CHAPTER NINETEEN

PATRIA LOST AND CHOSEN PEOPLE: THE CASE OF THE
SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY BOHEMIAN PROTESTANT EXILES

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The concept of a chosen people or elect nation and its role in the formation of early modern “national consciousness” has recently been discussed in several important studies. The most well-known cases are the Netherlands\(^1\) and England\(^2\) where the representations of “national identity” were closely linked to the Calvinist tradition and the semantics of “Hebraic patriotism,” which drew a parallel between the people of Israel and the early modern “Protestant” nations. Already in the mid-1980s Simon Schama drew the attention of the broader western scholarly community to a similar phenomenon among the Calvinists of smaller territories—not merely such examples as the Huguenot enclave in France, but as well those in Bohemia and Hungary “where Calvinism was on the defensive within a larger territory.”\(^3\) While


\(^{3}\) Schama, The Embarrassment of Riches, 96.
Hungarian Calvinists and their identification as a new chosen people have been discussed by both Hungarian and British historians, the Bohemian case has received considerably less attention.

Rather than the seventeenth-century discourse of chosenness, Czech historians have focused much more on earlier Hussite nationalism and Messianism. Rudolf Urbánek saw the beginning of Czech Messianism in the times of Charles IV when in the mid-fourteenth century the Bohemian kingdom was called *regnum christianissimum*, and surveyed the expressions of Czech Messianism in the period of the Hussite reform movement and the following wars. Urbánek explored the Messianistic mood in the second half of the fifteenth century both among the Utraquists and Catholic intellectuals. He noted especially an Utraquist manifesto from 1469 where, in the context of the war with Matthias Corvinus, Bohemians were once again presented as a people chosen by God. According to Urbánek, the Utraquist Messianistic tradition gradually weakened and lost its vitality with the growing influence of the European Reformation. The idea of chosenness remained to play a role only within the small church of the Unity of Brethren. František Šmahel criticized Urbánek for his straightforward simplistic identification of the idea of the chosenness of the Czechs with the construction of a Messianistic mission and even expressed skepticism regarding the interpretation of the Hussite Messianism