

**PRORO-NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE REPRESENTATION OF
THE “OTHER” IN THE LUSIADS BY LUÍS DE CAMÕES AND IN THE
JOURNEY FROM BOHEMIA TO THE HOLY LAND BY KRYŠTOF HARANT**

*Consciência protonacional e a representação do «Outro» em Os Lusíadas, de Luís de
Camões, e em Viagem da Boémia à Terra Santa, de Kryštof Harant*

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Abstract

This study provides a comparative analysis of Luís de Camões' *Os Lusíadas* (1572) and Kryštof Harant's *Journey from Bohemia to the Holy Land* (1608), examining the emergence of a proto-national consciousness in Portugal and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Although both works recount travels to foreign territories, they reflect distinct historical and sociocultural contexts that shape identity and the perception of the “Other”. Camões' epic celebrates Portuguese maritime expansion, linking it to divine providence and the crusading ideal, thereby promoting a robust collective identity centered on the figure of the King as both a political and religious symbol. In contrast, Harant prioritizes Christian faith, morality, and an intellectual interest in other cultures, expressing a Bohemian identity that is primarily elitist and cultural. Despite a shared Eurocentrism, the works diverge: Camões constructs a unifying national narrative, whereas Harant adopts a humanist perspective without asserting a cohesive national identity.

Resumo

Este estudo analisa comparativamente *Os Lusíadas* (1572), de Luís de Camões, e *Viagem da Boémia à Terra Santa* (1608), de Kryštof Harant, examinando o surgimento de uma consciência proto-nacional em Portugal e nas Terras da Coroa da Boémia. Embora ambos representem viagens a territórios estrangeiros, refletem contextos históricos e socioculturais distintos que moldam a identidade e a percepção do “Outro”. A epopeia camoniana celebra a expansão marítima portuguesa, associada à providência divina e ao ideal cruzadístico, promovendo uma identidade coletiva forte, centrada na figura do rei como símbolo político e religioso. Em contraste, Harant privilegia a fé cristã, a moral e o interesse intelectual por outras culturas, exprimindo uma identidade boémia sobretudo elitista e cultural. Apesar de um eurocentrismo comum, as obras divergem: Camões constrói uma narrativa nacional unificadora, enquanto Harant adota uma perspetiva humanista, sem afirmar uma identidade nacional coesa.

Key-words: *Luís de Camões; Kryštof Harant; Travel literature; Proto-nationalism; Comparative study.*

Palavras-chave: *Luís de Camões; Kryštof Harant; Literatura de viagens; Proto-nacionalismo; Estudo comparativo.*

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INTRODUCTION

Camões's epic poem *The Lusiads*, as it is well known, is celebrating the Portuguese navigators. This celebration comes with a praise of their language, their characteristics, their King, their religion... Even though we are applying conceptual anachronism, we believe it's safe to say that the epic has a sense of national consciousness. As Portugal was a well established Kingdom with a quite homogeneous population in the time of the maritime voyages (and in the time of Camões), the existence of "national" literature was enabled to start evolving.

On the contrary, the Bohemian lands and their population existed in a much more heterogeneous and complex state, as will be described more thoroughly later on. This asymmetry influencing the sentiment of national identity of the 16th century Portuguese and Czechs respectively, led us to examine each's literary works from that time and analyze the differences in their expression of national consciousness. This study aims to analyze how the asymmetry of national consciousness shaped their respective perceptions of self and the Other.

The most eligible counterpart to *The Lusiads* from Czech literature is, in our opinion, Kryštof Harant's *Journey from Bohemia to the Holy Land, by way of Venice and the Sea*. This travel book shares with *The Lusads* the theme of voyage and the exposure to foreign oriental cultures. Both authors were educated renaissance intellectuals, the elites of their respective proto-nations.

The issues of analyzing classical literature by the modern concept of nationalism will be addressed later. For now, we contend that applying this modern framework to sixteenth-century literary works is justified insofar as it seeks to trace the historical roots of nationalism rather than to project a full-fledged national identity as understood from the eighteenth century onward.

As Kohn describes in *The Idea of Nationalism*, the exposure to foreign cultures will often instigate feelings of unfamiliarity and one will feel therefore threatened by this otherness. This leads to feelings of self-superiority. "The more primitive men are, the stronger will be their distrust of strangers, and therefore the greater the intensity of their group feeling" (Kohn, 2005, pp. 61–62).

Edward Said develops the matter of perception of the Other in his groundbreaking monograph *Orientalism*, according to him the Orient is “one of the deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (Said, 1979, p. 1) and “Orientalism [...] has less to do with the Orient than it does with ‘our’ world” (Said, 1979, p. 12). Thus, we take the representation of the Other in mind as it is an important catalyst of self-identification.

We do not anticipate a substantial difference in the perception of the Other in Harant’s and Camões’s works, since non-Christian lands were equally foreign to both and thus likely to elicit similar forms of cultural disapproval. Nevertheless, concerning the perception of oneself, we anticipate much stronger national sentiment in *The Lusíads* (in comparison to Harant’s *Pilgrimage*).

Methodologically, this study adopts a comparative literary approach grounded in close textual analysis considering the theory of nationalism and the representation of the Other. It juxtaposes Luís de Camões’s *The Lusíads* with Kryštof Harant’s *Journey from Bohemia to the Holy Land* in order to examine how dissimilar historical and sociopolitical conditions shaped early forms of national consciousness in the sixteenth-century Lands of the Bohemian Crown and the Kingdom of Portugal and the Algarves.

Historical overview

Portugal was established in the first half of the 12th century with a Christian majority and on the turn of 15th and 16th century, Christianity became the only allowed religion, the remaining minority of Muslim and Jewish population was prosecuted, had to convert to Christianity or was forced to exile. This, with multiple different actors, made Portugal, as soon as the 16th century, a homogeneous state, which allowed the early (in comparison to other European nations) creation of Portuguese national identity.

Unlike Portugal, whose population was in comparison to the other European states of the time quite a monoethnic one, the situation in the area of the current Czech republic was completely different. The Czech lands, inhabited by Czechs, Germans, Jews and others were divided not only ethnically but also by religion.

The preaching of Jan Hus in the beginning of 15th century started a pre-Protestant Christian reform movement of Hussitism. Hus's execution by the Catholic Church prompted a series of civil wars, which brought an immense devastation to the Czech lands. Nonetheless, for certain periods of time, "religious freedom" (only for certain Christian confessions) was "guaranteed" by the rulers, which allowed for the growth of a variety of Christian confessions.

From the Hussite wars till the consolidation of power by the Habsburgs in the 16th century the rulers of the land of the Czech crown have vehemently changed and, with an exception of George of Poděbrady, weren't Czechs. The Kingdom of Bohemia was in a constant social and political turmoil, as domestic religious and power disputes were complemented by power struggle over the politically volatile area of the Land of the Bohemian Crown and general European unrest in questions of Reformation. The state entity had quite often changed, thus there were no fixed borders defying the area. The population of Bohemia was much less unified, not possessing sovereignty, common language, religious unification nor ethnic homogeneity.

Proto-nationalism

Since this study focuses on the underlying influence of each nation's state of national consciousness on the works of Camões and Harant, it is important to outline the basic theoretical foundations of the concept of the nation.

The modern idea of nation, as we imagine it today, created by nationalism emerged in the second half of the 18th century and substantially influenced historical development in Europe thereafter. The rise of nationalism is accredited to the decline of life centred mainly by one's religion, decline of rulers of aristocratic lineages and decline of latin (Anderson, 2006). The latter was caused by print capitalism, "which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves and to relate themselves to others in profoundly new ways" (Anderson, 2006, p. 53). *The Lusiads* by Luís de Camões was undoubtedly part of this phenomenon.

The modern nation is closely related to the state, and as Hobsbawm claims: “Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round” (Hobsbawm, 1992, p. 10). From his point of view, nations are a: “dual phenomena, constructed essentially from above, but which cannot be understood unless also analysed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist” (Hobsbawm, 1992, p. 10).

Another respected academic studying nationalism, Miroslav Hroch, describes nation as “not an eternal phenomenon, but one which emerged and developed from the Middle Ages” (Hroch, 1995, p. 1). Thus, it would be daring to call the Portuguese and the Czechs in the 16th century nations, as they were not a nation in a modern sense, but rather groups of people that had to an extent “feelings of collective belonging” (Hobsbawm, 1992, pp. 46). Hobsbawm calls these bonds ‘proto-national’.

It’s difficult to assess the proto-national sentiments among the populations in the far past, as the majority of people have been illiterate. We can see traces of patriotic consciousness in the works of educated elites, but that doesn’t give us a view to the minds of the peasant population, which constituted the majority of people in Europe before the modern times (Hobsbawm, 1992). We’re acknowledging this fact and we aren’t trying to present our study as something more. We believe that the comparative analysis of the works of our chosen authors are still contributive, even if the sentiments expressed in the works should only be the ones of the then elites. Moreover, as Hobsbawm puts it: “the written word influenced the ideas of those who only spoke” (Hobsbawm, 1992, p. 48).

There have always been attempts to define a nation by characteristic features such as language, ethnicity, shared culture and so on (Hobsbawm, 1992). It’s essentially impossible to define nations in such a way, as we often find a precedence of a nation, where one of these traits isn’t present and the group of people still consider themselves a nation. Anderson defines nation as “an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 2006, pp. 21–22).

For our purposes, we will use as defining factors of a proto-nation the proto-national elements mentioned by Hobsbawm in his book *Nations and Nationalism*. That is: the language, the ethnicity, the religion, the holy icons and “the consciousness of belonging or having belonged to a lasting political entity” (Hobsbawm, 1992, p. 73). It may be suitable to state that these elements aren’t necessary prerequisites for a group of people to become a nation, but they can initiate bonding forces which may lead to a building of a nation (Hobsbawm, 1992).

Introduction of the works

Both *The Lusiads* by Luís de Camões and *Journey from Bohemia to the Holy Land* by Kryštof Harant are key literary works from the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. Although they come from different cultural backgrounds, they both reflect the early modern desire to explore and document the world beyond European borders. They represent two very different national perspectives: the Portuguese and the Czech.

The Lusiads (1572) is an epic poem by Luís de Camões that celebrates Portuguese maritime expansion and the Age of Discovery. By combining mythology with the historical voyage of Vasco da Gama, Camões creates a story where national greatness is defined by conquest and heroism. In contrast, Kryštof Harant’s *Journey from Bohemia to the Holy Land* (1608) offers a different perspective on the phenomenon of discovery. As both the author and the protagonist, Harant focuses on a religious pilgrimage and cultural observation rather than territorial expansion. While the Portuguese epic sees the sea to dominate the world, Harant’s travelogue bases Czech identity on education, morality, and the intellectual effort to understand the world.

The main objectives of these works also differ in their perspective on time and purpose. The goal of *The Lusiads* is to celebrate the future of the Portuguese nation. It focuses on maritime glory and the spread of the Christian faith, aiming to preserve and project this heroic image for future generations. In contrast, the objective of Harant’s *Journey* is the “protection of the present.” His work focuses on spiritual realization and personal experience. Furthermore, it serves as a detailed geographical and ethnographic document, providing the Czech nation with important knowledge about the world at that time.

The Lusiads

Camões strongly emphasizes the role of the Portuguese navigators to spread Christianity and the belief that they are supported in this by God himself.

And Thou ! O goodly omen'd trust, all-dear
to Lusitania's olden liberty,
whereon assured esperance we rear
[...]
to govern worlds of men by God so given,
that the world's best be given to God and Heaven
(Camões, 1572/1880, Canto I, 6)

And, eke, the Kings of mem'ory grand and glorious,
who hied them Holy Faith and Reign to spread,
converting, conquering, and in lands notorious,
Africk and Asia, devastation made
(Camões, 1572/1880, Canto I, 2)

To them 't was erst, and well you wot it, given,
albeit a Pow'r so single, simple, small,
to see the doughty Moor from 'trenchments driven
where gentle Tagus feeds and floods the vale :
Then with the dreadful Spaniard have they striven,
by boon of Heav'n serene ne'er known to fail ;
and urged their fortune's ever-glorious claim
to victor-trophies hung in fane of Fame
(Camões, 1572/1880, Canto I, 25)

The myth of divine providence of the Portuguese nation is also present in the work (Nepomuceno, 2010). Providentialism is a conception that God directs the course of history, while humans act only as tools through which God's will is carried out (Eugênio & Marcelino, 2018). The Portuguese have historically operated with this notion. This conception resides in the belief that the nation's history is guided by a divine force that shapes destiny, granting Portugal a special privileged role among Christian kingdoms (Vecchi, 2010).

Dost think that Sailor of the sturdiest mood,
or any Soldier save the Lusitan,
irchance, had loyalty so long preserved
both for his King and for the Chief he served?
(Camões, 1572/1880, Canto V, 71)

The unification of Portuguese people is not achieved solely on a religious basis, the collectiveness is boosted also by the presence of a leading figure of the King. The royal throne epitomizes three of the five elements: the statehood, the religion (as the ruler is perceived as God's emissary on Earth carrying out his will) and the holy icons.

Another holy icons of the Portuguese nation are the symbols of maritime expansion, which remind the people of the greatly glorified achievements of their navigators. The myth of Henryism, which centers on maritime voyages, is also connected to the Portuguese crown, as it is embodied by Prince Henry of Portugal. As Soares and Soares mention, this mythologem is connected to the typically Portuguese *Saudade* and "the spirit of the crusades" (Soares & Soares, 2020, p. 180). This interconnectedness of motifs and themes is highly prominent in *The Lusiads*, providing a strong foundation for illustrating the distinctive character of a Lusiad.

Cease the sage Grecian, and the Man of Troy
to vaunt long Voyage made in bygone day :
Cease Alexander, Trajan cease to 'joy
the fame of vict'ories that have pass'd away :
The noble Lusian's stouter breast sing I,
whom Mars and Neptune dared not disobey :
Cease all that antique Muse hath sung, for now
a better Brav'ry rears its bolder brow
(Camões, 1572/1880, Canto I, 3).

The concentrated entanglement of protonational elements in the representative of the Kingdom facilitated the Portuguese sense of national consciousness. Combined with the maritime expansion and the conquering spirit which persisted from the reconquista, Portuguese imperialism was being born. Camões celebrates and encourages this imperial character, as he portrays Vasco da Gama and his companions as heroes. He even goes as far as diminishing the relevance of ancient navigators and emphasizing the maritime achievements of the Portuguese. This is, once again, closely tied to the idea of the Portuguese being predestined for greatness by divine providence:

Camões's interpretation of Portuguese history adheres to a providentialist conception of the world and human action. The mission to expand the faith—the 'Law from Above'—with a view toward establishing an empire, was entrusted to the Portuguese, a people blessed by Divine Providence from their very origins (Soares, 2007, p. 89). [our translation]

Overall, Camões expresses great pride on behalf of the *Lusiads*. A strong affiliation between the Portuguese, Christianity, and the King (and thus the state) is present, creating an exclusive binding force.

Journey from Bohemia to the Holy Land, by way of Venice and the Sea

But since the Almighty and Everlasting Lord, in His great mercy, saw fit to allow me to complete such a journey and return to my dear homeland; to His Divine Majesty, as the eternal and immortal God, revealed to us in three persons yet one in divinity, may eternal praise and honor be given forever and ever Amen (Harant, 1608/2011, Vol. 2, p. 294). [our translation]

[Ale když všemohoucí a věčný pán bůh z svého milosrdenství velikého mně cestu takovou vykonati, a do této mé vlasti milé navrátiti mi se dáti ráčil, z toho jeho velebnosti božské jakožto bohu věčnému a nesmrtnému, v trůj osobách nám zjevenému, však v božství jedinému, budiž věčná chvála a čest vzdávána na věky věkův amen. (Harant, 1608/2011, Vol. 2, p. 294)]

In contrast to Camões’s expansive and imperial pride, Kryštof Harant’s representation of identity is more personal and intellectually grounded. While Camões constructs a national myth of divine predestination, Harant exhibits a sense of belonging to the Bohemian lands characterized by cultural and moral values. Although the “beloved homeland” is a source of personal heritage for Harant, his primary affiliation remains with his Christian faith. As seen in his prayers, he attributes the success of his journey not to a national destiny, but to the “great mercy” of the “almighty and eternal Lord God” (Harant, 1608/2011).

...many Czech lords and knights (...) for at that time it was a disgrace to sit at home on one’s estate when there was general danger, and when other countrymen were bleeding under the swords of the infidels (Harant, 1608/2011, Vol. 1, para. 6). [our translation]

[...mnoho pánův i rytířův českých [...] neb bylo tehdáž s potupou seděti doma na statku svém, kdež bylo nebezpečnoství obecné, a kdež jiní krajané krváceli pod meči nevěřících (Harant, 1608/2011, Vol. 1, para. 6)]

Harant’s (proto)-national consciousness manifests through a sense of shared responsibility for the defense of Christendom. He notes that for Bohemian lords, it was a disgrace to “sit at home” while countrymen bled beneath the “swords of the infidels.”

This reflects a “defensive” patriotism, as the proto-nation is defined by its role in protecting common Christian values against the direct threat of Ottoman expansion, rather than by a desire for imperial conquest.

He acquired his first literary education at home in his homeland, where at that time the schools were generally excellent, surpassing those of other neighboring lands in their thoroughness and orderliness (Harant, 1608/2011, Vol. 1, para. 3). [our translation]

[Prvního vzdělání svého literárního nabytí doma ve vlasti své, kdež tehdyž byly školy vůbec výtečné, vynikající důkladností a spořádaností svou nad jiné země okolních (Harant, 1608/2011, Vol. 1, para. 3).]

Furthermore, Harant anchors Czech pride in the quality of domestic education. He explicitly states that schools in his homeland were “generally excellent,” surpassing surrounding countries in their “thoroughness and orderliness.” This confirms that Harant was a true “Renaissance man” who shaped the character of his time through his versatile education in history, music, and politics. Therefore his Bohemian identity is represented through a “cultural anchor” rather than biological or imperial terms (Příbýl, 2018).

From the place of anointment, after forty paces, we came to the Holy Sepulchre, in which Christ the Lord was buried, and from which He deigned to rise from the dead on the third day (Harant, 1608/2011, Vol. 1, Chapter 21). [our translation]

[Od místa pomazání na čtyřiceti kročejův přišli jsme k hrobu božímu, v kterémž Kristus pán pochován býti a z něho z mrtvých třetího dne vstáti ráčil (Harant, 1608/2011, Vol. 1, Chapter 21).]

While Camões uses maritime expansion as a national symbol, Harant’s holy icons are primarily religious. His work is filled with descriptions of sacred sites, such as the Holy Sepulchre. This reinforces the point that his icons are fundamentally religious, serving as spiritual anchors for his identity.

As noted by Bočková (2019), a particular aspect of Harant's travelogue is his interest in territories beyond his own route, reflecting the Renaissance fascination with exotic lands viewed from a European perspective. His accounts of these regions emphasize the “process of discovery and conquest, accompanied by Christianization and the intensive import of exotic goods” (Bočková, 2019). As a result, while Camões celebrates the act of imperial conquering, Harant focuses on the intellectual and historical documentation of the world.

Perception of the Other

...In empty and rocky Arabia [...] These wandering Arabs abide in no fixed place [...] their custom is to move around like hawks, seeking whom they might attack and plunder. For otherwise they have no food, neither baked bread nor other things to eat, except what they extort from merchants; rather, they live upon milk and meat..." (Harant, 1608/2011, Vol. 2, p. 130). [our translation]

For this nation, if in our lands they are clever and cunning, among the Turks they are even more so; and that because the Turks are by nature quite simple, yet covetous. They have trained them in their wiles, so that they are capable of every kind of villainy and deception, like the Jews, without any conscience (Harant 1608/2011, Vol. 2, p. 51). [our translation]

[...V Arabii pusté a skalnaté [...] Ti pak Arabové tuláci nebydlejí na jednom místě [...] ustavení jejich jest, aby zjezdili co káně všecku zemi, hledajíce koho by, s čím napadli, aby ho obloupili. Nebo sic potrav, ani chleba pečeného, ani jiných věcí od jídla nemívají, leč co vyderou kupcům; než mlékem a masem živi jsou ... (Harant, 1608/2011, Vol. 2, p. 130)

Nebo ten národ, jest-li u nás chytrý a obmyslný, jest mezi Turky mnohem více, a to tím, že jsou Turky od přirození dosti sprostné, avšak lakomé; [oni] svým šejdům vycvičili, tak že všeho lotrovství a oklamání jako Židé beze všeho svědomí hledí. (Harant, 1608/2011, Vol. 2, p. 51)]

Thus do the Moormen, traitor-souls, despise
our Christian forces, nor can understand
how Heaven's high fortress wonted aid affies,
which e'en horrific Hell may not withstand :
On this and on his skill Castile relies,
falls on Marocco's King, strikes hand to hand :
The Portingall, who holds all danger light,
makes the Grandan kingdom fear his might
(Camões, 1572/1880, Canto III, 112).

The harsh characterization of the Arab tribes as “savage” and inherently dishonest serves as a clear illustration of Harant’s perspective on those outside his own faith. Although they differ in their national sentiments, Camões and Harant share a similar perception of the “enemies” of their faith. Both authors represent a Christian Eurocentric worldview where non-Christians are viewed with deep suspicion. In *The Lusiads*, this is deeply rooted in the historical context of the Reconquista, where Muslims are portrayed as the primary religious and political opponents of the Portuguese mission. Similarly, Harant frequently refers to the Ottoman forces as the “arch-enemy of Christendom” (Harant, 1608/2011).

However, a key difference remains: while Camões often uses this perception to justify imperial conquest and the domination of the Other, Harant's perspective is more ethnographic. He balances his religious prejudice with a humanist curiosity, documenting the cultures he visits with scientific detail. For Harant, the Other is a religious threat, but also an object of intellectual study.

CONCLUSION

Although Harant's *Pilgrimage* contains some traces of identification with his fellow Bohemian countrymen, these sentiments of collective identity are incomparable in scale to Camões's expression of national consciousness. His portrayal of the Portuguese is complex: they are distinctly united by several factors and share a common objective. They are depicted as a cohesive group on a divine mission and are accordingly celebrated for this in numerous instances. Within the framework of Camões's epic, one is encouraged to take pride in being Portuguese, as it is presented as a privilege to belong to the Lusiads.

In contrast to Camões, Harant refers to his Bohemian identity far less frequently and does not express comparable pride in it. Although he displays positive sentiments toward his homeland, he is primarily defined by his Christian beliefs rather than by his identification with the Czech people. The Bohemians are not represented as a nation; instead, Harant refers mainly to the Bohemian lords—the elite—and to the schools of the Kingdom of Bohemia, which were likewise domains of the elite. He does not describe his people through characteristic attributes that distinguish them from others or unite them among themselves. There is no national spirit stirring the reader's emotions, nor any sentiment of national greatness.

The reasons for these differences can be found in the historical and sociopolitical conditions of Portugal and Bohemia. Another factor may be that the Kingdom of Portugal and the Algarves was already an emerging imperial power with clearly defined political ambitions. As Edward Said argues, cultural production gains political significance when it is closely connected to "ascertainable sources of power within a political society" (Said, 1978, p. 10). According to Said, in the case of imperial states, culture does not merely reflect political and economic interests but actively participates in shaping and legitimizing them.

Because imperial powers are deeply invested in their overseas ambitions, their political societies infuse civil and cultural life with “a heightened sense of urgency” whenever imperial interests are at stake (Said, 1978, p. 11). Camões’s *The Lusiads* can thus be understood as part of this cultural dynamic: the poem’s strong nationalistic and imperialistic sentiment reflects Portugal’s position as an expanding empire and serves to celebrate, justify, and mythologize its imperial mission. By contrast, Harant’s *Pilgrimage* does not contain any form of imperial spirit. There is no underlying subliminal message suggesting a specific destiny for the Bohemian people, nor is there a strong expression of a Bohemian identity, as such an identity did not yet exist in a coherent form (the five criteria of proto-nationalism were scarcely met).

The perception of the Other by the respective authors further confirms the differing levels of national consciousness. Although Camões’s and Harant’s views of the Other are similar, the confrontation with the Orient in *The Lusiads* gives rise to prideful national sentiment, which does not occur in *Journey from Bohemia to Holy Land*.

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