

Indigenous or Foreign?

The Role of Origin in the Debate about the Suitable Candidate in Electing Bohemian Kings in the Fifteenth Century

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Abstract. In fifteenth-century Bohemia, the natural continuity of succeeding kings was interrupted, and the political situation resulted in searching for a new king and organizing the election. This procedure provoked comments on candidates from supporters and opponents. One of the criteria discussed was the candidate's origins. His labelling as a foreigner, or emphasis on alien origin and mother tongue was very often part of the strategy to defame the potential king. The article analyses how this specific criterion was integrated into other requirements to challenge the candidate's idoneity, introducing the various uses of this argument in contemporary sources.

Keywords: Middle Ages, medieval Bohemia, foreignness, George of Poděbrady, Hussites, medieval elections

The idea of determining a suitable candidate for a leading position through an election was not unfamiliar to the Middle Ages; on the contrary, it was standard practice in many contexts. We can refer to church dignitaries or to representatives of cities and universities. In all these cases, the election was conducted according to fixed procedures. In the case of the election of the king, the situation was more complicated, since the dominant model was hereditary succession to the throne, which constituted and symbolized greater stability. Although some medieval authors of theoretical treatises suggested that choosing the monarch by election could lead to the selection of a more suitable candidate, the need for a stable transition from generation to generation had its major advantage not only in the continuity of lineage, but also in predictability.¹ In this paper, I am deliberately leaving aside the very specific example of the election of a Roman king by the prince electors.²

1 Cp. Peltzer, *Idoneität. Eine Ordnungskategorie oder eine Frage des Rangs?*

2 Begert, *Entstehung und Entwicklung des Kurkollegs.*

Even in hereditary monarchies, an election was undertaken when the principle of heredity was disturbed by the extinction of the domestic dynasty. In Central Europe, in Poland, Hungary and Bohemia around the year 1300, the original domestic dynasty died out, and thereafter foreign kings were elected and enthroned in various ways, foreign dynasties ruled and for a long time. Usually, at such moments, topics related to foreignness and its political significance formed part of the political negotiations and communication.

In medieval Bohemia, the Přemyslid dynasty died out in 1306, then during the so-called ‘interregnum’ lasting until 1310, the king was elected (*electus*), but this act had no precise regulations and contemporary commentators did not see the act as a suitable and meaningful instrument.³ The chronicler Peter of Zittau’s rather caustic remark about the foolish people “who do not know what they ask for, and do not know what the person they elect is like”⁴ is a good example. In this case, ‘the people’ obviously refers to the so-called ‘political society’ (*société politique*), i.e., the nobility together with the representatives of the urban and ecclesiastical elites.⁵ The troubled period ended in 1310 with the election and accession of John of Luxembourg, who brought the Luxembourg dynasty to Bohemia. It was his personality that became a major theme in the perception of John as a foreigner on the throne, as shown in detail by Christa Birkel’s contribution in this issue of the journal.⁶

In Bohemia, the right to elect their own king was traditionally rooted in a privilege inserted in the so-called ‘Golden Bull of Sicily’ of 1212, which gave Bohemian rulers a hereditary royal title. In addition to defining the electors, in its confirmation of 1348, Charles IV stipulated that the election would only take place if there were no legitimate male or female heirs.⁷

Such an absolute absence of possible heirs rarely occurred in the fifteenth century; nevertheless, there were several more or less successful elections of a Bohemian king in the period after the armed phase of the Hussite Revolution (1420–1434), especially after the end of the reign of the Luxembourgs (until 1437) and before the

3 The extinction of the dynasty in 1306 was followed by a politically troubled period, as the rapid successions of the kings Rudolf of Habsburg (1306–1307) and Henry of Carinthia (1306; 1307–1310) did not allow the establishment and securing of stable royal power.

4 The note refers to the election of Rudolf of Habsburg as King of Bohemia in 1306, or the choice between him and Henry of Carinthia. *Chronicon Aulae Regiae*, 109–10: “Henricum [...] pro rege sibi postulat et eligit, quia nescit gens stulta, quid postulat, et qualis sit, quem eligit, ignorat.”

5 It is a social stratum involved in deciding the fate of the entire country. Cp. for instance the approach of Cazelles, *Société politique, noblesse et couronne*.

6 Birkel, “*Vos autem estis advena*”. Cp. Adde, “Élire le roi.”

7 On the Golden Bull, see Wihoda, *Die Sizilischen goldenen Bullen von 1212*. For the confirmation, see *Archivum coronae regni Bohemiae* Vol. 1/2, no. 51, 43–47. Cp. Tresp, “Gewalt bei böhmischen Königswählen.”

accession of the Jagiellonians (1471). My article will focus on these elections, specifically on the identification and assessment of the potential candidate, the perception of his 'national' identity, and the 'domestic' or 'foreign' labelling in the context of the pre-election campaign.

The electoral principle or mode of choosing a candidate for the throne emphasizes the importance of the complex discourse regarding the appropriate king and his suitability (idoneity). At the same time, it places more emphasis on the personal characteristics of the monarch, his origins, the perspectives of a hereditary title for his family, etc. Potential kings are assessed and evaluated. Moreover, as for example today, these conditions allow for a real campaign in favour of their candidate, which is often based on a negative assessment of the opponent. While there are few relevant extant sources, we can learn many things about the importance of the 'national' identity of candidates. The election usually occurs in a situation of crisis, conflict, and instability; therefore, communication is often rather escalated.

As František Šmahel shows in his seminal study, the idea of a promoter and defender of the right confession was intertwined with the concept of the 'true Czech' coined by Czech Utraquist scholars, and thus the two claims were combined. According to this idea, an appropriate Bohemian king had to be both a true Czech and an Utraquist.⁸

This opinion was repeatedly expressed on most occasions and it also worked the other way around, i.e., not only was the candidate's foreignness emphasised, but also his Catholic belief could be used as a reason for rejection.

In this article, I will discuss selected examples of elections in a chronological order, because the royal election and its course and reflection had a certain development, which culminated in 1458 with the election of George of Poděbrady. Based on the analysis of these different examples, I will then offer analytical insight and conclusions.

The development of the Bohemian royal elections begins at the end of the reign of Wenceslaus IV (1378–1419), when the authority of the royal power, on the one hand, gradually declined and, on the other, resistance to the eventual heir Sigismund of Luxembourg grew. This was certainly related to the confessional separation of the Utraquists from the Catholic Church, which was in majority. Sigismund, as the convener and protector of the Council of Constance and the ruler associated with the condemnation of Jan Hus, had no chance of gaining the sympathy of a large part of the Bohemian lords. Moreover, he was perceived as the one who led the crusade against the Bohemians.

8 Šmahel, *Idea národa v husitských Čechách*. This book was first published in 1971. See also Šmahel, "The Idea of the Nation in Hussite Bohemia". Another important book covers only the time before 1400, see Graus, *Die Nationenbildung der Westslawen im Mittelalter*.

Probably the awareness that the Bohemian royal title should be elective, combined with a general opposition, led to the rejection of the rightful heir to the throne and his secretly and hastily executed coronation being perceived as invalid.⁹ In a situation of exacerbated confessional discord, the consensus on not electing Sigismund was widely shared.¹⁰

It was in the atmosphere of emerging political and military conflicts that the originally purely political discourse on the idoneity of a candidate included, in addition to the emphasis on the appropriate nationality (Czech), the confessional aspect. The exacerbated mood gave the country's elites self-confidence. The rejection of Sigismund as an enemy of divine law and a tyrant undeserving of royal dignity grew out of the Hussite theory of the just ruler, and was primarily the work of Utraquist priests and scholars.

An interesting testimony in this respect came from the tense atmosphere of the nascent armed resistance against Sigismund and the first crusades of 1420 preserved in several Czech poems in the Bautzen manuscript.¹¹ These texts demonstrate how the (il)legitimacy of Sigismund was communicated. It is a collection of compositions copied in Czech, which represents a sophisticated form of propaganda aimed at both lay and educated audiences, and also circulated in a contemporary Latin version.

One of the texts, the pamphlet *Porok české koruny králi Uherskému, že neřádně korunu přijal a v království České se násilím tiskne* [A Complaint from the Czech Crown to the Hungarian King that He Improperly Accepted the Crown and Controls the Kingdom through Violence] also exists in a Latin version that was most probably written for the public abroad. It is known by the title *Corone regni Boemie satira in regem Hungarie Sigismundum* and begins with the words *Nuper coram*. After explaining the reasons for not recognizing Sigismund, the unknown author comments on the election and urges that a suitable king should be found for the kingdom. His instructions are quite simple: "Elect for yourselves a man of honour as your King of Bohemia, who has faith and the love of the land!"¹²

The confessional aspect was manifest not only in the rejection, but logically also in the next step—the search for a suitable candidate.

9 Žůrek, "Coronations," 20–22.

10 Šmahel, *Hussitische Revolution*, Vol. II, 1071–188.

11 Bautzen, Stadtbibliothek 8°4.

12 Both texts were last published in the book *Husitské skladby Budyšínského rukopisu: Latin text 173–78, Czech on 32–40*. For the quotation, see page 74: "volte sobě muže ctného, / již za krále vám českého, / jenžt má vieru, lásku k zemi!" For the context surrounding the creation of the two texts, see Klassen, "Images of Anti-Majesty in Hussite Literature," 267–81, and most recently Čornej, "Husitské skladby Budyšínského rukopisu." Cp. also Hruza, "Audite, celi! Ein satirischer husitischer Propagandatext."

This is confirmed by another contemporary statement of a Hussite religious authority, which also commented on the search for a king in the early stages of the armed conflict. Jakoubek of Stříbro, for example, was unequivocal when saying:

“In Deutoronom XXVII, it is laid down that the king is to be a brother, and not of a foreign nation, etc. And a brother he is, if he is of one faith, and of one accord with us in the truth, and resists the Antichrist.”¹³

What is evident from the statement about a prospective king is that there is an obvious emphasis both on nationality and confession. These two criteria work together here, but this was primarily a theoretical view propagated as part of the anti-Sigismund propaganda by Hussite intellectuals.

In reality, the king was actively sought in the family of the Polish king Vladislavus II Jagiello and the related Grand Duke of Lithuania Vitold, who eventually sent the young Sigismund Korybut in his place, who finally did not attempt to establish himself as ruler of Bohemia. Nevertheless, it is worth noting the considerations of the Bohemian Utraquist elites, who were looking for a suitable candidate at the court of the Slavonic king Vladislavus, and as we learn from the instructions of the envoy sent for negotiations to the Polish royal court, one of the arguments was to be the proximity of the two Slavonic languages or nations. At the same time, Sigismund was presented as a hazard since his rule threatened the privileged position of the German language.¹⁴

During the first years of the Hussite Revolution, the protection of the Czech language symbolizing the Czech Kingdom and the entire Czech nation played a significant role within the Utraquist fraction.¹⁵ However, this political situation gradually changed, and in 1436 Sigismund could officially ascend the hereditary throne, but he died the following year without a male heir. As in the Empire and Hungary, the Bohemian royal title was to be assumed by son-in-law and designated heir Albert

13 Jakoubek ze Stříbra, *Výklad na Zjevení sv. Jana I*, 32: “V Deutoronomu XXVII napsáno, že král má býti bratr a ne cizieho narodu etc. A bratrť jest, když jest jednostajné viery a jednostajné při s námi v pravdě hájiti bude a Antikristu se opře.”

14 Novotný, “K otázce polské kandidatury na český trůn“, 132: “Protož prosímeť pro pána boha a pro osvobozenie zákona jeho svatého, všemu křesťanstvu potřebně spassitedlného, aby se k tomu přičiniti ráčil, a ukutenstvie takového jemu dále k vyplnění všeho jazyka slovanského nedopúšťění; neb poráženie našeho jazyka českého, jakož z jistých příčin porozumieváme, polského bylo by vyhlazenie pro přichylnost našemu jazyku přirozenú. Nebť ten král miesta v královstvím Českém Němcóm cizozemcóm zapisuje na shlazenie jazyka českého ve všech miestech jemu přichylných volaje, aby ižádný v těch miestech toho královstvie Češského nezuostával, kdož by dobře německy neuměl.” See also Nodl, “Kráľ požádaný.”

15 Šmahel, *Idea národa*, 144–87.

of Habsburg.¹⁶ Although he had the support of a large part of the nobility and towns, there was still an audible and influential part of the nobility that did not want him and prepared the candidacy of the Polish king Casimir. Once again, the communication and propaganda to prepare for the election of another king was characterised by the emphasis on Slavic reciprocity and the joint anti-Habsburg position. This had great symbolic potential in the context of the situation after the events associated with the anti-Hussite crusades.¹⁷

The idea of the electability of the throne, promoted especially by supporters of the Polish candidacy, had reappeared. Albert, however, did not lag behind and grasped the opportunity to promote his legitimacy, in addition to emphasizing the role and claim of his wife Elisabeth of Luxembourg: outwardly he was presented as the defender of Catholicism, inwardly as the guarantor of the Compacts and also as the natural continuation of the Luxembourg dynasty. An example therefore is the Latin poems of Albert's scribe Nicholas Petschacher. He recalls the German origin of the Luxembourg dynasty, which for him is proof that the king's nationality is of minor importance. Rather, what matters for him is his piety and righteousness. Albert is said to be a second Charles to the Czechs, since both Czechs and Germans are his brothers. In Petschacher's view, that is why he alone will raise Bohemia from the dust, ensure its inner peace, fill Bohemian wallets, and restore the glory of the University of Prague.¹⁸

The resistance to a Habsburg personifying a German, foreign king was, however, persistent, at least judged by contemporary Bohemian literary production. In the chronicler's eyes "Germans are arch enemies of the Czech, Polish, and all Slavonic languages".¹⁹

This view appears in several sources, but found its most explicit expression in the historical pamphlet *Krátké sebrání z kronik českých ku výstražce věrných Čechuov* [A Short Collection from Czech Chronicles to Warn Faithful Bohemians].²⁰ This peculiar compilation of the history of the Bohemian lands is based mainly on

16 For the acceptance of Albert and the negotiations in Hungary, see Burkhardt, "Argumentative Uses" in this volume.

17 Urbánek, *Věk poděbradský*, Vol. 1, 303–18.

18 Šmahel, *Idea národa*, 192–96; Petschacher's compositions were edited by Huemer, *Historische Gedichte aus dem XV. Jahrhundert*.

19 The passage from Old Czech Annals reads: "...v němečskou moc poddánu býti se nezdálo, ješto by to mohlo jíti k velikému zlému nynějšímu i budúcímu, ale i všemu jazyku slovanskému, jakož jest to vždycky shledáváno i ve všech kronikách starých muož býti nalezeno, že sú Němci úhlavní nepřítelé jazyka českého, polského i všeho slovanského vždycky byli a býti nepřestávají, ješto by to bylo k škodě i k hanbě veliké." *Staré letopisy české z vratislavského rukopisu*, 79–80.

20 *O volbě Jiřího z Poděbrad za krále českého*, 32–41.

excerpts from the Chronicle of the so-called Dalimil, a vernacular verse and committed chronicle from the reign of John of Luxembourg.²¹ His allusions and intentions are obvious—to denigrate everything German as foreign and hostile, especially the potential German candidate for the Czech throne. The author constantly repeats that the Czechs, following their historical experience, should not choose a German as their ruler.

There is no consensus in scholarship on the question of dating. According to some, such as Rudolf Urbánek, the last editor of the text *Krátké sebrání* was compiled before the 1458 election of George of Poděbrady as part of an election campaign and effort to discredit George's rivals. More convincing, however, is the dating to 1437–1438, when there was a group of influential magnates who wanted to denigrate Albert of Habsburg, often using the argument that he was of German origin. His foreignness thus played a significant role in the discourse on Bohemian royal power. This is also true for George's election, but here, as we shall see, it is more a positive exhortation to elect a 'native' Bohemian king.²² The author selected excerpts from the Chronicle of the So-Called Dalimil and the fourteenth century anti-German poem *De Theutunicis bonum dictamen*.²³ His choice was deliberate: to preach the disadvantages of a foreign, here explicitly 'German' rule. At the same time, it is obvious that the author is promoting the solution that if a Czech candidate is not available, they should look for another Slav. This text is easy to read as a guide to the selection of King Casimir of Poland:

“Then the Bohemians, if they cannot make a lord of their tongue, should think of another Slavonic tongue, or of any other Christian tongue under heaven, and, though he may not be rich, take him for their lord; for their tongue and liberties are better under the king of every tongue but German.”²⁴

It is important to recall that in Old Czech the term 'tongue' (*jazyk*) represented not only the language but also the community of people speaking it. However, language as a means of communication played a significant symbolic role. This is even more valid in Bohemia in the first half of the fifteenth century, since the

21 A recent analysis of the chronicle is proposed by Adde-Vomáčka, *La Chronique de Dalimil*, 9–233; Rychterová, “The Chronicle of the so-called Dalimil.”

22 A convincing argument for the 1437–1438 dating is presented by Boubín, *Česká “národní” monarchie*, 72–73.

23 For the edition, see Wostry, *Ein deutschfeindliches Pamphlet*, 193–236.

24 *O volbě Jiřího z Poděbrad za krále českého*, 40: “Měli by tehda Čechové, nemohú-li z svého jazyka pána mieti, na jiný Slovanský jazyk nebo na jiný kterýkoliv pod nebem křestianský pomysliti, a, ač by bohatý nebyl, jeho sobě za pána vzieti; neb jich jazyk a svobody pod králem každého jazyka kromě německého lépe stanú.”

vernacularisation of church services and of theological and general scholarly discourse was an important part of the reform movement.²⁵ Moreover, in the multilingual environment of the countries of the Bohemian Crown, especially in Bohemia, the ability to communicate in Czech played a symbolic role of identification with the country. This was evident in 1440 when another election of the Bohemian king took place at the Diet of Bohemia, regardless of the birth of the successor Ladislaus the Posthumous. An *ad hoc* electoral commission formed of the higher and lower nobility, and representatives of the towns had to choose between four foreign contenders (Friedrich I of Brandenburg, Ludwig IV of Wittelsbach, Vladislaus III of Jagiellon, and Albert III of Bavaria).²⁶

In the end, Albert was elected, who before 1419 had been raised at the royal court in Prague by his aunt Queen Sophia and, according to the arguments in his favour, spoke Czech. Moreover, he was known to be familiar with local politics. He was unanimously elected in June, but politely declined at a meeting in Cham in August. He probably did not want to antagonize the Habsburgs, especially since the rule in the heretical kingdom did not promise to be easy.²⁷

It is worth recalling that all contemporary observers and actors noted that Albert spoke Czech. This is documented by a letter from Albert's secretary, Jan of Sedlec, in which he describes the ideal candidate for the royal throne as a man brought up in Bohemia, who knew the Czech language and has always been interested in the Czech land:

“His Grace would be very willing and glad to be of service to the country, as he speaks their language well, and was brought up in the country, and has been and continues to be interested in it all his days.”²⁸

The Czech foreman and head of the richest noble family in the country, Oldřich of Rožmberk, also praised this fact and considered it important to mention this in his letter to the Council of Basel. It is evident that in this case language skills were seen as something that helped facilitate identification with the ruler or, here at least, with a potential future ruler.²⁹

25 Rychterová, “Preaching, the Vernacular, and the Laity.”

26 On the election, see Urbánek, *Věk poděbradský*, Vol. I, 522–33.

27 Urbánek, *Věk poděbradský* I, 502–63.

28 Freyberg, *Aktenstücke über die Wahl Herzog Albrecht III von Bayern*, 11: “Sein gnad gar willig vnd fro auch wol dartzu genaigett vnd dem Lannd nutzlichen wäre, wann er dy sprach wol wais vnd Im lannd ertzogen auch all sein tag auf dy Behaim gericht gewesen vnd noch ist.”

29 *Listář a listinář Oldřicha z Rožmberka (1418–1462)*, Vol. 2 (1438–1444), 81: “Deinde his auditis et allegatis, nominavi Ducem Albertum Bawarie, quaerens, quid sentirent de eodem, adiciens, cum sit princeps potens et parentosus et nostri lingwagii bene enutritus et expertus, filium etiam habens, quis hiis de duobus, an marchio supratactus, vel dux nunc nominatus, valencior videretur.”

This also applied to the next Czech king, Ladislaus the Posthumous. “Nothing wins a prince the favour of the common people more than the knowledge of their language”, young Ladislaus was advised by Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, and his words rang true.³⁰ Above all, however, thanks to the administrator George of Poděbrady and his closest advisors, it was purposefully ensured that the future ruler learned Czech and was familiar with the Czech environment. In Ladislaus’s case, however, naturally, there was a parallel preparation for the ruler’s duties in the other countries where he was about to rule.

The development of the electoral procedure in Bohemia and the legitimacy of this mode of choosing the ruler culminated in the spring of 1458, when the electoral assembly was held to choose the Bohemian king. Due to the unexpected death without heir of the previously accepted, respected, and crowned King Ladislaus the Posthumous, the need to elect a new king arose, and the claims of succession made by some candidates were weak and invalid even from a legitimist point of view. Nevertheless, there were several contenders for the Bohemian throne. Of the foreign candidates, the most relevant were Prince Charles of France, son of Charles VII, who represented an interesting alternative to the Central European contenders, and Duke William of Saxony, husband of Anna of Habsburg, against whom the attacks criticising the possibility of electing a German as king were probably most strongly directed. It was this argument that emerged as the main one in the election campaign, which in this case was quite intense.

An important signal that may have worked in George’s favour was the election of Matthias Hunyadi called Corvinus as king of Hungary a few weeks before the Prague electoral assembly. The fact that Matthias was married to George’s daughter Catherine, in addition to the fact that a domestic nobleman had been elected king without the corresponding nobility, may have played a role.³¹

Assessments of George of Poděbrady’s election vary across scholarship.³² On the one hand, most historians consider it the culmination of the development after the Hussite Revolution, especially the gradual transformation of the balance between royal and noble power, when the self-confident nobility finally took the kingdom’s political power into their own hands and elected one of their own, a member of the nobility George as King of Bohemia.³³

30 De liberorum educatione, 121.

31 Boubín, *Česká “národní” monarchie*, 74.

32 The most detailed information about the election is provided by Urbánek, “Volba Jiřího z Poděbrad za krále českého”; cp. also Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 147–60; Odložilík, *The Hussite King*, 89–93.

33 Čornej, “Pohaslý lesk”; Urbánek, *Věk poděbradský*, Vol. 3, 223–80.

Others argue that it was, on the contrary, a sign of the normalization of the political situation in the country. The pragmatic election of a domestic nobleman, who had previously proven himself as a governor of the kingdom while offering the hope that he would respect the confessional divisions of society, may have been a sign that the situation in the kingdom had calmed down and was similar to that in other countries. In other words, it was not a late outcome of the Hussite Revolution, for in that case there would not have been similar elections in Hungary and in Sweden (King Charles Knutsson was elected in 1448). A domestic election may have demonstrated the rejection of foreign interference in domestic politics and a move towards building a 'national' monarchy.³⁴

The electoral campaign was intense, although it was relatively short-lived. Ladislaus died in November 1457, and the electoral diet began in February 1458. George and his supporters quickly grasped the situation and did not bet on George's confession alone being enough to win the diet, where the Catholic nobility held considerable power. It could not therefore be merely stated that a king of the Utraquist confession would certainly protect his fellow believers from oppression by the Catholics. On the contrary, in this respect George had to represent the power that would maintain the *status quo*, not only in the matter of respecting the Compacts of Basel, but especially in the matter of respecting the rightful possession of property acquired during the revolutionary years. The main argument for George, however, was that he was Czech and therefore a domestic, rather than a foreign ruler. Most surviving sources refer to this idea, and after the election, this topic often sparked relief.

An illustrative example of the election campaign is a pamphlet that has survived thanks to George's energetic opponent, the preacher Nicolaus Tempelfeld from Wrocław (Breslau), copied it into his treatise protesting against the validity of George's election.³⁵ The text urges the audience to realize George had not only proven himself capable of running the kingdom, but that, above all, it was necessary to elect a domestic candidate who would not compromise the holy faith, since under a German ruler the common good would be endangered. The election of a Bohemian is presented as the most beneficial choice for the entire kingdom.

"I think, urge, and persuade you to decide for George of Poděbrady, the long-established administrator of the Kingdom of Bohemia, who knows how to rule and administer, whose sense of justice has spread almost everywhere throughout the German nation. [...] It will therefore be useful to the whole community, more useful to the state, but most useful to our

34 This interpretation was suggested by Boubín, *Česká "národní" monarchie*.

35 Die Denkschrift des Breslauer Domherrn Nikolaus Tempelfeld von Brieg, 169–71.

holy faith, that it should not succumb to or be infected by its opponents, and that he, as a Bohemian, as the saviour of the state, as the most fervent zealot for our faith, as the most conspicuous defender of our articles, and as the best defender of the rights of the kingdom and its inhabitants, should be unanimously elected our king with the general consent and unanimous will; lest, God forbid, a German should be elected monarch, we should easily lose all our honour by the merit and weakening of our faith, by which we have hitherto grown, and lest we should be compelled, unless we conform to the Germans and their faith, to suffer the greatest ruin to our estates and throats.”³⁶

The campaign, however, did not seem to be conducted in the spirit of denouncing other candidates, but rather by emphasizing the Czech origin of the only domestic candidate. The promotion and support of George’s candidacy probably also involved the Utraquist clergy, who otherwise had no vote at the Diet. However, it had effective means of influencing public opinion. Not only could they operate from pulpits, but they probably tried to influence public opinion beyond Prague. Tempelfeld’s treatise from the turn of 1458–1459 informs that Rokycana

“[...] sent to the houses of the townsmen, craftsmen, merchants, to the leaders of the guilds, artisans, and others whom he could, and directly and by instructions he persuaded, requested, and ordered them to vote unanimously for George for various reasons. And he also sent to other cities, castles, fortresses, and towns of his own mind and acquaintance his chaplains and priests devoted to himself, to do the same, pleading for the great advantage of the country and nation and other advantages, that George should be elected king and not another, with the emphatic warning that if the latter were not elected, the election would then undoubtedly fall to one of the German princes, ignorant of the Czech language.”³⁷

36 Die Denkschrift des Breslauer Domherrn Nikolaus Tempelfeld von Brieg, 170–71: “Utile erit toti communitati, utililius reipublice, sed utilissimum fidei nostre sancte, ne ista succumbat aut ab emulis inficiatur, ut ipse tamquam Bohemus, tamquam reipublice conservator, tamquam fidei nostre ferventissimus zelator, tamquam articulorum nostrorum apertissimus defensor et tamquam optimus iurium regni et incolarum protector in regem nostrum omnium consensu unanimique voto concorditer eligatur, ne quod absit, si princeps eligeretur Theoticus, omnem honorem nostrum per interemcionem et enervacionem fidei nostre qua usque huc crevimus viliter perdamus et rerum corporumque, nisi nos Theoticis et fidei eorum conformaverimus, maximis periculis stare cogemur. Seclusis hiis quod si regem Theoticum habebimus, nec privilegia nostra conservare nec alienata a regno recuperare nec iniurias sive illatas sive inferendas vindicare nec fidem nostram ampliare valebimus in futuro.”

37 Die Denkschrift des Breslauer Domherrn Nikolaus Tempelfeld von Brieg, 167–68: “misit ad domos civium mechanicorum, mercatorum, maystros czecharum et artificiorum et alios, ad

As far as we can judge from other contemporary reports, this feature of the election, i.e., the election of a king of Bohemian origin against foreign candidates, resonated very strongly with contemporary observers. And not only with domestic commentators, but also with those in foreign lands, where it was often emphasized that the Czechs had erroneously chosen a heretic king. Wilhelm of Saxony's envoy Henry Leubing confirmed Tempelfeld's reports about the strong efforts to gain support for George, including from the city's leaders. For Leubing, this was a bold choice:

“[The Czechs] wanted to have a king of the Czech tongue by a presumptuous election, and in order to make this happen, the Prague town council confidentially sent a message to all the leading houses in the city of Prague, and urged especially those who would be present at the election not to vote for anyone other than a Czech.”³⁸

The election was unanimous, and some chroniclers also reported that the election of the Bohemian king and the “liberation” from the domination of German kings was the most dominant interpretation of the election for the contemporary Czech public.

The unknown chronicler in the Old Czech Annals first marvelled at the fact that so many foreigners were interested in the Czech throne.

“And there they made a common agreement in the Diet concerning the king of Bohemia, whom they thought would be king, that he should be king of Bohemia; for the foreigners were in favour of it, having made a great request after the death of the king: The king of France, who would have given his daughter to king Ladislaus, Charles his son, [would have] given the land of Bohemia for a king; also William, the prince of Saxony, stood for the kingship.”³⁹

In another edition of the same historiographical compilation, the author emphasizes the Czechs' alleged joy at the election, which was supposed to break the rule of German kings. However, he did not fail to stress that this would also save the Utraquists, who would otherwise have been persecuted:

quos potuit, in practica et avisamentis persuadens, rogans et precipiens, ut eum votis suis in eum concurrerent variis ex motivis. Misitque idem Rackiczanus ad alias civitates, castra, fortalicia et oppida sue intencionis et sibi nota capellanos suos et sacerdotes sibi adherentes ad idem faciendum allegans ad hec terre et linguagii gloriosum profectum diversiosque respectus expediencie, ut hic et non alius eligeretur in regem eo signanter attento, quod si ille non eligeretur, quod tunc electio indubitanter caderet super unum de principibus Theotonicis noticiam linguagii Bohemici non habentis.”

38 *O volbě Jiřího z Poděbrad za krále českého*, 57.

39 *Staré letopisy české z vratislavského rukopisu*, 122.

“[...] and then they rejoiced that they no longer had a German king... And many of them wept for joy that the dear God had delivered them out of the power of German kings, who thought to do evil to the Czech people, and especially to those who hold to the Holy Scriptures.”⁴⁰

Regardless of this seemingly idyllic moment of the victory of the Czech over the foreign element, the *modus vivendi* eventually broke down during George's reign: a part of the Catholic nobility rebelled and in 1469 elected Matthias Corvinus as King of Bohemia in Olomouc. This election was preceded only by negotiations rather than a campaign. It is clear, however, that Corvinus's foreign origin did not bother them, and that it was more important to agree on the Catholic faith and political programme.⁴¹

After the death of George of Poděbrady in 1471, the Polish Jagiellonian dynasty ascended the Czech throne, thus fulfilling plans that had been debated since the 1420s. The quest for a domestic king was thus complete, but the self-confident Estates retained a significant influence over the exercise of royal authority well into the sixteenth century.⁴²

Conclusion

The analysis of several elections of Czech kings in the fifteenth century demonstrates how the idea of a suitable candidate for the Czech throne changed, depending not only on the political situation, but also on the development of the negotiated coexistence between the people of two confessions in one country. However, the religious aspect was not the only or not even the decisive one. The question of the candidate's origin also played a significant role in the choice of the king. However, as becomes clear from the examples above, there was to a large extent a blending of both identities—national and confessional—and, at the same time, the two demands were partly merging, because in the spirit of the theory expressed earlier in the academic circles of the University of Prague, only a true Czech (*purus Bohemus*) could be a true Utraquist and, thus, take over the administration of the Bohemian Kingdom. At the same time, only such a king could, in the eyes of the Hussite political actors, guarantee respect for the Hussite political and religious programme, defined briefly as the Four Prague Articles and later, after 1436, as the observance of the Basel

40 O volbě Jiřího z Poděbrad za krále českého, 66–67.

41 Kalous, *Matyáš Korvín (1443–1490)*, 135–39.

42 Eberhard, *Konfessionsbildung und Stände in Böhmen 1478–1530*.

Compacts.⁴³ The candidate's idoneity, however, was not a stable category and was renegotiated anew on every occasion, as well as becoming the subject of political debate in the Bohemian *société politique*.⁴⁴

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43 On definition of the true Czech, see Šmahel, *Idea národa*, 44–48; on Compacts of Basel Šmahel, *Die Basler Kompaktaten*.

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