

Robert Antonín

From Warrior to Knight – The Paths of Chivalric Culture in the Central European Space on the Example of the Czech Lands

The paper will be divided into two thematic parts, in which I will endeavour to connect both of the organizers' offered approaches to capturing the places in Central-Eastern European history within the global history of the European Middle Ages, i.e. "contacts" and "comparisons". In the first, I will focus on a summary of the current discussion on the issue of the "transformation of medieval society" in Central-Eastern Europe, which in the polemics with the so-far predominating explanation within Czech medieval studies I present as a component of the wide process of the quantitative and qualitative transformations of the Latin West. In the second, crucial part of the paper, based on the concept presented in the first part, I will focus on an analysis of one of the specific phenomena of the process of the social transformations in the Czech lands, which was the spread of chivalric culture.

Here I will attempt a revision of the existing state of the research in the Czech lands, within which the research of knighthood is methodologically subordinate *a priori* to accepting the explanatory model of the so-called "Central European type of state", which sets the process of knowledge of the given issue in a narrow paradigmatic constriction limiting alternative perspectives that do not correspond to the premises of this explanatory framework and *de facto* essentially disrupt it. It is true that however the stated paradigm of a "Central European type of state" is a starting point primarily for research of the nature, functioning and development of the state system on the territory of the Czech lands, it consequently in Central-Eastern European region in the 10th–14th centuries forms at the same time also the limitations for research dealing with the question of the existence and formation of the social elites. The incompatibility of the world of the Bohemian nobility with the world of the Western European aristocracy in the 11th–12th centuries is used here as proof by circular reason (begging the question) for supporting the existence of independent forms of the state and social model, which was applied in the 1960s-80s for the description of the functioning of the Central European state wholes in the period of the Early and High Middle Ages.

In this context, I want to show in the paper that the mentioned incompatibility concerns first of all the source bases of the research. Czech research has so far based its analyses on interpretations of sources of a diplomatic and economic nature. Unlike the Western European situation, research aimed in this way in the Central-Eastern European area has focused on a very few pieces of documents, proving predominantly a shift within the economic structures and implicitly capturing the shifts on the level of the state organization, the form of the names of types of offices, etc... This approach building methodologically mainly on the tradition of positivistic historiography (with its emphasis on finding facticity) and Marxist historiography (emphasizing the role of material structures in the development of society) identifies reality, as a whole, with physically digested experience, which to a significant degree does not allow it to follow the issue of medieval transformations on the level of mental structures. Unlike this, in my paper, I work from a concept in which I consider the world of conceptions just like the physical world as an integral component of reality. From this perspective, the core of the paper becomes a consideration of the process of the genesis of chivalric culture in the Czech lands, as one of the expressions of the realized cultural transfers proving the transformation of the world of the ideas of the nobility and evoking also a transformation of self-identification of this part of society allowing the acceptance of the feudal system (respecting local possibilities and traditions). As against the existing research connecting the spread of chivalric culture in the Czech lands to the second half of the 13th century, I present the hypothesis that moves this phenomenon to the beginning of the 12th century and to a significant extent hence in this aspect erase the artificially created borders between the Western European and Central-Eastern European areas in the medieval period.