

The Velislav Bible, the Finest Picture Bible of the Late Middle Ages

Central European Medieval Studies

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The Velislav Bible, the Finest Picture Bible of the Late Middle Ages

Biblia depicta as Devotional, Mnemonic and Study Tool

Edited by
Lenka Panušková

Amsterdam University Press

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Preface

The finality is false, because there you still are, the reader, the observer, the listener, with a gaping chasm in front of you, left out of the resolution of the story that seduced you into thinking yourself inside it. Then it's done and gone, abandoning you to continuation, a con trick played out and you were the mark. An ending always leaves you standing in the whistling vacancy of a storyless landscape.¹

No research has its end. It keeps on going, enquiring into further possibilities, changing points of view, asking other questions that have been raised by previous researchers or else that have been more or less overlooked. This is precisely the aim of this monograph, one that focuses on the Bohemian picture Bible named after the figure of Velislav, who is depicted on its last folio: to approach the manuscript in a more complex perspective that allows image and text to be examined in close interrelationship.

The Velislav Bible plays a key role in Bohemian manuscript painting of the first half of the fourteenth century, as there are only a handful of examples from that period still extant. However, knowledge of the circumstances in which the Bible originated, as well as of its donator, is very sparse; neither does the name of the Velislav kneeling in the last scene depicted in the manuscript provide us with any further information on the manuscript itself.

Within the time that has passed since the manuscript was researched in its entirety by Antonín Matějček in 1920s² and by Karel Stejskal 50 years later (in the 1970s),³ new approaches and methods have been introduced in manuscript research in order to further advance our knowledge of the Middle Ages. That is why discussion on the Velislav Bible now has to be revised and viewed from a vantage point different to that from which previous scholars observed it.

All the essays in this book target the relationship between word and image in the Velislav Bible both in a more general and in a very specific way, working with stories specially selected from the pictorial narrative. Exploring this relationship enables us to think about the audience for which the manuscript was intended.

1 Diski, *Stranger on a Train*, p. 2.

2 Matějček, *Velislavova bible*.

3 Stejskal, *Velislav Bible picta*.

At the outset, in their essay 'Studying the Velislav Bible: An Overview' Anna Kernbach and Lenka Panušková provide the reader with a brief resumé of studies dealing with the Velislav Bible up as far as the brief commentary by Zdeněk Uhlíř that was published together with the CD-ROM version of the manuscript.⁴ In the second part of the introduction the identity of Velislav is discussed against a background of preserved written sources in which the name Velislav in its medieval variations (Welko, Welek, etc.) is mentioned. The popularity of this name in the period under investigation now casts doubt on the hitherto indisputable identification of the kneeling figure with the Velislav who served as notary and protonotary of King John of Luxembourg and his successor, Charles IV, and reopens this issue to further inquiry.

In the second essay, entitled 'Image and Text in the Velislav Bible: To the Interpretation of an Illuminated Codex' and also authored by Anna Kernbach and Lenka Panušková, the authors discuss the image-and-text relationship in more detail. Analysis of the *tituli* sheds light on the way in which the scribes compiled them, using quotations not only from the Bible but also from various school manuals, or even writing them out from memory. In the New Testament section of the manuscript Anna Kernbach has succeeded in following a chronology which corresponds to the pericopes read during the liturgical year. At a certain point the authors then return to the enigmatic figure of Velislav. They draw attention to the symptomatic distinction between the Latin diminutive form *famulus* that identifies Velislav and the *famula* description that refers to the female figure depicted at the bottom of f. 149v.

A more general point of view is taken by Lucie Doležalová in 'The Velislav Bible in the Context of Late Medieval Biblical Retellings and Mnemonic Aids,' where the author examines the Velislav Bible's narrative in the context of medieval Biblical retellings. She explores the selection of texts contained in the Velislav Bible but, unlike in the other contributions to this volume, she focuses on the visual narrative with regard to the medieval *ars memorativa*. Although observing many differences between those images designed to be used as mnemonic aids and the illustrations contained in the Velislav Bible, she concedes that there is a very close relationship between the manuscript and the concept of memory.

An art history-oriented study by Lenka Panušková entitled 'The Books of Genesis and Exodus in the Picture Bibles: Looking for an Audience' looks closely at the iconography of the images illustrating biblical events from

4 Uhlíř, *Velislavova bible*.

the first two books of Moses. Compared to other picture Bibles in which the depicted scenes are very carefully selected to suit the needs of the manuscript's user, in the case of the Velislav Bible no special purpose has yet been ascertained. In fact the very opposite is true, for the images depend very closely on the biblical narrative. In several instances this dependency is even complemented with other popular, nonbiblical material in order to emphasize the desired historical, typological or moral interpretation and to present the ideal model of Christian behavior. This is obviously the aim of the pictorial cycle which renders the story of Moses as told in the Book of Exodus. The Lord has chosen Moses to lead Israel from Egyptian captivity into the Promised Land. Especially in those scenes that describe the process of persuading the pharaoh to release the Israelites, Moses (depicted with a halo) acts as a mediator between the people and the Lord. Moreover, it is Aaron, Moses's brother, identified very symptomatically by a tonsure, who performs all the miracles annunciated by the Lord through Moses, and this emphasizing of the roles of both brothers implies that the Velislav Bible would have spoken to a specific audience. These, then, constitute the visual evidence for a chapter school's probably having been the environment in which the manuscripts were to be used.

The following two essays are concerned with the Antichrist story depicted on ff. 130v-135v in the Velislav Bible. While Pavlína Cermanová's study 'The Life of Antichrist in the Velislav Bible' focuses on the process of its creation, taking into account various literary influences, Kateřina Horníčková's essay 'The Antichrist Cycle in the Velislav Bible and the Representation of Intellectual Community' is concerned rather with its visual form. Focusing on the position of the Antichrist motif in salvation history and tracing its roots back to the early medieval patristic authors, Cermanová observes distinct changes in the characteristics of Antichrist, from his role as a through-and-through evil creature to his displaying of negative human characteristics as he acts in opposition to Christ and the latter's acts on Earth. She then goes on to compare the previously examined textual sources with the image cycle in the Velislav Bible. Horníčková also exploits the typological parallel between Antichrist and Christ and the lives of the saints contained in the last portion of the manuscript's images. Like Cermanová, she is interested not only in how the Velislav Bible cycle differs from earlier depictions of Antichrist, but also in the features they have in common. She recognizes, however, the emphasis on moral lessons that is implied in the evil doings of Antichrist and his followers. Her analysis finishes in pointing out the didactic function of the Antichrist's pictorial cycle.

Milena Bartlová's essay '*Tibi predicat hominibus*: In Search of the Practical Function of the Velislav Bible' constitutes a logical conclusion to this monograph. In it the author contemplates the practical function of the medieval manuscript with precise theoretical erudition. In order to define the character of the visual narrative provided by the Velislav Bible she does not hesitate to adapt the terminology used in the modern theory of comics narration. She briefly summarizes the pivotal thesis formulated in the previous essays in this volume and introduces a further hypothesis regarding the original practical purpose that fundamentally influenced the form of the Velislav Bible. Her suggestion that the Velislav Bible was designed as a manual to aid preachers in composing their sermons on various biblical topics is to be perceived as one complementary to the hypothesis proposed in other essays that the Velislav Bible was used as a didactic tool at the Vyšehrad Chapter school. That is to say, both hypotheses are equally plausible, besides also combining to reflect the multifunctionality of arts in the medieval age.

The essays presented in this book are supplemented with Anna Kernbach's edition of the *tituli*, short Latin inscriptions written just after the pictures were completed. Although it is the image that is the main mediator of the content, it is only through properly interpreting the *tituli* that detailed research of the text-image relationship may be carried out.

This monograph does not set out to provide a complex and definitive interpretation of the pictorial as well as textual material comprised in the Velislav Bible. On the contrary, it rather presents a variety of approaches to the selected topics in order to identify the environment for which the Velislav Bible might have been produced. In this book the Bible's manuscript is not treated here as a luxurious work of art to be locked away in a glass cabinet as manuscripts are usually exhibited in museums and galleries, but is viewed as an object of daily use, designated to be held in the hands and browsed through. In contrast, however, with Jenny Diski's feeling of the reader's being abandoned 'in a whistling vacancy of a storyless landscape,' the authors of the present monograph hope to leave *their* reader with the feeling of having gained a deeper insight into the reading of medieval images.

In conclusion, I wish to thank to all the authors who contributed to this volume for their patience and their willingness to look for solutions. My sincerest thanks go to Sarah Gráfová and Iva Dostálová, Stephen Douglas and also Michaela Ramešová and to my colleagues at the Department of Medieval Art of the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, especially to Klára Benešová, Kateřina Kubínová, and Hana Hlaváčková, who brought the Velislav Bible to my attention. I also wish

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Canterbury, 22 May 2016

Lenka Panušková

I Studying the Velislav Bible

An Overview

Anna Kernbach and Lenka Panušková

The Velislav Bible is a parchment manuscript of 188 folios containing 747 illuminations.¹ Although the manuscript originally comprised around 800 leaves, several of these – as well as one complete quaternion – were lost, probably during a later rebinding.² Most of the folios are divided into two sections of equal dimensions (to enclose two images per folio) edged along their left and right sides with a double red line and separated from one another horizontally by a triple line, as at the upper and lower edges of the text area. This creates a two-line blank space above, below and between the two images, and here the text has been inserted. The only exception to this are those folios on which just one single, full-page scene is depicted.

The text is written in a gothic minuscule used in the first half of the fourteenth century and originates from the pens of five scribes, each of whom was probably allocated those particular quires upon which he was to work. Scribe A was assigned the first six quires (ff. 1r-47v), while Scribe B worked on the seventh to the ninth (ff. 48r-71v). The hand of Scribe C is apparent only at the beginning of the fifth quire (ff. 72r-73v), and throughout the rest of the manuscript the two remaining hands alternate: Scribe D appears in the tenth (although only in part) to thirteenth quires, in the fifteenth to the seventeenth, and on the first page of the nineteenth quire (ff. 74r-103v; 112r-136r), while Scribe E worked on the fourteenth, on the nineteenth (in part) to the twenty-fourth, and on the first page of the twenty-fifth (ff. 104r-111v; 136v-183r). From folio 183v onward no text was provided to accompany the illuminations.

Besides continuous text the manuscript also contains brief captions to accompany the illustrations. Most of these are written in the hand of the corresponding scribe for the given section, although ff. 10r, 40r-52r, 78v-79r, 89v-92r and 97v bear Czech and Latin commentaries written in a rather

¹ The manuscript is housed in the National Library of the Czech Republic, Prague, MS XXIII C 124.

² One folio has been lost from each of the fourth and the final, twenty-fifth, quire, as well as from the fourth and seventh folios of the twentieth quire. Also missing is the entire eighteenth quire, as is evidenced by the signature marks located always (with the exception of the first quire) at the bottom-middle of the last folio in each gathering. During rebinding the margins were trimmed rather insensitively, which has caused damage to the text in several places.

hasty gothic minuscule and dating probably from the end of the fourteenth century or the first half of the fifteenth, while ff. 1r-22v and 41r contain German commentary in a seventeenth-century German cursive script.

The first scientific monograph devoted to the Velislav Bible was produced by Johann Erasmus Wocel in the 1870s, when the manuscript was still in the possession of Duke George of Lobkovicz,³ further evidence of this being the fact that Wocel himself referred to the manuscript as the Lobkovicz Bible, or, alternatively, the Lobkovicz Picture Bible (*Lobkowitzzer Bilderbibel*). Wocel, who dated the codex to the late thirteenth century – that is, to a period that predates the Passional of Abbess Kunigunde⁴ – appears nonetheless not to have observed certain stylistic similarities between the two manuscripts. Besides providing us with a basic codicological description, Wocel is probably the only commentator to have concerned himself also with the manuscript's later binding. In this regard he notes the fact that marks made by the tip of the needle that was used to sew the component parts of the volume together after their completion are still to be seen in various places on the binding, which may attest to the manuscript's having existed originally as two to three independent volumes that nonetheless shared a common content and purpose. A further significant contribution made by Wocel was the deciphering of the ownership inscription on f. 1r – *Milit. Ordinis Crucigerorum cum Rubra Stella Cathalogo inscriptus. Pragae A°. 1725*. Regrettably, however, just how the Knights of the Cross with the Red Star came to be in the possession of the codex remains unknown. While he rejects the idea of placing this manuscript in a category along with such traditional types as, for example, the *biblia pauperum* and the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, Wocel does nevertheless concede to the fact that the Lobkovicz Picture Bible also works with Old Testament archetypes and with their maturation in the New Testament narrative of the life of Christ. He also very judiciously states that it is precisely the visual depiction of biblical events in their various complementary relationships that renders them more easily memorizable. Perhaps the most revolutionary of Wocel's ideas, one that has passed unnoticed by other researchers studying this

3 Wocel, *Velislav's Bilderbibel*. Wocel tells us that the first ever work to bring the Bible to the attention of scholars was Schottky's account of the times of Charles IV; Schottky, *Die karolinische Zeit*. Wocel goes on to inform us that at that time the Lobkovicz Bible was in the possession of Dr. Schuster. Wocel, *Velislav's Bilderbibel*, p. 2. For details of Schuster's collections, see Svobodová, *Rukopisy ze sbírek*, cat. no. 126, pp. 337-350.

4 Prague, National Library of the Czech Republic, MS XIV A 17, 1312 and pre-1320. Stejskal and Urbánková, *Pasionál*. For more recent work on the MS, see Benešová et al., *A Royal Marriage*, cat. no. VI.2.2K, pp. 487-490 (Hana Hlaváčková).

manuscript, concerns the possible role of the Latin commentary inscriptions that accompany the pictures; these, he suggests, might have served as handy 'prompts' to the clergy as they delivered their interpretations of biblical events to the congregation.⁵ Wocel justifies this claim in a reference to Abbot Ulrich of Lilienfeld (1345-1351), who produced a rather different compendium of picture types entitled *Concordantiae caritatis* and, in the preface to this work, defined it as a sermon preparation aid for poor clergy members unable to afford access to sufficient quantities of biblical and exegetic theological literature.⁶ While these two manuscripts appear at first glance to differ from one another, the authors of the present volume nonetheless consider Wocel's theory as to the function of the Latin commentaries to be a relevant one particularly in the light of the length and sectioning of the texts and in the manner in which the pictures are organized in corresponding types.

Antonín Matějček, author of what is still the most voluminous monograph to date on the subject of the Velislav Bible,⁷ is in acceptance of Wocel's belief that there originally existed two independent volumes that were intended for binding into one at some later date. He precedes this acceptance, however, with a critical evaluation of existing opinion on the manuscript,⁸ of its content and its chronological placing within the history of Bohemian manuscript illumination, thus forming a point of departure from which to venture into his own, primarily stylistic, analytical evaluation of the Velislav Bible. Earlier researchers, including Wocel, misguided by the archaic rendering of garments and architecture in some of the biblical scenes, had previously dated the codex to the close of the thirteenth century or else the beginning of the fourteenth, and for certain to the time prior to the Passional of Abbess Kunigunde. While Wocel's study, however, was confined to the Book of Genesis and to the iconographic description of the miniatures contained there, Matějček undertook an analysis of the manuscript in its entirety, on the basis of which he was then able to compare the Velislav Bible not only with other manuscript illuminations of Bohemian origin but also in the

5 'Die den Illustrationen beigegefügt Aufschriften mochten als Gedächtnisshilfe den die biblischen Szenen erklärenden Priestern gedient haben.' Wocel, *Velislav's Bilderbibel*, p. 3.

6 The original MS is now housed in the Stiftsbibliothek Lilienfeld, Cod. 151, 1349-1351 or c. 1355. Most recently, see *Die Concordantiae caritatis des Ulrich von Lilienfeld: Edition* as well as Munscheck, *Die Concordantiae caritatis des Ulrich von Lilienfeld: Untersuchungen*.

7 Matějček, *Velislavova bible*.

8 Ibidem, pp. 30-36. As we consider Matějček's recapitulation of various opinions on the Velislav Bible comprehensive, this text will not concern itself with the work of individual authors. Here I refer primarily to collected works on Gothic art in central Europe by such writers as Grueber, *Die Kunst des Mittelalters in Böhmen*; Neuwirth, *Geschichte der christlichen Kunst in Böhmen*; Chytil, 'Vývoj miniaturního malířství'; Janitschek, *Geschichte der deutschen Malerei*, and others.

broader context of the development of illumination in Europe throughout the High Middle Ages.⁹ As does Wocel, Matějček, too, assigns the picture a leading role in the essential concept of manuscript creation, the role of the manuscript's *own* 'conveyer and imparter of the ideas contained in it',¹⁰ perceiving the written text as a set of mere 'explanatory notes' to accompany the events portrayed. In this regard Matějček very correctly points out the use of the demonstrative *hic* and *ibi* in the inscriptions, which is a characteristic feature in picture-dominated Bible story retellings (the *bible imagée* type).¹¹

In addition, he supposes that the illuminations in the Velislav Bible are not original work but rather imitations of those in French Norman manuscripts of the *bible historiée* (*historiale*) type, a genre that enjoyed a wide popularity in particular throughout the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹² Matějček's views are diametrically opposed to those of Wocel and all his adherents, however, in the matter of classifying and dating the manuscript in terms of its stylistic features, discerning as he does a clear linearity in graphic style linking the Bible's two illuminators with the stylistic tendencies prevalent in the genre in central Europe – and particularly in those works to have emerged from southern German scriptoria – in the first half of the fourteenth century. By way of an exhaustive enumeration of extant manuscripts Matějček refutes once and for all Wocel's attempts to date the Velislav Bible to the end of the thirteenth century.¹³

9 Matějček, *Velislavova bible*, pp. 35–36.

10 Ibidem, p. 11.

11 Ibidem, p. 37ff. See also Lucie Doležalová's study in this book.

12 Matějček, *Velislavova bible*, p. 35. Here the author repeatedly quotes Wocel's opinion. The *bible historiée* type, however, is that which would best describe the Velislav Bible, for its Latin texts, which at times provide only the most elliptical of commentaries on the events in the illuminations, do not correspond to the Vulgate, but rather constitute, as was stated earlier, a loose retelling of biblical texts intermixed with various apocryphal and extrabiblical sources. See Kernbach and Panušková's study in this volume. On manuscripts of the *bible historiée* type, see Morey, 'Peter Comestor, Biblical Paraphrase.' Here we take the liberty of emphasizing the fact that Petrus Comestor conceived his *Historia scholastica*, which provided the foundations for the Old French *bible historiée*, primarily for use by students of the cathedral school at Notre-Dame in Paris. After being granted papal approval at the Fourth Council of the Lateran (1215), this abridged and glossed version of the Vulgate became – along with the *Sentences* of Petrus Lombardus and the glossed Bible – an indispensable part of the university curriculum.

13 On the issue of dating Wocel allowed himself to be swayed by the intentionally archaizing style of the architecture and of certain figures' attire. The strongest argument he seems to have found to support the dating of this manuscript to the close of the thirteenth century is the identification of the figure kneeling before the statue of St. Catherine in its final illustration with a Velislav – royal protonotary, teacher, and canon at Vyšehrad – who is mentioned in period sources from the final quarter of the thirteenth century. I consider Wocel's comment on Velislav's youthful looks and secular garments, however, to be of importance; these aspects lead him to

Figure 1.1 Velislav in adoration of St. Catherine (below)

Velislav Bible, Prague, Národní knihovna České republiky, MS XXIII C 124, f. 188v

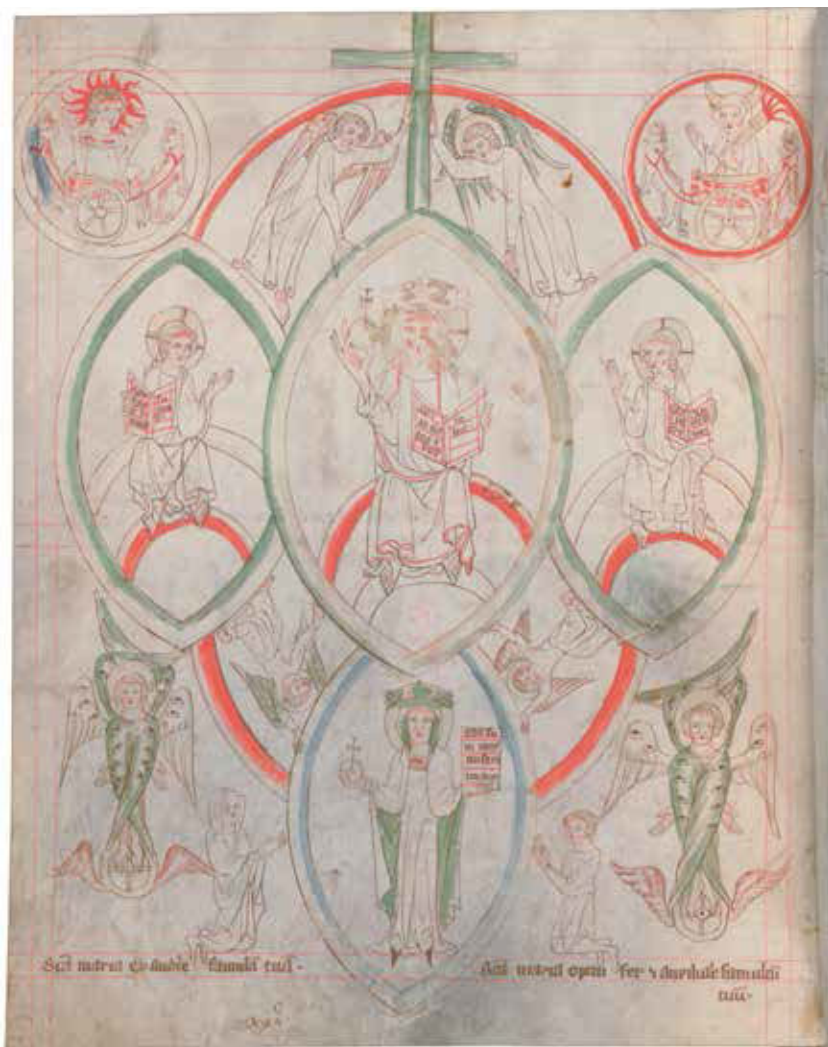
assume the manuscript to have originated prior to 1279, the year in which Velislav's name first appears in sources. See Wocel, *Velislav's Bilderbibel*, pp. 60–61. While it is not possible to link the manuscript to such an early period from a stylistic and iconographic point of view, this observation, made in fact not only by Wocel, plays a significant role in subsequent discussion on the identity of the Velislav Bible's commissioner and recipient.

It was not until the 1970s that the Velislav Bible once again became a focal point of specialist interest when Karel Stejskal published a complete and annotated facsimile of the manuscript.¹⁴ In this edition Stejskal provides a brief description of the manuscript itself and, in contrast with previous researchers, draws our attention to features of iconographic interest in certain of the scenes depicted. He returns repeatedly to the figure of Velislav on the final folio (f. 188v), although, unlike Wocel, he assumes Velislav to have been Prague canon, notary to John of Luxembourg, and protonotary and then notary to Charles IV; he associates him, in other words, with that dynasty of rulers to have emerged following the extinction of the Premyslids (1306), with a Velislav documented in various sources dating from the period 1341-1354. According to Stejskal, the fact that the male figure in this illumination is kneeling before St. Catherine, patron of theologians and philosophers, is indicative of Velislav's clerical affiliation. He solves the problematic issue of Velislav's secular garments and the absence of tonsure so essential for members of the priesthood by referring to Petr Žitavský's Zbraslav Chronicle, in which Žitavský in no uncertain terms criticizes the tendency among priests to dress in accordance with the fashion of the day and to mask the tonsure with hair. According to Stejskal, then, it would appear that Velislav might be regarded as the commissioner of this illustrated Bible. He goes on to observe that for reasons of slightness of scale the anonymous figures of man and woman kneeling in prayer to the Virgin Mary on f. 149v cannot be assumed to be a donor couple but are most likely rather subjects of no specific relation to Velislav. Stejskal's identification of a Velislav engaged in the confines of the royal court around the mid-fourteenth century as the commissioner of this manuscript would also appear to support the conclusions drawn by the stylistic analysis previously undertaken by Matějček, an analysis with which Stejskal, too, is in agreement: that the illustrations contained in the Velislav Bible are datable to the period around the middle of the fourteenth century. Stejskal also further expands upon these conclusions by assuming the manuscript to have originated in one of the lay scriptoria of Prague during the reign of Charles IV, a supposition based on the overall content and orientation of this picture Bible of ours.¹⁵

In characterizing the graphic style of its illuminators he accentuates the sculptural depth of their vivid depictions of both architectural and figural elements, the detailed execution of the drapery, the distribution

¹⁴ Stejskal, *Velislav Bible picta*.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

Figure 1.2 Vision of Holy Trinity

Velislav Bible, Prague, Národní knihovna České republiky, MS XXIII C 124, f. 149v

of the folds in the fabric. He also takes note of the great care taken over the depiction of human hands and the vivid portrayal of their movements, which aids the expression of emotions and the forward momentum of the action; in this matter he uses Matějček's term 'sign language.' He is also in agreement with the idea that the work was shared by two illuminators, the first of whom – seemingly the workshop superior – undertook the illustrations on the first six quaternions (ff. 1r-47v), while the second, a rather less

Figure 1.3 Liber depictus



Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 370, f. 1v

competent illustrator and most likely a mere assistant,¹⁶ contributed to the illumination of the two subsequent quires (ff. 48r-71v), with the superior himself then returning for the final stages to bring the illustration of this

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 10.

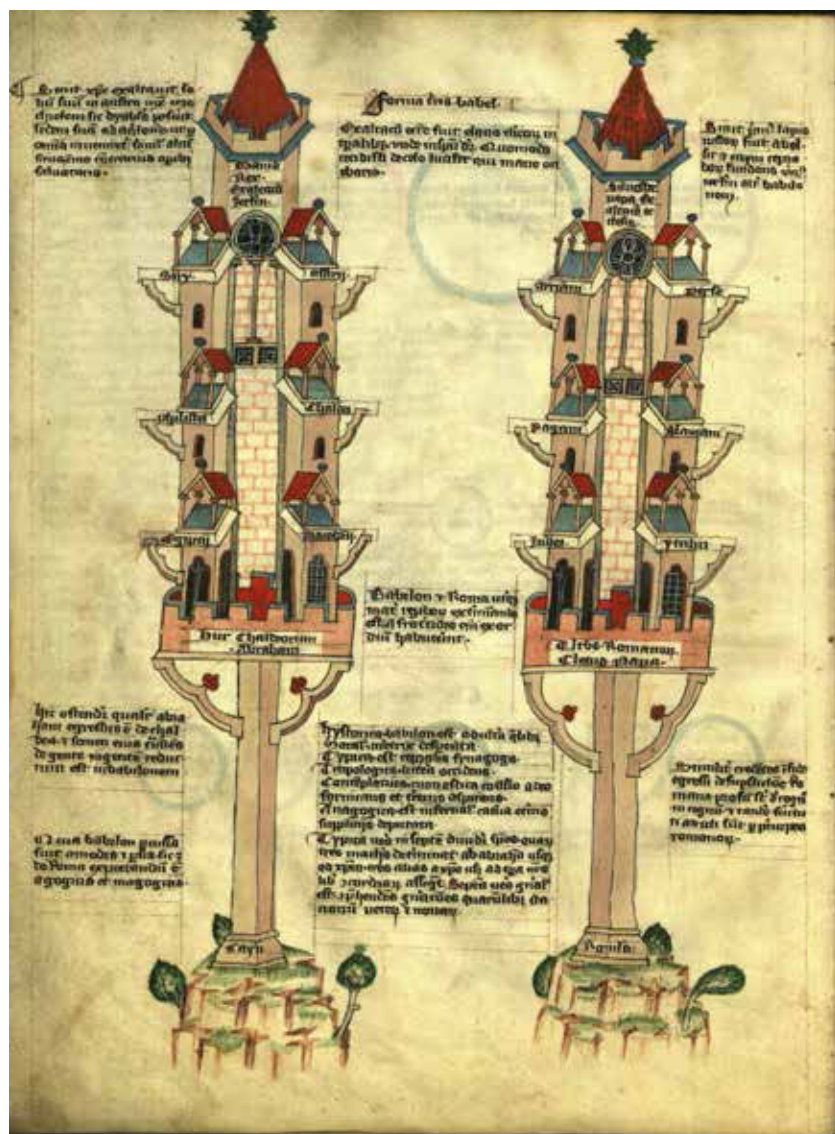
Figure 1.4 *Mater dolorosa*, Passionale of Abbess Kunigonde

Prague, Národní knihovna České republiky, MS XIV A 17, f. 11r

codex to successful completion. As regards the placing of the Velislav Bible within the context of European manuscript production as a whole, Stejskal repeatedly adopts the research findings of Antonín Matějček. Aside of a certain affinity to an illustrated Bible from the collection of Thomas Phillipps of Cheltenham, now known as the ‘Crusader Bible,’¹⁷ and to the Queen

17 Crusader Bible, New York, Morgan Pierpont Library, MS M 638, c. 1240. For details on the manuscript per se, see Weiss et al., *The Morgan Crusader Bible*. For reviews, see Landau, [Review] ‘The Morgan Crusader Bible.’

Figure 1.5 Joachim del Fiore, Commentary on the Book of Isaiah



Mary Psalter¹⁸ that is almost a century its junior, Stejskal names a further Anglo-Norman vernacular manuscript, the Holkham Bible.¹⁹ Rather than matters of style, however, what connects the Velislav and Holkham Bibles is the sheer quantity of textual narrative contained within them, narrative that combines events both biblical and apocryphal, or else nonbiblical, and relates them through the spirited gesticulations of the individual figures in the illuminations. While beyond making this very general observation Stejskal does not dwell on the finer details of the similarity he has noted, we do nonetheless consider it useful to mention at this juncture that researchers would seem to be in more-or-less general agreement, in the light of the introductory miniature, that the Bible was intended for use by an itinerant Dominican friar and preacher; the first folio, that is, shows a Dominican approaching a scribe with a commission,²⁰ a manuscript containing the story of the Virgin Mary and the birth, suffering and resurrection of Christ. The text area here contains the monk's appeal to the scribe to execute his commission with particular care, as his work is to be shown to men of wealth: *Oreferes been e nettement / Kar mustre serra a riche gent.*²¹ This gives rise to the question of whether the Velislav Bible, too, might have been produced for the same purpose – that is, for a cleric or a friar who would have used these stories told in pictures as a visual aid or some sort of mnemonic device that would help him to call to mind all the fundamental details of the holy events at a mere glance while preaching.

The nearest parallel phenomenon in the Czech lands is considered by Karel Stejskal to be the Český Krumlov *Liber depictus*,²² another richly illuminated manuscript which, besides the typological *biblia pauperum* (Paupers' Bible) also contains legends of the saints. Stejskal believes this manuscript to be a stylistic continuation of the Passional of Abbess Kuniunde and of the Christological cycle in the cloister of the Commandery of the Order of St. John at Strakonice Castle, the latter dating from around 1320. He also mentions Joachim del Fiore's illustrated commentary on the Book of Isaiah, dated to around 1350 and now housed in the National Museum in Prague, MS XIV B 17, and frescoes in the churches at Žďár u Blovic and Starý Plzenec, in Western Bohemia, both from around 1351. The

18 Queen Mary Psalter, London, British Library, Royal MS 2 B VII, 1310–1320.

19 Holkham Bible, London, British Library, MS Add. 47682, c. 1327–1335. See Stejskal, *Velislav Biblia picta*, p. 10.

20 For the illumination see http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_47682_fs001r (accessed 31 May 2016).

21 For quotation see Brown, *The Holkham Bible*, p. 30.

22 Now in Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 3710, around 1358.

scholar gives consideration to the intentional antithesis of Christological and Antichrist cycles, which, in his opinion, is quite in keeping with the situation around the year 1350, when the raging Black Death merely heightened people's fears of the impending Apocalypse; once again the Joachimites' notion of history came to the fore, receiving the support not only of religious mystics but also of the influential Italian humanist and politician Cola di Rienzo, who, coincidentally, in 1350 fled from Italy to the court of Charles IV in Prague. Stejskal even refers to Jan Milíč of Kroměříž, Velislav's successor at the royal chancellery from 1358 to 1362. Under the influence of the preaching of Konrad Waldhauser, in 1363 Milíč relinquished all official functions to fully immerse himself in public preaching, during which he went so far as to apply the label of Antichrist to the uppermost echelon of the secular hierarchy and even to Charles IV himself. At the end of his commentary to accompany the facsimile edition of the Velislav Bible manuscript Stejskal gives emphasis to the fact that the scriptorium from which this codex emerged had heartily embraced the then widespread tendency toward apocalyptic Joachimite visions and expectations of the impending coming of the Antichrist. Individual illuminations, then, may be said to clearly reflect 'the contemporary state of medieval life and society, one threatened by an ever-deepening crisis that shaped the way people viewed the Biblical past.'²³

The age of the Internet and the digitization of historical collections worldwide have also made possible a new release of the facsimile edition of the Velislav Bible on a CD-ROM enclosed in a brochure containing a commentary by Zdeněk Uhlíř.²⁴ The author automatically identifies the Velislav kneeling at the feet of St. Catherine as being that same notary and protonotary from the office of John of Luxembourg and then of his son Charles. In contrast with Stejskal's explanation for Velislav's being depicted as a member of the laity, Uhlíř wonders whether the commissioner may have been a married cleric, a *clericus uxoratus*, one ordained as a mere acolyte, a status that made him a member of the clergy and thus allowed him to engage in canonical duties, although in practice he would not have been involved in spiritual guidance and so was not required to undergo priestly consecration. Should this truly be the case, the interpretation offered by Uhlíř would be in correspondence with the relatively frequent incidence in those days of free marriage among scribes and notaries. It is also for this reason that Uhlíř goes on to suppose that the male and female figures

²³ Stejskal, *Velislav Bible picta*, p. 14.

²⁴ Uhlíř, *Velislavova bible*.

Figure 1.6 Premyslid flaming eagle on the shield (above)

Velislav Bible, Prague, Národní knihovna České republiky, MS XXIII C 124, f. 121r

in the picture of the Holy Trinity on f. 149v perhaps represent Velislav and his wife. He finds support for the identification of Velislav as Charles's notary and protonotary in the appearance of the motif of the Premyslid flaming eagle on the shield of the sentry in the tower on f. 121r. As with the incorporation of the legend of St. Wenceslas, Uhlíř perceives this feature, too, as a conscious historicism or, more precisely, as serving to underline Charles's royal ancestry and the fact that through him the Czech lands had

become the center of imperial politics.²⁵ He states that the intermingling of secular and salvational history and the sensitive reflection of contemporary life in the illuminations in this codex is fully in keeping with the mentality prevalent at Charles's court.

It now remains to pause to consider what has been said thus far on the subject of Velislav himself. A good deal of credit for having 'brought him to life' goes not only to Matějček and Stejskal but also, and primarily, to Jiří Spěváček, who has produced several studies on the topic of the Bohemian royal chancellery during the reigns of John of Luxembourg and Charles IV.²⁶ He believes the function of the contemporary notary to have consisted primarily in the undertaking of various diplomatic tasks, in the conception and preparation of declarations and resolutions, and in the validation of international negotiations, contracts and agreements through witness presence.²⁷ As in an earlier study published in the *Sborník historický* (Historical anthology) in 1973, Spěváček had already succeeded in identifying another notary, Vavřinec Mikulášov of Dědice, employed in the services of Charles IV in the period when the latter held the Margraviate of Moravia,²⁸ the scholar now applied similar methods to identify the protonotary and notary. His work resulted in what was the first – and is to this date the only – independent study of Velislav's activities at the royal chancellery; besides this, the only sources to provide any more detailed mention of Velislav as commissioner, *initiator* or *proprietor* of this 'picture Bible' are the art-historical sources mentioned above, for which reason Spěváček's introduction aims first to take stock of the opinions of those authors. He is fairly quick to object to Matějček's caution in drawing connections between the Velislav portrayed in the codex and the royal notary-protonotary, a caution based upon the fact of Velislav's appearing here in secular dress devoid of any indication of ecclesiastical rank. We feel Spěváček's reasoning here to be somewhat awkward; he suggests that Velislav's clothing here corresponds in type to that worn by most of the other figures in the illuminations and that it was neither necessary nor, indeed, appropriate that when being portrayed in an act of private supplication Velislav should be dressed in richly draped cloaks more suited to figures that were depicted either standing or walking.²⁹ Without going on to state his reasons for making these claims, he then turns his attention to the figure of St.

25 Ibidem, p. 34.

26 See Spěváček, 'Významní notáři-diplomaté,' idem, 'Vavřinec Mikulášův z Dědic,' and, in particular, idem, 'Protonotář Velislav.'

27 See Spěváček, 'Protonotář Velislav,' p. 5.

28 Spěváček, 'Vavřinec Mikulášův z Dědic.'

29 Spěváček, 'Protonotář Velislav,' p. 6.

Catherine, patron saint of scholars as well as of arts and philosophy faculties throughout Europe. Like Karel Stejskal, Spěváček, too, mentions the cult of St. Catherine, which was so strong in the Czech lands during the reign of Charles IV; indeed, even the emperor himself was an ardent devotee.³⁰ For this reason he automatically accepts Stejskal's conclusion³¹ that this illuminated Bible, as an item from the private property of Charles's protonotary Velislav, constitutes a 'rare testament' to medieval intellectual life, its problems and contradictions. Spěváček traces the first mention of Velislav to a deed of John of Luxembourg drawn up *per manus Welezlay, Pragensis et Wissegradensis canonici, notarii nostri dilecti* on 23 October 1341.³² He then distinguishes between two groups of documents, referring to them as A and B,³³ the former group comprising those deeds conceived and handwritten by Velislav himself, the latter comprising those that were conceived or else approved by him. It is a natural outcome of this analysis that Velislav's activities in the services of John of Luxembourg and of his son Charles, then Margrave of Moravia, may be dated to the years 1325 to 1346, with the 1330s (1335-1337) appearing to have been Velislav's most active period.³⁴

What Spěváček considers to be the most substantial piece of evidence as to the identity of Velislav, though, is a document issued by Bishop Arnošt of Pardubice in which Arnošt and the provost and the chapter of the Prague church consent to the establishing of a choir of mansionary canons at the collegiate church by Charles in his role as Margrave of Moravia.³⁵ Velislav (Welko) confirms his presence at the signing of the document with a witness' clause inscribed in his own hand:

Et ego welco, canonicus ecclesie pragensis [sic] cum premissis intefuerim,
manu propria subscribo in testimonium premissorum.

30 The chapel dedicated to St. Catherine at Karlstein Castle is further evidence of Charles's veneration of this saint.

31 See Stejskal, *Velislav's Biblia picta*.

32 RBM IV, pp. 411-413, no. 1029. The list of those present at the signing of this agreement includes a considerable number of church dignitaries, scholars (*Michaelis scholastici, Tobie, scholastici Wissegradensis*), and relatives of King John (*consanguinei nostri*).

33 Paleographic analysis aside, Spěváček also notes the character of the conceptual notes and formulae *conscriptum (datum) per manus*. Spěváček, 'Protonotář Velislav.'

34 For a list of the documents, see *ibidem*, pp. 7-12.

35 Deed issued by Arnošt of Pardubice on 5 January 1344, transcription at RBM IV, pp. 554-555, no. 1396. Originals now at the Knihovna pražské metropolitní kapituly (Library of the Prague Metropolitan Chapter), sig. VII 8, new system: no. 156. See also Eršil and Pražák, *Archiv pražské metropolitní kapituly*, p. 62, no. 190.

Welko's round seal was also attached to the document, although it has become rather badly damaged. For information on Velislav's origins Spěvák turned to the papal registers; in an entry dated 3 May 1344, Charles the Margrave requests funding for the upkeep of the parish church in the south Bohemian town of Netolice for the son of Hayn of Sedlčany, Welko, Charles's curate, secretary and advisor.³⁶ A full ten years earlier, in an act issued by Pope John XXII and dated 29 September 1334, we read that the office of canon – with all attendant privileges – at the collegiate chapter of Vyšehrad has been granted to this same Welko (*Welconi Haynae de Sedlcany*).³⁷ Four years later, on 9 August 1338, he is granted a canonical post at the Prague chapter (now the Prague Metropolitan Chapter) that had been vacated by the appointment of Canon Nicholas (Mikuláš) to the bishopric in Trent. Of particular interest is the fact that this occurs at the intercession of King John.³⁸

The documents quoted here are convincing evidence of Velislav's, or Welko's, close links with the royal court during the reigns of both John of Luxembourg and Charles IV. The faith invested by both Luxembourg rulers in their faithful servant Velislav is clearly borne out by the import of the missions with which they entrusted their respective protonotary and notary; as early as 1338, during the reign of John, Velislav was sent to Avignon as royal secretary to engage in negotiations with Pope Benedict XII on a certain confidential matter, and later, under Charles IV, he was alone among the king's faithful servants in being entrusted with removing holy relics from Trier to Prague. Further documents in which Velislav appears – whether as scribe, as witness, or more directly as the subject for whom the document in question is requesting a promotion, a canonical post or a prebend – lead us to rightfully assume that during the 1340s and early 1350s Welko, or Velislav, son of Hayn, was at the very height of his career.

This is also the period, however, which almost all researchers working in the field agree to be that of the creation of the manuscript now known as the Velislav Bible. The question therefore arises as to whether such a prominent figure in the diplomatic and political employ of both John of Luxembourg and Charles IV would have allowed himself to be portrayed without any of the emblems or attributes that would have clearly indicated his being in the services of the king. And it is primarily in his roles as canon with the Prague and Vyšehrad chapters, with the chapter at the central Bohemian

36 MBV I, no. 376, pp. 231-232.

37 MBV, *Tomus prodromus*, no. 1131, pp. 604-605.

38 MBV, *Tomus prodromus*, no. 1293, pp. 696-697.

town of Sadská and later at the church of St. Apollinaire in the New Town district of Prague (Charles's new location for the removed Sadská chapter) that Velislav is likely to have been very particular in matters of reference to his ecclesiastical rank, especially at a moment of private veneration, as is the case in the panel painting of the Madonna of Kłodzko,³⁹ before whose throne there kneels the Prague archbishop himself, Arnošt of Pardubice. Although Arnošt's episcopal vestments – the pontifical gloves, miter and crozier – are laid out on the steps leading up to the heavenly throne, they do nonetheless join his very marked tonsure in forming an integral component of the figure of Arnošt portrayed during a moment of private adoration, or perhaps of receiving a divine vision.⁴⁰ The figure of Velislav as depicted in the final scene of our manuscript, however, is reminiscent rather of a youth than of a mature man at the height of his career. Indeed, it is suggested by Anna Kernbach⁴¹ that the Latin diminutive form *famulcus* (from *famulus*, servant), which appears in the text both in the closing image and in the full-page scene, indicates the relative youth of the figure portrayed. The same scholar points out the age difference that is visible also in the scene with the Holy Trinity, in which the female figure with arms raised toward the Virgin Mary (as Church) is mentioned in the text as *famula*, while her apparel rather corresponds to that in which a married woman would typically have been depicted. As was stated above, the caption in the hand of the man in the same scene describes him as a *famulcus*; this diminutive form, however, might wish to hint rather at other aspects of Velislav's person: humility and penitence.⁴² In iconographic terms the nature of Velislav's garments here – his penitential robes – would attest to this, as has been observed by Miriam Kolářová.⁴³

These various possible interpretations lead one to believe that the process of identifying the protonotary and notary Welko/Velislav as the commissioner of the manuscript is rather more complex than was originally supposed. Extant written sources from between the twelfth and early fifteenth centuries reveal the considerable popularity of this typically Slavonic name in the Bohemian territories. Suffice it to mention, for example, the Count Velislav whom King Vladislav rewarded for his good services by bestowing

39 Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Inv. No. 1624, after 1344.

40 See Hledíková, *Arnošt z Pardubic*, p. 247; for an account of the work itself see Royt, 'Die ikonologische Interpretation' and Suckale, 'Die Glatzer Madonnentafel.'

41 See Kernbach and Panušková's study in the present publication (pp. 35-67).

42 I wish to thank Kateřina Kubínová for alerting me to this meaning.

43 In personal discussion.

on him trusteeship of Vyšehrad in 1143.⁴⁴ Another Velislav, also a canon at Vyšehrad and some time later vice-dean of the same chapter, was active during the last third of the thirteenth century, with sources dating from 1279 mentioning him as protonotary in the king's employ.⁴⁵ In addition to this role he also functioned within his own chapter as a scribe, and represented the chapter in property disputes,⁴⁶ and one of the first references to him (on 23 November 1276) mentions his having successfully completed his studies of the civil and canonical law.⁴⁷ This is the same Velislav with whom Wocel originally linked the creation of the manuscript on the strength of its archaicism.⁴⁸ Various other sources from the end of the thirteenth century and the first decade of the fourteenth also mention figures – from among both the clergy and the ranks of the laity – named Velislav.

Our aim here, however, is not to call into question those opinions which until now have assigned the Velislav Bible to the period around 1340, but rather to point out the fact that the name Velislav and its various derived forms was a relatively common one in the Czech lands and Moravia not only in the thirteenth century but also in the fourteenth. It is for this reason that we do not regard current opinion on the identity of the Velislav shown venerating St. Catherine in this manuscript as the only possible interpretation; we believe this figure to be a member of the laity, even given the decidedly problematic nature of establishing definite links between him and any of the given Velislavs. At any rate, the argument offered by Uhlíř – that Velislav received the ministry of mere acolyte – is not in agreement with contemporary practice, in which a canon was necessarily and automatically also a priest. In this case Velislav would have to have been portrayed at

44 See *Annales Vincencii*, FRB II., p. 412 and, in particular, p. 414.

45 See RBM II, no. 1300, p. 561: *Dat. Prage per manus mag. Welislai, prothonotarii nostri, a. d. MCCLXXXIII, X kal. Oct.* In another deed of King Wenceslas II, however, dated 21 November 1283 – that is, just two months later – it is Václav (*Venceslai*), canon of Prague and Vyšehrad, who is mentioned in the role of royal protonotary. Apparently on account of the fact that the dating clauses on both deeds are identical, particularly in their reference to the protonotary, Emler assigns this Václav to the register under Velislav; see RBM II, p. 1438. Emler's identification of Václav with Velislav would appear justified, for in further deeds issued during the ensuing period of 1284/1296 Velislav, canon of Prague and Vyšehrad, appears time and again in the function of royal protonotary. Furthermore, in a deed dated 8 May 1285 Velislav signs as a canon of Olomouc.

46 See RBM II, no. 1180, p. 507 (dispute between the chapter of Vyšehrad and Puta of Riesenberga); no. 1182, p. 509, and other disputes between the Prague provost and the chapter of Vyšehrad at which Master Velislav and Master Jindřich (Henry) appeared together as witnesses and mediators.

47 See RBM II, no. 1051, p. 439: *Circa personam tuam de causa gerimus paternae benignitatis affectum, quia sicut in nostra constitutus praesentia retulisti, diu in iure canonico et civili studuisti et profecisti laudabiliter.*

48 Wocel, *Velislav's Bilderbibel*, in the note on pp. 60–61.

least with the tonsure, which is never absent in any of the clerical figures depicted in the manuscript, particularly in its sections dealing with the New Testament and the Legends. Iconographic analysis of the cycle of illuminations in 'the Velislav,' with particular attention paid to questions of function and use of the manuscript, may shed more light upon these matters, and this is indeed what the other studies included in this publication aim to contribute to, each from its own, very different point of view.

