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## Call for papers

### EXPRESSING DIFFERENCE : EAST- CENTRAL EUROPE IN LATE MIDDLE AGES

Institute of Philosophy AS CR, Prague

21.-22. 10. 2014

The conference “Expressing Difference : East-Central Europe in Late Middle Ages”, organized within the research project supported and financed by Charles University in Prague, echoes and pursues some of the questions arisen from the research project “Later Crusades” lead by the Center of Medieval Studies of Academy of Sciences (Prague) and Université de Toulouse. The hypothesis of a “bohemian exemplum”, negative image of the Czech lands created as a consequence of Hussitism, was then formulated. Therefore, we suggest to examine this notion in wider methodological and geographical perspective.

“In order to hold reasonable discourse, human mind is constantly generalizing; it has a tendency to simplify and lump things together in order to characterize particular groups” (Meyvaert, 1991:5). Does an individual testimony result from a unique apprehension of unknown reality, or is it a product of pre-existing, pre-categorized, and rather collective imagery? These are classical, yet somehow schematized questions, which are to be asked in all studies of sources dealing with other geographical areas. In the scheduled conference, we suggest to narrow such a questioning to West European observations of East-Central Europe in the period of 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Our goal is to follow the mechanisms of creation, transfer and endurance of statements and images in the historical context of what might have been judged as a possible rupture of values; travelers or chroniclers facing disrupted reality of a foreign region.

There is no doubt that the Hussite movement was a generative impulse for the associative link between “Czech” and “heretic”. The Council of Basel explicitly and on their request defined the Hussite representatives as *Bohemi*. Turkish threat – and worse – their victories were as well the source of possible evaluations and stereotyping of concerned entities, Christian or not. These phenomena, however extremely interesting by themselves, should be, we believe, approached not separately, but as a system of image-production in a particular geographical frame. This is why we came to the concept of East-Central Europe, which allows to engage a comparative study within a coherently defined space. This region placed in the Eastern extremity of Christendom, borders immediately other ethnical, and most importantly, other religious groups. Its marginal position – viewed from the Western European perspective – is counterbalanced by a network of relations

with the German-speaking sphere and Western countries in general, displayed in economic, cultural and eventually political domain (namely, the case of the Kingdom of Bohemia belonging to the Roman Empire). This attachment is reinforced even further during the 14<sup>th</sup> century due to the installation of new dynasties of Luxembourg in the Czech lands, and Anjou in Hungary. Thus, when related to the Western Latin Christendom, East-Central Europe is a different space, but not essentially “other”, implying the perception of an important geographical distance and rather minor degree of interest. Such is our understanding of the framework within which the study of Western testimonies concerning the kingdoms of Poland, Hungary and Bohemia should be undertaken.

The capacity of differentiation is clearly paralleled with the extent of the horizons, either of the author themselves, or of its sources and informants. On the other hand, the accounts are often quite nourished by stereotypes. Outside of these two major factors channeling the perception and impacting onto the fabrication of an image, there are other, more immediate influences which may intervene into the process of description and creation of a narrative. On the basis of this methodological and conceptual background, which we consider necessary to pursue more profoundly within the conference, a set of questions connected to the religion emerges. What role does heterodoxy play in the figuration of lands and their inhabitants? What is the relation between the phenomenon of heresy and the imagery already issued as a result of ethnical or “national” observations? Does Hussitism represent an absolutely specific case, or are the judgments about it of a wider significance, and potentially applicable to other subjects situated even outside the borders of Christendom?

Another track to be followed is connected to war. This domain opens widely to a series of themes, such as the role of conflicts – Crusades, but more generally all “just” wars – in the way to envisage the others. The wars above mentioned are to be accompanied by a whole set of reasons legitimizing the enterprise, and very often they are focused on the description of an enemy with the aid of fixed images. However, even the specific aspects of the ideological and military organization of the campaigns against the enemies, Hussites, pagans, or Turks, cannot be excluded from our questioning.

We believe that the axis of study formulated in this way will help us understand in what extent a particular disruptive phenomenon functions as a generator of particular imagery, which could become a vehicle of a certain *exemplarity*, or, if such a process arises from a more general mechanisms: Do the perceptions of spaces and populations, as well as the resulting images, undergo transformations depending on political, religious, and cultural changes, or do they resist on the contrary despite all those momentary constellations and influences?

**YOU ARE INVITED TO SEND THE PROPOSITION OF YOUR PAPER IN FORM OF A HALF-PAGE ABSTRACT BEFORE 15 MAY 2014 TO THE E-MAIL ADDRESS [vejrychovav@seznam.cz](mailto:vejrychovav@seznam.cz) AND [vojta.bazant@gmail.com](mailto:vojta.bazant@gmail.com)**

**For the organizers :**

Mgr. Věra Vejrychová – ÚČD FF UK – Paris-Sorbonne (Doctoral student)

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Under the auspices of doc. Martin Nejedlý, ÚČD FF UK