

PATRICK GEARY

## CUR IN FEMINAS TAMDIU PERSEVERAT?

Well into his history of the Goths Jordanes, the sixth century author who claims to be summarizing a lost history by Cassiodorus, enters a long excursus on the valor of Gothic women who, according to his tale, were actually the Amazons. Then follows a long account drawn primarily from Orosius of the deeds of the Amazons up to the time of Alexander the Great. Jordanes breaks off this narrative abruptly however to ask, "Why does an account concerning the men of the Goths pay so much attention to women?"<sup>1</sup> This is indeed an interesting question, but Jordanes himself provides no answer: instead he returns to the great and praiseworthy deeds of men. But rather than following Jordanes, I would like to reflect on his question, because women are a problem in both ancient and medieval accounts of the origins of families, peoples, and nations, the so-called *origines gentium* texts. From the earliest accounts of peoples in Herodotus, to the genealogies in Sacred Scripture, to Christian apocrypha, Islamic Hadith, and Jewish Midrash, to the *Origo gentis* accounts of the early middle ages, to the women in noble families' genealogies constructed in the twelfth century and beyond, women often hold an ambivalent place, or no place at all.<sup>2</sup>

In some accounts, as in the prototypical genesis story, that of Adam and Eve, in some Medieval Islamic accounts of Sarah and Hagar, the Saxon origin story told by Widukind of Corvey,<sup>3</sup> or the story of the Lombard hero Alboin,<sup>4</sup> women are the source of sin and conflict. In the Aeneid Dido, founder of Carthage, is at the heart of the conflict with Aeneas and thus, ultimately, responsible for the disastrous fate of her city.<sup>5</sup> But there are other, more complex women: magical women such as Gambara, mother of the

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<sup>1</sup> Jordanes, *Getica* IX (ed. Theodor Mommsen, MGH AA 5, 1, Berlin 1882) 53–138, here 70: *Sed ne dicas: "de viris Gothorum sermo adsumptus cur in feminas tamdiu perseverat?"*.

<sup>2</sup> Herodotus, IV 5–11 (ed. Josef Feix, griech. und deut., Düsseldorf/Zürich 2000) 45. On Herodotus and his Scythian origin accounts see François Hartog, *Le miroir d'Hérodote. Essai sur la représentation de l'autre* (Paris 1991) 38–47. The New Testament genealogies are treated in Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City NY 1979, 1993). On women in Islamic traditions see Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an: Traditions, and Interpretation* (New York 1994); Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: the Evolution of the Abraham-Ismael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany/New York 1990). The first extensive treatment of women in early medieval origin legends is Walter Pohl, *Gender and ethnicity in the early Middle Ages*, in: *Gender and the Transformation of the Roman World*, ed. Leslie Brubaker/Julia Smith (in press). On women in Scandinavian myth see Margaret Clunies Ross, *Women and power in the Scandinavian sagas*, in: *Stereotypes of Women in Power: Historical Perspectives and Revisionist Views*, ed. Barbara Garlick/Suzanne Dixon/Pauline Allen (New York 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Widukind von Corvey, *Rerum gestarum Saxoniarum libri tres* I, 9–13 (ed. Paul Hirsch/Hans-Eberhard Lohmann, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. [60], Hannover 1935, reprint 1989) 6–14.

<sup>4</sup> Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum* (ed. Georg Waitz, MGH SS rer. Lang., Hannover 1878) 12–187.

<sup>5</sup> On Dido see Christopher Baswell, *Dido's purse*, in: *Cultures in Contact, Past and Present: Studies in honor of Paul Beekman Taylor*, ed. Wystan H. Auden/Margaret Bridges/Paul Beekman Taylor (*Multilingua Journal of Cross Cultural and Interlanguage Communication* 18–2/3, Berlin 1999) 159–172; and id., *Aeneas in 1381*, in: *New Medieval Literatures* 5 (Oxford 2002) 7–58.

first Lombards, and Libuše, Kazi, and Tethka, the three magical sisters in Cosmas of Prague's account of the origins of the Czechs;<sup>6</sup> women who engender races of monsters by consorting with demons such as Lilith,<sup>7</sup> and the Gothic Haliurunnæ from whom sprang the Huns;<sup>8</sup> saintly women like Clothild or Dubrovca who were responsible for converting their husbands and thus their peoples in the tradition of St. Helen. There were monstrous women like the mother of the Scyths in Herodotus, or Melusine who were part serpent part human.<sup>9</sup> And there was Mary, in the Jewish tradition a fallen woman who foisted off her bastard child by a Roman soldier on her gullible husband, in Islam, "above the women of all created beings", and in Christianity the Mother of all faithful. The representations of women in stories of beginnings, as Amazons or saints, monsters or troublemakers, are too complex to categorize. Whenever they appear, women are problematic and contradictory figures.

But if their presence is problematic, so too is their absence. In many Biblical accounts, particularly those in Genesis that form the Babel narrative, they are altogether absent. But this does not work either. Prior to the brave new world of cloning, families, kindreds and peoples needed more than *insigni viri* – they needed women to reproduce. But the representation of ancestry in patriarchal societies focused on male descent. As the *Glossa ordinaria*, echoing St. Ambrose and others put it, *Non est consuetudo Scripturarum, ut ordo mulierum in generationibus texatur*. ("It is not the custom of the Sacred Scriptures that the order of women would be woven into generations."). And nevertheless, organizing the past in terms of generations was the fundamental mode of historical thinking. If, as Ralph Howard Bloch suggests, "From the fourth century on, the defining mode of universal history was that of genealogy," and fathers were "the prime subject of historical enunciation and children its object,"<sup>10</sup> what then were mothers, either historically or grammatically?<sup>11</sup>

My approach is to see the complex and interrelated treatments of women in these texts as a kind of Midrash. In Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, normative scripture leaves inconsistencies, ambiguities, and unfinished stories that subsequent generations attempt to resolve. Midrashic traditions, whether the rabbinical Midrash itself, apocrypha and exegetical texts in Christianity, or Qur'anic exegesis, historiographical works on the pre-Islamic prophets, or popular "Tales of the Prophets", and of course Hadith in Islam,<sup>12</sup> try to come to terms with these troublesome canonical texts, and do so unconsciously in terms of their own societies and cultures. Similarly, more secular authors, as they reflect on oral traditions and the classical historiographical and ethnographical texts that they hope to reconcile create a kind of secular Midrash in the sense of 'searching out' the meaning of authoritative texts and traditions, adding, synthesizing,

<sup>6</sup> Cosmas von Prag, *Chronik der Böhmen* (ed. Berthold Bretholz, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. NS 2, Berlin 1923, reprint 1980).

<sup>7</sup> Who first appears in the medieval *Alphabetum Siracidis*. *Alphabetum Siracidis* (Sepher Ben Sira) (ed. Moritz Steinschneider, Berlin 1858).

<sup>8</sup> Jordanes, *Getica* XXIV, ed. Mommsen 89.

<sup>9</sup> On Melusine see especially Jacques Le Goff, *Pour un autre Moyen Age. Temps, travail et culture en Occident*. 18 essais (Paris 1977) 77.

<sup>10</sup> Ralph Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago/London 1983) 37 f.

<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere he answers this by saying that women have the status of "*translatio*, of translation, transfer, metaphor trope." Ralph Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago/London 1991) 11. Cited by Alfred Thomas, *The Labyrinth of the Word: Truth and Representation in Czech Literature* (*Veröffentlichungen des Collegium Carolinum* 78, München 1995) 39f., who discusses this concept in relation to Czech myth and to which I will refer below.

<sup>12</sup> On types of Islamic texts see Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands* 11–21 (Chapter 2: The Nature of the Literature).

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or commenting on parts of these traditions that they find too important to discard but too problematic to simply report.

This is a vast project on which few scholars other than Herwig Wolfram and Walter Pohl have written in a systematic way, and here I wish to present one small case study, that suggests how one might begin to answer Jordanes' question: the origin myth of Bohemia and its Přemysl ducal dynasty.<sup>13</sup>

A woman is central to the origin of the Přemysl dynasty, but like so many others, she is complex and ambivalent, living in a world stitched from Biblical and classical motifs, a world of gender equality and Amazons just before the start of what might be termed history. Cosmas, who served in the cathedral of Prague, composed the first part of his Chronicle of Bohemia in 1119, six years before his death at about the age of 80. During his long life Cosmas saw not only the elevation of Duke Vratislav to the kingship in 1086, but also the rebellion and fratricidal violence that resulted from weak rulership around the year 1100. Bohemians, he and his contemporaries believed, needed a strong duke or king, and yet the king was at once their greatest threat. The Chronicle has long been noted for the apparent tension between Cosmas' evident praise for the Bohemian ducal family and his harsh evaluation of the evils of lordship that make up the most widely quoted section of the first book.

The whole chronicle follows the history of Bohemia and its Přemysl dynasty until the year of Cosmas' death, 1125. It begins, in a manner common to other such histories, with the story of the tower of Babel, and then moves to Europe and a region he calls *Germania*, flowing with milk and honey but devoid of people. The first humans to enter the region are led by Boemus, after whom his followers name the region. The first generations lived in a prelapsarian paradise, when no one knew the word *meum* but only *nostrum*.<sup>14</sup>

This was also an age of gender equality: "At that time the virgins of this land came to maturity without control (*sine iugo*) and carried arms like Amazons and, choosing commanders for themselves, fought just like young male soldiers and penetrated into the forests to hunt in a manly way, and they did allow themselves to be chosen by men, but they chose whom and when they wanted, and like the Scythians men and women did not wear different dress."<sup>15</sup>

This paradise did not last and communal property ceded to private, as conflict and injustice entered this society. Still, there were neither judges nor princes, and when people had conflicts, they spontaneously brought them to those persons who in morals and honor were deemed to be greater. Among these was one Crocco, whose reputation for settling disputes was such that people from near and far came to him to settle their conflicts. Crocco had no sons, but he had three daughters. And here our story begins.

The first two daughters were Kazi and Tethka. Kazi was another Media of Kolchis, universally acclaimed for her skills with plants and medicinal incantations. Tethka, the second daughter, was equally praised for her sharp intelligence. However she taught the ignorant people to adore deities and instituted sacrilegious rites. The youngest

<sup>13</sup> Pohl, Gender; Herwig Wolfram, *Ethnographie und die Entstehung neuer ethnischer Identitäten im Frühmittelalter* (in press). In general on *Origo gentis* texts in the early Middle Ages: Herwig Wolfram/Walter Pohl/Hans-Hubert Anton/Ian N. Wood/Matthias Becher, *Origo Gentis*, in: RGA 2. Aufl. 22 (Berlin/New York 2003) 174–210.

<sup>14</sup> Cosmas, *Chronik I*, iii, ed. Bretholz 8: *Nec quisquam 'meum' dicere norat, sed ad instar monastrice vite, quicquid habebant, nostrum ore, corde et opere sonabant.*

<sup>15</sup> Cosmas, *Chronik I*, ix, ed. Bretholz 19f.: *Et quia ea tempestate virgines huius terre sine iugo pubescentes veluti Amazones militaria arma affectantes et sibi ductrices facientes pari modo uti tirones militabant, venacionibus per silas viriliter insistebant, non eas viri, sed ipsemet sibi viros, quos et quando voluerunt, accipiebant et, sicut gens Scitica Plauci sive Picenatici, vir et femina in habitu nullum discrimen habebant.*

daughter, Libuše, was the most marvelous of the three: wise in council, powerful in speech, chaste in body, outstanding in morals, second to none in her concern for justice, affable to all, a glory and decoration of the female sex. But, Cosmas adds, “since no one is in every way good, this praiseworthy woman – oh sad human estate – was a *phitonissa*”, that is, a seer.<sup>16</sup>

She was so universally beloved that she was made the judge of all quarrels. But it happened that two wealthy men came before her to settle a property dispute. She lay, “as is the wanton softness of women when they do not have a man whom they might fear, on her elbow on her soft and richly decorated bed.”<sup>17</sup> She judged the case justly without regard to the persons, and gave her verdict. The one who lost however complained that it was an intolerable injury that a woman should render justice: “We know that a woman, either standing or seated on a throne understands little, so how much less must she understand lying in a bed. A bed is more suited to receiving a husband than speaking martial justice. Women are characterized by long hair but short judgment. It would be better to die than for men to accept such behavior. Nature leaves us only the opprobrium of nations and peoples because we lack a ruler and a virile judge.”<sup>18</sup>

Libuše hiding her shame and anger, admitted that she was and would remain a woman and that since she did not judge them with an iron rod, and since they did not live in terror, they rightly despised her: “For where there is fear, there is honor. Now you need a rector who is more savage than a woman.”<sup>19</sup> With this she sent them home and told them that whomever they would choose the next day as lord, she would accept as husband. But that night she called together her two sisters to divine the future by their magical arts. The next day, after she had warned the people of the dangers of having a duke: “O you unfortunate people, who do not know how to live free, and that no good person loses freedom except along with life,” she then continued her famous caution against princes largely drawn from the first book of Kings and from Sallust, extolling the value of liberty and cataloguing the impositions and demands that would be made by a ruler on their sons and daughters, even on the livestock.<sup>20</sup> However they persisted in their demand for a duke, and she indicated to them that they would find a man in the village of Staditz on the banks of the Bila, ploughing with two oxen. This man, whose name was Přemysl, would be the first of the Přemysl dynasty. Emissaries did as they were told, found Přemysl, and brought him back to marry Libuše, assume the position of Duke, and, again through her prophetic powers, identify and found the city of Prague.<sup>21</sup> Following this, Cosmas tells of the virgins of the land who lived like Amazons, wore the same clothes as men, and established their own city, Devin, ‘the City of Vir-

<sup>16</sup> Cosmas, Chronik I, iv, ed. Bretholz 11: *Hec fuit inter feminas una prorsus femina in consilio provida, in sermone strenua, corpore casta, moribus probata, ad dirimenta populi iudicia nulli secunda, omnibus affabilis, sed plus amabilis, feminei sexus decus et gloria, dictans negocia providenter virilia. Sed quia nemo ex omni parte beatus, talis ac tante laudis femina – heu dira conditio humana – fuit phitonissa.*

<sup>17</sup> Cosmas, Chronik I, iv, ed. Bretholz 11: *Illam autem, ut est lasciva mollicies mulierum, quando non habet quem timeat virum, cubito subnixa, ceu puerum enixa, alle in pictis stratis nimis molliter accubabat.*

<sup>18</sup> Cosmas, Chronik I, iv, ed. Bretholz 12: *Scimus profecto, quia femina sive stans seu in solio residens parum sapit, quanto minus, cum in stratis accubat? Re vera tunc magis est ad accessum mariti apta quam dicere militibus iura. Certum est enim longos esse crines omnibus, sed breves sensus mulieribus. Satius est mori quam viris talia pati. Nos solos obprobrium nationibus et gentibus destituit natura, quibus deest rector et virilis censura, et quos premunt feminea iura.*

<sup>19</sup> Cosmas, Chronik I, iv, ed. Bretholz 12: *Nam ubi est timor, ibi honor. Nunc dicitur necesse est valde, ut habeatis rectorem femina ferociorem.*

<sup>20</sup> Cosmas, Chronik I, v, ed. Bretholz 14. Much of the criticism is based on 1 Kings 8, although as Lisa Wolverton, *Hastening toward Prag: Power and Society in the Medieval Czech Lands* (Philadelphia 2002), points out, Cosmas has constructed a critique that is not simply a paraphrase of Samuel.

<sup>21</sup> Cosmas, Chronik I, vi–viii, ed. Bretholz 15–18.

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gins.' The young men built an opposing city but, unable to take the women because they were stronger than the men, they tricked them into participating in a banquet. That night, each seized for himself a virgin, and they burned the city.<sup>22</sup>

Cosmas' text has long been the object of scholarly attention, either as evidence of pre-Christian Slavic religion, of distant memories of matriarchy among the western Slavs, or simply as an elaborate critique of the Czech dukes of Cosmas' time.<sup>23</sup> There are particularly interesting questions about the extent to which this account reflects social and cultural reality: How commonly did seers accompany Slavic armies in the eleventh and twelfth centuries? One accompanied a Polish army as late as 1209.<sup>24</sup> Were there women warriors in Slavic or other central and eastern European societies? Archaeological evidence is most suggestive. However as fascinating as these questions about the reflection of reality in the text may be, they are not mine. Instead, I want to consider how Cosmas attempts to make sense of inherited traditions, whether Czech and local or Classical and universal; how his text is a sort of Midrash, searching out the meaning of Libuše for his day and his audience.<sup>25</sup>

If the much-debated *Legenda Christiani* is indeed tenth century, then Cosmas may in fact be elaborating on a tradition at least two hundred years old. According to this text, the Slavs of Bohemia lived like an unbridled horse, without law, prince, or city until, stricken by plague, they turned to a certain *phitonissa* for divination and advice. Having received her counsel, they established the city of Prague. Then, still following the advice of the *phitonissa*, they found a wise and prudent man named Přemysl, whose occupation was agriculture, and appointed him prince or ruler, joining him in matrimony to the *phitonissa*.<sup>26</sup>

If this was the bare tradition received by Cosmas, we can follow how he transformed it, elaborating a story that preserved its essentials while transforming the meaning into a commentary on the relationship between ruler and people. Central to this transformation is Libuše, a carefully constructed figure whose story is deeply informed by Cosmas's reading of classical texts, among them Ovid, Horace, Stacius, Virgil, the Bible, especially the Acts of the Apostles and the critique of kingship in First Kings, but also Boethius, Sedulius, Regino of Prüm and other early medieval authors.<sup>27</sup> The resulting

<sup>22</sup> Cosmas, *Chronik I*, ix, ed. Bretholz 20f.

<sup>23</sup> In general, Dušan Třeštík, *Kosmova Kronika. Studie k počátkům českého dějepiscetví a politického myšlení* (Prag 1968). For a review of the history of the treatment of this material see Vladimír Karbusický, *Anfänge der historischen Überlieferung in Böhmen* (Ostmitteleuropa in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart 18, Köln/Wien 1980) 71–92. Although his intention is to connect the material in Cosmas to a long tradition of Czech epic and portions of his structural analysis of the material is perhaps overelaborated, Karbusický's understanding of Cosmas and his uses of traditional material, classical and medieval sources, and contemporary events is extremely insightful.

<sup>24</sup> *Chronicon Montis Sereni* (ed. Ernst Ehrenfeuchter, MGH SS 23, Hannover 1874) 176. Cited by Robert Bartlett, *Reflections on paganism and Christianity in Medieval Europe*, in: *Proceedings of the British Academy* 101 (1998) 55–76, here 61.

<sup>25</sup> Or as Walter Pohl, *Gender* (in press), has suggested, "Successful myth does not state the obvious, it sets out to resolve tensions."

<sup>26</sup> *Kristiánova legenda. Legenda Christiani* (ed. Jaroslav Ludvíkovský, Prag 1978) 16–18. On the authenticity of the text and the argument that it dates from ca. 992–994, see Dušan Třeštík, *Počátky Přemyslovců* (Prag 1997) 117–136. For an English language summary of the debate see Marvin Kanton, *The Origins of Christianity in Bohemia: Sources and Commentary* (Evanston, Illinois 1990) 18 and 31–46. I am grateful to Professor Dušan Třeštík for his assistance with this text and that of Cosmas.

<sup>27</sup> On the construction of Cosmas's text see Alfred Thomas, *The Labyrinth of the Word* 31–46 and more generally Karbusický, *Anfänge der historischen Überlieferung*. Still fundamental is František Graus, *Lebendige Vergangenheit. Überlieferung im Mittelalter und in den Vorstellungen vom Mittelalter* (Wien/Köln 1975) esp. 89–97.

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image is anything but the simple reporting of traditions concerning Libuše and Přemysl.

Clearly Cosmas is extremely ambivalent about Libuše. On the one hand she is a paragon of female virtue and demonstrates herself to be superior to the men of her time. As a female judge, she is at least partly modeled on the Judges of the Old Testament, especially Deborah "who used to sit under a palm tree and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment." Moreover she is, with Přemysl, the ancestor of the Bohemian dukes including Cosmas's contemporary Duke Vladislav I. (1109–1117; 1120–1125) Her judgment, like her prognostications, are true. And yet, he constantly disparages her softness, her lack of a male to control her, and most significantly he characterizes her and her sisters as furies. They practice the magic arts; she is, he says twice, a *phitonissa*, a seer, and he compares her to the Cumaean Sybil.<sup>28</sup>

The term *phitonissa* is perhaps the way into a deeper understanding of the tensions and problems within the person of Cosmas' Libuše. *Phitonissa* is a medieval variant of *Pythonissa*, a term derived from Pythia, the high priestess who uttered the responses of the Delphic Apollo. She was in turn named after the Python, the vast serpent slain near Delphi by Apollo and well known to Cosmas from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Like Hercules' Scythian consort or Melusine, the snake woman who is the mother of the Lusignan family, there is perhaps something serpentine about her.

Moreover, the use of *phitonissa* rather than the more positive *prophetessa* or some more classical choice such as *vates*, has a specific resonance: the term is post classical. It first appears in Jerome's translation of the Vulgate and refers to the medium consulted by King Saul in 1 Chronicles 10, 13, referred to as a *mulier habens pythonum* in 1 Samuel 28, that is, 'a woman possessed'.

Like the Hebrew medium who summons the ghost of the prophet Samuel, Libuše, as a wielder of magical arts, is a transgressor of divine order intimately involved with kingship and royal succession. And yet, like Libuše, the *pythonessa* summoned by Saul is not an altogether negative figure: First she attempts to refuse the royal request, just as Libuše attempted to reject the people's demand that she find them a duke. After Saul faints from hunger and fear at the announcement of his imminent death, she kills her fattened calf for him and cajoles him into taking some nourishment. Peter Damien, in a letter to Abbot Desiderius of Montecassino, praises the *phitonissa* (he uses the same rare spelling as Cosmas) for returning good for evil.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, both women prophesy the truth: the spirit of Samuel (or rather, according to most medieval commentators, a phantasm of Samuel) accurately predicts the death of Saul the next day. Libuše too predicts the truth: she finds the future duke, the city of Prague, and even foresees the Bohemian saints Wenceslaus and Adalbert.

This is in a real sense Cosmas' dilemma: woman's power is illegitimate, but it can also be both potent and true. "What cannot the phitonicus's furor know? What can magical arts not accomplish? The Sybil was able to predict the series of fates of the Roman people even to the day of judgment, and even, if one can believe it, prophesied concerning Christ."<sup>30</sup>

Nor is the distant Libuše the only such woman whose power to settle conflicts between men both fascinates and troubles Cosmas. This is the same dilemma that he faces when dealing with the most powerful woman of his day. When Cosmas wrote about Libuše and the Bohemian Amazons he was reflecting on Mathilda of Tuscany, another

<sup>28</sup> Cosmas, *Chronik I*, iv, ed. Bretholz 12f.

<sup>29</sup> Petrus Damiani, *Epistulae libri II*, xiii (ed. J.-P. Migne, PL 144, Paris 1867) col. 282f.

<sup>30</sup> COSMAS, *Chronik I*, 14, ed Bretholz 13.

woman who exercises judgment and settles disputes in his chronicle.<sup>20</sup> Cosmas' description of her could almost fit Libuše: she rules Lombardy and Burgundy after the death of her father, "having the power to elect and to enthrone or to dismiss 120 bishops."<sup>21</sup> Not only was Mathilda the woman who most famously brought about the temporary reconciliation of Pope Gregory VII and Emperor Henry IV at Canossa, but as importantly from Cosmas' perspective, she reconciled Cosmas' patron Bishop Jaromir of Prague (d. 1090) and his brother Duke and later King Vratislav (1061–1092), and brought about the former's restoration to his see. Here, as in the case of Libuše, Cosmas confronted the positive effects of female power. At the same time, Cosmas reports an apocryphal story in which Mathilda is accused of using *malificium* to prevent Duke Welf of Suabia from performing his marital duties on their wedding night. Again, one sees the uneasy combination of virtue and magic.

Libuše's world like that of Mathilda is meant to be at once appealing and repellent. This ambiguity is reinforced by the account of the Amazon-like women of Libuše's time. Evoking the age of Amazons has been, since Antiquity, a way of criticizing weakness in rulers and a lack of manly courage in warriors. And yet Cosmas constructs the Czech Amazons differently from those in Orosius or other *Origo* texts. This is the natural state of Czech women, not the result of rebellion or a desperate response to attack. Still, a society in which women and men live in equality, a society led by a woman, one who practices magical arts, and is perhaps possessed by a demon, is certainly no paradise. It is the weakness of the people, their femininity, that demands a strong ruler. The age of Libuše prefigures the future relationship between the Bohemian populace and its dukes: lordship is harsh, its powers coercive and destructive; and yet without lords societies, like women without husbands, are prey to their own weaknesses. Significantly, as Herwig Wolfram has pointed out,<sup>22</sup> the foundation account ends with the defeat and capture of the warrior maidens by the young men and concludes: "And from that time forward, after the death of Princess Libuše, our women are subject to the authority of men."<sup>23</sup> In other words, women are subject to men just as the Bohemian people are subject to their Přemyslid dukes.

And still, Cosmas is no run of the mill medieval misogynist. Libuše may represent the need of the Bohemians for ducal control, but she remains both a figure of justice and guidance to her people and her husband. One need only compare the brutal slaughter of the Czech Amazons in the *Dalimil Chronicle* of ca. 1314 to see the difference between a fully developed misogyny and Cosmas' deeply ambivalent treatment of the same material.<sup>24</sup> Just perhaps this is in part due to Cosmas's own situation: although a priest and canon of the Cathedral of Prague, he was married and had at least one son, Henry. His wife Bozeteha died in 1117, shortly before he finished the first section of his chronicle, and he remembers her in book III as "the inseparable partner in all my undertakings."<sup>25</sup> His experience of women was thus more intimate and positive than that of reformed clerics of his day and thereafter, and he acknowledged a certain partnership and friend-

<sup>20</sup> The parallels between Libuše and Mathilda have been pointed out by Karbusický, *Anfänge der historischen Überlieferung* 17 f., although his analysis differs significantly from my own.

<sup>21</sup> Cosmas, *Chronik II*, xxxi, x, ed. Bretholz 37: *Hisdem diebus venerat Romam Mahtildis potentissima domna, que post obitum patris sui Bonifacii tocius Longobardie simul et Burgundie suscepit regni gubernacula, habens potestatem eligendi et intronizandi sive eliminandi CXX super episcopos.*

<sup>22</sup> Wolfram, *Ethnographie* (in press).

<sup>23</sup> Cosmas, *Chronik I*, ix, ed. Bretholz 21: *Et ex illa tempestate post obitum principis Lubosse sunt mulieres nostrates virorum sub potestate.*

<sup>24</sup> See Thomas, *The Labyrinth of the Word* 34–45.

<sup>25</sup> Cosmas, *Chronik III*, xxxiii, ed. Bretholz 217: *Rerum cunclarum comes indimota mearum, bis Februi quinis obiit Bozeteha kalendis.*

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ship with his wife. Of course, before we assume this to be simply the outpouring of his grief and recognition of his wife's equality and companionship, we must recognize that the line is itself a reminiscence of a poem attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine that begins: *Age iam precor mearum comes irremota rerum.*<sup>36</sup> Thus his wife, no less than Libuše, becomes an intertextual reference. And yet in the crafting of this epitaph, no less than in the crafting of the women at the beginning of his Chronicle, we can see an elderly man using gendered categories to simultaneously criticize his contemporaries, warn his ruler, and remember his wife.

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<sup>36</sup> Prosper of Aquitaine bei Paulinus Nolanus, *Poemata in ep. app.* (ed. J.-P. Migne, PL 61, Paris 1905) col. 737. Cosmas need not have known the poem first hand. It was quoted by Bede, *De arte metrica* (ed. J.-P. Migne, PL 90, 1904) col. 173 to illustrate Anacreontine meter.

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