuremburg. These two figures made up part of the delegation of the Czech nobleman Leo of Rozmital and Blatna on his diplomatic mission through western European states in the years 1465 to 1467, a period coinciding with the reigns of the Hussite King George of Podebrady and Edward IV of England. The comparative analysis of both travel diaries in the context of historical sources will uncover not only the similarities and differences regarding the depiction of their mission and particularly the city of London, but also the credibility of their observations.

Original Czech travel works held quite a specific position in older Czech literature, as they only began to come into their own after the cessation of the Hussite wars.[1] The travel literature of the Venetian merchant Marco Polo was well-known, telling the author's authentic experiences from his travels to Mongolia and China, but was regarded as untrustworthy and labelled as a "million lies".[2] However, the hyperbolic and often unreliable travel accounts of Sir John Mandeville gained relatively significant popularity in the Czech lands, as well as the British Islands, later

inspiring authors such as Richard Hakluyt and Walter Raleigh, with their fantastic and naive concepts which drew on the travel writings of Pliny. It is interesting to note that Mandeville's travel writings – unlike Pliny's – held their popularity until the Czech National Revival period (from the 1780's to the 1850's).[3] While the onset of travel literature in England was naturally linked to the explorative voyages of the Renaissance, the appearance of authentic travel writings in the Czech lands was primarily linked to the missions of Czech rulers.[4] Medieval travel terminology was also enriched in this context by the term "lantfaré!", borrowed from the German language, and the equivalent Czech term "zjezdilec", denoting man who was given the opportunity to travel the world.[5]

The term "zjezdilec" (English traveller) appertains to Leo of Rozmital and Blatna, who undertook an arduous journey with his retinue, which several centuries later inspired the Czech author Alois Jirásek to write his historical novel *From the Czech Lands to the End of the World (Z ! ech a" na konec sv#ta)* in 1888. The aim of Leo of Rozmital's diplomatic travels, initiated by Leo's brother-in-law King George of Podebrady (1420 – 1471),[6] was to undertake a peace mission to meet with prominent European Catholic rulers and princes. This mission was meant to lead to the creation of a union of European Catholic states, cooperating in repelling Turkish aggression. This ambitious plan was aimed at the creation of a "court of conciliation" which would be financed by member states contributing one percent of their yearly income. An integral part of the project consisted of periodic planned conferences of rulers of the individual states. Although the mission was obviously to pursue political aims and attempted to promote George's schemes in a straightforward way, the true import of the mission was never stated in journal records. The records are limited merely to vague justifications of a pilgrimage carried out in piety and for religious

reasons.[7] It is also interesting to note here that the accompanying permission for the journey was not issued by the King, but by Queen Johana. Generally speaking, Rozmital's journey represented a diplomatic mission hidden under the facade of a private journey undertaken for religious reasons. According to Rudolf Urbánek, the true diplomatic aim of the journey may have been later eliminated in the translation obtained by the Catholic prelate Stanislav Pavlovsk", who dedicated this translation to the Moravian commissioner Zden#k Lev.[8] The translator most likely wished to avoid the risk of possible association between the contemporary commissioner Zden#k Lev and his pro-Hussite relative, Leo of Rozmital. Translator Hork" later dubbed Rozmital's journey as a knightly, courtly, and pilgrim-like journey.[9]

On 26 November 1465, the fourteen-member delegation set out from Prague with fifty-two horses and one supply cart. The retinue of Lord Leo was made up of Catholic squires from southwest Bohemia, personal servants and linguistically skilled heralds who were versed in coats of arms and genealogical relations and who worked as interpreters. Among the group there were also cooks, and even a jester and lute-player.[10] Wenzel Schaseck indirectly confirms the Catholic denomination of Rozmital's fellow travellers in his journal entry by commenting on the "confession of sins" in the city of Plze$ at the very beginning of their journey.

name Pollack most likely refers to the surname Polák, perhaps from the Sulislav Polák Family. Urbánek[13] and Letts[14] identically list the corruption of the surname Knysto, i.e. the damaged section of text most probably indicating the page, John Knizek of Beharov. Urbánek also gives hypotheses on possible genealogical variations of the members of the retinue.[15] The structure of Rozmital's retinue however confirms the representative character of the mission serving to spread the "good name and repute" of the Czech King abroad.

The journey was simultaneously recorded by two of the previously mentioned members of the mission – Wenzel Schaseck of Birkov and Gabriel Tetzel of Gräfenberk and Nuremberg. The character of Schaseck's and Tetzel's journal records was a priori predetermined by various authorial perspectives stemming from varied social statuses and also the experiences of both authors. Schaseck's journal reflects

with Schaseck's works, which during the period of the fading "victorious phase" of the National Revival in the 1830s and 1850s, the end of the nineteenth century, and the first half of the twentieth century were used mainly for stressing Hussite ideals and the reign of George of Podebrady. Czech researchers had only mere fragments of the translation at their disposal, for example, the annotated translation by Bohumil Mathesius which was published in the year 1940 together with Schaseck's journal accompanied by an introductory note by Rudolf Urbánek. The only complex translation of the complete Tetzel travel journal that exists today is paradoxically the renowned English translation written by Malcolm Letts, who uses a comparative viewpoint of both travel journals. Letts's translation is located in the State Research Library in Olomouc. In the year 2003, an excellent translation written by Lenka Líbalová[19] was published, making it the first complete translation of Tetzel's travel journal in the Czech language. Gabriel Tetzel can be considered the author (or more exactly the intellectual creator) of the travel records, although the text was recorded between the years 1469 and 1500 by Gabriel Muffel – Tetzel's cousin – who also participated in Rozmital's mission.[20] The whole manuscript most probably appeared in the middle of the fifteenth century and belonged to the Muffel Family. Tetzel's travel journal can be classified by its lettering as belonging to the branch of Upper German called Ostfränkische, typical for Nuremburg, Bamberg, and Würzburg in the years between 1350 and 1500.[21]

Wenzel Schaseck's travel journal was a better known source of information concerning Leo of Rozmital's journey in the years 1465 to 1467. This written source was probably created after their return from the journey, which explains various chronological and topographical errors which the author would have avoided in recording information directly during the journey.[22] The record was preserved in a

Latin version from the year 1577, which was the work of the Moravian prelate Stanislav Pavlovsk". It was published in the Czech language a number of times, for example in the year 1890 in Franti%ek Augustin Slavik's work, and in the years 1940 and 1974 in Mathesius's translation, which also formed a part of Malcolm Letts's English translation (see above). A record of Schaseck's writings can be found directly in the journal, such as the description of a contest in Brussels where the narrator passes over to the first person singular present and thus reveals his identity to the reader. The author uses similar techniques in other sections of the text; although speaking in the third person singular present, Schaseck's association with his own person is evident. This voice also appears in the narration of "favours in the London Court" (see the following). Schaseck's friendly and intimate relationship with Leo of Rozmital can be seen in the records: he might well have been Leo's favoured servant. Schaseck's trustworthiness is also apparent in the records, which gives evidence as to his role carrying Rozmital's accounts to King George and back.

It is worth noting that Wenzel Schaseck mentions Gabriel Tetzel in two sections of his travel journal (firstly in connection with the tournament in Cologne), while Gabriel Tetzel does not make any mention of Schaseck. He is not even named in the list of the diplomatic mission's members. Urbánek has speculated on the possible tension between Schaseck and Tetzel, the latter being a German who

In their journals, Schaseck and Tetzel emphasise different aspects of medieval London, as can be seen from the following extracts:

> Schaseck: London is a grand and beautiful city and has two castles. In the first, located at the very end of the city surrounded by the ocean's gulf, lives the English King. He was present at the time of our arrival. Across the gulf there is a bridge made of stone and quite long, and houses have been built on both sides of it stretching its full length. I have never seen such a quantity of kite birds as I have here. Harming them is forbidden and is punishable by death.[27]

> Tetzel: We have passed through Canterbury through the English kingdom all the way to the capital, which is home to the English King. Its name is London and it is a very vigorous and busy city, conducting trade with all lands. In this city there are many craftsmen, and mainly goldsmiths and drapers, beautiful women and expensive food.[28]

Their first impressions illustrate how Schaseck and Tetzel reflect on the same facts regarding London in different ways; both remaining faithful to their own character. Schaseck, whose travel experience was relatively limited, concentrates on the magnitude and grandeur of London and intuitively links

for the ocean's gulf might have arisen from his lack of topographical knowledge or possibly is the result of a translation error. Malcolm Letts uses more factually accurate terminology: " [...] This arm [the river Thames] is crossed [..]."[31] Schaseck's description of the bridge itself is perhaps coloured by his memory of Prague's Charles Bridge (or the Kamenn" Bridge), decorated with statues and sculptures along both sides, rather than the congested warren of shops and houses which perched above the low arches over the Thames. In contrast Tetzel's record reflects the viewpoint of a more experienced traveller and hardheaded negotiator: including information on the commercial activities taking place in London and comments, in accordance with his obvious interests, on the quantity of craftsmen, the significant prices of food and the beauty of the women. However, neither Schaseck nor Tetzel mention the marketplaces, shops, and warehouses along the banks of the Thames, which would perhaps be the significant features a modern historian of the period might choose to concentrate on.

Schaseck demonstrates a great sense for detail in his account of London's important sites visited by many travellers, for example Thomas Beckett's birthplace or the church in which Saint Keuhardus was laid to rest.[32] He marvelled at the skilful and carefully wrought decorations in this church and regarded the churches in London as being incomparable. Indeed, the quantity of churches in Medieval London was unique in the context of fifteenth- century Europe, with approximately one hundred churches contained within the walls of the old city.[33] This might possibly have given the members of Rozmital's suite the impression that London was a "city of churches". Schaseck has a similarly superlative and exclusive view of the holy remains and gold gravestones preserved in London. His illustrative description of London is supplemented by specific and quantitative information, for instance the twenty gold

According to Tetzel's account, the King was delighted by the great respect of his subjects, but in spite of this he did not hesitate to

from the countryside and from London, who were followed by trumpeters, pipers, forty two singers of the royal choir, forty two heralds, and sixty earls and knights. According to Tetzel's account, the Queen took up the rear of the procession with two dukes, followed by her mother who was accompanied by sixty girls and ladies. The Queen then listened to a lyrical mass and afterwards, along with all the members of her escort, took part in a banquet which took place in four separate halls. Lord Leo and his retinue were once again shown the utmost reverence, as they feasted at the tables reserved for the King's court and the King himself. On this occasion, Edward's chair was occupied by one of his most important nobles (most probably the Earl of Warwick), while Leo, according to Tetzel's record, sat a mere two seats to the side of him. Lord Leo also experienced all the privileges commonly reserved for the King himself, for example the tasting of various dishes. While the banquet was taking place, King Edward rewarded the royal trumpeters, pipers, jesters, and heralds with gifts to the sum of four hundred nobles.

After the banquet had finished, the members of Rozmital's suite were given the unique opportunity to view the Queen's banquet in the adjacent hall, which was attended by the Queen's mother and the King's sister and also by her courtiers and ladies of the court. Tetzel was successful in capturing the atmosphere of the banquet, which lasted for almost three hours. He also recorded the customs associated with the Queen's banquet during other similar events: the Queen sat in an elaborate golden chair alone at the table, as her mother and the King's sisters stood by. While speaking with the Queen, they remained kneeling until she tgoldm.07 2l en

which the Queen, her mother, and her sister-in-law were served the most select dishes, took place in absolute silence. After the banquet there was dancing, but the Queen remained in her chair and her mother continued to kneel at her feet with only brief

aristocratic residence.[50] In return, Leo of Rozmital treated the English nobility with numerous typical Czech dishes. The jousting tournament planned by Rozmital unfortunately did not take place.[51] Lord Leo, Achatz Frodner and Gabriel Tetzel later presented all their armour and horses to the English King as a gift. Before the mission's departure from London, King Edward reimbursed Rozmital for his expenses at the inn and assigned him a man who was to lead the retinue to the sea and help them procure a vessel.

Schaseck supplements Tetzel's accounts of London with information on the magnificent gardens and their numerous types of plants and trees, the beautiful churches, golden gravestones, and the quantity of holy relics there. Schaseck openly admits that although he tried his hardest, it was not possible to record them all. He also comments on the great quantity of full-time goldsmiths in London, of which there were approximately four hundred (according to Schaseck these were only master craftsmen, not employing journeymen). In the context of the structure and development of London's crafts this comment is quite accurate, as goldsmiths (or more accurately gold-beaters) belonged to one of the oldest crafts practised in London and first documented in the year 1180. In this year, according to Inwood, eighteen unregistered London livery companies including gold beaters were given a fine.[52] In the year 1327, the goldsmith's trade guild obtained a royal document enabling these crafts to be officially monitored in the city of London and essentially in all of England.[53] The Goldsmiths' House, the residence of London's livery company goldsmiths was located between London Wall and Cheapside. Neither Tetzel nor Schaseck, most likely because of their unfamiliarity with the English language, mention any definite locations of crafts by listing the names of streets whose

etymology reflects the types of products manufactured or sold there, for example Silver, Honey Lane, Milk Street, Bread Street, and so on.

Contrary to Tetzel, Schaseck notes the London custom of cordially welcoming new noble guests from abroad, who in turn give gifts to the women and maidens. He notes that "when guests first arrive at an inn the hostess comes out with her whole family to receive them, and they have to kiss her and all the others" and colourfully portrays this hostess as a female archetype of the city.[54] Members of the mission created astonishment at the length of their hair, which the Londoners assumed to be covered in resin. In listing various other pieces of information about England, Schaseck makes no effort to hide his fondness of practical matters and comments, for example, on the use of horses not only for transportation, but also for the transport of goods and special English wood from the forest.[55] He also makes a comment on the enormous length of the trains of women's dresses. Schaseck's description of England as a private garden surrounded and protected by the sea bears comparison with the death speech of Shakespeare's

52. Inwood, 116.
53. Ibid.
54. Letts, 54.
55. Schaseck also mentions the use of carts with two firm wheels for the transport of goods (&a%ek, 64).
56. &a%ek, 68; Tetzel, 27-28.
57. Letts, 49.
58. Ackroyd, 330.
59. Lenka Líbalová qted in: Tetzel, 12.