Hiding sense in the date

Date and historical memory in the Middle Ages

Call for Papers

Proposed book project is based on two sections 1033 and 1133 organized in IMC Leeds 2018 under the title "Inventing Heroes, Reversing Legends, Constructing Facts: The Dynamics of Identity Shaping". It is the ambition of its redactors to analyze the need for exact dates for establishing historical memory not only from methodological point of view (cf. bellow), but also from the perspective of the medieval and modern historiography.

As for now, the collection includes these contributions *Re-membering the competition: Benedictines and new religious orders in the Czech lands (12th century) from a contemporary and modern view*; *Creating the Identity of the gens Boemorum through the Holy Days of Czech Patrons in the Narrative Sources of Early Přemyslid Bohemia, until 1198*; *The Forgotten Patrons: The Cult of the Holy Five Brothers in the Czech Lands in the Period between the Middle Ages and the Present*; *Fashioning Political Cultures in Philip The Good´s Low Countries* and *The Great Schism in the letters of patriarch Peter of Antiocheia*.

Until February-28, 2020, we will welcome ten-thousand-words-long contributions in English related to the medieval history (not necessarily European). Our goal is to publish them in respectful peer-reviewed series of a renowned publishing house such as Brill, Brepols, or De Gruyter.

1. Intro (K)

The memory of nations is a construct, built from the accretion of political, cultural and social traditions, perpetuated by a mutual history and often intermingled with an idea called identity. Usually, the creation of national identity relies upon something that is defined as a historical "benchmark". These are occurrences so important for the self-awareness of a community, that they became distinctive in their evolution. Most commonly, these benchmarks were important and therefore datable events that marked points of no return and the hopeful beginning of something new in national doctrine. Sometimes its people; men and women considered important due to their achievements for country or state. Rarely objects linked to process of state building or places, where the mazy fate of governmental entities was finally decided. All of these objects and subjects, places and events form the backbone of national identity. However, it is not their factual recurrence throughout time, but the ways, in which they are looked at and dealt with that reveals their greatest problem – their interpretability, which makes them a highly actual argument. Today, where national identity is once again pocketed by populists it's more important than ever, to come back to processes of nation building: First by realising that even the most factual "benchmarks" of national identity are often nothing more than uncertain nuclei, buried under layers of interpretations and deforming traditions that transformed their primary clearness into blurry uncertainty. Second that these immense and deforming layers of meaning are in fact the real bearers of collective identity. It is therefore more fruitful to unveil the mechanisms of this build-up and re-establish their connection with the facts and myths, they're built on, than to treat both phenomena separately.

Third, it is essential to come back to the structures of power that led to the build-up of these layers. They not only had an impact on their growth, but influenced the means of their interpretation; first through the language and images bound to benchmarks, second with the propagation of certain views that can be very prohibitive in the *longue durée*, in the end by limiting the public access to a different view.

But why it is sometimes so hard to push through the core of piled up significances and what is the nature of fragility in historical benchmarks? In many ways, the formation of benchmarks relies on the basic human need, to remember things and give them a broader significance by reinserting them into an greater context: According to Aleida Assmann, memory is not only formed of individual experience, but of a *mosaic of imprints, texts, books or rituals that were formed by the generations.* This is the base of concepts like *cultural* and *historical memory* or *culture as memory,* introduced by Marcel Mauss, Jan Assmann or Otto-Gerhard Oexle. They not only imply a perpetual dialogue between individual and collective memory, but, first of all the basic need for a collective memory, expressed through culture and a shared history. In this perception, historical benchmarks are facts in the frame of a culture. The problem starts, when they are used to restrain this frame, by becoming unquestioned instruments of compartmentalization and teleology – what happens when the identity of a nation or a collective is shaped. This is a somehow normal process, but there are no inhibitions to its misuse.

From the perspective of fragility and "unnaturalness" of those benchmarks, it is also important to take in consideration those narratives that failed and ask why did this happened – we are used too much to look only on those that succeeded, but what were their competitors?

Before we plunge in the subjects of our double sections dedicated as well to medieval examples of identity shaping and their later transformation through historiography all over Europe, let me once again turn your attention to the different manifestations and mechanisms in this gracilisation process. For this is a quite new concept, my colleague, David Kalhous and I were so far able to define six fields, where the transformation in the perception of historical benchmarks visualised in very different ways: Its 1. Thorough Ideology, 2. The Literary dimension, 3. Material culture and Objects, 4. Communication, 5. The actors, 6. Dynamics. For starters, let me introduce you to this variety:

2. Literary dimension (D)

"When a reader is lost in a book, the wheels of comprehension move on many levels. Most of the wheels need to be in working order and the wheels must mesh in harmony. Damage to a single wheel can spoil the entire experience," comment Graesser and Klettke on literary plot. We have already noted there is strong relationship between literary manifestation, historiography and memory. Hayden White once pointed out that historians in their texts follow the main general patterns of narrative, comedy, tragedy romance and satire. Even though these "modes of emplotments", as White call them, substantially differ in their approach to the human faith, they all share the need for organizing the information into the specific plot.

It was Aristotle already, who in his Poetics remarked that every tragedy has it's a beginning, a middle and an end, which are causally related to each other and should lead to the catharsis.

Similarly organized a plot German writer G. Freytag (1863), who used the terms "exposition", "climax" and "denouement", where towards the climax the action grows up and towards the denouement it calms down. Russian formalists spoke about *fabula* and *sujet* and looked for general patterns of different genres. Thus, at least in European cultural tradition, a narrative requires its clearly defined milestones – beginning, climax and end, which both should help the audience to recognize the border between the reality and its representation and to understand the direction of the story. Because of the literary tradition, which works with that structure, the audience also raises certain expectations to the narrative, even though they might not necessarily be fulfilled like in abruptly finished TV shows. Script writers enable these expectations to intentionally use "cliff-hangers" to raise ratings; from psychological point of view, it reveals our need for climax and catharsis.

Clear structure of any particular narrative is, in this case, also an attempt to reduce the complexity of the world through a story by careful organization of the *fabula* and by cautious selection of the information. Within fictional, or non-fictional story, it helps to simplify the complexity of the transformation of a character, and thus makes it apprehensible, or rather it creates an effect of impression of understanding.

The experiments have showed that the plot is extremely fragile and its ability to influence the reader and stay in personal memory strongly depends on exact wording and careful organization of its individual parts. From that perspective, it offers good parallel to the historical memory, which obviously present ideal characters and representatives of the community and in the same time offer the audience someone and something to identify with on emotional level; successful history narrations are mostly the result of the selective and competitive processes that makes some narratives fall, while others survive. How exactly is established the relationship between the plot and the moral message of the story is, however, very difficult to understand and we lack any convincing theory that would explain the importance of the narratives in every day live. We only know it works. In future, the cooperation among the historians, marketing specialist, psychologists, or experts in literature and cognitive science might bring substantial progress.

From medieval perspective, one important reason that might have decided about survival of a particular narrative was its codicological context. If we look on monastic historical narratives written in Czech lands, we can recognize two substantial groups – some of the authors used chronicle of Bohemians written by Cosmas of Prague as a basis for their own story. Thanks to the popularity of that chronicle, their texts were later copied together, and later scribe took them over completely, with all additions and amendments. Therefore, they easily survived outside of their particular monastic contexts and got a chance to influence wider audience. But there were others, e. g. Gerlach of Milevsko, Henry the Woodcutter, who decided to stay alone with their texts. Therefore, they remained fairly unknown outside of their intended audience and survived in one manuscript. It was not a failure because texts in both groups hit the intended audience, but still one detail related to the structure of the manuscript and text decided, whose narrative survived, and whose did not.

3. Ideology (D)

But let us go back to more general questions. The general idea, how the text should be structured, how it should begin and end has its parallel in Augustin´s philosophy of history, story of human salvation with the beginning in the creation of the world and fall of Adam and

Eva, with its climax in the crucifixion of Jesus and its denouement in the Last Judgement. As such, it became the basic plot for the most of the Christian chronicles, but the need for beginning and end, for firm borders with its milestones/border stones, which divide the safety of one's home from the wilderness, become integrated into modern historiography as well. The national, or even nationalistic narratives inspired subconsciously by the Christian story followed similar pattern, but general humanity/ mankind/ Christianity was replaced by ethnically defined group. Similar to the general Christian narrative, particular narrative of certain social group required well defined beginning and other milestones that were prescribed by literary theory. Biblical exegesis, which introduced four different modes of interpretation, literal, typological, moral or tropological and anagogical, also enabled to see hierarchies among the texts and to find models (anti-types) for characters, who represented particular community, and specific narrative patterns in the Bible, i. e. in the general story of salvation, or in the ancient Latin literature, which constituted the canon of medieval literacy. E. g. Cosmas of Prague begins his chronicle with the tower of Babel. Medieval authors did not need to wait for modern conception of time and modern realist novel, they did write their particular narratives even before.

"[In] epochs of revolutionary crisis [people] anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honoured disguise and borrowed language. Thus, Luther put on the mask of the Apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789-1814 draped itself alternately in the guise of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire ...", wrote Karl Marx in his analysis of the 1848 Revolution in France, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte". With that powerful shortcut, Marx made his reader aware of the continuity of rhetorical and political tactics, which based modern goals on respected patterns. Nationalistic historiography, or other modern political movements continued this Christian tradition. In vocabulary, where especially the word "martyr" found its place, in the semantics, in the semiotics, or in the structure of the narrative.

Whereas in fictional narratives they accompanied the phases of the plot, in historiographical narratives, they did the same, and more – they also framed the polities in time and space. As politicians and scholars of nationalistic era were obsessed in the same way their medieval predecessors were with alleged ancientness of their communities, they set those beginnings in the distant past. Yet, they needed them – setting the milestones was important part of the narrative strategy.

In Palacký´s story of Czech nation – ethno-history in A. D. Smith´s categorization, the main plot was based on the conflict between the Czechs and Germans. Germans became an external and internal threat and enabled Palacký to fill the categories of inclusion and exclusion with concrete content. Palacký was, of course, not primitive nationalist, he accompanied the struggles between those two nations, which both seemed to exist forever, with contacts, spoke about reciprocal cultural enrichment and admitted e. g. that only taking over certain institutions in the thirteenth century or later made the establishment of strong monarchy possible. But subconsciously, on metaphorical level, he understood a nation as a pure substance, which can only be corrupted/spoiled by foreign additives/ingredients. These moments of strong foreign influence stand for/signified also important milestones in his historiographical narrative. Setting a milestone in the story of a nation played similar role it

played in the fictional narrative – it helped to establish the main conflict on one side, on the other side, it enabled its author to build a plot in story and

4. Material manifestation of historical memory (K)

Material in historical landmarks is very important; no other thing stimulates our phantasy about past events better than historical monuments that are generally bursting with meaning. Among these targets of national veneration – battle memorial places or statues of important people – figure legal documents like foundation charts of states that link abstract concepts of freedom, equality and/or property to a precise factual initiating point of political empowerment. In the conception of national identity, this gives them the quality of profane relics and stimulates the emergence of collateral materiality, first of all the construction of a worthy storage buildings and recurring, mostly annual memorial days. Such a tradition was initiated in the case of United States Declaration of Independence from July 4, 1776, standing synonymously for American democracy. It is stored in the National Archives of Washington and celebrated in the most popular nationwide Memorial Day of the USA. In Europe, a recurrence to medieval charts, like the Golden Bull of Charles IV in Germany and Central Europe or the English Magna Charta Libertatum form 1215 is more common.

Only one country handles its foundation chart in a similar way as the Americans – Switzerland. Here, the myth of its foundation is bound to an inconsiderable Latin chart from 1291, an alliance between three communities from central Switzerland – Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden – that were just trying to protect their mutual interests in the precarious times following the interregnum. The stellar ascent of this charter to the one and only foundation chart of modern, democratic and neutral Switzerland began only in the 19th century, precisely at its end, when the liberal leaders of the Confederation desperately tried to anchor the roots of Young Switzerland into an egalitarian tradition as old as the late middle Ages. The document proved to be very helpful; even though, it was known only after 1760, it offered valuable connections to the already very popular legends about the mythical oath of Old Swiss Confederation taken on the Rütli, a meadow above lake Uri, the tale of William Tell or the justified murder of the tyrannical Habsburg bailiff Gessler – all of them immortalised by Friedrich Schiller. Even though its true historical character was already known to national historians like Joseph Eutych Kopp, politicians needed a strong symbol – a charter and a date. The alliance charter of 1291 became the Highlight of the official 600-years celebration of Switzerland's founding in 1891, its reproductions were hanged in public buildings and schools and a special building – the later confederacy charter archive – (Bundesbriefarchiv) was planned as vault for the political relic. Due to typical Swiss skirmish between cantons and Confederation, it could be built and only 45 later. In 1936, the times were again favourable to the national fairy tale of liberation, since Switzerland began to figure as the only democracy surrounded by totalitarian regimes. And this popular doctrine was that strong, that it survived the following decades, despite the paradigm shift in historical research that began in the 1970ties. As for a precise date for the founding of the Swiss Confederation, the charter unfortunately offers no practical answer. Its issue date indicated on the Latin original as 'the end of July' was translated by its political users as the first of August – which was established as the official Swiss Memorial Day.

5. Final remarks

Our main goal in this paper was to demonstrate how deeply rooted in European literary tradition and ideologies are structured historiographical narratives and how strongly is the

need for clearly defined benchmarks entangled in them. We have also highlighted the importance of the details, which decided about success, or failure of different identificational narratives.