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The Castles of King Wenceslaus IV as Venues for Diplomatic Negotiations

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Wenceslaus IV is a highly a unique and contradictory figure in Bohemian history. His private hobbies were often focused outside the world of regal duties, formalities and ceremonies.¹ He had a great affection for art and hunting, and he especially enjoyed walking around his private residences and castles, which provided him refuge from the nagging duties of being a monarch. This was also expressed in the appearance of his castles, which were the first in Bohemia to clearly differentiate areas designed for the ruler's private living quarters from "official" areas.² This also relates to the establishment of the so-called "second or hosting palaces", meaning specialised buildings designed for hosting visitors and holding festivities.³

The Royal Castles in Bohemia represent a fairly extensive group of buildings which fulfilled various functions. The network of late mediaeval royal castles was built in Bohemia in the course of the 13th century, in particular during the reign of Otto-kar II of Bohemia. In the 14th century this network was merely expanded. The largest builder of royal castles in the 14th century was Charles IV, and the final new royal castles were constructed under Wenceslaus IV. In the post-Hussite era, the vast majority of royal castles ended up in pledge to the nobility, and no new royal castles were built. Only a few buildings were worked on under the patronage of the mon-

¹ For more on Wenceslaus IV and his era, see: PELZEL 1947; SPĚVÁČEK 1986; BOBKOVÁ, BÁRTLOVÁ 2003; ČORNEJ 2000.

² The architecture of Wenceslaus IV's castles was first presented by a husband and wife team, MENCLOVI 1942, pp. 89–103, 143–160; other publications particularly worth mentioning: MENCLOVÁ 1976, pp. 109–185; DURDÍK 1986, pp. 24–46; DURDÍK 2001, pp. 63–76; ZÁRUBA 2009, pp. 321–341; DURDÍK 2012, pp. 356–368; ZÁRUBA 2014.

³ First to refer to the division of a private section of the castle Točnick was MENCLOVÁ 1976, vol. II, p. 156; also DURDÍK 1999, p. 554.

arch in the post-Hussite period. However, under Wenceslaus IV, to whom this study is devoted, this network of royal castles was almost complete. Only a few of the royal castles had a developed residential component and were able to permanently host the monarch and his court, or could be used as a dignified venue for diplomatic negotiations. The Bohemian king's main residence was naturally the Prague Castle, which played an extremely important role within the entire Bohemian state and was also a traditional venue for festivities, and for receiving various deputations and important visitors. We would merely note here that the old royal palace underwent a comprehensive renovation during the times of the young Charles IV and John of Bohemia in the 1340s.⁴ Later, the large hall was even decorated with a series of panel paintings of Roman kings and emperors.⁵ Chronicles of the time lavished praise on the palace for its sumptuousness, comparing it to the seats of the French kings.⁶ This generously conceived building was a worthy representation of the Bohemian monarch. Nevertheless, even in the 12th and 13th centuries other castles were often used for diplomatic negotiations with envoys, or directly with monarchs or members of ruling dynasties. Wenceslaus I, for example, hosted a large number of leading Church figures from southern Germany and Austria at the Křivoklát Castle in 1253.⁷ In 1268 Ottokar II of Bohemia hosted leaders of the Austrian lands in Poděbrady.⁸ Wenceslaus II met the young Rudolf I of Bohemia at Nižbor, and there are other similar examples.⁹ This remained the case during the reign of the Luxembourgs.

Individual Bohemian kings from the Luxembourg dynasty varied greatly in their characters. Perhaps the greatest such difference was between Charles IV and his son Wenceslaus IV, after some time this was expressed significantly in their approach to the government and selection of locations for political negotiations and exercise of their rule. This difference is particularly marked when we compare both monarchs' itineraries. Charles IV evidently preferred Prague as the venue for negotiations in Bohemia and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Other locations — usually royal towns — were only seen, when he stayed there for a longer period of time, or when they were one of the main destinations of his travels (e.g. Wrocław, Brno, Cheb, Hradec Králové and Znojmo). On his journeys he issued a few documents, almost as if the place where they were issued was of great importance to him. In contrast, his son Wenceslaus IV began to sideline these traditional “official” venues after a relatively short period of rule. Although he did not entirely give up on Prague and the Prague

⁴ For more on the old royal palace, see in particular MENCLOVÁ 1976, pp. 43–48; more recently: NĚMEC 2012, pp. 2–25; ZÁRUBA 2014, pp. 87–137; NĚMEC 2015, pp. 27–85; CHOTĚBOR 2019, pp. 261–277.

⁵ SALAČ 1962, pp. 304–306; ULIČNÝ 2018, pp. 466–488.

⁶ FRANTIŠEK PRAŽSKÝ 1987, p. 116.

⁷ FRB II, 290.

⁸ CDB V/2, pp. 152–154.

⁹ RBM II, pp. 650–651.

Castle, as older publications sometimes state,¹⁰ it is true that he preferred to stay in the middle of the Křivoklát woods in his castles of Křivoklát, Žebrák and later Točnick; and during one period of his rule he also favoured Karlštejn.¹¹ There were periods when he almost never left the Křivoklát woods, appearing only sporadically in Prague.

Nevertheless this was not the first time that the Bohemian king avoided Prague and regal obligations, indulging in pleasures in the Křivoklát forest — Wenceslaus I did the same, but since Wenceslaus IV was also King of the Romans and had much broader obligations, this caused far-reaching problems. One of these was the sovereign's accessibility to foreign emissaries, envoys and even delegations, who often did not know the local language and ended up literally lost and wandering in the forest. Furthermore, Wenceslaus IV often failed to turn up, depending on his mood, something his courtesans and favoured figures soon began to take advantage of, charging large commissions for introducing people to the sovereign. Any delegations that refused to agree to pay this commission were often forced to wait in extremely poor conditions in various rural inns, which were far below their social class. Accounts from the period often mention such situations.

The most detailed report comes from Bonifacius de Lupi and dates to 1383. In it, he portrayed the difficulties and his long wait to be received by the king, whom he eventually crossed paths with by chance on a road near Beroun.¹² Prior to that, he had waited in vain for him at Karlštejn, and at Křivoklát he had even been informed by Wenceslaus IV's counsellor that, "the king does not wish to receive anyone here and he has had the houses which serve the guests here burnt down, and that was true."

Also unflattering is a poem by Eustache Deschamps, who was sent to Bohemia to see Wenceslaus IV in 1397, and who was confronted with the harsh and inhospitable rural environment when seeking out the monarch in the Křivoklát forest:¹³

Send me anywhere,
 Just not to the German lands,
 On the way to Moravia and Bohemia.
 [...]
 Lice, fleas, pigs, mould,
 the gist of the Bohemian soul,
 bread and salted fish and cold.

¹⁰ For more on the development and forms of royal residences in Prague during the Luxembourg period, see ZÁRUBA 2019, pp. 31–53.

¹¹ In this regard, compare the itineraries of both rulers: HOLTZ 2013; HLAVÁČEK 1962, pp. 64–94.

¹² KNOTT 1899, pp. 337–357; SPĚVÁČEK 1986, pp. 171–173.

¹³ Original poem: DESCHAMPS 1878, p. 90; Commentary on his journey to Bohemia: DESCHAMPS 1903, pp. 80–82; NEJEDLÝ 1998a, pp. 26–71; NEJEDLÝ 2008b, pp. 14–17; NEJEDLÝ 2012, pp. 792–794.

Black pepper, leeks, a rotten cabbage roll,
smoked meat as hard and black as coal;
lice, fleas, pigs, mould.

Other French envoys, Honoré Bovet and Philipp de Mézières, gave similar reports. A deputation from Görlitz in 1398 (23 November) also sought the sovereign in vain in Prague and Žebrák, while he had been in neighbouring Točník: "... do suchtin sie en zun Bettelern unde suchtin en vorbas unde vunde en of dem Toczenik dem huse..."¹⁴

In contrast, Edmund Dwynter gives a kinder picture of Wenceslaus IV:¹⁵

He respectfully received princes, counts, barons, envoys or messengers of kings and princes who came to him as they turned up for the king [...] as I saw and experienced myself. I saw this at his castle of Točník by Žebrák, the messenger of the Polish King, Grand Prince Vytautas the Great, also the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights. He also honoured generously messengers from Wrocław and Moravian towns at Nový hrad. I also saw how he respectfully received the envoys of Prince Antoine (of Brabant), whom I was with at the castles of Karlštejn, Točník and Nový hrad. He opened up a Latin letter from the king and other French princes they had given him, read it and told us what it contained. He asked us very kindly how were the French prince and Luxembourg barons that he knew. So he was an educated man and he knew how to express himself in Latin very well [...] he took me by the hand and led me to a room wherein were painted the precious images of all the dukes of Brabant down to John III. These images had been commissioned by the Emperor Charles, his father. The king also said to me that this was his genealogy, and that he was descended from the progeny of the Trojans, and more specifically from the emperor Saint Charles the Great and the noble house of Brabant. For he said that his great-grandfather, the emperor Henry of Luxemburg, was married to the daughter of John I Duke of Brabant from which union sprang his grandfather John, King of Bohemia and Poland.

Fascinating testimony is given of the journey of the future King of England, Henry Bolingbroke (the cousin of King Richard II, who married Wenceslaus IV's sister Anna). Although this journey was not primarily diplomatic in nature, it was a military expedition to provide aid to the Teutonic Order, who were besieging the city of Vilnius. Henry did not return to England directly from Lithuania, but set out on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. His route also took him through the Kingdom of Bohemia, and in October 1392 he arrived in Prague, where he wanted to visit Wenceslaus IV. The course of his journey is documented in detail in his accounts book.¹⁶ He arrived in Bohemia from Zittau and continued to Prague. He stayed in Prague from 13 to 24 October, and set out for Žebrák Castle to visit Wenceslaus IV

¹⁴ CDL III, p. 275.

¹⁵ DYNTER 1857, pp. 73–74.

¹⁶ PRUTZ 1893.

for three days. He had his coat of arms painted in the hall of the leased home he stayed in, and for the remainder of his time in Prague he focused on purchasing works of art. He purchased fourteen necklaces from a goldsmith named Jan, nine of which were gilded. He also purchased a double-winged painted altarpiece which he had set with gems and consecrated. Most of his other costs, however, involved the purchase of wine, beer and food. The amounts spent show he did not skimp on either food or drink. His stay in Bohemia cost him a total of 9365 groschen, which was quite a large sum. His journey from Prague then led via Brno and Vienna to Venice, where he took a boat to the Holy Land. Although the journey did not have any specific diplomatic objectives, it demonstrates the huge financial costs of diplomacy and of cultural exchange in the form of the purchase of precious objects.

Wenceslaus IV was clearly aware of the difficult accessibility of his court outside Prague, and he made some attempts at dealing with this.¹⁷ Most of the castles where he stayed in the Křivoklát forest were not prepared for the king and his court to stay there for longer periods, nor were they prepared for increased deputations. Only the Křivoklát Castle represented somewhat of an exception here, although it had to be structurally modified. But the Křivoklát Castle was located in the middle of a hunting forest and was quite far from long-distance roads. As a result, Wenceslaus IV began to prefer the Žebrák Castle, which was located on the very southern edge of the hunting ground near the town of the same name, through which the most important provincial route from Prague to Nuremberg passed. The castle's position thus made it easier to find the sovereign, while deputations could receive basic hospitality in the nearby town. At the same time, the sovereign could indulge in hunting and lie low while being able to go deeper into the woods to get to the Křivoklát Castle at any time. Originally, the Žebrák Castle had been a smaller nobleman's residence and it had to be extensively rebuilt for the king. But not even this was enough and a second castle, Točník, was built in close proximity expressly in order to accommodate the ruler. One should also mention Karlštejn, a castle built by his father which Wenceslaus IV began to make use of more often from the 1390s, when it replaced Křivoklát as the sovereign's favoured castle, with the king last recorded there in 1398 for a brief period of relaxation upon his return from France.

These circumstances, in which the king separated himself from public obligations, inevitably affected the structure of his castles. There was a clear division between his official and private areas, as stated in the introduction. This led to a so-called "second" or "hosting" palace being set up, which served to accommodate important visitors, and as the venue for official events and large festivities. This second palace was well-equipped for the purpose, with a large hall and other stately living areas. While a similar arrangement of rooms can be seen in the palace for the king, these were smaller in size and appear to have mainly served the king and a small number of courtesans. This was

¹⁷ For a comparison with the accommodation of the nobility in burgher houses under Charles IV, see HLAVÁČEK 1992, pp. 33–42.

a completely new situation compared to the previous period in which there was no such category. The only parallel to some extent is the second palace core of the Křivoklát Castle during the reigns of Wenceslas I and Ottokar II of Bohemia.¹⁸

We can encounter a “hosting” palace at a number of Wenceslaus IV’s castles, in particular at Točník and Žebrák, and there was most likely also one at Křivoklát and probably Nový hrad at Kunratice. The “second” palace is best preserved at the Točník Castle, where it was a large three-storey building.¹⁹ The basement contained large stables, while there were two smaller halls on the ground floor, the smaller of which was timber-lined to provide insulation, although it came with only standard windows with window seats. The second hall incorporated a sophisticated beamed ceiling which was likely similar to the still-extant ceiling of the Tall House in Vlašský dvůr. The first floor comprised a single 34 x 10 m hall. Thus the layout of rooms is reminiscent of a traditional three-section apartment layout, something we see at royal castles from the second half of the 13th century, but the size of the individual halls goes entirely beyond the scale of their original purpose.²⁰

There was also a similar “hosting” palace at Žebrák, which was a little older than that at Točník.²¹ This palace is in a significantly worse condition and today only the western section is visible, where there was a timber room heated by a stove. The palace had only two storeys, which its position on a steep slope required. It is very likely that the palace, besides this timber chamber, also included a large hall in the middle, with another smaller hall in its eastern section. It would appear that this was again similar in layout to older Přemyslid castles, and neighbouring Točník in particular, the difference being that here the rooms were set out next to each other horizontally. It is likely, then, that the new palace at Točník utilised the tried and tested structure of the older Žebrák. There may have been a similar palace at Nový hrad in Kunratice too, in its western section, which has not been archaeologically investigated. This building was 34 x 9 m in size. It was divided by interior walls, with surface explorations only managing to find one such wall, although we can expect that there were more.²² The interpretation of the so-called Burgrave’s Palace at Křivoklát is somewhat uncertain. It may theoretically have served as a second hosting palace during Wenceslaus IV’s era, but this is not certain. The Burgrave’s Palace stands in front of the castle and is 29.5 m long, with the building 11.2 m wide and a large flat-ceil-

¹⁸ DURDÍK 1978, pp. 309–310.

¹⁹ Selection of core publications: MENCLOVÁ 1976, pp. 153–171; LÍBAL, MUK, NOVOSADOVÁ 1974; ZÁRUBA 2014, pp. 170–222.

²⁰ For more on the composition of living rooms at the royal castles of the 13th and 14th centuries, see: DURDÍK 2008, pp. 5–12; ANDERLE 2008, pp. 13–23; on the development of the large hall in Bohemia: ZÁRUBA 2016, pp. 75–114.

²¹ Selection of core publications: MENCLOVÁ 1976, pp. 152–153; MUK 1974; RAZÍM 2003, pp. 65–85; ZÁRUBA 2014, pp. 170–222.

²² MENCLOVÁ 1976, pp. 176–179; DURDÍK 1984, pp. 173–190; ZÁRUBA 2014, pp. 265–271, especially p. 270.

inged hall on the first floor that was basically identical to the arched early Gothic hall in the core of the castle in terms of size. With its dimensions, the palace would fall well within this special category, as T. Durdík has already suggested, wondering for the first time whether the palace really was for burgraves, or whether it replaced the older second palace core site from the era of Ottokar II of Bohemia.²³

If we endeavour, then, to summarise the issue, there emerges a group of three or four palace buildings at Wenceslaus IV's favoured castles. These were clearly built for the needs of the king and his visitors, guests and deputations, and were designed to provide maximum comfort and create a respectable backdrop. The Žebrák and Točnick castles deserve particular attention, having literally served as Wenceslaus IV's rural centre of political negotiations and having been equipped for this purpose. Točnick was also built on a dominant hill which was clear to see from the nearby road from Nuremberg to Prague. The castle's entrance gate was decorated with emblems presenting Wenceslaus IV, and it is overall the most monumental stately castle of Wenceslaus IV. Nevertheless, Wenceslaus IV issued more documents at Žebrák. It is possible that following the completion of Točnick, Žebrák was more often used for official matters, with Wenceslaus IV's chancellery seated there. During this time Wenceslaus resided at Točnick and did not want to be disturbed, as reports of the Görlitz deputation of 1398 imply. As a result, visitors wishing to see the king had to pass through the fortified Žebrák Castle before continuing on to Točnick. Unfortunately, we have no written sources which give a deeper picture of the operation of both castles.

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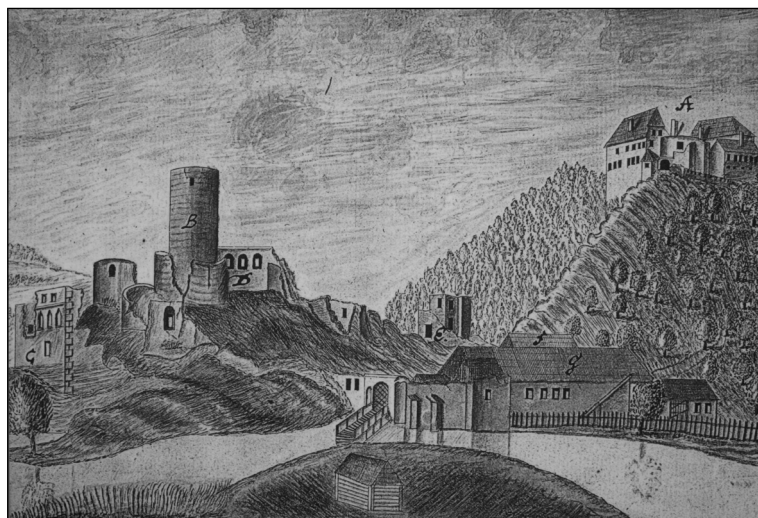


Fig. 1. *Žebrák and Točnick*, a highly valuable view of both castles from 1736. Notable is the still-standing entrance gate, through which visitors to Wenceslaus IV passed. Also shown are the “hosting” palaces of both castles.

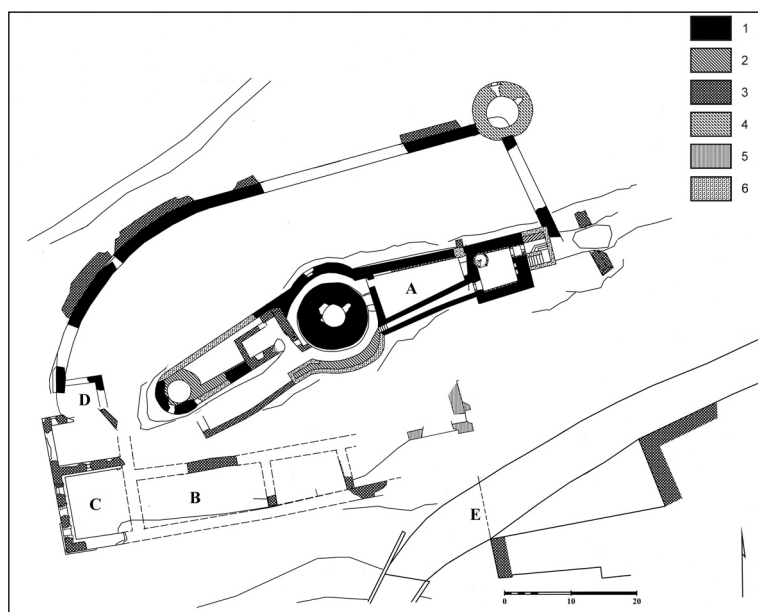


Fig. 2. *Žebrák*, castle floor plan with reconstruction of lower palace marked (dotted), Key: A) upper castle for the ruler; B) lower palace, for visitors; C) wood-insulated stove-heated parlour, D) remains of the older entrance gate; E) entrance gate to the lower castle, through which the road to Točnick went; 1) late-13th-century brickwork; 2) late-13th-century recently raised foundation brickwork; 3) brickwork from Wenceslaus IV's era; 4) late-Gothic brickwork; 5) Gothic brickwork not further identified; 6) modern brickwork.

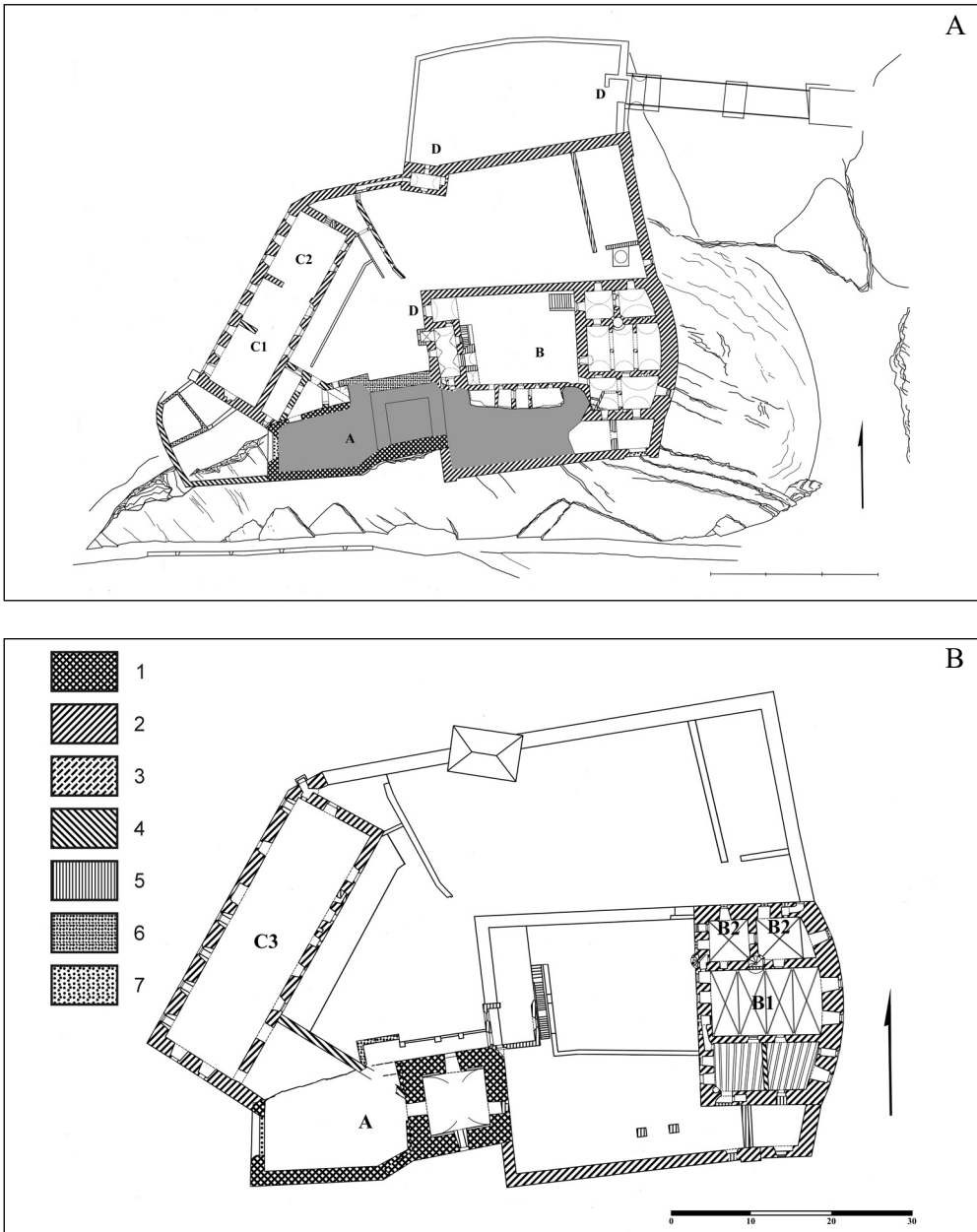


Fig. 3. *Točník*, castle floor plan for ground floor and first floor with main living areas. Key: A) original hunting castle; B) upper castle with Wenceslaus IV's palace, B1 hall for Wenceslaus IV, B2 chambers heated by fireplace used as private quarters for Wenceslaus IV, C lower palace for guests, C1 lower hall heated by fireplace, C2 timber-insulated parlour heated by stove, C3 large hall; D) entrance gate; 1) first phase (hunting castle); 2) brickwork from second phase, 1380s to around 1400; 3) third phase of castle shortly after 1400; 4) brickwork from first half of 16th century; 5) Renaissance brickwork; 6) Baroque brickwork; 7) modern brickwork.



Fig. 4. *Točník*, view of castle and hosting palace from west.



Fig. 5. *Křivoklát*, Burgrave's palace, view from east.

The Castles of King Wenceslaus IV as Venues for Diplomatic Negotiations

The article deals with castle architecture of the late fourteenth century and is an analysis of Wenceslaus IV's castles as venues for diplomatic negotiations and use of castle premises for fairs. Václav IV is a very specific and contradictory figure in Czech history. His personal interests often went beyond the world of royal duties, formalities and ceremonies, which he was eager to avoid, preferring instead to devote himself to hunting or art. That is why he liked to stay in his luxury private residences and castles, which provided him with safe refuge from monarchical duties. He was particularly fond of the hunting areas in the Křivoklát region with the Křivoklát castle, where he would stay for months. Yet Křivoklát was located away from the main transport routes, so foreign envoys and ambassadors often had to look for it laboriously, which was very inconvenient. That is why Václav IV began to prefer Žebrák, next to which he later built the monumental Točnick castle. The two castles were close to the most important provincial route from Prague to Nuremberg. The king's reluctance to perform his monarchical duties also influenced the form of his castles. Thus for the first time we see the ruler's private residence and "official" spaces being clearly separated in Bohemia. This is linked to the emergence of the so-called "second or banquet palaces", that is specialist buildings for receiving guests and hosting fairs, which we find in Wenceslaus IV's main castles, namely Točnick, Žebrák, probably also Křivoklát and Nový hrad near Kunratic.

