

Silesian Duke Charles I of Münsterberg and Oels and His Power Aspirations



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ABSTRACT

Although Duke Charles I of Münsterberg and Oels has been vastly overlooked or even negatively judged by Czech historiography, he was one of the crucial and most distinct political figures of the Bohemian state at the threshold of the modern era. The offspring of the Podiebrad family and grandson of the Bohemian King George of Podiebrad both noticeably influenced events occurring under the Jagiellonian reign and the Central-European events following the 1526 arrival of the Habsburgs to the Bohemian throne. The historical stage marked by his birth and death was one of the most turbulent periods of the Bohemian Kingdom, Silesia and European history.

KEYWORDS

Duke Charles I of Münsterberg and Oels; the Bohemian Estates'; the Jagiellonian reign; the lands of the Bohemian Crown; Silesia

Duke Charles I of Münsterberg and Oels certainly holds an eminent position in the pantheon of the most notable Silesian political figures.² The offspring of the Podiebrad family and grandson of the Bohemian King George of Podiebrad both noticeably influenced events occurring under the Jagiellonian reign and the Central-European events following the 1526 arrival of the Habsburgs to the Bohemian throne. The

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2 The publication of the present study was made possible by the financial support provided to the 2017 institutional research of the Philosophical Faculty of Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem. It follows on and departs from the author's previous essays focusing on Duke Charles of Münsterberg and Oels and his kin: R. FUKALA, *Karel I. Minsterberský — politik příležitosti a činu*, in: V. WOLF (Ed.), *Od Žižky k Poděbradům*, Acta Universitatis Reginaehradecensis, Facultatis Studiorum Humanorum, Historica I, Hradec Králové 2006, pp. 189–200; R. FUKALA, *Minsterberští bratrance ve víru jagellonské politiky*, in: O. FELCMAN — R. FUKALA (Eds.), *Poděbradové. Rod českomoravských pánů, kladských hrabat a slezských knížat*, Praha 2008, pp. 139–161 (where also see more bibliography); R. FUKALA, *Karel I. Minsterberský a epitař Kristus na Olivetské hoře*, in: B. CZECHOWICZ (Ed.), *Ziębice — miasto św. Jerzego. Dzieje i kultura dawnej stolicy księżęcej*, Wrocław 2010, pp. 63–75.



historical stage marked by his birth and death was one of the most turbulent periods of the Bohemian Kingdom, Silesia and European history. The influence of humanism and Renaissance on the lifestyle, new religious and power and political fights and, last but not least, overseas discoveries had revolutionary significance for European Christian civilization. At this eventful time, the Münsterberg duke quietly grew in power and did not hesitate to establish various religious and political corporations and beneficial relations with prominent European dynasties of dukes, mainly the Piasts, Wettins and Hohenzollerns — and it must be noted that he was quite successful in this. His politics were already not so straightforwardly assertive but rather, conciliatory and more diplomatic. The duke's gradual estrangement from the Czech milieu clearly shows how the political and religious atmosphere changed in Prague and Bohemia. It was he who unambiguously moved to Silesia and was interested in imperial and Central-European events, at the same time striving for the country's larger political independence.

Although Duke Charles I of Münsterberg and Oels has been vastly overlooked or even negatively judged by Czech historiography, he was one of the crucial and most distinct political figures of the Bohemian state at the threshold of the modern era. This Silesian duke not only occupied fore positions in the Bohemian Estates' society but also held very important offices in the lands of the Bohemian Crown. He was mainly the supreme district administrator of Silesia and supreme bailiff of Upper Lusatia and, last but not least, life-time district administrator of the Great Glogau (Głogów) Duchy. During his lifetime, he held the titles of Silesian Duke of Münsterberg and Oels, Duke of Troppau (Opava) and Count of Glatz (Kłodzko). He ranked among the close counsellors of the Jagiellonian rulers and was a powerful aristocrat and patron who consciously pampered the prestige of his Podiebrad dynasty also in the sphere of fine arts.³ He certainly was a master of deceit, corruption, clientelism, political stratagems and diplomatic dodges and a Machiavellian to his adversaries, but his closest ones towards the end of his life perceived him as of a moderate, restrained, equable and calm nature, who could mainly boast his royal origin.⁴

When Charles' cousin, Bartholomäus of Münsterberg and Troppau, tragically died in the troubled waters of the Danube in the beginning of the restless year of 1515, Bautzen and Prague came to face the pressing issue as to his substitute. King Wladis-

3 The most recent and most precise information on the patronage and cultural interests of Charles I of Münsterberg was provided by B. CZECHOWICZ, *Dwie drogi? Fryderyk II Legnicko-Brzeski i Karol I Ziębicko-Oleśnicki oraz ich siedziby w Legnicy i Ząbkowicach Śląskich*, in: *Szkice Legnickie*, XXVIII, 2007, pp. 23–54; B. CZECHOWICZ, *Książęcy mecenát artystyczny na Śląsku u schyłku średniowiecza*, Warszawa 2005, pp. 122–160.

4 Very traditional and very unfavourable standpoint towards Duke Charles I was taken by the prominent Czech historian J. MACEK, *Jagellonský věk v českých zemích (1471–1526)*, 2: *Šlechta*, Praha 1994, pp. 24–25; similarly gloomy portrait of the duke was drawn by, e.g., J. FRANCEK, *24. 10. 1517. Svatováclavská smlouva. Urození versus neurození (Dny, které tvořily české dějiny)*, Praha 2006, p. 77. A more objective approach, on the contrary, came from P. ČORNEJ, *Poděbradové. Úvaha na okraj monografie o jedné větvi šlechtického rodu*, in: *Český časopis historický*, Vol. 107, 2009, pp. 152–159, esp. p. 156; P. ČORNEJ, *Slezsko*, in: P. ČORNEJ — M. BARTLOVÁ (Eds.), *Velké dějiny země Koruny české, VI: 1437–1526*, Praha — Litomyšl 2007, p. 583.



las II Jagiello in no way concealed that it should again be one of the Podiebrad family. The only ones taken into consideration were the descendants of Duke Henry the Elder of Münsterberg, the founder of the new dynasty of the Münsterberg dukes in Silesia.⁵ The choice in this case was quite simple. Henry's first-begotten son, Albrecht, had died four years ago and, in contrast to his siblings, never strikingly asserted himself in the political arena. Yet another of Henry's sons, George, shared a similar fate, also being no great political protagonist, and his negative experiences from the Glogau War (1488–1489) moreover made him prefer to passively watch the events from his seat in Oels (Oleśnica) as late as to his premature death in 1502.⁶ No wonder that the relatives had since turned their big hopes to the smart and diligent Charles who soon proved to be one of the most competent Podiebrads.⁷

Duke Charles I of Münsterberg and Oels was born in Glatz on 4 May 1476 as the fifth child to Henry the Elder of Münsterberg and Margravine Ursula of Brandenburg. There is no sound information as to his childhood and youth. We only know about his politically motivated marriage, closed on 6 January 1488 in Glatz with the underage Duchess Anna of Sagan (Žagaň) and Glogau (1483–1541), daughter of the Piast Duke John II the Mad.⁸ The husband and wife, however, began sharing common household as late as in 1495, when they reached maturity in the contemporary opinion. All available signs seem to suggest that the life of the couple was happy, and Anna bore 12 children to her husband, remaining his only lifetime partner. Charles' fate can be more precisely followed in the historical sources only from the early 16th century when he established closer contacts with his relative, Duke Bartholomäus.⁹ His first

5 Let us only mention the crucial work dealing with the genealogic relations: S. GŁOGOWSKI, *Potomci krále Jiřího z Poděbrad. Genealogie knížat z Minstrberka*, Ostrava 1989, and its Polish edition: S. GŁOGOWSKI, *Genealogia Podiebradów*, Gliwice 1997.

6 On the fights for the Glogau inheritance, comp. H. SZCZEGÓŁA, *Koniec panowania piastowskiego nad Środkową Odrą*, Poznań 1968; R. FUKALA, *Potomci krále Jiřího z Poděbrad a jejich zápas o hlohovské dědictví*, in: *Kladský sborník 7, 2006*, pp. 53–84 (where also see earlier editions of sources and literature); these dramatic events were most recently summarized by Martin Šandera in his paper *Jindřich starší z Minsterberka a válka o hlohovské dědictví*, in: B. CZECHOWICZ — M. KONOPNICKA (Eds.) *Glogovia Maior. Wielki Głogów między blaskiem dziejów i cieniem ruin*, Głogów — Zielona Góra 2010, pp. 111–120.

7 On the activities of the Münsterberg and Oels dukes, see, most recently, M. NIEN- AŁTOWSKI, *Podiebradowie w dziejach księstwa ziębicko-oleśnickiego 1495–1647. Zarys*, Oleśnica 2013, pp. 17–35.

8 On this last Glogau-Sagan Piast, see, most recently, B. TECHMAŃSKA, *Niespokojny księżę Jan II Żagański*, Kraków 2001. The fundamental source to the Piast-Podiebrad agreements is the so-called Glogau Annals; on this, comp. H. MARKGRAF (Ed.), *Annales Glogovienses bis z. J. 1493 nebst urkundlichen Beilagen*, in: *Scriptores rerum Silesiacarum*, 10, Breslau 1877, pp. 50–51, while its last Polish edition was provided by W. MROZOWICZ, *Próba wprowadzenia potomków Jerzego z Podiebradów do księstwa głogowskiego (1488) w świetle Roczniku głogowskiego*, in: W. WRZESIŃSKI (Ed.), *Dolny Śląsk. Monografia historyczna*, Wrocław 2006, pp. 159–160.

9 The collection of the hitherto most crucial Podiebrad documents is held in the archives of the Archiwum Państwowe Wrocław (hereinafter, APW), Księstwo Ziębickie (1492–1882), Rep. (Repatriata) 30, old signatures I 5a–I 5n, new signatures 5–12; Księst-



limelight appearance arrived with the disputes between the Silesian Estates and the Breslau (Wrocław) Chapter. At that time, the young duke signed and sealed the so-called Kolowrat Agreement of 4 February 1504, being accompanied by three other distinguished personalities and, at the same time, royal referees: Albrecht of Kolowrat, Chancellor of the Kingdom of Bohemia, Prince Sigismund of Jagiello, and Silesian District Administrator Kazimierz II of Teschen (Cieszyn). The text of the agreement ruled that no one born outside the lands of the Bohemian Crown could be elected a Breslau bishop and no clerical offices and feudal estates could be passed onto foreigners.¹⁰

Duke Charles entered the political scene of the Bohemian-Hungarian Jagiellonian statehood in the turbulent era when his cousin Bartholomäus opened a big game and became a leading personality of the township union. In 1509, Charles participated in the ceremonial coronation of the king's son, Louis of Jagiello, where he was introduced to King Wladislas and other prominent guests via Duke Kasimir II of Teschen and Bartholomäus.¹¹ The variegated society of the Jagiellonian royal court allured him with irresistible strength. Bartholomäus vividly outlined to him the chances and the financial prospects of a royal courtier and official. The duke, sunk in debts inherited from his father, left Silesia with no delay and decided to attempt some lucrative job at the Bautzen court. His ears would cherish the jingle of the so desperately desired coins for all his life — since he and his siblings had had to sell the native Glatz region to his relative, Count Ulrich of Hardegg, already in 1501¹² and since other unfavourable circumstances forced him to forfeit the Münsterberg Duchy to the wealthy Duke John II the Good, the last member of the Oppeln (Opole) branch of the Piasts, in

wo Oleśnickie (1324–1862), Rep 33 F (Oels), I 7u Rep. 132c (Dep. Oels–Urkunden), esp. Nos. 512–641 and 756.

10 *Listinář Těšínska, 1496–1526*. Codex diplomaticus Ducatus Tessiensis, III, ed. Emerich Němec, Český Těšín 1961, Nos. 363, 364. — As concerns the Kolowrat Agreement, the personality of the Silesian district administrator Duke Kasimir II of Teschen is especially worth attention; on this, comp. the biography D. PINDUR, *Těšínsko za vlády piastovského knížete Kazimíra II (1477–1528)*, in: *Práce a studie Muzea Beskyd, společenské vědy*, No. 14, Frýdek-Místek 2004, pp. 1–93; D. PINDUR, *Książę czasów przelomu. Kazimierz II Cieszyński (1450–1528) i jego władztwo*, Wrocław 2010.

11 F. PALACKÝ, *Dějiny národu českého*, V, Praha 1968, p. 358; also comp. one of the most important narrative sources for understanding the Bohemian history of the given era, J. PORÁK — J. KAŠPAR (Eds.), *Ze starých letopisů českých*, Praha 1980 (hereinafter, SLČ), p. 313, where also see information about the presence of Charles I of Münsterberg in the St Vitus' Cathedral on 11 March 1509.

12 On the regest, see A. HAAS (Ed.), *Archiv koruny České, 6. Katalog listin z let 1438–1526*, Praha 1958 (hereinafter, AKČ), p. 153, No. 298; on the basis of the document of 16 August 1501, Albrecht, George and Charles of Münsterberg surrendered Glatz with its entire amenities and rights to Count Ulrich of Hardegg; also comp. other documents, pp. 154–155, Nos. 301, 302, 304 and 305; C. GRÜNHAGEN — H. MARKGRAF (Eds.), *Lehns- und Besitzurkunden Schlesiens und seiner einzelnen Fürstenthümer im Mittelalter*, Bd. II, Leipzig 1883, No. 35, pp. 190–193. The document concerning the sale was most recently made available via F. MÜSIL — P. PREGIEL (Eds.), *Chrestomatie k dějinám Kladska, Hradec Králové 2002 (Kladský sborník: 3. supplementum)*, pp. 100–103, No. 63.



1509.¹³ And although he took the entire Silesian property base of the family over after the death of his brother Albrecht in 1511, his financial situation even worsened. In addition, his debts were publicly discussed at the general assembly of the lands of the Bohemian Crown, held in December 1512 in Glatz.¹⁴ The experienced and influential Bartholomäus, although also being in serious disputes and troubles with the Breslau patriciate, would not deny him social support at that time. This determined standpoint, including certain favouritism, influenced Charles' future power orientation to such an extent that he could not be persuaded by the offers of the Bohemian lordly oligarchy who tried to recruit him to their own camp as the arbiter between the disunited camps.¹⁵ Charles thus secretly supported Bartholomäus' military performance in Hungary, launched on 27 November 1514, already at the Bautzen assembly, and followed on his assumed political course since 1515.¹⁶

Duke Charles I also enjoyed some favour from the Jagiellonian royal siblings – the older Wladislas II and the younger Sigismund – and later from the Polish ruler Sigismund the Elder. Especially after the 1515 Viennese Congress, the patronage of the Polish King Sigismund the Elder and Emperor Maximilian steered him to the position of royal counsellor and catapulted his diplomatic career in the service of the Bautzen court,¹⁷ so substituting for the late Bartholomäus was without further problems. In addition, his credit on the Central-European political scene gradually grew because he was the one and only male offspring of the Podiebrads in the lands of the Bohemian Crown, while the memory of the King George would open every single door to

13 Duke John the Good ranked among the wealthiest Silesian dukes. He forfeited the Münsterberg Duchy from Charles I and, after the death of the last Troppau and Ratibor Přemyslid, Valentin the Humpback, also acquired the entire Ratibor region. It, however, was a forfeit of the Münsterberg Duchy instead of its straightforward sale, as the professional literature would sometimes claim. The forfeit equalled the considerable amount of 25,000 Hungarian gulden. On this, comp. W. WATTENBACH — C. GRÜNHAGEN (Eds.), *Registrum st. Wenceslai, Codex diplomaticus Silesiae* (hereinafter, CDS), VI, Breslau 1865, p. 168, reges 505.

14 F. PALACKÝ, *Dějiny národu českého*, V, pp. 398–399.

15 Charles at that time closely cooperated with Duke Kasimir II of Teschen who, in turn, conspired with Zdeněk Lev of Rožmitál in the matter of the rich Opoln and Ratibor regions against yet another person interested in the two territories, Margrave George of Brandenburg and Ansbach. Comp. the regests CDS VI, pp. 168–171. On the entire dispute, see R. FUKALA, *Zápas o opolsko-ratibořské dědictví a mocenské aspirace slezských knížat na prahu raného novověku*, in: *Slezský sborník* 100, 2002, pp. 81–102 (where also see earlier bibliography); R. FUKALA, *Hohenzollernové v evropské politice 16. století. Mezi Ansbachem, Krnovem a Královcem (1523–1603)*, Praha 2005, pp. 40–85; on this, also see, most recently, M. HOLÁ, *Panovník, čeští stavové a Jiří Braniborský ve sporu o konfirmaci braniborsko-opolsko-ratibořských nástupnických smluv v letech 1528–1531*, in: L. BŘEZINA — J. KONVIČNÁ — Jan ZDICHY-NEC (Eds.), *Ve znamení zemí Koruny české. Sborník k šedesátým narozeninám prof. PhDr. Lenky Bobkové, CSc.*, Praha 2006, pp. 97–111.

16 On the positive appraisal of Charles' arrival to Bohemian politics after the late Bartholomäus, comp., e.g., F. PALACKÝ, *Dějiny národu českého*, V, p. 444, esp. p. 450.

17 A. REZEK, *Příspěvky k dějinám českým za králů Vladislava a Ludvíka*, in: *Časopis českého Muzea* 56, 1882, pp. 217–218.



him. No wonder that the Münsterberg duke subsequently climbed up to the top of the career ladder rather swiftly.¹⁸

An embarrassing, but paradoxical occurrence which brought Duke Charles I of Münsterberg to the heart of the Central-European events was the death of King Wladislas II, who died on 13 March 1516 in Bautzen. It was settled in the gloomy atmosphere of the court, where the aging and ill king was humbly getting ready to leave the mundane sorrows behind, that Duke Charles — along with Zdeněk Lev of Rožmitál and Břetislav Švihovský of Rýzmberek — would be the guardians of the ten-year old King Louis II in the framework of the lands of the Bohemian Crown.¹⁹ A year later, the ambitious Charles was summoned to the office of royal counsellor, being re-confirmed in it by the young Jagellonian ruler.

The eventful life at the Bautzen court and the official duties resulted in yet more financial troubles for the lavish Podiebrad. Alongside the array of Hungarian courtiers and aristocrats, he above all cherished luxury and was totally void of economic sense, moreover suffering from a delayed royal treasury cash-flow. So there again were heard the sound voices of the creditors, and Charles began contemplating further sale of his Silesian property in order to avert the ensuing legal consequences and threatening notices. In 1517, he sold the Steinau (Ścinawa) and Wohlau (Wołów) regions, i.e. the areas recently inherited from the unfortunate John II the Mad, to the quite wealthy brother of the Breslau bishop, John Thurzó.²⁰ No matter how inevitable, the given measure seriously harmed the prestige of the dynasty of the Münsterberg Podiebrads. Simply put, Duke Charles did not possess the investment talents of the Liegnitz-Brieg and Oppeln-Ratibor Piasts, and definitely did not enjoy as considerable successes in any of the mining enterprises as the Thurzas and the Jägendorf (Krnov) Hohenzollerns did. His activities in the economic sphere and management were almost non-existent; he instead lingered within the spirit of the medieval noble mentality and passively maintained the hitherto acquired property conglomerate which was far from being as interlinked as in the case of his neighbouring Silesian dukes. And it was exactly this zero sense of enterprise and overtaking various debts which brought his family to the verge of disaster. True, Charles succeeded in retaining the entire Münsterberg Duchy towards the end of his career and successfully re-installed the Podiebrad power there, but his sons remained trapped in the unceasing fights with their creditors and were left to keep resisting the unceasing demands. Their stringency alone allowed them to save the Oels region, while they forever lost

18 On Charles' frequent participation in the political events in Bohemia, comp. SLČ, 1980, pp. 387, 390–397.

19 King Louis' most important guardians and protectors were his uncles Sigismund the Elder and Emperor Maximilian as well as Margrave George of Brandenburg and Ansbach and, on behalf of the Hungarian side, János Bornemisza and Cardinal Tamás Bakócz; comp. F. PALACKÝ, *Dějiny národu českého*, V, p. 457; see the Latin extract from the testament of King Wladislas II, AKČ, 6, p. 189, No. 390.

20 The two purchases were countersigned by the ruler in 1518, AKČ 6, No. 409, pp. 197–198; on this sale, see AKČ 6, esp. No. 403, p. 195; also comp. CDS, Bd. XX, Breslau 1900, No. 358, p. 201; *Lehns- und Besitzurkunden Schlesiens und seiner einzelnen Fürstenthümer im Mittelalter*, Bd. I, Leipzig 1881, No. 17, pp. 289–291, Bd. II, Leipzig 1883, No. 99, p. 118.

the inherited Münsterberg except for the formal title. The dream of George of Po-diebrad, envisaging a powerful basis on the Bohemian-Silesian borderline — in the very heart of the lands of the Bohemian Crown — thus faded as fast as spring snow during Charles' generation.²¹

Let us now return to the stirred society of the Bohemian Estates to where the Duke Charles I of Münsterberg soon moved and which was soon exposed to the pitting of power clashes, both between the nobility and the towns and among the particular religious camps. This restlessness moreover included threats in the form of provincial social riots, violent attacks in the towns and echoes of the German peasant war in the borderland, as well as the fear of similar rebellious outbursts which had previously been seen in Hungary. Neither the underage king nor his guardians had the powers to intervene in the political, religious and social conflicts and to consistently forge the interests of the Jagiellonian dynasty. In the meantime, there was the increasing resistance against Rožmitál's predatory rule, which already several fore noblemen opposed. The fear of a major uprising along with some noblemen's prudence eventually forced the two disunited Estates to negotiate in a more constructive way, the result of which was the 1517 St Wenceslas Agreement — alias the first amendment to the Land Ordinance. It was signed at the St Wenceslas Assembly and was made part of the Land Registers on 24 October 1517 without the ruler's consent. The agreement was codified as a law, but its character was that of a compromise: the royal towns finally proclaimed the Land Ordinance valid and counterbalanced the approval of their assembly vote by consenting to the freedom of town markets and the development of aristocratic enterprise, thus giving up their own privileges. It indeed contemporarily defended its own position, but at a rather high cost.²² During the next stage of the power and political fights, the Bohemian opposition circles scored in pulling Duke Charles to their camp and made every effort to reinstall his royal authority in the country upon the approval of King Louis.²³

21 On the APW debts, see Rep. 30, signs. 8, 9, 10, 12. — On the general overview of the activities of the Silesian dukes, see R. FUKALA, *Silesia. The Society of Elites. Silesian Dukes and Estates (1437–1740)*, Ústí nad Orlicí 2008, pp. 30–62 (where also see earlier literature on the economic activities of the dukes); also comp. N. CONRADS, *Książęta i stany. Historia Śląska (1469–1740)*, Wrocław 2005, pp. 57–94.

22 K. MALÝ, *Svatováclavská smlouva, třídní kompromis mezi šlechtou a městy z r. 1517*, in: Universitas Carolina, Philosophica 1, 1955, pp. 195–222; J. FRANCEK, 24. 10. 1517. *Svatováclavská smlouva*, where esp. see the edition of the agreement, pp. 91–116; the most recent view of the events, conflicts and mainly legal conditions of the Jagiellonian period, provided by historians and historians of law, is part of the miscellany K. MALÝ — J. PÁNEK (Eds.), *Vladislavské zřízení zemské a počátky ústavního zřízení v českých zemích (1500–1619)*, Praha 2001, where esp. comp. the fundamental contribution by Petr Kreuz, pp. 267–289, with significant references to literature and sources; last but not least, see the edition of three crucial sources to the Jagiellonian period, P. KREUZ — I. MARTINOVSKÝ (Eds.), *Vladislavské zřízení zemské a navazující prameny (Svatováclavská smlouva a Zřízení o ručnicích)*, Dolní Břežany 2007.

23 The essay which is rather important to this day as concerns the followed dramatic events in Bohemia is J. PEŠEK — B. ZILYNSKYJ, *Městský stav v boji se šlechtou na počátku 16. století*, in: Folia Historica Bohemica, 6, Praha 1984, pp. 137–161; see also J. MACEK, *Jagellonský*



When Charles spoke to the young king on behalf of the above-mentioned group of opposition figures from the ranks of nobility and burghers in January 1523, his social credit increased dramatically. He was also backed up by Habsburg diplomacy and supported by the energetic Queen Mary whose influence on her husband, and thus also the administration within the lands of the Bohemian Crown, was undoubted. This time, the Podiebrad diplomatic offensive triumphed. The king resolutely intervened in the Bohemian political scene by forcing Zdeněk Lev of Rožmitál and other land officials to resign, and the land assembly then appointed new officials, faithful to the Jagiellonian dynastic politics. With Louis' blessing, the supreme administrator of the Bohemian Kingdom became the adept and energetic Duke Charles of Münsterberg and Oels, who ranked among the respected Estates' politicians and, according to Queen Mary of Habsburg, could even become a decisive link in Louis' way to power. Yet another important aspect was that he was a leading and politically experienced member of the Silesian dynasty of dukes.²⁴

The royal governor Charles of Münsterberg was quite aware of his crucial position in the Central-European diplomacy as well as on the scales of Bohemian politics, and was moreover perfectly capable of employing it for the sake of his own profit and power. He was unscrupulous in choosing his means in order to pursue his own goals, also in Prague. He was often thinking mainly of himself. Having taken a lesson from the non-effective activities of his father and uncles, he realized that neither military service nor the protection of state interests would equal rapid financial profit from a long-term perspective, and thus began seeking a different way to his family's prosperity. A certain role-model to him was the Podiebrad's opponent, ex-burgrave Zdeněk Lev of Rožmitál, the devilish instigator of political plots and inspirer of economic contrivances and, last but not least, corruption affairs. His point of departure became the new family relations which brought both local and foreign diplomatic contacts on everyday basis. He would easily adapt to the new conditions and religious and cultural tendencies in the early Renaissance milieu of Bohemia and Silesia, and was also fond of frequently ignoring the contemporary ethical principles and the customary aristocratic manners. Clientelism and corruption served him to avert his countless financial troubles and debts. Everything was arranged to be paid for, which is also proved by Charles' surviving bills and claims with the rulers.²⁵ His acts and

věk v českých zemích (1471–1526), 3: *Města*, Praha 1998, pp. 322–372; on the most recent evaluation of the events, see P. ČORNEJ — M. BARTLOVÁ (Eds.), *Velké dějiny zemí Koruny české*, VI: 1437–1526, Praha — Litomyšl 2007, pp. 472–596, where also see references to other literature and sources.

²⁴ The duke is sometimes mentioned as the “Supreme Governor and Lord Chamberlain of the Bohemian Kingdom”. On his titles, see, e.g., Bartoloměj Paprocký of Glogol, *Zrcadlo slavného markrabství moravského*, Olomouc 1593, fol. XVIIIa, SLČ, pp. 440–449, AKČ, 6, p. 209, No. 441.

²⁵ Duke Charles had had all travelling expenses relating to his diplomatic missions and various services confirmed. His own calculations state that King Louis owed him 19,070 Hungarian guldens, 16 Bohemian groschen and 15 Hungarian hellers over the span of six years. For more details on this, see A. REZEK, *Diplomatické služby Karla Minsterberského u králů Vladislava a Ludvíka a účty za ně (1515–1521)*, in: *Zprávy o zasedání Královské české společnosti nauk v Praze*, Vol. 1882, Praha 1883, pp. 405–410.

moves were, nevertheless, always circumspect and he was adept in winning many supporters at the court as well as among the Bohemian Estates who craved having him in the leading position in the existing statehood.

As soon as Duke Charles was entrusted the position of the royal representative in Bohemia (or, respectively, the supreme district administrator of the Bohemian Kingdom), he wasted no time cumulating many other strategically significant offices. Already from 1519, he controlled developments in Upper Lusatia as its supreme bailiff. He also fortified his political status in his domestic Silesia, where he became the Lower-Silesian district administrator in 1524 and, in the same year, was appointed lifetime district administrator of the Glatz Duchy, receiving all the relevant annuities and pensions (this probably was some compensation provided to the Jagiellonians for defaulting on the contract of inheritance after the Sagan and Glatz Duke John II the Mad).²⁶ Thus, the actual power in the lands of the Bohemian Crown came to rest in the hands of this master of compromise and a bright politician who perfectly learned how to get along in the muddy waters and was well orientated in the unstable conditions of Jagiellonian statehood.

Duke Charles of Münsterberg, nonetheless, did not hold his positions for long, since the attacks from the Rožmitál side continued with unabated strength. A flood of various court summons and complaints of the disunited camps landed on the bumped-up district administrator, while the crucial issue became the dispute for the Rožmberk inheritance backed up by the all-powerful Rožmitál, which could be of catastrophic consequences to the majority of Rožmberks.²⁷ King Louis appointed a conciliation board with Charles of Münsterberg, along with Bishop Stanislaus Thurzó, Adam of Hradec and Vojtěch of Pernštejn, playing the decisive roles, but the solution of the case was endlessly postponed. The disunited sides armed against each other and King Louis, quite unfamiliar with Bohemian affairs and religious fights, yielded to the pressure of intrigues. In January 1525, he reappointed Zdeněk Lev of Rožmitál to the position of supreme burgrave and his allies were moreover appointed to the leading land offices. Dark clouds began gathering over Duke Charles, but he was able to tactically withdraw and retain the position of the supreme Lord Chamberlain, which he held from 1523 to the death of King Louis in 1526, when he was replaced by Vojtěch of Pernštejn.²⁸ The duke, however, also was in trouble with Silesia and the two Lusatias, i.e. regions experiencing outbursts of social and religious discon-

26 In 1514, the Bohemian king passed his feudal rights to the Krosen region (i.e., the Brandenburg part of the Glogau region) to Duke Charles I of Münsterberg who arranged the sale of these rights to the Brandenburg Elector Joachim I the Nestor for 6,000 guilders on 20 October 1517. This actually separated the most northern part of the Silesian territory from the Bohemian state and definitely passed it on to the Hohenzollern hands. This was yet another case when Charles' money-craving prevailed over the overall state interests. For more on this, see *Lehns- und Besitzurkunden*, I, pp. 261–263.

27 For more details, see J. V. ŠIMÁK, *Spor o dědictví rožmberské 1523–1528*, in: *Časopis Českého Musea*, 70, 1896, pp. 81–112, 308–322, 419–441; J. ŠEBÁNEK, *Příspěvek ke konci sporu o dědictví rožmberské*, in: *Časopis Společnosti přátel starožitností* 33, 1925, pp. 89–102.

28 The author who most recently dealt with the complex personality of Vilém of Pernštejn (Wilhelm of Pernstein) was P. VOREL, *Páni z Pernštejna. Vzestup a pád rodu zubří hlavy v dějinách Čech a Moravy*, Praha 1999, pp. 93–139.



tentment mainly among the German-speaking population — the Reformation. He himself moaned several times in his letters to his sister Margaret of Anhalt that the clergy could probably expect vast bloodshed if the conduct of the prelates did not change and their unbridled pursuit of mammon was not halted. His fears were well-founded.²⁹

Charles' Bohemian administration witnessed gradual radicalization of part of the Utraquists who gradually returned to their Taborite traditions and drew themselves nearer to the *Unitas Fratrum*. Their activities were one of the reasons for organizing the 1524 covert putsch initiated by John Pašek of Vrat, which was part of a larger action undertaken by the lords in support of Rožmitál. These lords soon came to leading positions in the country as Louis succumbed to the hysterical campaign of the Catholic hierarchy claiming that the Lutherans and Picards might dangerously take control of the lands of the Bohemian Crown. Pašek's dictatorship in Prague not only equalled the defeat of the town estates in their struggle with the oligarchy of lords but also the withdrawal of Charles of Münsterberg from the Bohemian political scene.³⁰ The duke, as the land administrator, sided with the ousted and arrested Utraquist burghers. Respecting the new situation and the new Prague ruler, he nonetheless behaved decently to the persecuted and pitied many of them.³¹ He remained a quite conservative and restrained Catholic, and at the same time was not bothered at all by the fact that his sons were brought up by the well-known Oels provost and humanist, John Hess, in an already Lutheran spirit.³² Although having to publicly drive non-Catholics out of Prague, he did not personally mind his Protestant relatives. He was taking bribes from Rome. In January 1525, he asked the papal nuncio, Cardinal Lorenzo Campeggio, to purge his famous predecessor George of Podiebrad from heresy and bring him back to the devoted members of the Catholic Church. And although Duke Charles was well familiar with Martin Luther and his son-in-law, the Brandenburg-Ansbach Margrave George the Pious, who also ruled Silesia as the Duke of Jägendorf and understood the advantages of the Reformation, he himself eventually assumed a negative position towards the new religious tendency. Interestingly, the Münsterberg duke and the Oppeln Duke John II the Good remained faithful to Rome and the Breslau bishop to their deaths.³³

29 C. A. SCHIMMELPFENNIG, *Herzog Karl I. von Münsterberg-Oels und seine Schwester Margaretha von Anhalt. Nach ungedruckten Briefen aus den Jahren 1503–1530*, in: *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Geschichte und Alterthum Schlesiens* 18, 1884, pp. 117–161.

30 On the conflict, see J. PEŠEK, *Některé problémy bádání o spojené Praze let 1518–1528*, in: *Documenta Pragensia*, 4, Praha 1984, pp. 188–191; the documents of crucial significance for the period of Louis' reign are represented by Rožmitál's correspondence, F. DVORSKÝ, *Dopisy pana Zdeňka Lva z Rožmitálu z let 1508–1535*, *Archiv český* IX, Praha 1889.

31 J. MACEK, *Jagellonský věk*, III, p. 319.

32 On the activities of this Protestant theologian, see R. FUKALA, *Jan Hess a počátky slezské reformace*, in: ed. B. CZECHOWICZ, *Śródmiejska katedra. Kóściół Marii Magdaleny w dziejach i kulturze Wrocławia*, Wrocław 2010, pp. 345–354; vast literature on the history of Reformation in Silesia is provided idem, *Reformace ve Slezsku a na Opavsku*, Opava 2010, pp. 136–159.

33 On the overall religious situation in Bohemia and Moravia, see J. MACEK, *Věra a zbožnost jagellonského věku*, Praha 2001 (where also see the contacts between the Münsterberg duke and the Olomouc bishop and other prelates), pp. 172, 194, 252–254; also comp. R. FUKALA,



A very specific religious and cultural chapter of Charles' reign in the Oels region was his standpoint on Jews who were permitted to settle in the town already in 1495. Even though the Oels burghers viewed the Jewish minority as hostile, suspicious and dangerous to the Christians, the Podiebrad family ruled that it could be neither despised nor ridiculed. Duke Charles I moreover viewed the Jews as deft and light-fingered assistants in procuring credits — and an increasing number of Jewish families would thus soon flow to the residential town of the Podiebrads, which became their main asylum in Silesia. Already in the spirit of Charles' protection, the local vigorous Jews procured themselves a synagogue in 1500, built after the example of the famed Prague sanctuary. In 1527, Duke Charles permitted the exiled Prague printer Chaim Schwarz to establish a printing plant in the town, which published the exquisite *Oels Pentateuch* — the Five Books of Moses, or Torah — in 1530. The front page of this earliest edition of the Hebrew Bible published in the German environment bore Charles' coat-of-arms and, above it, a Hebrew text extolling the patron and his reign. Only two copies of the rare Oels print have hitherto been known, one of them being held by the Bodleian Library in Oxford. But Charles' death unfortunately halted the promising development of the Oels Jewish community and all of its Jews were soon driven out. The pretence for their displacement was the 1535 calamity when the town was swept by a disastrous whirlwind. The apparent reason, however, was their thriving businesses and the rages provoked by the religious intolerance resulting from the arrival of Lutheranism, supported by Charles' heirs.³⁴

When the Hungarian and Bohemian King Louis of Jagiello suffered the slashing defeat and died in the Battle at Mohács in late August of 1526, it took Duke Charles I two weeks to actually take in the dreadful news. His career, though, entered a new political stage. Some unfounded reports claim that he was registered as one of the feasible local candidates to the Bohemian throne after the horrendous Mohács failure. But having learned the lesson from his predecessors, Charles instead came to support the strongest Habsburg candidate and his political goals in Silesia. And contrary to his relatives — the Liegnitz and Brieg Piasts as well as the Jägendorf Hohenzollern —, he did not oppose the Habsburgs, knowing that his wealth would never suffice to finance the backstage fights and bribe the hoarders proliferating amongst both the Bohemian and Moravian lords. He was sceptical as to his vote, better respecting the Viennese Jagiello-Habsburg Agreement of 1515, in which he personally participated along with Bartholomäus.³⁵ Upon the election of Ferdinand I of Habsburg, Charles

Reformace ve Slezsku a na Opavsku, pp. 31–54; Charles' Catholic inclinations can be, e.g., proved by his vindication of the privileges to the Cistercian monastery in Henryków, APW, Rep. 84, sign. 177; on this, see also B. CZECHOWICZ, *Dwie drogi? ...*, in: *Fryderyk II Legnicko-Brzeski i Karol I Ziębicko-Oleśnicki oraz ich siedziby...*, p. 28.

³⁴ The issue of the Oels Jews has hitherto been summed up quite synoptically; see N. CONRADS, *Książęta i stany*, pp. 75–82; J. HARASIMOWICZ, *Dolny Śląsk*, Wrocław 2007, pp. 78–82; A. HERZIG — K. RUCHNIEWICZ — M. RUCHNIEWICZ (Eds.), *Śląsk i jego dzieje*, Wrocław 2012, pp. 51–55.

³⁵ On Charles' political standpoints, comp. A. REZEK, *Nové příspěvky k volbě české r. 1526*, Praha 1882, pp. 9–10, esp. pp. 12–13. At the Bautzen assembly, Charles succeeded in persuading the Upper-Lusatian leaders to acknowledge Ferdinand I as their new ruler. — Many facts can be found in the following syntheses: J. JANÁČEK, *České dějiny. Doba předbělohorská*



became the Upper-Silesian district administrator and his neutral standpoints along with his admiration of Emperor Charles V earned him many more life-time offices. Holding the position of the Silesian supreme district administrator, he preferred the ruler's religious and political programme in the country as well as the Silesian emancipation policy and the orientation of the Silesian duchy families to the Holy Roman Empire; and, last but not least, he initiated the defence against the Turkish peril.³⁶ He also regained all of the Münsterberg Duchy at the closing of his career, reinstalling there his power unconditionally.

The fate of Duke Charles I of Münsterberg and Oels unfolded in the transition period that marked the fading Middle Ages and the arrival of the modern times, which was logically reflected both in his policies and his lifestyle. Being interested in the new religious movement, humanist culture and Renaissance art, he well realized their potential as the attributes of his royal origin. Similar to his father Henry I, he would use large portrait seals of natural wax, as had been customary in the office of the last Jagiellonians. Moreover, Charles' large-dimensional figural seal highly surpasses the traditional contemporary production with its unique 96-mm diameter and ultimate artistry. The featured duke holds an unsheathed sword in his right hand and over his shoulder and the family guidon on a lance in his left hand. The duchy coat-of-arms is broken down to five small signs, situated on the console and on the sides where two figures — of a savage woman and savage man — carry them above their heads. The remaining surface is occupied by two figures of armour-bearers. From the point of artistic execution, this large portrait seal represents an unquestionable pinnacle of goldsmithery of its time.³⁷ The duke also projected his political career and representation of power to the mintage of coins — gold ducats and their multiples — under his name in order to highlight his influence in the lands of the Bohemian Crown and his duchy independence in Silesia.³⁸

(1526–1547), I/1–2, Praha 1971–1984; P. VOREL, *Velké dějiny zemí Koruny české, VII: 1526–1618*, Praha — Litomyšl 2005, pp. 29–149.

36 On Charles' activities in the fields of politics and religion under the reign of Ferdinand I, comp. J. BAHLCKE, *Regionalismus und Staatsintegration im Widerstreit: die Länder der böhmischen Krone im ersten Jahrhundert der Habsburgerherrschaft (1526–1619)*, München 1994, pp. 24–168, where also see other essential and synoptic bibliography.

37 K. MÜLLER, *Pečeti minsterberských knížat*, in: O. FELCMAN — R. FUKALA (Eds.), *Poděbradové. Rod českomoravských pánů, kladských hrabat a slezských knížat*, Praha 2008, pp. 426–438.

38 On minting, comp. H. Freiherrn von SAURMA-JELTSCH, *Schlesische Münzen und Medailen*, Breslau 1883, figs. XXIV–XXVII; F. FRIEDENSBURG — H. SEGER, *Schlesiens Münzen und Medaillen der neuren Zeit*, Breslau 1901; E. KOPICKI, *Katalog podstawowych typów monet i banknotów Polski oraz ziem historycznie z Polską związanych, VIII/1: Monety Śląskie okresu nowożytnego*, Warszawa 1982, pp. 175–211; B. PASZKIEWICZ, „Złoty osioł” albo metamorfozy monetarne księcia Karola, in: B. CZECHOWICZ (Ed.), *Monety — zamek — nagrobek. Książę Karol I z Podiebradów (1476–1536) między dziedzictwem przodków a dokonanymi potomków*, Červený Kostelec — Wrocław 2015, pp. 65–121; B. PASZKIEWICZ, *Późnośredniowieczne mennictwo Księstwa Oleśnickiego*, in: W. MROZOWICZ (Ed.), *Czeska historia Śląska. Zszczególnym uwzględnieniem Olesnicy i Księstwa Oleśnickiego*, Wrocław — Olesnica 2017, pp. 355–370.



Between 1524 and 1532, Charles had a costly reconstruction of his Frankenstein (Ząbkowice Śląskie) residence done by the Prague court workshop of Benedikt Rejt. Both the opening wing of the *castello* and the tower were already equipped with Renaissance windows, while the attic gable of the *château* was brick-crenelated by massive Venetian semi-arcs. This piece of architecture, built in the spirit of Jagiellonian Gothic but simultaneously bearing early Renaissance elements, as if reflected the contradictory nature of its owner. All in all, the residence was a prefiguration of the Renaissance Silesian dukes — with Charles' entire power and personal profit cravings and attempts at dazzling splendour. The traditional representation role was accentuated by generous heraldic decoration and a foundation plate with an inscription providing the date of its construction and celebrating the builder as the grandson of King George, but mainly commemorating Emperor Charles V and King Ferdinand I and their merits in the defence against the Turkish peril.³⁹

When Duke Charles I of Münsterberg and Oels suddenly died on 31 May 1536 in his beloved Frankenstein *château*, his survivors organized a magnificent funeral for him, held on 3 June. The Podiebrad family tomb in the local parish cathedral became a remarkable piece of masonry and sculpture, executed by Ulrich of Frankenstein. The top of the sandstone tombstone displays the declining duchy couple, captured in representative attire. Charles I, situated on the right, is featured as a duke and warrior, clad in armour and wearing a duchy crown on his head. He holds a spear with a standard in his right hand and a sword, laid alongside his body, in his left. Duchess Anna is represented in a down-to-the-ground, flared gown, with her hands clasped in prayer. Two lions at their feet serve to symbolize knightly virtues. The sides of the tombstone are covered with genealogic and heraldic decoration glorifying the dead couple and stating the couple's origin, property and titles.⁴⁰

It is worth noting that the period of Charles' reign had left yet another significant funeral work on the territory of the Münsterberg Duchy behind — the epitaph *Christ at the Mountain of Olives* in the St George church in Münsterberg, which apparently followed the woodcut of the same name by Albrecht Dürer. The bottom part of the painting features the entire duchy family of Podiebrads, where Duke Charles and his wife naturally cannot be absent. The epitaph was created to commemorate the late

³⁹ On Charles' activities in the field of architecture, comp., e.g., J. PILCH, *Leksykon zabytków architektury Dolnego Śląska*, Warszawa 2005, pp. 463–466; M. CHOROWSKA, *Rezydencje średniowieczne na Śląsku. Zamki, pałace, wieże mieszkalne*, Wrocław 2003, pp. 163–166; on this, see also the earlier Czech essay by E. ŠAMÁNKOVÁ, Rejtův Frankenstein, in: *Zprávy památkové péče XIII*, Praha 1953, pp. 126–128; for overall summary, see B. CZECHOWICZ, *Książęcy mecenat artystyczny na Śląsku u schyłku średniowiecza*, pp. 122–160 (where also see earlier bibliography); A. KWAŚNIEWSKI, *Zamek w Ząbkowicach Śląskich w okresie rządów księcia Karola I – próba rekonstrukcji form, funkcji i treści*, in: B. CZECHOWICZ (Ed.), *Money — zamek — nagrobek. Książę Karol I z Podiebradów (1476–1536) między dziedzictwem przodków a dokonanymi potomków*, Červený Kostelec — Wrocław 2015, pp. 123–217.

⁴⁰ H. LUCHS, *Schlesische Fürstenbilder des Mittelalters*, Breslau 1870, pp. 4, 9–12, where Charles' tombstone is featured in detail. On the precise date of Charles' death, comp. the chronicle J. KOLÁR (Ed.), *Marek Bydžovský z Florentina, Svět za tří českých králů. Výbor z kronikářských zápisů o letech 1526–1596*, Praha 1987, p. 32.



duke in his second residential town.⁴¹

In conclusion, a question: Was Duke Charles I of Münsterberg and Oels indeed as corrupt and dangerous a politician as the modern Czech historian Josef Macek sternly described him? The author of the present essay opines that he certainly was nothing ranging at simplicity, but definitely does not deserve overstated condemnation and historical ignorance. Silesian chroniclers and contemporaries perceived him as a politician seeking economic reform in the country, supporting businesses and restoring towns to their initial prestige and glory. In his person, new issues and new perspectives in the northern part of the Bohemian state opened to the rest of Podiebrads, and his heirs could thus build upon his political and cultural heritage. Silesian observers perhaps only disliked his Bohemian and Hussite origins, while his political wiliness and deftness were thorns in the flesh of Bohemian nobility – for the thinking of Charles I was a dynastic one and, moreover, that of an imperial duke who persistently deprecated the limits of the hegemonic policy of the Bohemian Estates. His positive qualities worth highlighting were certainly his tenaciousness and his will to reach the set goals, which must have impressed his ambitious relatives and scions. Incessantly seeking compromises, he eventually achieved an almost dominant position on the Silesian power and political scene. The described features, however, suggest that both the acts and the personality of this Estates' politician mirrored the enormously interesting and complex agitation of the turn of the period in which Charles lived and which deserves yet more understanding and research.

⁴¹ R. FUKALA, *Karel I. Minsterberský a epitaf Kristus na Olivetské hoře*, pp. 63–75 (where also see earlier literature). — On the surviving Frankenstein tombstone and the epitaph as viewed in yet wider context of Silesian relics, comp. J. HARASIMOWICZ, *Mors Janua Vitae. Śląskie epitafia i nagrobki wieku reformacji*, Wrocław 1992, p. 58.