

VI. SUMMARY

The Deeds of Pledge of Sigismund of Luxembourg for the Church Estates (1420–1437)

In the Czech historiography the pledging policy of Sigismund of Luxembourg is a very well-known and frequently treated issue, mainly in the context of the secularization of the church estates during the Hussite Revolution. But many unanswered questions and unusual cases came to light in Sigismund's pledge charters during the preparation of their abstracts for the new volumes of *Regesta imperii*. We were not able to fit them into the former narratives, hence the need for this book. Its aim is to analyse the deeds of pledge of Sigismund of Luxembourg for the church estates and to verify or rectify the conclusions of the up-to-date research. We can sum them up as follows. The secularization and the pledges of the church estates through the Czech kings started already during the reign of Wenceslaus IV. After the outbreak of the Hussite Revolution monasteries became a target for the ultraquist as well as catholic nobility, and unrestrained secularization of the church estates started. King Sigismund continued with the pledging of the church property, and mostly only confirmed the usurpation of the church estates. His pledging policy brought nothing new but quantitative change. The point of view of this book is a little bit different, because it does not use the term "secularization" at all, and focuses on the pledging of the church estates as a tool of Sigismund's financial policy. The work is based on diplomatic analysis of Sigismund's pledge charters and the combination of the results with other historical sources.

In the first chapters the available sources are introduced and also the recent historical literature on the topic of the pledging of church estates and secularization is analysed. The main part is the chapter III, in which Sigismund's deeds of pledge for the church estates are analysed in chronological order. At the outset, King Sigismund held a similar model to his predecessors in his pledge policy. However, soon after August 1420 he started to pledge the estates of church insti-

tutions in his own name. The first such acts are dated to 22 August 1420. Because of that, he got into a conflict with his chancellor George of Hohenlohe, and the resistance of other church representatives is also documented (e. g. the refusal of the abbot of Břevnov monastery to give up the pledged estates to Jan of Opočno). In the first acts, King Sigismund pledged large sums on monastic estates to prominent Bohemian lords, who disposed of substantial military forces (Jan and Vilém Švihovský of Rýzmbek, Buhuslav and Krušina of Švamberk, Jan of Opočno and Oldřich of Rožmbek). In Beroun, on 28 October 1420, Sigismund issued a series of charters for the lower nobility, which is a completely new type of deed of pledge. It is a pledge of property of church institutions associated with the mercenary contract. Therefore, by pledging church estates, he actually paid in advance for military services of the Bohemian nobility.

The change in Sigismund's pledging policy in Bohemia occurred as a result of events at the Imperial Diet in Nuremberg in July and August 1422, where he released a series of retraction charters on 23 August 1422. He withdrew pledges of church estates in Bohemia and Moravia and he admitted that this practice was against the existing legal usage. He therefore annulled the means which he used for dealing with his debts to the Bohemian nobility for two years. It is questionable how realistic it was to enforce the cancellation of pledges of church estates. Some of the Bohemian lords were present at the Imperial Diet in Nuremberg, and they obtained various compensations for the retracted pledge charters. Already in September 1422 in Nuremberg, the King Sigismund issued several deeds of pledge for the chamber income or estates, or alternatively he issued bills of debt with a promise to pay the due amount in a pre-agreed time. He pledged a gold clasp with a large diamond, two rubies and a large pearl to a group of nobles. In October 1420, in Passau, he issued several bills of debt to prominent nobles as well.

In the years 1423 to 1436 the use of pledges of the church estates as a legally unacceptable act became rare, and was always followed by some form of agreement with the particular church institution. The king did not reside in the country, and the intensity of the pledging of chamber estates and incomes fully reflected that. Sigismund turned to the pledging of church estates again in the years 1436-1437. The pledge charters from this period reflect a slightly changed situation. Specifically denominated amounts and debts appear in the pledge charters less and less often, and there is an expansion of general vague formulations that property is being pledged so that its holder could better serve the common good, intervene against violators of the peace, faithfully serve the king and so on. They not only contain vaguely formulated duties, but it is also hard to postulate some relationship between the value of the pledged estates and the pledging sum. The reason for this is probably somewhat different than in the years 1420-22. The

main function of the pledge charters in that period was to consolidate the situation in the Bohemian kingdom after the Hussite Revolution.

As early as 20 July 1436, Sigismund ordered in his great privilege of the estate liberty that all the holders of his pledge charters should bring these charters to his council, which should examine their validity. This order was repeated at the St. Wenceslaus Land Diet in 1436 as well as through the findings of the Land Court in 1437. The strict application of this order probably led to many conflicts, because a lot of actual holders of crown and church estates had no legal guarantee of their property. To secure the status quo, Sigismund's chancery issued a number of pledge charters in the years 1436-37. For former supporters of Sigismund it was an opportunity to gain the reward for their services and compensation for incurred damages. In the case of his former enemies, it was a means of buying their loyalty.

Chapter IV contains two case studies about the pledging policy towards selected church institutions. The Chotěšov and Zbraslav monasteries were chosen because of the favourable preservation of sources. The analysis shows that Wenceslaus IV pledged only the chamber incomes from the Chotěšov monastery. In the case of Zbraslav we cannot document his activity in this direction; he only confirmed the pledge charter of the abbot of Zbraslav. The situation changed with the pledges of King Sigismund. Both monasteries were impacted with varying intensity by two waves of pledging of church estates in 1420-1422 and 1436-1437. The revocation of the pledges in 1422 was reflected in the changed pledging policy. Thanks to Provost Petr and his effort to revise the pledges, Chotěšov monastery almost avoided the pledging in 1436-1437. For Zbraslav, on the other hand, this period meant the confirmation of the bad economic situation. Many cases from other church institution show that the pledging of their property did not automatically mean its loss. The stabilization of the situation in 1437 brought the possibility to regain the property. While Chotěšov succeeded, Zbraslav was less successful. But there were also monasteries which were not renewed after the revolution. The conclusion that the pledging of church estates came first with the activity of King Sigismund from 1420 corresponds with the results of the analysis from Miroslav Svoboda concerning the order of the Hospitallers in Bohemia.

It turns out that in the case of the pledging policy of Sigismund of Luxembourg we must strictly distinguish between two types of pledges, depending on what Sigismund of Luxembourg actually pledged. The first are pledges of chamber estates and incomes, which were fully in line with current legal practices. The second were direct pledges of church estates, in fact their alienation, which meant a significant qualitative change from the previous period. The pledging of church property came in two major waves, every time when Sigismund needed to resolve some urgent financial situation. The first was between 1420 and 1422, when his intention was to finance an expensive army in the short term. The second came at the end of 1436 and the beginning of 1437 when pledging became a means

VI. Summary

to financially ensure the status quo and the loyalty of both parties. The pledging of royal property was a common tool used already by Sigmund's predecessors. Although some processes of the pledge policy towards church institutions reach back to the time of King Wenceslaus IV (the pledge of the king's taxes), we have to consider Sigismund's pledges of church estates to be not only a great change of quantity but also of quality. This change shaped the pledge policy of the Czech kings in the second half of the 15th century.