

SLAVERY AND LIBERATION OBSERVED FROM THE MARGINS OF THE ATLANTIC: REFLECTION OF OVERSEAS COLONIZATION IN *THE BOOK OF JOSEPH* (1783-1784)¹

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Abstract: The article explores how African slavery was perceived in the Czech Lands. After a brief review of earlier Czech reflections of modern slavery, the text focuses on The Book of Joseph (1783-1784), a rare source in German and Czech language that was aimed to communicate to the public in the Czech Lands the essence of the Enlightenment reforms. In the text, the theme of slavery was used in several different ways when discussing the problems of political autonomy, religious tolerance, and abolition of serfdom. While responding to the widespread Enlightenment discourse of “liberation” from the bonds of prejudice, superstition, and ignorance, the author(s) of the text also followed up on more than two centuries of indirect encounters of Czech readers with the complex world of the Atlantic and, at the same time, reacted to the specific political claims and debates that marked public discourse in the Czech Lands of the late eighteenth century.

Debates about the “colonial hinterlands” or “margins of colonialism” have been going on for some time. That colonialism was not just a bilateral relationship between the metropolis and the subdued (overseas) regions may seem self-evident, equally to the fact that “Atlantic history” should not be limited solely to the societies, polities, and populations immediately surrounding the Atlantic

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Ocean.² In spite of their physical distance from the actual colonial encounter, inhabitants of regions not directly involved in it had also profited from the Atlantic system of economic and cultural interchange. What is equally important, they had been reflecting upon the new lands and strange peoples living in them, making comparisons and debating their own position within the global networks, although they perhaps were not aware of their extent and organization.

Several shared themes can be identified in almost every reflection on overseas realities by various groups of Europeans – one of these was the conviction of spiritual, moral, and intellectual superiority that underpinned their self-confidence in encounters with the non-European “others.” At the same time, in each region, national or cultural context, such encounters were integrated into specific worldviews and mental structures.

The present article explores how one aspect of the Atlantic colonial system, namely the phenomenon of African slavery, was perceived in a region located on the margins of this system – in the Czech Lands. After a brief review of the earliest Czech reflections on slavery, the article focuses on *The Book of Joseph* (1783-1784), a rare source in German and Czech language that was aimed to communicate to the public in the Czech Lands the essence of the Enlightenment reforms.³ In doing so, the author(s) made use of the theme of slavery in several

² Philip D. Morgan, “A Comment,” *Europeans Engaging the Atlantic: Knowledge and Trade, 1500-1800*, ed. Susanne Lachenicht (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus Verlag, 2016) 153. I am fully aware of the many inadequacies of the concept of the “Atlantic.” In this, I agree with many of the critical points formulated by Bernd Hausberger in his review of *Latin America and the Atlantic World / El mundo atlántico y América Latina (1500-1850): Essays in Honor of Horst Pietschmann*, ed. Renate Pieper and Peer Schmidt (Wien, Köln und Weimar: Böhlau, 2006), published in *Historia Mexicana* 57, no. 1 (July-September 2007): 279-91. Still, with all the reservations, I decided to use the term in the present text as an abbreviation for the global connections of the early phase of the overseas expansion of Europe in the fifteenth to the eighteenth century.

³ Of course, the “Enlightenment” was not a single coherent movement and also its expression in literary production varied considerably in specific contexts. For the purpose of the present text, the focus is on the emphasis on reason instead of religious dogma and accepted knowledge as one of the distinguishing features of the new attitude to the world, an attitude perceived as novel also by contemporaries; and also the commitment of the advocates of the Enlightenment to the amelioration of the conditions of humankind. See Jonathan Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750-1790* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 2-7; Thomas Munck, *The Enlightenment: A Comparative Social History 1721-1794* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 7, defines Enlightenment as an “attitude of mind” rather than a coherent system of beliefs.

different ways, discussing problems of political autonomy, religious tolerance and abolition of serfdom. While responding to the widespread Enlightenment discourse of “liberation” from the bonds of prejudice, superstition and ignorance, they also followed up on more than two centuries of indirect encounters of Czech readers with the “new world and new seas.”⁴ At the same time, the text reacted to the specific political claims and debates that marked the public discourse in the Czech Lands of the late eighteenth century.

The names the “Czech Lands” or the “Lands of the Bohemian Crown” denote the regions of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, historically ruled by the kings of Bohemia. In 1526 the throne was assumed by the Habsburg dynasty and the three territories attached to the complex Habsburg confederation, together with the Hungarian Kingdom and various inherited territories of Austria and later also northern Italy and the Balkans.⁵ Significantly, at least since the Middle Ages, the population of the three regions consisted not only of those whose first language was Czech, but also of German speakers. For a century, the Czech Lands under the Catholic and German-speaking Habsburg kings kept part of their state autonomy, symbolized by the diet with a seat in the local capital –

⁴ Allusion to the expressions of the times, such as Louis LeRoy, who in the text *On the Interchangeable Course, or Variety of Things in the Whole World* (London: Charles Yetsweirt, 1594) described in detail the “new lands, new seas, new formes of men, manners, lawes and customes; new diseases and new remedies; new waies of the Heavens, and of the Ocean, never before found out”; quoted in Jack P. Greene, *Imperatives, Behaviors and Identities: Essays in Early American Cultural History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992) 351.

⁵ In 1918 the three regions (Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia) became, together with Slovakia and Ruthenia, parts of the new Czechoslovak Republic. In contrast to English and other languages, the Czech language does not distinguish between: 1. “Czech” in the linguistic, ethnic, and cultural sense (Czech nation) and 2. “Bohemian” in the geographical sense (from Latin *Boiohaemum*, i.e., the homeland of the Celtic Boii; the term “Bohemia” is in this sense limited to the region itself, and distinguished from Moravia and Silesia). Both meanings are covered by the adjective “český” (Czech). This causes certain problems in translation. The phrase “the Czech Lands” results from the effort of present-day historians to grasp the territorial-social-cultural integrity of the whole region of the Crown Lands subject to the King of Bohemia (since 1526, this title was held by the Habsburg emperors); it was not used in the period under consideration here. See, e.g., Jaroslav Pánek, Oldřich Tůma, eds., *A History of the Czech Lands*, trans. Justin Quinn, Petra Key, and Lea Bennis (Prague: Karolinum, 2018); detailed explication of the toponym in Tom Dickens, “The Czech-Speaking Lands, Their Peoples, and Contact Communities: Titles, Names and Ethnonyms,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 89, no. 3 (2011): 401-54.

Prague. Moreover, Czech was retained as an official language of administration, alongside a unique system of coexistence of Protestants and Catholics, legacy of the religious “Hussite” wars of the fifteenth century. A radical change came after the unsuccessful rebellion of the (Protestant) Czech Estates against the Habsburgs in 1618-20. In the aftermath of the lost Battle of White Mountain in 1620, the politics of religious tolerance was revoked and the non-Catholic population forced to convert or emigrate.⁶ All these historical developments influenced how the inhabitants of the Czech Lands perceived themselves and the outside world.

Czech responses to the colonial explorations have been studied by Czech historians, but mostly within a frame of dominantly nationalist historiographic narratives. In these texts the “fellow countrymen” who “left their traces” in the most remote parts of the world were eulogized, without any effort to contextualize their presence overseas.⁷ This article follows different objectives. Its principal inspiration are the methodological reflections of Peter Burke and other historians of cultural contact studies. The objective is to study the “translation” or “active reception”⁸ of information from overseas and its adjustment to the local needs by the local people who often – no matter how active they actually were in the processes of accepting or rejecting the new cultural phenomena brought about by early globalization – were not fully aware that they themselves and their communities were undergoing substantial change and were connected to the economic and cultural networks of the Atlantic.

“Perhaps In Your Country Ethiopians and Apes Are Scarce”

Throughout human history, slavery had been almost omnipresent in all parts of the world. At the same time, it had always been a “peculiar institution,” to a certain

⁶ Hans Wolfgang Berghausen, “Die ‘Verneuerte Landesordnung’ in Böhmen 1627: Ein Grunddokument des habsburgischen Absolutismus,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 272, no. 2 (2001): 327-51.

⁷ Examples of such approaches to the connections between world and Czech history include Zdeněk Kalista, *Čechové, kteří tvořili dějiny světa: Z historikova skicáře o XVI. a XVII. věku* (Czechs Who Shaped the History of the World: From a Historian’s Sketchbook of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries) (Prague: Českomoravský Kompas, 1939); Vilém Mathesius, *Co daly naše země Evropě a lidstvu: od slovanských věrozvěstů k národnímu obrození* (What Our Countries Contributed to Europe and the World: From the Slavonic Missionaries to the National Revival), vol. 1 (Prague: ELK, 1940).

⁸ Peter Burke, “Translating Knowledge, Translating Cultures,” *Kultureller Austausch. Bilanz und Perspektiven der Frühneuzeitforschung*, ed. Michael North (Wien, Köln und Weimar: Böhlau, 2009) 69-77; Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge II: From the Encyclopaedia to Wikipedia* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2012) 48.

degree extreme, structurally different from other forms of oppression and servitude.⁹ It represented the ultimate limit of subordination, inferiority, and alienation; the slave remained an outsider within the community. These aspects of slavery had been discussed by European authors from the Antiquity to modern times. Much less reflected upon, but from the point of view of a historian of equal importance, was the impact of slavery on identity formation. The institution helped create clear-cut inner borders, determining the “insiders” and the “outsiders” within a community with precision, even when the actual number of slaves was minimal.¹⁰ This was precisely the case of the Czech Lands.

Up to the late eighteenth century, the Habsburgs neither possessed colonies nor pursued geopolitical interests in other directions of the world. Most of the territory governed by them (with the exception of the Austrian Netherlands) was relatively distant from the Atlantic Basin and thus it did not profit much from the new trade routes. The rest of Central Europe, too, remained beyond the immediate impact of overseas discoveries. Nevertheless, news about them soon reached the Czech Lands in the form of written and printed testimonies, at first translated from foreign languages, and later also through scarce but for the general public much more exciting, eyewitness accounts.¹¹

Probably the first encounter of Czechs with African slavery is mentioned in a memoir of a member of the diplomatic mission of King George of Bohemia to the West European courts in 1466. The embassy also visited Portugal, and its leader, Baron Zdeněk Lev of Rožmitál, was honoured by an audience with Dom Afonso V of Portugal. “The King spoke very kindly to my lord,” remembered Václav Šašek of Břířkov, a page-boy in service of Rožmitál, in a text written sometime after his return to Bohemia. He continued:

My lord asked the King to give him two Ethiopians. On hearing this request the king’s brother [...] burst out laughing and said: “Friend, that which you ask is of no value. You should ask for something greater and

⁹ Kenneth M. Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution. Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956). See also Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

¹⁰ Markéta Křížová, “Frontiers of Race, Frontiers of Freedom: Fabrication of ‘Negro slave’ in European Discourse of the Early Modern Era,” *Imagining Frontiers, Contesting Identities*, ed. Steven G. Ellis and Luďa Klusáková (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2007) 109-23.

¹¹ For early Czech contacts with overseas regions, especially America, see Josef Opatrný, “La imagen cambiante de América en la sociedad de Bohemia entre 1500 y 1848,” *Latin America and the Atlantic World/El mundo atlántico y América Latina (1500-1850)* 97-113.

more worthy of your position than Ethiopians. But since you ask only this, I beg you to add a third present from me, namely an ape, so that you may return richly dowered to your country. Perhaps," he continued, "in your country Ethiopians and apes are scarce, since you make them your first choice."¹²

Further in the memoir, Šašek's observations of the slave markets in Porto leave no doubt as to the character of Portuguese ventures to Africa at the time of his visit in the country. Šašek mentioned the shock the Czech embassy experienced when seeing men and women "sold like cattle."¹³ Still, there was no moral outrage on the part of the author and no further comments on the unusual institution of slavery. There were many other strange, shocking, and irrational customs and events the embassy encountered on the way, and the trade in humans was just one among many. The strange faces of the "Ethiopes" meant nothing more to Šašek than an exotic motive in the narrative about far-away lands and the people inhabiting them.

It is not known whether the two African slaves had survived the journey to Bohemia, and if so, how they were received; nor how much information about African slavery the members of the embassy passed on to their fellow countrymen. Šašek's account was certainly not published either during his lifetime or long afterwards, but might have circulated in copies. Further information on overseas voyages that reached Czech readers was also fragmentary. But the concept of slavery – perpetual deprivation of a human being of all rights, and the subject's degradation into a transferable possession, a mere work tool belonging to another person – was of course known to those readers.

To some extent, slavery was discussed in relation to the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century news about the discoveries in the West, especially the conquest and colonization of America and the brutal treatment of the American natives. In line with many other Protestant writers all over Europe, non-Catholic authors in the Czech Lands had since the early sixteenth century repeated and embellished the topics of the Black Legend – that is the story of violent acts

¹² *The Travels of Leo of Rozmítal through Germany, Flanders, England, France, Spain, Portugal, and Italy, 1465-1467*, ed. and trans. Malcolm Letts (Cambridge: The Hakluyt Society at the University Press, 1957) 106-107. The original memoir, written by Václav Šašek of Bříkovo, has not been preserved – only its translation into Latin, made in 1577 by Stanislav Pavlovský, Bishop of Olomouc, which was published in Czech under the title *Ve službách Jiříka krále* (In the Service of King George) (Prague: ELK, 1940), and also in translation into English by Malcolm Letts.

¹³ *Travels of Leo of Rozmítal* 118.

committed by Spaniards in America. Although in the earliest Czech testimonies Native Americans were portrayed as culturally and intellectually inferior to Europeans, their enslavement was condemned – in order to accentuate Spanish, i.e., Catholic, atrocities as an argument in the persistent religious strife within the Czech Lands.¹⁴ But none of these early testimonies dealt with the enslavement of Africans on the American soil; this specific violation of rights of a specific group of people, rights so eagerly defended in the case of “Indians,” was never mentioned. Africa appeared sparsely in Czech texts, and whenever it did, it was portrayed as mostly inhabited by “fierce beasts and monsters,” not people.¹⁵

In fact, the word “slavery” was seldom used in Czech texts of this period. When it appeared at all, it was in legal, religious, and philosophical treatises, and it mostly alluded to a state of things long past. This approach was not limited to Czech authors. Most Humanist and Baroque scholars treated slavery as an institution of the Antiquity, often within the framework of the descriptions of the humiliation experienced by the Jews during their captivity in Egypt. Such inconsistency is evident in the works of Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius), a prominent member of the Unity of Brethren, the first independent church of the European Reformation, established in 1457, but banned in the Czech Lands in 1627. Comenius spent the rest of his life in exile, his writings reaching his homeland only clandestinely.¹⁶ For long periods of time, Comenius resided in the Protestant countries of Western and Northern Europe: in the Netherlands or Sweden. Among his sponsors and patrons were men closely tied to the Atlantic

¹⁴ For anti-Spanish propaganda in general, see Charles Gibson, *The Black Legend: Anti-Spanish Attitudes in the Old World and the New* (New York: Knopf, 1971); for its specific manifestations in the Czech Lands, see Simona Binková, “Manifestaciones de la leyenda negra antiespañola en los países checos y posibles vías de su difusión,” *Historie – otázky – problémy* 8, no. 2 (2016): 39-63. The first reports of American colonization were contained, among others, in the *Spis o Nových zemích a Novém světě* (A Treatise on the New Lands and the New World) by Mikuláš Bakalář Štětina, published ca. 1506. Its source may be a heavily edited and abbreviated letter (commonly known as *Mundus Novus*) written in 1502 by Amerigo Vespucci. A later source is *Kozmografia česká* (Czech Cosmography, 1554), published by Zikmund of Púchov, an adaptation of Sebastian Münster’s *Cosmography* (1544).

¹⁵ Zikmund z Púchova, *Kozmografia česká* (Prague: Tiskárna severinsko-kosořská, 1554) 118r.

¹⁶ For the history of the Unity of Brethren, see Joseph Theodor Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmischen Brüder*, 3 vols. (Herrnhut: Verlag der Missionsbuchandlung, 1922-31), and Craig D. Atwood, *The Theology of the Czech Brethren from Hus to Comenius* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009). On Comenius, see Daniel Murphy, *Comenius: A Critical Reassessment of His Life and Works* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1995).

exploration and colonization ventures – such as the members of the de Geer family who supported him in the 1640s when he was staying in Sweden. The de Geers were heavily involved in the African trade, including slave trade.¹⁷

Comenius apparently kept up with news about overseas colonization, and even via books by Catholic authors (there are obvious signs of his familiarity with the writings of Jesuit missionaries on Native American languages in his linguistic treatises).¹⁸ Several times, in line with the Black Legend, he mentions the treatment of the “poor Americans” at the hands of the Spanish colonizers.¹⁹ In his other writings, Comenius refers to America when developing the thesis that Europeans should bring to other continents education, peace, and salvation.²⁰ Yet in his entire oeuvre, he chose to ignore the realities of Atlantic slavery. This is evident in *Orbis sensualium pictus* (Visible World in Pictures), an illustrated textbook for children written ca. 1651-1654 and subsequently modified for different languages. In a sequence of entries describing social structures and relations, Comenius also explained the term “slavery”: “A Servant was heretofore a Slave, over whom the Master had power of life and death. At this day the poorer sort serve in a free manner, being hired for wages.”²¹ The entry relegates the institution

¹⁷ In 1649 Laurentius de Geer stood at the founding of the Swedish Africa Company (*Svenska Afrikanska Kompaniet*), pursuing trade on the Gold Coast. According to some authors, Comenius saw an opportunity to extend missionary work to West Africa, thanks to de Geer’s ventures there. See Susanna Akerman, *Queen Christina of Sweden and Her Circle: The Transformation of a Seventeenth-Century Philosophical Libertine* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1991) 135. On the patronage of the de Geer family towards Comenius, see Vladimír Urbánek, “Displaced Intellectuals and Rebuilt Networks: The Protestant Exiles from the Lands of the Bohemian Crown,” *Religious Diaspora in Early Modern Europe: Strategies of Exile*, ed. Timothy G. Fehler, Greta Grace Kroeker, Charles H. Parker and Jonathan Ray (London and New York: Routledge 2016) 167-79.

¹⁸ In his *Novissima linguarum methodus* (1648), Comenius quoted the Jesuit missionary José de Acosta; see Joannes Amos Comenius, *Opera didactica omnia* (Prague: Academia, 1957) 1:46.

¹⁹ In the moralizing dialogue in Czech, “*Truchlivý*” (Mournful, 1622), Comenius even quoted Bartolomé de Las Casas as an eyewitness to how “the miserable, unarmed Americans were extinguished not like beasts, but like helpless caterpillars” (*Joannis Amos Comenii Opera Omnia / Dílo Jana Amose Komenského*, vol. 3., ed. Milan Kopecký [Prague: Academia, 1978] 83).

²⁰ For Comenius’s interest in America see Tibor Wittman, “La imagen de Nuevo Mundo en las obras de Juan Amos Comenio,” *Ibero-Americana Pragensia* 5 (1971): 139-48.

²¹ Jan Amos Comenius, *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* [...], *Visible World: or a Nomenclature, and Pictures of all The chief things that are in the world* [...], trans. Charles Hoole (London: Joseph Kirton, 1659) 247.

of slavery to the past, obscuring any possible connection with the situation of his own times.

When not dealt with as an institution of the past, slavery in the Czech texts of the sixteenth and seventeenth century was most often explicitly connected with Islamic countries and the images of Christian captives suffering at the hands of the Turks. This topic was omnipresent in various genres of the *turcica*, that is popular literature on Turks and the Ottoman Empire – in sermons, travelogues, songs, and tales. Václav Vratislav of Mitrovice, a Czech nobleman who at the close of the sixteenth century travelled with a diplomatic envoy to Constantinople, witnessed the arrival of Christian war captives and their selling at the open market: “They are sold and badly treated, so that the spectator’s heart breaks at the sight. [...] And whoever wants to buy the slave, examines him not unlike a beast or horse, teeth, eyes, hands and feet.”²² The image of suffering Christian slaves and merciless Muslim masters was widespread all over Europe in this period, supporting the idealized image of Christian Europe.²³ The use of anti-Turkish stereotypes by Václav Vratislav of Mitrovice thus also confirms the sentiments shared by the author and his readers. There is no mention, however, of Turkish slaves in Vienna and other Christian cities that the author passed through on his journey to Istanbul.²⁴

The image of the Muslim master and the suffering Christian slave was not limited to literature, but found support and widened its outreach through visualizations in paintings and statuary, such as the sculptural group on Charles Bridge, the principal bridge in Prague, by Ferdinand Maximilian Brokoff (1714). While this specific work of art celebrated St. John of Matha and St. Felix of Valois, prominent figures of the Trinitarian Order who took as their principal

²² [Václav Vratislav of Mitrovice,] *Příhody Václava Vratislava z Mitrovic* (The Adventures of Václav Vratislav of Mitrovice) (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1977) 111. As in the case of Šašek’s text, this memoir was only published long afterwards, at the end of the eighteenth century; but it had circulated in handwritten copies and must have had an impact on the reading public.

²³ On the captivity narratives circulating in Europe at this time, see Robert C. Davis, *Holy War and Human Bondage: Tales of Christian-Muslim Slavery in the Early-Modern Mediterranean* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger/ABC-CLIO, 2009). For the Czech images of the Turks, see Tomáš Rataj, *České země ve stínu půlměsíce: Obraz Turka v raně novověké literatuře z českých zemí* (Czech Lands in the Shadow of the Crescent: The Image of the Turk in Early Modern Literature from the Czech Lands) (Prague: Scriptorium, 2002).

²⁴ Markus Friedrich, “‘Türken’ im Alten Reich: Zur Aufnahme und Konversion von Muslimen im deutschen Sprachraum (16.-18. Jahrhundert),” *Historische Zeitschrift* 294, no. 2 (2012): 329-60.

goal the ransoming of captured Christians from Turkish hands, in fact the most prominent figure is that of a Turk with quirts and a curved sword standing guard over prisoners depicted at the bottom of the sculptural group (Fig. 1).²⁵



**Fig. 1. "Turk on the Bridge," sculptural group celebrating St. John of Matha and St. Felix of Valois on Charles Bridge in Prague, by Ferdinand Maximilian Brokoff (1714).
Source: Wikimedia Commons.**

²⁵ Oldřich Blažíček, *Umění baroku v Čechách* (Baroque Art in Bohemia) (Prague: Obelisk, 1971) 110.



Fig. 2. Bartholome Kilian, "Tasks of the Society," copper engraving for the university thesis of Franz Vogt (1703), depicting the global outreach of the Society of Jesus; to the right, an African neophyte. Source: National Library in Prague, Th 144.

Another important aspect of the discussions about slavery was connected with the topos of the liberating force of Christ's message, redeeming believers from the bondage of sin, the Devil, and barbarity through integration into the community of men.²⁶ These images of the "bondage of sin" and spiritual liberation through conversion, widespread as they were throughout Europe, were especially relevant in the Czech context, particularly after 1627, when the "Recatholicisation" began – the pressure of the Catholic Church and government authorities to counter the persisting adherence of a part of the population in the Czech Lands to Protestantism (Fig. 2).²⁷ It was also within the Recatholicisation discourse that Black Africans entered once more the public consciousness in the Czech Lands, through the reports and letters of Jesuit missionaries. The Society of Jesus was assigned an important role in the Recatholicisation process; at the same time, members of the order were involved in the missionary enterprise overseas. Some of them maintained contact with their original residences. Their letters celebrated the overall flourishing of the Catholic community, but they also satisfied the hunger for information about far-away lands. As a result, they were extremely popular, being disseminated in handwritten copies or in print.²⁸ In one of such letters, Joannes Gintzel, a missionary stationed at a Portuguese colony in Brazil, wrote to the members of the Jesuit residence of Český Krumlov, where he had lived for a number of years before travelling to America. Gintzel wrote about Bahía and its inhabitants

who are being served by twenty-five thousand African slaves. These are imported annually in great numbers, one being sold for a hundred gold pieces. Our college alone owns one hundred and fifty slaves. They walk

²⁶ Marc Bloch, *Slavery and Serfdom in the Middle Ages*, trans. William R. Beer (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975) 11; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966) 10.

²⁷ Howard Louthan, *Converting Bohemia: Force and Persuasion in the Catholic Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

²⁸ The so-called *Welt-Bott* ("Messenger of the World"), a 26-volume compendium of letters from the members of the German Assistance sent into their provinces of origin, is the most relevant source for Central Europe: Joseph Stöcklein, ed., *Der Neue Welt-Bott. Allerhand so Lehr- als Geistreiche Brief-Schriften und Reis-Beschreibungen, welche von denen Missionariis der Gesellschaft Jesu aus beyden Indien, und andern uber Meer gelegenen Ländern* (Augsburg und Gratz: Philipp, Martin und Johann Veith, 1726-1761). For the specificities of the attitudes of Czech Jesuit missionaries to their mission tasks, see Markéta Křížová, "Meeting the Other in the New World: Jesuit Missionaries from Bohemian Province in America," *Historie – Otázky – Problémy* 8, no. 2 (2016): 35-46.

on their lands either naked or half naked, and carry out various professions: they are shoemakers, tailors, barbers, sculptors, or carpenters, because no Portuguese would lend his hand for handiwork or service. Also they do not like to walk on their own and instead let themselves be carried by two Moors in a net made for this purpose. Such nets are used instead of carriages and our [Jesuit] Fathers use them too.²⁹

Among his fellow Jesuits there were some who doubted that slavery could be justified,³⁰ but Gintzel merely described the situation as unusual to Central Europeans. He did not manifest any moral outrage at such treatment of fellow human beings and, moreover, of fellow Christians, as the majority of the slave population in Bahía and elsewhere in America had been baptized. While Native Americans were often idealized in Jesuit discourse as not only converts but as protagonists of a global reform of the Christian community,³¹ the enslaved Africans were not considered to possess such potential. Similarly to Šašek or Comenius, Gintzel and the other Jesuit missionaries did not consider the problem of African slavery to be of any relevance or even of much interest to Czech readers.

Thus, on the self-same Charles Bridge where the abovementioned figure of the “Turk” stands over his Christian prisoners, another statue by Ferdinand Maximilian Brokoff, erected three years earlier (1711), recalls the deeds of the Jesuit missionary St. Francis Xavier. The saint stands on a raised pedestal, carried on the shoulders of representatives of various “pagan” nations: a Chinese, an Indian, a Tartar, and a Black African (Fig. 3).³² Such depictions not only commemorated the victory of true religion over heathens but they symbolically drew the inhabitants of non-European regions into the worldview of Central Europe.

²⁹ Letter of Joannes Gintzel from Bahía to Český Krumlov, 5 June 1694, Moravian Land Archive (Brno), G 11 557/1A, f. 21r (copy), quoted in Simona Binková, “Os países checos e a zona lusitana (Contactos e testemunhos dos séculos XV-XVIII),” *Ibero-Americana Pragensia* 21 (1987): 158-59.

³⁰ For example, in 1606, Baltasar Barreira, who had worked in Angola and in the Jesuit missions in Guinea, wrote to the Portuguese Crown, enumerating the various reasons why there should be concern about the legality of the enslavement of Africans. Baltasar Barreira, “Concerning the Slaves Who Come from the Parts of Guinea Called Cape Verde (1606),” quoted in P.E.H. Hair, “A Jesuit Document on African Enslavement,” *Slavery and Abolition* 19, no. 3 (1998): 118-27.

³¹ See Markéta Křížová, *La ciudad ideal en el desierto: Proyectos misionales de la Compañía de Jesús y la Iglesia Morava en la América colonial* (Prague: Karolinum, 2004).

³² Blažiček, *Umění baroku v Čechách* 110. The same book lists another sculpture group by Brokoff inspired by overseas voyages, the two “Moors” supporting a balcony of the Morzin Palace, also in Prague, from 1714.



Fig. 3. Detail of the sculpture group of St. Francis Xavier on Charles Bridge in Prague, by Ferdinand Maximilian Brokoff (1711) – personifications of three continents supporting the saint. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Enlightenment Reforms, the “Czech Renaissance” and *The Book of Joseph*

Roughly at the same time as Gintzel was writing from Bahía, Bohuslav Balbín, another member of the Czech province of the Society of Jesus, resident at the Prague college of the Order, opened the discussion on slavery with completely different objectives in mind. In a tractate that criticized the inhuman treatment of

serfs, Balbín compared their situation to that of Roman slaves.³³ Seemingly, his text revived the notorious topos referred to above, the contrast between Greek and Roman slavery and the more benign social institutions of the present day, but the principal objective was different. As a historian celebrating the past, with focus on the still independent Bohemian kingdom, Balbín emphasized that in the times before the Habsburg ascension to the throne of Bohemia, lords treated serfs with more humanity and compassion. Indirectly, the text implied that the whole kingdom was “enslaved” politically after 1527, and this theme was taken up by many other authors in the eighteenth and the nineteenth century.

Apart from declaring Catholicism the only religion permitted, the Land Ordinance of 1627 also granted the equality of German and Czech language. In the subsequent century and a half, German became the dominant language in administration, economy, and cultural life. Already in the seventeenth and more pronouncedly in the eighteenth century, voices such as that of Balbín could be heard calling for the “renaissance” of the culture and of the political rights of the Czech nation, understood, at that time, in a territorial rather than ethnic or linguistic sense. Expressions of love for the motherland, its history and natural beauties, gradually gave way to more radical demands of the Czech “patriots” with respect to land rights, political representation and the right to use the mother tongue in official communication and at schools.³⁴

With greater intensity still, these demands evolved under the impact of the social, legal, and cultural reforms of the Enlightened Habsburg rulers, Maria Theresa (1740-1780) and Joseph II (1780-1790).³⁵ While introduced in all of the Habsburg domains, some of these reforms resonated particularly in the Czech context, especially the Edict of Toleration (1781) that attacked the dominance of the Catholic Church. For the Czechs it had a special meaning, since it mitigated

³³ The tractate “De clementia veterum Bohemiae procerum, et quorumvos dominorum in subditos, et glebae suae adscriptitios” had been published a century after Balbín’s death, in J.A. Riegger, *Materialien zur alten und neuen Statistik von Böhmen* 12 (Prag und Leipzig: Kaspar Widtmann, 1794) 111-19. On Balbín, see Zuzana Pokorná and Martin Svatoš, eds., *Bohuslav Balbín und die Kultur seiner Zeit in Böhmen* (Wien, Köln und Weimar: Böhlau, 1993).

³⁴ Miroslav Hroch, “From Ethnic Group toward the Modern Nation: The Czech Case,” *Nations and Nationalism* 10, no. 1/2 (2004): 95-107; Hugh LeCaine Agnew, *Origins of the Czech National Renaissance* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993).

³⁵ For the reforms in the broad context, see Paul Bernard, *Jesuits and Jacobins: Enlightenment and Enlightened Despotism in Austria* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971); Rudolph C. Blitz, “The Religious Reforms of Joseph II (1780-1790) and their Economic Significance,” *The Journal of European Economic History* 18, no. 3 (1989): 583-94.

the ostracism of Protestant denominations and also of the Czech Reformation culture. The protagonists of the national revival perceived the Edict as a step that would finally bring about appreciation of Czech history and also hope for the return of autonomy. The abolition of serfdom, announced in the same year, was also welcome by the educated public in the Czech Lands, not only with respect to the improvement of the lot of the peasants themselves, but as a symbolic confirmation of the principles of equality that had been voiced by the proponents of Enlightenment philosophy throughout Europe. At the same time, both reform endeavours provoked an upsurge of reactions and polemics, positive as well as negative. There was, especially in the early 1780s, a flurry of pamphlets, prints, broadside ballads, and other popular genres.

It is against this background that we have to read *The Book of Joseph* (*Das Buch Joseph*, 1783), an effort of two patriotic authors from Prague to present to the general public the outline of the Josephine Reforms and their social benefits. The alias of the author, “Franz Adam Ziegler,” probably concealed Augustin Zitte, a Catholic priest turned journalist who had some time before renounced the Catholic Church and embraced Enlightenment philosophy and also the study of the Czech Reformation.³⁶ A year later, Zitte’s text was translated into Czech by a young patriot, Matěj Václav Kramerius, who became one of the most important protagonists of the Czech Renaissance in the next two decades.³⁷ The German version was intended for better-educated readers – it is much longer and more detailed, containing allusions to previously published texts on various topics dealt with in the book. Kramerius simplified Zitte’s wording, cut down some of the lengthy literary references but kept the overall structure and most of the motives included in the original and its central message: that the Czechs had been “enslaved,” in various senses of the term, under the Habsburgs, but thanks to Emperor Joseph II they could now celebrate their liberation.

Zitte’s version could have been forgotten within the flood of numerous German pamphlets of this kind published throughout the Habsburg domains, but the translation by Kramerius became one of the first books on the topic in the Czech language. While the patriots defended the richness and beauty of the

³⁶ Franz Adam Ziegler, *Das Buch Joseph* (Prague: Wolfgang Gerle, 1783). For Zitte, see Arnošt Kraus, “Augustin Zitte,” *Sborník filologický* 5, no. 1 (1915): 140-61.

³⁷ M[atěj] V[áclav] K[ramerius], *Kniha Josefova, sepsaná od jistého spatřujícího osmnácté století: dílem již stalé věci a dílem prorockví, na způsob Biblí [...]* (The Book of Joseph, Composed by a Certain Witness of the Eighteenth Century, Partly Accomplished Deeds and Partly Prophecies, Presented in the Manner of the Bible [...]) (Prague: M.V. Kramerius, 1784), repr. 1941. For Kramerius, see his biography in Czech by Jan Novotný, *Matěj Václav Kramerius* (Prague: Melantrich, 1973).

Czech language, they themselves published mostly in German. It also responded to the popular taste by using dramatic language derived from prayer books and prophecies. In 1784 alone, it was published in at least four editions and it became one of the most widely read and influential Enlightenment texts among the lower classes in the Czech Lands. Thus, it had decisive influence in imprinting its images and interpretations onto the general population. The most important of those was the image of Joseph II as a good ruler whose aim was the well-being of his subjects.

The Book of Joseph focused especially on the church reform. It presented the Emperor's acts as an effort to return the Catholic Church towards the original spirit of Christianity, to purge the rites and the doctrine of "human inventions," superstitions, and avarice. Zitte and Kramerius even discussed such themes as an overall ecumenical reform, abolition of celibacy, and other radical proposals that Joseph II and his counsellors certainly did not have in mind. Alluding to the Old Testament by its title and styled as a "prophecy," *The Book of Joseph* presented motions that were, in fact, never intended by the Emperor and his administrators, be it in the field of ecclesiastical and educational reforms or the political restructuring of the Habsburg Empire, as already accomplished. The authors put these promises directly into the Emperor's mouth, thus increasing the plausibility of the "testimony" for the readers.³⁸

Because of its dissemination among the incipient Czech reading public, Kramerius's version of *The Book of Joseph* is quoted dutifully in the handbooks on early Czech literature. So far, however, it has provoked little interest among historians and literary scholars, either with respect to inserting it into the broader context Enlightenment debates or identifying the specificities of the Czech responses to them. Zitte's original contribution and the links between the two texts have been studied even less. While trying to draw attention to these questions, the ambitions of this article are relatively limited. It makes use of both versions of *The Book of Joseph* as a testimony of the ways in which the Czech population imagined the world beyond the borders of Bohemia and Moravia – and beyond the columns of Hercules – in the wake of the Modern Era. It enquires into possible sources of information on overseas colonization the authors shared with their readers, and the ways in which these exotic realities were presented within the framework of very localized discourse of the early Czech Renaissance.

³⁸ Zdeněk Nešpor, *Náboženství na prahu nové doby: česká lidová zbožnost 18. a 19. století* (Religion on the Threshold of the New Age: Czech Popular Religiosity of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century) (Ústí nad Labem: Albis, 2006) 334-35.

Prophecy of the Slave Rebellion

The theme of “liberation” was rather prominent in Enlightenment discourse all over Europe. The notion of individual and collective “freedom” could acquire numerous diverse forms – for instance, political participation, unrestricted movement, choice of occupation and religious tolerance. It must be added that the concepts of “liberty” or “freedom” had undergone a prolonged, complicated and by no means one-way development in Europe since the Middle Ages. For a long time, freedom in the sense of “not depending on another,” and, consequently, “not serving,” bore negative connotations, while “slavery” to a noble cause or slavery to God was praised as a model of the hierarchical pattern that pervaded society and the entire universe.³⁹

However, during the Enlightenment the rhetoric was inverted and the trope of “slavery” was used to accentuate a radical change, whether demanded or accomplished. It might seem paradoxical that many of those who actively promoted such rhetoric were themselves slave owners or were involved in slave economies. This was the case of John Locke, who in his *Second Treatise on Civil Government* (1690) presented the enslavement of a human being as equivalent to execution, and profited, at the same time, as a shareholder in the Royal African Company, from the export of slaves from Africa to the New World.⁴⁰

However, especially in the 1770s and 1780s, the debates on the abolition of American slavery – not the abstract discourses on human freedom and bondage – were taking hold within the Enlightened community and from there, they reached wider audiences via pamphlets, tracts, and newspapers.⁴¹ These debates, in turn, reinforced the general imagery of “liberation” through reason and just government.

Thus, also Zitte and Kramerius opened their respective visions of the “liberation” of the Czech Lands by using the metaphor of the “liberation” of “slaves.” They were merging – as Balbín did – the themes of the liberation of serfs from the subjection to the whim of their masters and the granting of state autonomy to the whole of the Czech Kingdom. Of course, reverting state autonomy to the Kingdom of Bohemia was neither intended nor implemented by

³⁹ Bloch, *Slavery and Serfdom in the Middle Ages* 11; Davis, *The Problem of Slavery* 10.

⁴⁰ David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) 107.

⁴¹ Thomas N. Tyson and David Oldroyd, “Accounting for Slavery during the Enlightenment: Contradictions and Interpretations,” *Accounting History* 24, no. 2 (2019): 212-35; Lauren R. Clay, “‘Cruel Necessity’: Capitalism, the Discourse of Sympathy, and the Problem of the Slave Trade in the Age of Human Rights,” *Slavery and Abolition* 37, no. 2 (2016): 256-83.

the Emperor, Joseph II, but this connection between individual and collective freedom, that of the liberated slave and the emancipated citizen, is the central topic of *The Book of Joseph*. The text opens with a description of the kingdom, “known by history as glorious and noble, distinguished in arts and in bravery,” that had, however,

become enslaved for several hundred years. [...] Joseph, its heir, had seen the ruin [of that kingdom] with his own eyes, heard the laments with his own ears, and determined to loosen the bonds of slavery of the kingdom. [...] He thus issued a decree of freedom, and after it being read to the people, they rejoiced all over the kingdom. [...] They danced and rejoiced under the linden tree, under which their sorrowful fathers reposed in times of slavery.⁴²

While never explicitly naming the anonymous “kingdom,” the symbol of the linden tree identifies Bohemia unequivocally.⁴³ Another noteworthy fact is that in this chapter of *The Book of Joseph*, the liberated “slaves” – serfs, subjects of the King of Bohemia – were, prior to the decree of the Emperor, not actively seeking their freedom, but rather bore patiently their unjust lot. They rejoiced only after the Enlightened monarch stooped down to them and granted them rights previously denied. This way of presenting the reforms was perfectly in line with general Enlightenment discourse. The popular masses were uniformly presented as passive recipients of the benefits of reason, bestowed upon them by rulers and philosophers. The same line is followed further in the text, when the metaphor of slavery and liberation is developed in the area of religion. Both Zitte and Kramerius were building upon the rhetoric of the early Enlightenment that reversed the previous imagery of redeeming Christian faith. For them, that faith – or rather, the corrupted religion with its purposeless rituals, empty pomp, intolerance, and useless monks – was seen as “slavery,” while the forces of Reason served as the liberating agent. But again, the slaves redeemed from the shackles of prejudice were not taking active part in their liberation, but rather waited in darkness until being led to light by the Enlightened teachers. “Cruelty is born of weak reason, and so Joseph throughout his lands released the human spirit from slavery, and returned reason to his peoples, before firmly held in iron shatters by the priests”;⁴⁴ here, in fact, Zitte – consciously or unconsciously – repeated the

⁴² Ziegler, *Das Buch Joseph* 10-11; Kramerius, *Knihy Josefova* 11-12.

⁴³ For the linden as a symbol of Bohemia, see Vladimír Macura, *Znamení zrodu a české sny* (The Sign of Birth and Czech Dreams) (Prague: Academia, 2015) 103.

⁴⁴ Ziegler, *Das Buch Joseph* 40-41; Kramerius, *Knihy Josefova* 39-40.

words of Joseph II himself. In several proclamations, the Emperor denounced the “enslavement of spirit” perpetrated by those who were advocating prejudice, fanaticism, and partisanship.⁴⁵

However, these passive recipients undergo radical transformation in the final part of the book, where the narrative moves from the Kingdom of Bohemia to the Atlantic realm. As a prelude, Zitte and Kramerius explain to the readers the meaning of “slavery to foolishness,” and the fact that proper education could help in shedding this. There is a clear parallel to Rousseau’s rejection of “slavery to ignorance” in the *Discourse on the Moral Effects of the Arts and Sciences* (1750), even though Rousseau’s name is not mentioned in *The Book of Joseph*, and neither is any other protagonist of the Enlightenment. To prove that any nation “fettered” by stupidity is necessarily “superstitious and cruel,” examples are drawn from the history of the colonization of America. Spaniards, as the authors explain, “set out across the unknown seas to discover new lands” and upon reaching them, “fettered free and innocent nations into shackles, and sold people, and they have led this trade until today.” The reason why the Spanish colonizers sold fellow human beings into slavery was – according to Kramerius and Zitte – their superstitiousness: “In their foolishness they thought their acts were pleasing God.”⁴⁶

Interestingly, with the change of focus from Bohemia to America and from the discussion of the abolition of serfdom and restoration of political rights to explanations from the history of the revitalization of modern slavery, the vocabulary changes too, at least in the original version by Zitte. Throughout the Czech translation of *The Book of Joseph* by Kramerius, the Czech word for “slavery” – “otročtví” – is used systematically, unlike the term “člověčenství” that denoted “serfdom” in eighteenth-century documents. The German version is more nuanced. When dealing with the abolition of serfdom and with state autonomy, the word “Knechtschaft” is used, a legal term that could denote both servant, serf, and slave, that is, “servitude” in a broad sense. Only once, a more specific term *Leibeigenschaft*, an equivalent of the Czech *člověčenství*, is used, when referring to the Josephine Reforms.⁴⁷ But when moving the narrative towards the “slavery of ignorance,” another word is employed – “Sklaverey,” a term derived from the word “Sklave” that entered the German language in the Middle Ages, replacing the Latin “servus” (which, in turn, acquired the meaning of “servant”).

⁴⁵ Letter of Joseph II to Count Colloredo, Archbishop of Salzburg, from February 1781, quoted in Eva Melmuková, *Patent zvaný toleranční* (The So-Called Edict of Toleration) (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1999) 19.

⁴⁶ Ziegler, *Das Buch Joseph* 42-43; Kramerius, *Kniha Josefova* 39-40.

⁴⁷ Ziegler, *Das Buch Joseph* 22.

The whole process of terminological changes in various European languages with respect to slavery was prolonged and complicated, reflecting the equally complicated developments of various categories and degrees of bondage in the Middle Ages.⁴⁸ But for the present text, it is sufficient to state that unlike “Knechtschaft” – a legal term which remained tied with the institution of serfdom – the word “Sklaverey” had since the sixteenth century become firmly connected to the new realities of Atlantic slavery.⁴⁹

We do not know to what extent Zitte and Kramerius were acquainted with the debates on slavery that were going on especially in England and France precisely at that time: the discussions on the moral dimension of slavery, its economic profitability, and its legality. The news of slave rebellions that erupted periodically in the Caribbean islands circulated throughout Europe and might have also reached the Czech Lands. What certainly did reach them was the *Encyclopédie* with the article on slavery by the Chevalier de Jaucourt, which argued against the legitimacy of slavery in the strongest terms, presenting it as a “humiliating state” not only for the slave but a state whose existence degrades humankind as a whole, alongside an article on the “trade in Negroes” by the same author.⁵⁰ However, we cannot be sure about the circulation and reception in the Czech Lands of other ground-breaking texts, such as Raynal’s *Philosophical and Political History of the Two Indies*.⁵¹

Between the 1780s and 1800s, Kramerius published numerous texts on geography and history for the education and amusement of Czech readers, some original, some translated. Among them were also several works that explained the circumstances of the discovery and colonization of America, such as the memoir of John Smith or a didactic dialogue for the education of popular masses, entitled *A Historical Account of How the Fourth Part of the World, America,*

⁴⁸ Charles Verlinden, “L’origine de sclavus = esclave,” *Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 12 (1942): 97-128.

⁴⁹ Robin Blackburn, “The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (1997): 65-102.

⁵⁰ Louis de Jaucourt, “Esclavage [Droit naturel/Morale/Religion],” *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. 5, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond D’Alembert (Paris: Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, 1755) 934-39; Louis de Jaucourt, “Traite des negres, [Commerce d’Afrique],” *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. 16, ed. Denis Diderot (Paris: Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, 1765) 532-33, quoted in Clay, ““Cruel Necessity”” 263-64.

⁵¹ Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, 6 vols. (Amsterdam: s.p., 1770).

Was Discovered through Columbus.⁵² It seems that Kramerius considered the colonial expansion to be extremely important for the European continent as a whole, having an impact even upon the inhabitants of the Czech Lands who did not have direct connection to it. In contrast, Zitte's publication activities were negligible in comparison to Kramerius's – in his works, there were no reflections whatsoever on overseas colonization – and yet *The Book of Joseph* indeed contains an important reference to the phenomenon.

After discussing the slavery of foolishness, the author(s) once more open the topic of the “enslavement of the nation.” Without any preamble, the narrative returns to America:

And God promised: I will fortify the shoulders of the oppressed, and move them against you, to avenge their blood and the blood of their fathers, as it calls to me to heaven. And they will come from the West in great crowds, across the sea, so many times coloured by their blood, and possess your land, and subdue you, and will retaliate as equals, the time of retribution is coming. And they will take their gold and precious stones from you and throw them to the sea, as their fathers and themselves were brought to slavery because of it. And you will be enslaved by foreign nations for a long time.⁵³

Although unspoken, the parallel is clear. Just like the slaves oppressed across the seas, the Czechs crushed under the Habsburgs would also rise, seeking release from bondage, the return of their rightful property, and revenge on their oppressors.

Rather than being a menace, the uprisings on the American plantations are seen as an inspiration by the Czech patriot writers. This is precisely the moment when Zitte and Kramerius diverge sharply from the mainstream discourse of their times on the topic of Atlantic slavery. Even when in the subsequent decades the abolitionist stream prevailed in this discourse all over the Atlantic, and when the calls for ending slavery were providing further confirmation of European superiority, by demonstrating the level of moral and social progress,⁵⁴ never

⁵² Matěj Václav Kramerius, *Historické vypsání, kterak čtvrtý díl světa Amerika skrze Kolumbusa vynalezena byla* (Prague: M.V. Kramerius, 1803), based on William Robertson, *The History of America*, vol. 1 (Dublin: Whitestone et al., 1777).

⁵³ Ziegler, *Das Buch Joseph* 43-44; Kramerius, *Knih Josefova* 40-41.

⁵⁴ Joel Quirk and David Richardson, “Anti-slavery, European Identity and International Society,” *Journal of Modern European History / Zeitschrift für moderne europäische Geschichte / Revue d'histoire européenne contemporaine* 7, no. 1 (2009): 68-92.

were the liberating efforts of the slaves themselves eulogized in the writings of Enlightenment authors. It was always up to the ruler or the owner to dictate the pace and procedure of liberation. This is, crucially, what makes *The Book of Joseph* unique in the context of European Enlightenment and abolitionist literature.

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