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The uncrowned “Bohemian king” and his “bible” castle. Blatná as commissioned by the highest burgrave of Prague castle, Zdeňek Lev of Rožmitál, around the years 1520–1530

Abstract

This article presents a new interpretation of the ideological message of Blatná Castle after its expansion by Benedikt Ried, commissioned by Zdeňek Lev of Rožmitál around 1520–1530. The key to deciphering the biblical code of the residence of this powerful magnate is found in two columns standing in front of the castle façade, which have not been included in previous research. Their dilapidated state, as well as residually legible profile forms and ornaments, unequivocally point to their dating back to the time of Ried's expansion. In the history of art, they are a well-known imitation of the bronze pillars of Jachin and Boaz, placed in front of the Old Testament Temple of Solomon. The expressive oriels of the part of the castle erected by Ried may be a reference to a diagram similar to a pentagram, often appearing on the pages of codices called the *clavicula Salomonis*. In the beginning, they contained the instructions of the great biblical king to his son Roboam. This is reflected in the family situation of the builder, as it is generally agreed that Blatná Castle was built by Zdeněk Lev in connection with the marriage of his son Adam. References to Solomon were quite common at the time, both at Prague Castle and at the residences of several Silesian dukes. They should not be surprising in the case of someone who, for more than 20 years (1507–1530), was the most important person in the state after the ruler (the highest burgrave of Prague Castle). Zdeněk Lev was a very active and influential politician with a Catholic orientation and nationalist, Bohemian disposition, who liked to moralize and judge and use biblical examples or episodes from Bohemian history.

Keywords: architecture, castelology, biblicisms, late gothic, early renaissance, representation of power, Bohemian Crown

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Zdeněk Lev of Rožmitál and Blatná set the tone in Bohemian politics for almost a quarter of a century at the end of the reign of Vladislav II, for almost the whole decade of Louis' rule, and during the first years of the reign of Ferdinand I. When he took over the office of the supreme burgrave of Prague Castle in 1507, Zdeněk had extensive political experience (from 1504, he was the supreme state magistrate) and, above all, the enormous political capital and prestige of the family from which Queen Joanna, the second wife of King George of Poděbrady, came. Zdeněk's father, Jaroslav Lev of Rožmitál, a Catholic in the Utraquist service, a prominent diplomat, and the highest hofmaster of the Bohemian Kingdom,¹ was an important figure during the reign of this monarch. His son's career was thus guaranteed, and his position only occasionally weakened, as in 1523–1525, when Zdeněk Lev lost his office to political rivals: Duke Charles of Minsterberg and Jan of Vartemberk, and after 1526 when Ferdinand I increasingly started basing his Bohemian rule on the younger generation of officials. It was probably more and more difficult for Zdeněk Lev, who did not understand German,² at the court of a monarch who, in turn, did not understand Bohemian. He was also suffering more and more from financial problems,³ as well as simple fatigue (“I have deficiencies in my health” – he wrote on 12.3.1530 to Jaroslav of Šelmberk⁴). Judging from the magnate's voluminous correspondence and the scale of his involvement in state affairs, Zdeněk Lev was a workaholic, which he himself admitted in a letter: “it might seem that I take on more than I should.”⁵ Even after his resignation in 1530, he did not let his guard down – letters written until his death in 1535 show that he was still a key figure in political games in the Crown area, even becoming involved in Silesian or Lusatian affairs.⁶

Being a politician and statesman is one side of the coin.⁷ However, there is also another side to which art historians have drawn attention using the

¹ J.A. Schmeller, 1844; Z. Nejedlý, 1903; on the family of S. Kotlárová, 2008.

² This is shown, for example, in a letter in which he asked Kašpar Urticell on 3.6.1533 to translate letters from Bavaria into Bohemian language (“for him to translate into Bohemian [...] these German letters” / “aby mi je vyložil do české řeči [...] to sepsání německé”). J. Kalousek, F. Dvorský, 1893, p. 165, No. 1059.

³ V. Holý, 1960; J. Janaček, 1968, p. 81; V. Bůžek, 1989, p. 24; P. Vorel, 2005, p. 67–68; S. Kotlárová, 2008, p. 62–65.

⁴ “nedostatky na mém zdraví mievam.” F. Dvorský, A. Gindely, 1877, p. 335, No. 223.

⁵ “mohlo by se někomu zdáti, že víc na se беру, nežli mi přesušíe” – he then added that he was doing it for the good of the state, asked to be forgiven if he had done anything wrong, and said that he was always ready to correct his actions; letter to Petr of Rožmberk of 28.2.1509 r. F. Palacký, 1862, p. 8–10, No. 5 (quote from p. 9).

⁶ On Zdeněk Lev, see S. Kotlárová, 2008, p. 70–79, who writes most extensively on him; in the past, see also O. Vinař, 1994, p. 129–153; M. Vandrovcová, 2003, p. 81–93 and J. Čechura 2020, p. 29–42.

⁷ Three historians' opinions about him: “distinguished by his spiritual abilities, he did not manage to rise above the conflicts of his time” / “při vši vynikající schopnosti své duševní nedovedl se povznést nad rozbouřené vášně svého času” (F. Dvorský, in the introduction, [in]: J. Čelakovský, F. Dvorský, 1887, p. 1; “neither Zdeněk Lev of Rožmitál nor Petr of Rožmberk dared

opinion of Vilém of Pernštejn from 1520: "some people are shamefully stealing. We are simply blind!"⁸ In this light, the lord of Blatná Castle is a man who derives private benefits from his office beyond measure. In the opinion of researchers, these benefits materialized in the form of the reconstruction of Blatná Castle – the magnate's main residence.⁹ Before we return to the person of the Blatná and Rožmítal lord, let us look at the Blatná residence through the eyes of the researchers and then, in a way, through our own eyes.

The Blatná seat cannot complain about a lack of interest of art historians and historians over the last 100 years. An extensive chapter was written by the doyen of Czech castellology, A. Sedláček, who focused on the history of the building.¹⁰ E. Šamanková has collected source references mainly concerning the extension of the castle in the time of Zdeňek Lev and attesting to the participation of Benedikt Ried.¹¹ D. Menclová interpreted the parts of the castle erected by Zdeňek Lev, seeing in its façades the opposite of the horizontality of the Ludvík Wing of the palace part of Prague Castle and the renaissance of the late Gothic forms in the work of Benedikt Ried. Dating the beginning of construction work in Blatná to 1513–1514, she was inclined to see it as preparation of a new dwelling for his son Adam, for whom he was looking for a wife. He found her in 1516 in the person of Anna, the daughter of Hynek Haugwitz from Biskupice (the actual wedding took place in 1518).¹² V. Mencl referred to this fact and added that it was clearly inspired by the work of Arnold of Westphalia.¹³ T. Durdík emphasized the representative character of the Ried extension. At the same time, he pointed out that the opportunity offered by the cooperation with the outstanding architect to improve the fortification of the residence was not used (even though the reconstruction of the defense system was linked to this phase by Šamanková).¹⁴ F. Kašička and B. Nechvátíl established that the Ried's extension was determined by the older lower parts of the wings, to which he added rather than built from the foundations, as was formerly assumed.¹⁵ K. Benešová, who opted to date the work on the castle to 1522–1523 (according to the design from around

to unequivocally prefer their personal interests over «the public interest» and repeatedly respected the laws of their state" / "Ani Zdeněk Lev z Rožmitálu ani Petr z Rožmberka neodvází se preferovat jednoznačně osobní prospěch před «obecním dobrým» a respektují mnohokrát zákony země" (J. Macek, 2001, p. 368); "an extremely hard-working and fame-seeking aristocrat" / "nesmírně ctizádnostivý i pracovitý aristokrat" (P. Čornej, M. Bartlová, 2007, p. 531).

⁸ "haněbně v některých místech se krade. Prostě jsme slepi!" – F. Palacký, 1842, p. 138, No. 91, letter of 2.9.1520 to Ladislav of Šternberk.

⁹ P. Kalina, 2009, p. 132, 157–158.

¹⁰ A. Sedláček, 1897, p. 175–186.

¹¹ E. Šamanková, 1948, p. 111–113.

¹² D. Menclová, 1972, p. 414–420.

¹³ V. Mencl, 1978, p. 147; Similarly: J. Hořejší, 1984, p. 510.

¹⁴ T. Durdík, 2000, p. 67–68. On the other hand, P. Vlček, 1999, p. 172–174 erroneously stated that Zdeněk Lev was to marry in 1516 and stated that the Blatná seat belonged to the most important castles of its time after its reconstruction in 1523–1530.

¹⁵ F. Kašička, B. Nechvátíl, 2001, p. 9–42.

1518) and also saw the sources of the expressive design of the façade in the Saxon architecture of Arnold's circle, posed the important question of who was the driving force behind the choice of forms: Zdeněk Lev or Benedikt Ried.¹⁶ We will return to this question, as well as to the moral assessment of the supreme burgrave.

The key item in the bibliography of Blatná Castle is the monograph on Benedikt Ried by P. Kalina. The researcher offered a look at the castle in the context of the whole of Blatná and the activities connected with it (its promotion to a town and the construction of a parish church). He also analyzed the architectural details more thoroughly than before, drawing attention to the formal affinities of the castle of the Joannites in Strakonice but also to many others, mostly coinciding with family affinities or political sympathies of Zdeňek Lev.¹⁷ S. Kotlárová, the monographer of the family, paid more attention to the overall impression of the seat, relating it to the castle in nearby Buzice and the more distant Rožmitál pod Třemšínem,¹⁸ while J. Kuthan summarized the previous research, stating the uniqueness of expressive oriels in Bohemian architecture prior to the 20th century.¹⁹ In fact, R. Šimůnek's attention was drawn only to the castle gate. It is worth noting that this researcher, by emphasizing the visual and symbolic role of the castle tower, opposed the claims of many earlier authors who considered the Ried's wing to be the dominant feature of the castle.²⁰ The building repeatedly appeared in V. Červenka's and R. Lavička's monograph on the parish church in Blatná,²¹ while B. Czechowicz's comprehensive panorama of the magnates' state in the Bohemian Crown attempted a new interpretation of the residence after Ried's reconstruction, stimulated by biblical inspirations. These remarks are further elaborated on in this article.²²

Blatná Castle, in the time of Zdeňek Lev, was a building with more than two hundred years of history and many additions. It was situated on an island surrounded by a moat and a pond and had, as it does today, an oval ground plan (fig. 1).

¹⁶ K. Benešová, 2009, p. 257–258.

¹⁷ P. Kalina, 2009, p. 152–159.

¹⁸ S. Kotlárová, 2008, p. 111–117.

¹⁹ J. Kuthan, 2010, p. 302–304; see also the summary in K. Kaczmarek-Löw, 2019, p. 428–429.

²⁰ R. Šimůnek, 2013, p. 29–31.

²¹ V. Červenka, R. Lavička, 2015, p. 21–71.

²² B. Czechowicz, 2020, p. 176–183.

1. The Blatná Castle from the south, photo by B. Czechowicz



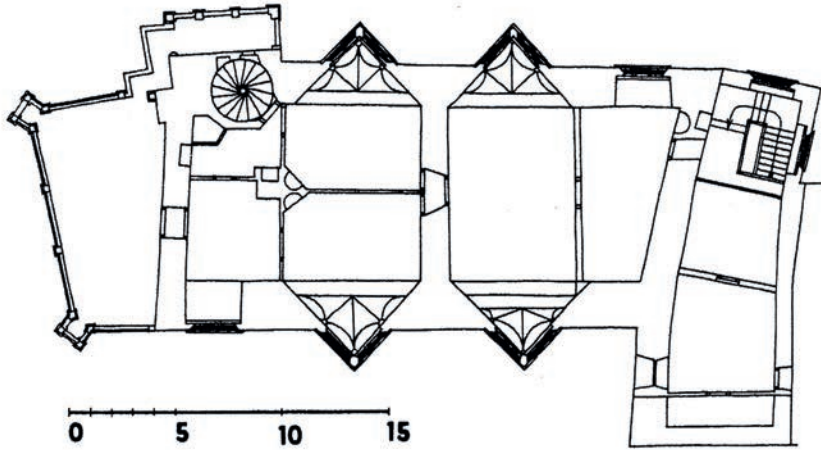
The older parts were located in the western area of the foundation and the construction works from the time of Jaroslav Lev and the first decades of Zdeňek Lev moved mainly towards the east. They resulted in the construction of a gate segment. Its main elements include a tower with a gate passage in the lower part and a new chapel signaled by an oriel on the eastern side. The old chapel still existed (until the 19th century), Romanesque in plan with a square in the lower part, the upper part passing into a quadrilateral intersecting with a slanting square. Nearby, on the opposite side of the courtyard, around 1520, the construction of a four-story (including a high attic) part of the southern wing started. Its characteristic features are the expressive north and south elevations, articulated with three-story pairs of oriels on a triangular plan (fig. 2).

2. Courtyard (north) elevation of the western part of the southern (Ried) wing of the Blatná Castle, photo by B. Czechowicz



Originally, they were probably crowned with pointed roofs. It is worth noting that since the 1560s, two oriels on a triangular plan could be seen on the southern elevation of the town hall in Wrocław (figs. 3–4).

3. Horizontal cross-section of the western part of the southern (Ried) wing of the Blatná Castle



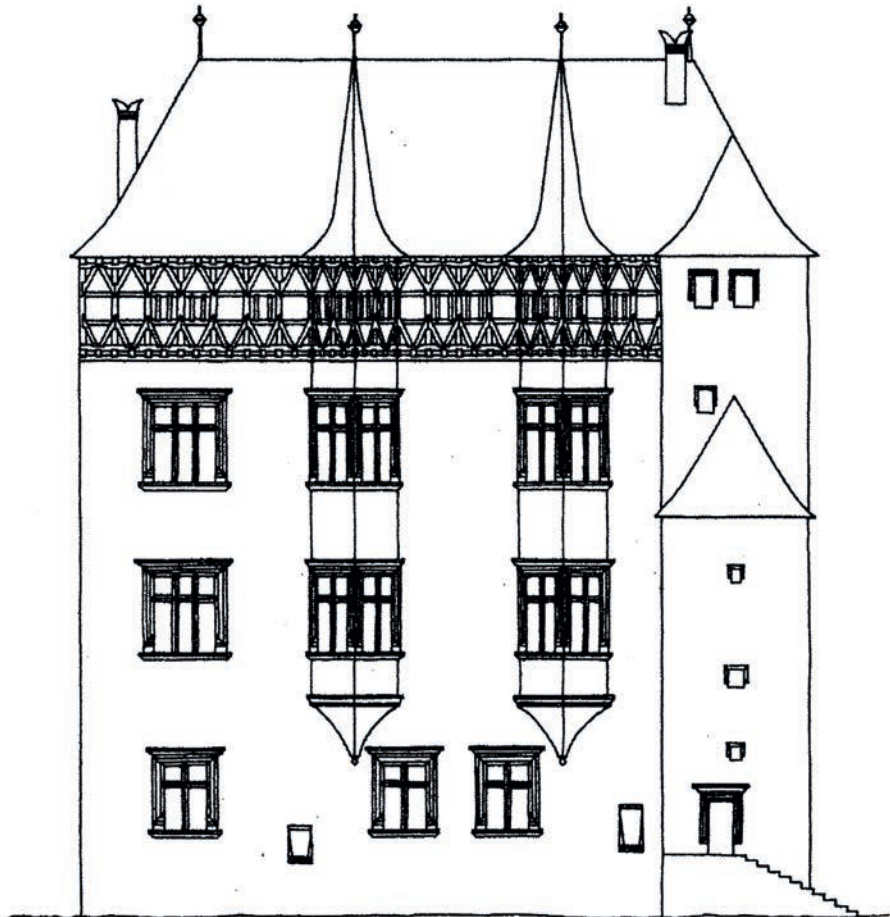
Source: D. Menclová, 1972

4. Oriels of the southern elevation of the Town Hall in Wrocław, photo by B. Czechowicz



Here, in comparison to the oriels of Blatná Castle, they are almost miniature.²³ However, considering the proposed reconstructions of the original appearance of Ried's elevation of the fragment of the Bohemian castle (fig. 5) and the south elevation of the town hall in the Silesian capital dotted with pointed oriel roofs (finally formed in the penultimate decade of the 15th century), it is hard to resist the impression that we have a similar type of expression of architectural forms.

5. Drawing reconstruction of the original appearance of the western part of the southern (Ried) wing of the Blatná Castle



Source: D. Menclová, 1972

It is worth mentioning that Zdeněk Lev visited Wrocław more than once, for example, in 1516 on his way to Syców, where he was to consider the dowry

²³ See B. Czechowicz, 2014a on this subject.

of his future daughter-in-law.²⁴ However, we can also point to another local, though not to say hyper-local, source of this form. These are the elevations of the Romanesque chapel at Blatná Castle, where the corner of a square inscribed into a quadrilateral was sharply drawn between the round parts of the wall. It is also worth noting that the composition of the segment built by Ried is based on a Greek cross set diagonally to the building. The ends of its arms are the warp on which the four oriels on both elevations are based.

However, this is not the end of the overview of the castle. Standing in front of the building from the east, at some distance, we can see two pillars situated on the outer bank of the moat. They flank the entrance to the bridge leading to the castle gate and are set in the stone walling of the moat (figs. 6–7).

6–7. The pillars in front of the façade of the Blatná Castle, photo by B. Czechowicz



²⁴ He did not neglect to add: “at that time the air [in] Wrocław is good healthy, like in Prague, or perhaps better” / “na tento čas jest zde [ve] Vratislavi tak dobre povětrí, jako v Praze, anebo lepší”; letter 18.2.1516 to Petr of Rožmberk; J. Čelakovský, F. Dvorský, 1887, p. 129–130, No. 138.

Their state of preservation, at first sight, suggests that they are probably older than the 17th or 18th century. A closer look at the profiles and poorly preserved ornaments does not leave any doubt that we are dealing with elements closer to the reconstructions made at the time of Zdeňek Lev. The pillars have no finials. They are also not visible on older vedutas of the castle,²⁵ which suggests that they fell victim to devastation during the Thirty Years' War (perhaps they fell into the moat and are still there?).²⁶

The interpretation of the meaning of the placing of these columns should not pose greater problems. After all, they are imitations of the Jachin and Boaz pillars placed by the bronze worker Hiram in front of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. As written in the *First Book of Kings* (7.15–22): “Two hollow bronze columns were cast, each eighteen cubits high and twelve cubits in circumference; their metal was of four fingers' thickness. [...] The columns were then erected adjacent to the porch of the temple, one to the right, called Jachin, and the other to the left, called Boaz.”²⁷ Thus, the message to the guest of the residence is clear: the master of the castle presented himself as a new Solomon.

He was not alone in this. Associations with Jerusalem can be found in Litice Castle, belonging to George of Poděbrady,²⁸ in the castle of Ortenburg in Bautzen in the era of the Corvinian reconstruction,²⁹ and in the Vladislav Hall of the Prague Castle,³⁰ so well-known to the Rožmitál master by virtue of his long-time residence there. It would be true to say that Prague and Blatná are the work of the same architect, Benedikt Ried. But these are not the only examples – references to the buildings of King Solomon have recently been noticed in another of his works, the castle of Duke Charles of Minsterberg in Żąbkowice Śląskie,³¹ in the residence of Duke Frederick II in Legnica (it is worth mentioning that in his youth, he made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land),³² that of Casimir II in Cieszyn,³³ and probably a few others. In order to close the list, however, I will only mention the biblical associations of the northern portal of St. Bartholomew's Church in Pardubice, a church located in the city, but castle-like in its essence, being the mausoleum of the Pernštejn family, with many more biblical references.³⁴ It is also worth mentioning that Solomonic features exist in the constructions

²⁵ A. Sedláček, 1897, p. 175, the view of the castle façade published here shows one of the columns (the northern one) in a condition close to the present one.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 175–186; B. Czechowicz, 2019a, p. 83–106.

²⁷ Quote according to the New American Bible, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/_P8L.HTM [last access: 20.06.2021]. On imitations or rather interpretations of the appearance of the *Templum Salomonis*, see, e.g., H.Y. Yigael, 1975; W.J. Hamblin, D.R. Seely, 2007.

²⁸ B. Czechowicz, 2013, p. 111–118, 193–194; idem, 2015, p. 101–114.

²⁹ Idem, 2017, p. 187–197.

³⁰ P. Kalina, 2017, p. 26–36; B. Czechowicz, 2018, p. 66–100.

³¹ B. Czechowicz, 2005, p. 125–135; idem, 2007, p. 23–54; these suggestions were further developed by A. Kwaśniewski, 2015, p. 123–217.

³² B. Czechowicz, 2005, p. 174–185, 564–565.

³³ Idem, 2009, p. 368–369; idem, 2010, p. 340–343.

³⁴ V. Hrubý, 2003, p. 116, 118; B. Czechowicz, 2014b, p. 86–95, <http://hdl.handle.net/11104/0247652> [latest access: 20.08.2021]; M. Ramešová, 2017, p. 17–54; B. Czechowicz, 2020, p. 415–420, with ideological analysis and interpretation of the whole church.

at the Wawel castle of the Polish king Sigismund I the Old in Kraków, with whom Zdeněk Lev maintained a lively correspondence.³⁵

The turn to biblical, Old Testament influences was part of the search for the roots of Christianity, threatened above all by Turkey, whose ruler from 1453 onwards also used the title of Roman emperor.³⁶ In the time of Zdeněk Lev, this ruler was called Solomon – Suleiman – and the question about the relationship of Christian Europe anchored in the authority of Rome but still spiritually rooted in Jerusalem became more and more sensitive. The letter from Zdeněk Lev to Volf Planknar of Kyšperk, dated 17.3.1526, is worth mentioning here. Therein, the magnate, a staunch Catholic, criticized Duke Frederick II, who introduced the Lutheran Reformation in his country. He wrote that by interfering in the matters of masses, the Silesian prince was behaving like a pope, which his respondent should report to King Ludwig in Buda. He concluded by saying that the "Turkish emperor" would not tolerate such people around him.³⁷

The inspiration for the residential architecture from various reconstructions of the Temple of Solomon has been indicated many times and in relation to different periods to the epoch of Zdeněk Lev and his son Adam – and recently in relation to English buildings.³⁸ They can probably also be seen in Blatná. Much more popular was the octagram drawn in many publications on magic known as the *clavicula Salomonis*. It resembles a hexagram and has the form of interpenetrating squares, which makes the shape known from the elevation of the Ried wing of the Bohemian castle outlined on the periphery of this figure.³⁹ In the textual layer, the *clavicula Salomonis* opens with an instruction addressed by Solomon to his son Roboam.⁴⁰ This, in turn, introduces us to the repeatedly mentioned circumstances of the origin of this "biblical" segment of Blatná Castle. It was built – let me remind you – by Zdeněk Lev for his son Adam, who was getting married, providing him with a beautiful seat imbued with divine wisdom and safety. After 1517 and the end of the conflict between

³⁵ T. Zadrožny, 2005, p. 9–57; M. Morka, 2005, p. 59–57.

³⁶ More about this issue can be found in B. Czechowicz, 2016, p. 159–174.

³⁷ J. Kalousek, J. Čelakovský, 1889, p. 31–35 (here p. 32), No. 464.

³⁸ I. Campbell, A. MacKechnie, 2011, p. 91–118; I. Campbell, 2020.

³⁹ S.L. MacGregor Mathers, 1889, p. 15–16 (diagram description). Key of Solomon codices collected in: The Key of Solomon (Clavicula Salomonis) edited by S.L. MacGregor Mathers, <https://esotericarchives.com> [latest access: 20.08.2021].

⁴⁰ Translated into English: "Treasure up, O my son Roboam! the wisdom of my words, seeing that I, Solomon, have received it from the Lord. Then answered Roboam, and said: How have I deserved to follow the example of my father Solomon in such things, who hath been found worthy to receive the knowledge of all living things through (the teaching of) an Angel of God and Solomon said: Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings, and learn the wonders of God. For, on a certain night, when I laid me down to sleep, I called upon that most holy Name of God, I AH, and prayed for the Ineffable Wisdom, and when I was beginning to close mine eyes, the Angel of the Lord, even Homadiel, appeared unto me, spake many things courteously unto me, and said: Listen, O Solomon! thy prayer before the Most High is not in vain, and since thou hast asked neither for long life, nor for much riches, nor for the souls of thine enemies, but hast asked for thyself wisdom to perform justice. Thus saith the Lord: According to thy word have I given unto thee a wise and understanding heart, so that before thee was none like unto thee, nor ever shall arise."; as per: S.L. MacGregor Mathers, 1889, p. 2.

the nobility and the royal towns, Zdeněk Lev, as the leader of the first party threatened by the attack of the burghers in Prague, no longer had anything to fear from this direction. However, at the time of the conflict with the younger Rožmberks, known as the dispute over the Rožmberk inheritance, he did not feel safe in Blatná when he wrote to his son on 16.9.1526: “And I understand that the lords of Rožmberk and especially Mr. Jan have little respect for law and order these days, so be careful at Blatná Castle as well.”⁴¹

Zdeněk Lev received a fairly thorough education under the guidance of his father, Jaroslav Lev of Rožmitál (+1488), although we do not know who specifically educated the young Zdeněk Lev. We know that he had a great appreciation for history afterward. It was also thanks to his patronage that the canonist and historian Václav Hájek of Libočany, previously parish priest in Rožmitál pod Třemšínem between 1524 and 1527, was able to pursue his Prague career.⁴² A measure of his interest in the family tradition can be seen not only in the prayers for the souls of his ancestors commissioned by Zdeněk Lev⁴³ but also in his ideological activities related to the castle on the mountain of Třemšín, which he wanted to rebuild as one of the “mythical” nests of his family.⁴⁴ But he cared for other castles as well – he built them in nearby Buzice, from which the family of Lords of Rožmitál, a branch of the Buzic family, originated.⁴⁵ The monastery church in Zaječov bears traces of this commitment. At the end of the 15th century, the coats of arms with inscriptions “Johannes de Schellenberg et Costi, Johannes Lepus de Hazenburg” and “Zdeniek Lew de Rozmital a Blatny” emphasize the common roots of four branches of the Buzic family: Rožmitál, Zajíc of Házmburk, and Šelmberk.⁴⁶

⁴¹ “A rozumiem tomu, že pani z Rožmberka, a zvláště snad pan Jan, málo sobě na tento čas rád a právo váří, protož měj se opatrně i na zamku Blatné.”; J. Kalousek, J. Čelakovský, 1890, p. 135–136, No. 618. This refers to Jan III of Rožmberk (+1532), the general prior of the Joannites in Strakonice. P. Kalina, 2009, p. 155 saw in the similarity of the reconstructions of the castles in Strakonice and Blatná the effect of the connections between the lord of Rožmitál and Jan III of Rožmberk. However, the issue is more complex. In 1523, a dispute over the Rožmberk inheritance broke out because the uncle of Jan III and his four brothers – the senior member of the family Petr IV of Rožmberk (+1523) bequeathed much of the family property to the Catholic Church and Zdeněk Lev of Rožmitál. Initially, Jan III supported the decision of his late uncle and was in conflict with his brothers, but after the death in 1526 of one of them, Jindřich V of Rožmberk, when he himself became the senior member of the family, he changed his tune and entered into a dispute with the Lord of Rožmitál; cf. S. Kotlárová, 2010, p. 105–106.

⁴² When necessary, the magnate did not hesitate to call him to order in 1527: “so you can correct the mistakes you have made” / “abyšte takové věci k nápravě přivedli,” it was about the objects that Hájek had appropriated for himself as parson in Rožmitál; J. Kalousek, J. Čelakovský (ed.), 1890, p. 211, No. 728.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 171.

⁴⁴ Zdeněk Lev bought it in 1528 and obtained permission from Ferdinand I to rebuild the fortress, but he never did; A. Sedláček, 1897, p. 199–202; T. Durdík, 2000, p. 564; S. Kotlárová, 2008, p. 117; T. Krofta, R. Křivánek, 2014, p. 503–517.

⁴⁵ A. Sedláček, 1897, p. 186–187; S. Kotlárová, 2008, p. 110; M. Rykl, 1994, p. 123–132; a roundel from the first years of the 16th century was erroneously identified by the researcher as a free-standing tower; cf. B. Czechowicz, 2020, p. 168–169.

⁴⁶ A. Podlaha, 1900, p. 4–14; R. Šimůnek, 2013, p. 97–102.

Zdeněk Lev, in his extremely rich correspondence, very willingly and freely used various examples from biblical,⁴⁷ ancient,⁴⁸ or Bohemian⁴⁹ history. He knew Greek myths and Aesop's fables.⁵⁰ He loved to moralize by drawing from them.⁵¹ He cared very much about his reputation, not once emphasizing his service to justice.⁵² He was critical of officials who abused their powers,⁵³ as well as of religious novelties⁵⁴ and disrespect for sacred imagery.⁵⁵ Criticism or even punishment of others came easily to him – he liked to judge and call people scoundrels⁵⁶ or create norms, as in a letter to Petr of Rožmberk from 11.4.1523: "he who perseveres in righteousness, blessed are all his deeds."⁵⁷ In a letter of 1519 about an army coming from the Empire to help the Teutonic Order in Prussia, whose master refused to pay a fief tribute to the Polish king, he wrote with irony that one of the German commanders signed his letters as "supreme hetman of the Reich and enforcer of justice against the unjust."⁵⁸

Zdeněk Lev was a politician with a clear vision of the Bohemian state (Bohemian Crown)⁵⁹ and its place in Europe.⁶⁰ In the interregnum following the death of Louis Jagiellon, he informed Jakub, Bishop of Wrocław, that the duty

⁴⁷ E.g., in a letter to Opel of Fictum of 2.4.1523, where he quoted King David and mentioned King Nebuchadnezzar; J. Kalousek, J. Čelakovský, 1888, p. 216–218, No. 280; cf. also p. 214–215, No. 279 (letter of 1523).

⁴⁸ E.g., in a letter to Vojtěch of Pernštejn of 5.7.1517; J. Čelakovský, F. Dvorský, 1887, p. 174–177, No. 186.

⁴⁹ E.g., in a letter to Vojtěch of Pernštejn of 28.6.1526, he mentioned a chronicle he knew of about the times of kings Wenceslas IV and Sigismund, when the states knew how to behave if someone interfered in the affairs of the Kingdom of Bohemia; J. Kalousek, J. Čelakovský, 1889, p. 82–84, No. 536.

⁵⁰ J. Kalousek, J. Čelakovský, 1888, p. 216–218, No. 280.

⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 243, 305, No. 406; J. Kalousek, F. Dvorský (ed.) 1893, p. 158, No. 1045.

⁵² In a letter of September 1514 to the council of the Old and New Town of Prague, he asked about people who spoke ill of him; J. Čelakovský, F. Dvorský, 1887, p. 103–104, No. 113. In 1526, in turn, he appealed to the Silesian states not to allow royal officials to attend the parliament in Bohemia as delegates, as he did not want his own, the highest official, to be suspected of any partiality; J. Kalousek, J. Čelakovský, 1888, p. 265, 1526.

⁵³ He reprimanded his burgrave in Syców for abusing the child of one of the townsmen; J. Kalousek, F. Dvorský, A. Rezek, 1892, p. 21.

⁵⁴ Cf. the letter to the Bishop of Wrocław, Jakob of Salza, on the spread of Lutheran books in Silesia; J. Kalousek, J. Čelakovský, 1889, p. 112–113, No. 587.

⁵⁵ The magnate expressed his displeasure that the townsmen in his town Krupka had pawned a painting from the church to pay the tax; J. Kalousek, F. Dvorský, A. Rezek, 1892, p. 92, No. 928; about the magnate's attitude to art, see P. Kováč, 2020, p. 43–238.

⁵⁶ As in the letter to Vilém of Pernštejn dated 2.12.1513 about the Duke Bartholomew of Ministerberg; J. Čelakovský, F. Dvorský, 1887, p. 22–26, No. 18 (here p. 23).

⁵⁷ "ktož při spravedlnosti upřemě stojí, že jsou jeho věci všechny požehnané"; J. Kalousek, J. Čelakovský, 1887, p. 241–242, No. 313.

⁵⁸ J. Kalousek, F. Dvorský, 1893, p. 185, No. 1087.

⁵⁹ See B. Czechowicz, 2019b on this subject.

⁶⁰ In a letter of March 1526 to Vojtěch of Pernštejn, he wrote that the Kingdom of Bohemia was subject neither to Rome (did he mean the pope?), nor to the Reich (i.e., the emperor), nor to Magdeburg (which concerned jurisdiction over towns under Magdeburg law); J. Kalousek, J. Čelakovský, 1889, p. 47, No. 482.

to manage the state affairs fell to him,⁶¹ unambiguously making himself out to be a regent temporarily holding supreme power.⁶² Whether he really was a candidate for the kingship at that time is impossible to prove. Certainly, his political rival, Duke Charles of Minsterberg, who at that time was building his “Solomon” castle in Silesia according to Ried’s project, was considered a candidate.⁶³ Even so, considering the almost quarter of a century that Zdeněk Lev was at the helm of Bohemian politics and the near-permanent absence from Prague of the “distant” rulers Vladislav II and Ludwig, he can be considered the “uncrowned king” of Bohemia.

It is therefore difficult to see anyone else in the position of the conceptual designer of the Blatná Castle. It was undoubtedly – at least as far as the general ideological message is concerned – Zdeněk Lev. It was not only him, though. In a letter to his son of 31.3.1530 from Prague Castle, we learn: “I want to talk to Master Benedict to go to Blatná one day for the reasons you told me.”⁶⁴ This shows that sometimes, the younger representative of the family, Adam of Rožmitál, who was married to a noblewoman from Silesia, had something to say about the castle. This was likely also the reason why Zdeněk Lev wrote so warmly in 1520 about the necessity of the cooperation and unity of Bohemians and Silesians in the face of the recent Polish-Teutonic war.⁶⁵ As the overview above shows, at that time, several Silesian princes were imbuing their castles with a biblical code. The Bohemian “almost king” could not have been worse in this matter, especially since he came across architectural references to King Solomon at Prague Castle, which was like a second home to him for many years.

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⁶¹ J. Kalousek, J. Čelakovský, 1890, p. 138.

⁶² Ibidem, p. 144.

⁶³ For a new interpretation of the sources on this subject, cf. note 59.

⁶⁴ “Chci dáti s mistrem Benediktem mluvit, aby některý den na Blatnú jel pro tu potřebu, kteráž jsi mi oznámil”; J. Kalousek, F. Dvorský, A. Rezek, 1892, p. 31–37, No. 852.

⁶⁵ J. Kalousek, J. Čelakovský, 1888, p. 188.

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