

Fateful Periods: Routinisation of a Wittenberg Chronological and Eschatological Concept within Bohemian University Humanism (c. 1550–1620)

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Abstract. The article deals with ways in which one of the most important chronological tools of Lutheran historical writing and eschatology—the “fateful periods” that were based on Daniel’s prophecy and predicted originally the demise of the Holy Roman Empire and the End of the World—was modified when it spread from Wittenberg to the University of Prague. The study does not seek to illustrate the importance of apocalyptic imagination by adding further examples of Central European provenance; rather, its goal is to demonstrate how eschatological discourses became absorbed into scholarly material, how they were rewritten and reapplied in individual humanist texts and, particularly, how their meanings and functions changed in the process of cultural exchange. Calculations based on “fateful periods” of 500 or 250 years were made part of the ordinary curriculum of the University of Prague and became one of the basic intellectual themes employed by non-theologians in various subjects, for example in different historical narratives, strategies for seeking patronage or as a tool for producing a community and shared identity among humanist scholars.

Keywords: Protestant Historiography, Bohemian lands, cultural exchange, Carion’s Chronicle, Philipp Melanchthon, Caspar Peucer

The Bohemian lands constituted a multi-ethnic and multi-religious region in the 1540s, with a strong Utraquist majority, which developed the Proto-Protestant theology of the Hussites and only cautiously entered into discussion with Lutheranism. Using the example of scholars based at the University in Prague (or, more correctly, at the Faculty of Arts, since this was all that survived the Hussite wars), this article discusses how Lutheran chronology and moderate eschatology were adapted to fit the new cultural and confessional environment. Specific interpretations of the past were imparted to a group of Bohemian scholars during their studies in Wittenberg.¹

1 For intellectual exchanges between Wittenberg and the Bohemian lands see Storchová, *Řád přírody*.

What they brought back were not only certain literary practices, especially in writing Neo-Latin poetry, but also information about natural philosophy and medicine, and about history, including chronological schemes. This article will focus on how one of the most important Lutheran eschatological concepts—the “fateful periods” that were based on Daniel’s prophecy and originally predicted the demise of the Holy Roman Empire and the End of the World—was modified at the University of Prague during the second half of the sixteenth century.

In the broader context of the European Reformation, eschatological discourses are of such number and importance that Philip S. Gorski refers to the “pandemic character” of imaginaries rooted in biblical patterns during the early seventeenth century.² I do not seek merely to illustrate the importance of apocalyptic imagination by adding further special examples of Bohemian provenance but to concentrate on the question of how eschatological discourses could have been rewritten and reapplied in individual texts written by humanist scholars at the University of Prague. In analysing these I indicate particular examples of the dissemination of eschatological discourses that do not refer to comprehensive concepts based on apocalyptic visions but instead became absorbed into scholarly material. As we shall see, they were made part of the ordinary university curriculum and became one of the basic intellectual themes employed by non-theologians in secular subjects, for example in various non-apocalyptic kinds of historical writing and, maybe not so surprisingly, in their diverse strategies for seeking patronage. In this way, “fateful periods” could have become a topos, but this reduces neither their importance nor their analytical potential; indeed, the de-eschatologised, routinised and widely shared concept of “fateful periods” can also be interpreted as a tool of humanist self-fashioning and scholarly community formation.

Fateful Periods: The chronological scheme of Lutheran historiography

Although the Wittenberg curriculum did not focus on history as much as, for example, astronomy or anatomy, students, including Bohemians, had to familiarise themselves with certain essential historical works. The concept of “fateful periods” (*fatales periodi, anni fatales, mutationes fatales*) was established among Protestant scholars due both to their instruction in Wittenberg and to Melancthon’s shorter texts, especially his university speeches.³ It was also transmitted via Carion’s Chronicle, the most influential Protestant historical work, which also formed part

2 Gorski, “The Mosaic Moment,” 1444 and 1455.

3 See CR III, col. 556; CR VIII, col. 814; CR XII, col. 85–86; CR XVI, 439. See also Lotito, *The Reformation of Historical Thought*, 149f.

of the instruction at the Leucorea from 1537. As is well-known, this chronicle was co-authored not only by Melanchthon but by a Brandenburg court astrologer, Johannes Nāgelin-Carion, and published for the first time in 1532.⁴ Five years later, it was translated into Latin by Hermann Bonn, a German reformer and the superintendent of Lübeck. Melanchthon rewrote this Latin version completely and managed to publish two volumes before he died in 1560. At the time he was already being assisted by his son-in-law and closest colleague, Caspar Peucer, who inherited much of Melanchthon's library and documents, and edited his collected works. After co-working with the *Praeceptor Germaniae* for almost twenty years, Peucer undertook the project in the middle of the passage on the reign of Charlemagne; as recent research has shown, he entirely adopted Melanchthon's interpretation, employing, word for word, passages from his late teacher's previous works, orations and perhaps even excerpts and drafts.⁵ Peucer published two more volumes, still under the name of the original author, between 1562 and 1565. This new version of the chronicle expanded the first to more than four times its original length. The very title—now *Chronicon Carionis*—further illustrated a significant shift in genre: it had become both more narrative and more academic; above all there was a change in the level of historical interpretation. It represented Roman popes (much like Turks and other tyrants)⁶ as the enemies of a properly functioning Christian society based on subject-sovereign relationships. Despite the fact that *Chronicon Carionis* might appear denominationally moderate at first sight,⁷ Peucer (following Melanchthon's approach) focused more on church history and transformed the original version “into an attack not just on papal politics but on the entire Medieval religious world” which vehemently and effectively justified the Reformation itself.⁸

As previous researchers have shown,⁹ more general characteristics may be found in Melanchthon's late university teachings and his version of Carion's Chronicle. Using biblical-exegetical methods, the *Praeceptor Germaniae* saw history as the gradual fulfilment of God's plan for salvation; it offered moral examples and was set in an apocalyptic chronological framework. It assumed that the course of nature, human behaviour and society had not changed since the Fall: the world

4 For Melanchthon's involvement in the 1532 edition, see Prietz, *Das Mittelalter*, 36f.

5 Neddermeyer, “Kaspar Peucer,” 79ff; Prietz, *Das Mittelalter*, 617f.

6 Lotito, *The Reformation of Historical Thought*, 161–66.

7 Pohlig, *Zwischen Gelehrsamkeit und konfessioneller Identitätsstiftung*, 188.

8 Lotito, *The Reformation of Historical Thought*, 145.

9 Schneider, “Geschichte”; Leppin, “Humanistische Gelehrsamkeit und Zukunftsansage”; Bollbuck, “Universalgeschichte, Kirchengeschichte und die Ordnung der Schöpfung,” 131–41; Schäufole, “Theologie und Historie,” 138–41; Pohlig, *Zwischen Gelehrsamkeit und konfessioneller Identitätsstiftung*, 17f, 67f; Neddermeyer, “Kaspar Peucer,” 74f; Bauer, “Die göttliche Ordnung.”

remains always the same, as do human beings and their behaviour. If we compare this approach with that of the 1532 first edition, Melanchthon used no different sources or methods, but his work should be understood as a comprehensive—even all-embracing—but well-structured sum of the period’s historical knowledge that shows God’s agency in the world and might serve, therefore, as a didactic basis for common Christian morality. Both levels of universal history—church history (*historia ecclesiastica* or *sacra*) and world history (*historia politica, ethnica* or *gentium*)—should offer readers a set of particular exemplary historical stories, events and divine rewards and punishments and through these should depict God’s plan for salvation in its entirety. Through these instances, history would reveal God’s dominion over the world and the church as well as his plan for the salvation of humanity. At the same time, this history would show that those who opposed their positions in the created order did not escape God’s punishment. This was, moreover, important also from other theological perspectives – historical works were believed to help their readers understand theological disputes and to distinguish “sects” from the “true church.”¹⁰ In addition to political and confessional messages, moral education was another major objective of historical writing.

The way such a comprehensive narrative composed of seemingly disparate moral examples is structured is of particular importance. The concept of “fateful periods” remains at the very centre of this chronological scheme. From Melanchthon’s perspective, universal history can be read as a meaningful story (*integra series temporum*),¹¹ tragic and hopeful at the same time, because of its dependency on divine providence and the end towards which this inevitably proceeds. In the other words, the very chronological structure and its implicit or explicit eschatological background impart both a meaning and an intelligibility to the historical narrative. Melanchthon elaborated on regular changes in a polity (*fatales periodi*) in his university orations and interpreted them as a consequence of God’s omnipotence and providence, both wrath and grace becoming visible in this form to all Christians. According to this model, the past was divided into three periods based on Elijah’s prophecy, or separated into the four kingdoms of Daniel of which the last is approaching its decline.¹²

In the paratextual material to later editions of the chronicle we find the first attempts to calculate periods in the transfer of power. The fully-fledged fateful period calculated as approximately 490 (or in a simplified computation 500) years with reference to Plato, Aristotle and Daniel’s seventy weeks, *septuaginta hebdomades*, was

10 Ben-Tov, *Lutheran Humanists and Greek Antiquity*, 36f.

11 CR IX, 1075.

12 For further sources of Lutheran chronologies, see Prietz, *Das Mittelalter*, 142. The model was widely accepted in later Lutheran historiography and chronological manuals; see Steiner, *Die Ordnung der Geschichte*, 97ff.

applied to mark the turning points in history. For church history, Melanchthon more explicitly developed the concept of fateful periods. He thematised three 500-year periods of *vera ecclesia*: the period up to AD 500 (when evangelical teaching had been transmitted in a pure form without the intermediary primacy of the Bishop of Rome); the period from AD 500 to AD 1000 (when the church had fallen under papal authority, ancient scholarship degenerated and heresies appeared); and finally, the period from AD 1000 to AD 1500 (during which the popes had aspired not only to spiritual but also to secular power).¹³

From the early 1550s the concept of periodical changes in a polity was linked explicitly with eschatological expectations after Melanchthon drew attention to the currently expiring fateful period which had allegedly commenced at the time that the electoral vote and the Electoral College had been constituted by Otto III.¹⁴ This turning point should refer to the approaching demise of the Holy Roman Empire, the last of the world's monarchies to have started when Jesus Christ was born. This fact would also imply the coming of Judgment Day—the end of the current *ultima, languida et delira mundi senecta*, as Melanchthon put it.¹⁵ This concept, based on Elijah's prophecy, then assigned no more than 6000 years to the world: calculating according to that period, only a few final years remained, with Judgement Day being soon expected.¹⁶

However, the historical interpretation Melanchthon developed in the pages of a later version of Carion's Chronicle differed substantially from the early Lutheran apocalyptic fear of the Antichrist. In the words of Matthias Pohlig, it was a specific sort of "school-developed" eschatological discourse based mostly on implicit prophetic chronology instead of apocalyptic visions and signs and differed, in so doing, from the Gnesio-Lutheran approach.¹⁷ Universal history had an apocalyptic dimension merely because of its chronological structure, which indicated that what was believed to be the final world monarchy was just coming into its decline. Chronological schemes as such must have proven sufficient to draw contemporary intellectuals into anticipation of the forthcoming Judgment Day. Moreover, in his ground-breaking monograph on Lutheran historiography and the formation of confessionalised identities, Pohlig has shown that the very fact Lutheran historians

13 For other periodization schemes in ecclesiastical history, see Lotito, *The Reformation of Historical Thought*, 199–205.

14 The Electoral College was of great importance in Melanchthon's and Peucer's interpretation of the Holy Roman Empire's history; Lotito, *The Reformation of Historical Thought*, 195–196.

15 CR VII, 1006; CR XIII, 354.

16 Pohlig, *Zwischen Gelehrsamkeit und konfessioneller Identitätsstiftung*, 186.

17 Pohlig, *Zwischen Gelehrsamkeit und konfessioneller Identitätsstiftung*, 468. See also Leppin, *Antichrist und Jüngster Tag*, 130f.

had worked with the school-expounded scheme based on Daniel did not necessarily have to lead to the use of apocalyptic figurative speech or vocabulary—neither Melanchthon nor Peucer used terms with strong eschatological connotations, such as “Antichrist”, as Luther had done only twenty years before. Their eschatological discourse was much more self-evident, implicit and “academic.”

Already in Melanchthon’s view, learned eschatology had intermingled with more popular apocalyptic elements; his eschatological expectations were supported by astronomical and meteorological signs of God’s wrath. Reading and writing about the human past was one of the ways of reflecting not only on God’s will but also on the functioning of the created world, and thus in many respects similar to direct observations of Nature.¹⁸ In the past, it was also possible to observe the interventions of special divine providence, for example in the form of the irregular movements of heavenly bodies or unusual astronomical phenomena in general (such as comets, solar eclipses etc.). *Res gestae* and catastrophes on Earth were both related to astral phenomena, but this “theophanic character” of both reality and history, to use the term of Stefano Caroti, had to be attributed entirely to God’s will.¹⁹ Both historical and astral causalities serve as a sort of communicative basis between God and man; they reveal God’s providential plan and initiate a specific vision of a social and political order that not only excludes all dangerous “deviations” but also legitimises, in a markedly conservative way, existing social hierarchies.²⁰

The concept of “fateful periods” was upheld by Melanchthon’s disciples and collaborators—Georgius Maior, for example, along with many others. In 1572, Caspar Peucer completed, revised and published the cogent and most widely distributed version of *Chronicon*; this was the first single-volume edition to appear. Compared to Melanchthon, Peucer stressed still more explicitly *Gesamtdarstellung*, the fact that the history of human salvation must be, on both levels, written and read as universal, integral and a closed story; as he put it, using a corporeal metaphor, history must be similar to a perfect, intact body (*integro perfectoque corpori similis*). In the preface to the “canonical” 1572 edition of Carion, Peucer applied the concept of fateful periods to a number of historical events, and he defines, again with explicit reference to Daniel’s seventy weeks, the *periodus universalis* and its origin solely in terms of

18 For Melanchthon’s natural philosophy, cf. Holm, “Theologische Anthropologie,” 355–407; Bihlmaier, “Anthropologie”; Bihlmaier, “Naturphilosophie”; Meinel, “Certa Deus toti impressit vestigia mundo”; De Angelis, *Anthropologien*, 22–63; Fuchs, ed., *Mathematik und Naturwissenschaften in der Zeit von Philipp Melanchthon*; Methuen, *Science and Theology in the Reformation*, 11–14 and passim; Bellucci, *Science de la nature et Réformation*, 636f; Bauer, “Gott, Welt, Mensch und Sterne”; Kusukawa, *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy*.

19 Caroti, “Melanchthon’s Astrology,” 120.

20 Bauer, “Die göttliche Ordnung,” 218.

God's will. God's will also determines all forms of historical and natural "irregularities," wonders and signs (*portenta, ostenta et miracula*) that predict imminent divine punishments and impart a common Christian moral – something which ancient political thinkers such as Aristotle and Plato, despite sophisticated calculations and moral appeals, were unable to understand.²¹ In addition to the "classical", fully-fledged period of 500 years, Peucer also elaborated in detail a half-period lasting 250 years.²² The concept of fateful periods served here as a chronological structure but was still placed within an unambiguous eschatological framework. Peucer also predicted forthcoming sinister changes in the political sphere following the end of the current period, as well as in the context of church history, where the third period of 500 years culminated in the teachings of Luther and Melanchthon themselves.²³

Routinisation of the concept within Bohemian university humanism

From 1550, this framework began to influence both instruction at the University of Prague and Bohemian historiography. Bohemian scholars adopted the concepts of the four world empires and the fateful periods that predicted the demise of the Holy Roman Empire and the end of the world. A potential venue for Wittenberg chronology was provided by Latin scholarly works on the question of periodic changes in government. The concept of fateful periods and implicit "academic" eschatology were used first by the humanist Martinus Rakocius (Martin Rakovský, d. 1579), who studied in Wittenberg in the mid-1550s.²⁴ Having spent several years in Bohemia as a schoolteacher, Rakocius moved to the present-day Bratislava and worked there as a scribe. As we can see, in his case the cultural context to which knowledge was transferred overrode geographical distance. Rakocius lived farther from Wittenberg than his Prague colleagues but his reflections were clearly more attuned to contemporary Protestant discussions.

His early poetic translation of Proclus' *On the Sphere* already contained an astronomical interpretation that met Wittenberg standards. Rakocius' extensive 1574 poetic work, *De magistratu politico libri tres*, was thus both an excellent rendering of the Wittenberg style and a comprehensive presentation of political and

21 *Chronicon Carionis*, Peucer's dedication, 4a–4b.

22 Peucer also mentioned a period of 700 years, see Brosseder, *In Bann der Sterne*, 90–94.

23 Pohlig, *Zwischen Gelehrsamkeit und konfessioneller Identitätsstiftung*, 185.

24 For more details on Rakocius's interpretation, see Storchová, "Melanchthonský koncept" and Storchová, *Řád přírody*, 225–30. For his biography and work, see Hejnic and Martínek, *Rukověť humanistického básnictví*, 3, 289–291; Okál, *Život a dílo Martina Rakovského* and most recently my entry in *Companion to Central and Eastern European Humanism 2/II: Czech lands* (forthcoming with De Gruyter).

administrative structures.²⁵ The work was based on a Wittenberg view of sovereign–subject relations created by God and critiques of actions that subverted social and political harmony. The sections on secular authorities (magistrates), their origins and causes and the seven virtues of a good ruler were all direct adaptations that drew particularly on Melanchthon’s commentaries on Aristotle and on Cicero’s *De officiis*. Melanchthon’s commentaries also inspired Rakocius’ descriptions of non-monarchical forms of government; here he directed most of his criticisms at tyranny.

He elaborated on fateful periods in his mostly elegant elegiac poem, *Libellus de partibus reipublicae et causis mutationum regnorum imperiorumque*, which appeared in Vienna in 1560 and was addressed to his Protestant patrons in Upper Hungary (e.g. Tamás Nadasdy). The main poem was directly based on works and declamations by Melanchthon and his collaborators and students, such as Matthias Lauterwald, Joachim Camerarius and Caspar Cruciger. Besides periodic changes in government, it dealt with the classification of social groups according to Book IV of Aristotle’s *Politics*²⁶ and celebrated the biblical village of Capernaum as an ideal town community which could serve as an example for early modern burghers. On the question of the causes of governmental changes, Rakocius listed disagreements, discord, impiety, tyrannical governments, and the negative traits or *affectus* (Melanchthon’s concept describing involuntary movements of the human heart)²⁷ of both rulers and their subjects. All this could not escape God’s punishment. Regarding changes in empires, Rakocius’ *Libellus* also alluded to tyrannical rule and the right to resist.

While his overall interpretation remained somewhat basic, his approach was notable for its effort to determine the optimal method of how to calculate the transmission of power. Among the general reasons for changes of polity, Rakocius cited the *locus Platonis* (Plato’s nuptial number),²⁸ which was used in the Wittenberg instruction to calculate “fateful periods.” By referring to Plato’s *Republic* (8,3,545c), Rakocius mentions here the disintegration of musical harmony (*musicus ordo*) and the establishment of a new harmony, a process he relates to changes of government. Similarly, God establishes both the good and the rulers, who bring prosperity or disorder to their kingdoms.²⁹ The change in musical harmony can be calculated by multiplying the dissonance numbers (64 and 27); this results in a mysterious

25 Storchová, *Řád přírody*, 211–215; Okál, “L’idée de la justice.” Modern edition in: Okál, ed., *Martini Rakovský a Rakov Opera omnia*, 243–372.

26 Okál, “Aristotelova Politika,” 126f.

27 Storchová, “Strategies for Adapting Knowledge,” 185–195.

28 For Plato’s nuptial number, its meanings and computation, Seiler, *Die pythagoreisch-naturwissenschaftlichen Grundlagen*; Sonntagbauer, *Von der Hochzeit der Gegensätze*.

29 Rakovský, Martin. *Ad serenissimum principem [...] libellus*, fol. B3a. Modern edition in: Okál, ed., *Martini Rakovský a Rakov Opera omnia*, 160.

“nuptial number” (1728).³⁰ A portion ($3 \frac{3}{8}$) of the nuptial number is then 512, a number overlapping with a fateful period’s duration, which can also be applied to the transmission of power. Rakocius illustrates this calculation with a simple chart in the margin of his poem.

He adhered here very closely to the university declamations published in *Selectarum declamationum Philippi Melanthonis [...] tomus II.* in 1551: while the first part of his poem dealing with a nuptial number as a source of governmental changes was adapted from Melanchthon’s *Disputatio de loco Platonis*, the second dealing with particular calculations followed another declamation included in the volume (pp. 361–69), *Verba Platonis in octavo Πολιτικῶν* by Melanchthon’s former student, Matthias Lauterwald.³¹

Despite this moderate eschatological reading, Rakocius was able to combine the concept of fateful periods with strategies for obtaining urban and aristocratic patrons and would provide them, while so doing, with positive meanings. He did so, for instance, in a poem celebrating his patron Jan Hodějovský the Elder of Hodějov, which he wrote during his early years in Prague. Rakocius related a poetic wish for the growth of Hodějovský’s family with a story about a Phoenix based primarily on Lactantius.³² He estimated the cycle of the Phoenix’s regeneration to be approximately 500 years, which was in accordance with a fully-fledged fateful period.

The concept was further modified by the humanists based at the University of Prague during the 1570s and 1580s. Fateful periods became part of a non-theological curriculum and were a common intellectual tool and theme employed even in secular subjects among local professors and students and other scholars related to the university. They remained popular for more than four decades. When compared with the Rakocius approach, Prague scholars applied Lutheran chronological schemes in a more straightforward manner to chosen historical material.

This could be illustrated in a mainstream and stereotypical master’s thesis by Georgius Syrus entitled *Periodus imperiorum, regnorum et civitatum* (1614). The thesis is structured quite normally as a “rhetorical exercise”, with a couple of pages answering the training question *An imperia, regna et civitates, fatales periodos ac mutationes habeant?* and referring to classical authorities, just as one finds in early seventeenth-century university theses in other disciplines such as astronomy. It is obvious that *Periodus* was not expected to bear testament to the author’s creative abilities but rather to his skill in concise definition and the use of basic terms and categories shared in this period among the community of scholars to connect them

30 Okál, “L’humaniste Slovaque Martin Rakovský et le nombre nuptial,” 36.

31 Okál, “L’humaniste Slovaque Martin Rakovský et le nombre nuptial,” 41–46.

32 Okál, “Rakovský, Hodějovský a zázračný vták fénix.”

with some of the Ancient “greats” (most specifically Aristotle, Plato, Cratippus and Polybius) and, above all, in combining the intertexts from the Golden Age of Latin mastered during his education at the Latin town schools and the Faculty of Arts.

After stating categories such as natural and common changeability, finality and *τέλος* of all things, Syrus proceeds to look at changes of polity, their roots in human crimes, their historical and astrological manifestations, and at the fateful period of 490 years that marks *mutationes in principatu*. The author applies this period to Bohemian history but without any explicit eschatological expectation. Calamities occurred in Bohemia after 1586, the year of conclusion of the most recent full 500-year period which began with the coronation of the first Bohemian king, Vratislav I, in 1086 (an argument which will be mentioned below).³³ *Calamitates* are not interpreted as a presage of the coming Judgment Day, but as a sort of threat to Bohemian towns which Syrus understood as a source of patronage for the university and its scholars. He mentioned in these terms the declines of various ancient cities and expressed his anxiety that Bohemian towns, above all Prague, which was characteristically compared to Rome, could be ruined.³⁴ This interpretation of fateful periods corresponds with the usual strategies of attempting to acquire support from municipal officials. Syrus dedicated his thesis to officials from Český Brod, his native town in Central Bohemia, to express his gratitude for their support during his studies in Prague. It was common practice that students dedicated their first Latin works to relatives or local officials, who very often had also studied at the University of Prague and, after having settled down in a particular town, supported local schools and students and participated in local literary life.³⁵ Instead of an elaborated apocalyptic vision, we see here the first example of the concept of fateful periods modified as a tool to legitimise the scholarly community and to define a group of potential patrons.

33 Syrus, Georgius. *Periodus imperiorum*, A4a: “Sic veniat nobis in mentem anni Christi 1586 qui ultimus fuit periodi fatalis, regni Boemiae, quingentorum annorum, computatione facta temporis, ex quo Rex Vratislaus diadema regium ab Imperatore Henrico susceperit: et ex principe, Rex Boemiae, faustis undique cum acclamationibus, confirmatus est. Proinde, si ad calculum res redigetur, facile apparebit, cur plurimae calamitates, Boemiam, quaedudum excessit periodum, indeusque opprimant.”

34 Syrus, Georgius. *Periodus imperiorum*, A4a–b: “Verendum est, ne plures et tristiores, quod tamen Deus omen avertat, subsequantur. Verendum est, ne civitates nostrae mutantur aut destruantur, veluti 12 celeberrimae Asiae civitates, uno terrae motu, tempore Tyberii mutatae aut eversae potius sunt. Venerandum, ne hinc deinde, instar Carthaginis, Numantiae, Corinthi, ruderibus misceantur, urbes; verendum, ne ut Athenae, ut Sparta, et sexcentae aliae dirutae urbes, exteris gentibus, spectaculum faciant. Metuendum, ne florentissima haec Triurbs Praga, ocellus Boemiae, quemadmodum Roma, concidat et diruatur.”

35 Storchová, *Bohemian School Humanism*, 51–54.

Table 1 Fateful periods in *Periodus imperiorum, regnorum et civitatum* (1614) by Georgius Syrus

<i>Opening historical event</i>	<i>Closing historical event</i>	<i>Period</i>
Coming of Bohemians	coronation of Vratislav I	500 years
Coming of Bohemians	Christianization	250 years
Christianization of Bohemia	Hussitism	500 years
Death of Dietmar, the first Bishop of Prague	death of Johannes Rokycana, a Hussite archbishop	500 years
Coronation of Vratislav I	recent changes (<i>calamitates</i> since 1586), without an explicit eschatological connotation	500 years

After 1590, fateful periods thus acquired new functions in Prague university humanism. In particular, they lost their eschatological charge and began to appear in representations of the university and strategies to acquire patronage, even surfacing in predictions of forthcoming positive developments at the university. This routinised and widely shared concept can be interpreted also as a tool to produce a scholarly community.

One should mention, as the first example of a historical narrative in fateful periods without explicit eschatological connotations, the inaugural oration which was given at the beginning of January 1612 by the well-known Bohemian humanist and physician Adam Huber, entitled *De nobilissima illa, et omni humano generi utilisima arte medicina*.³⁶ Besides the usual legitimising motives—the university is represented as the only institution to be of value in the education of future generations and in the welfare of the whole kingdom—Huber tells another quite common story of ancient and biblical education and schools. Historical communities of scholars are viewed as guarantors of social order, peace and pure religion. With regard to the Bohemian case, Huber organises the story of the University of Prague according to the fateful period scheme. He demonstrates that the “short period” of 250 years falls between the origin of Bohemian statehood—the coronation of the first Bohemian king, Vratislav I—and the foundation of the University of Prague. The conclusion of this period is specified with precision, given even to the minute, and is interpreted as one of the most important turning points in the history of Bohemia.³⁷ The golden

36 Huber, Adam. *De nobilissima illa [...] Medicina [...] Oratio*, Aiiiia–Avb. See also Storchová, *Paupertate styloque connecti*, 210–211. Huber held a university disputation dealing with Plato’s nuptial number in 1567 (Hejnic and Martínek, *Rukověť humanistického básnictví* 2, 365).

37 Huber, Adam. *De nobilissima arte medicina*, A4b: “Regnum hoc Bohemiae feliciter fuit fundatum Anno Christi 1086, Iunii 15 die hora 19. Cum dimidiam periodum suam attigisset, quae est annorum 250, mirifice effloruit et nominis celebritatem insignem accepit ex liberali fundatione hujus Academiae a Carolo IIII. Imperatore et Rege Bohemiae. P. M. suscepta, quam Clemens Papa II. anno 1346. Ianuarii 25. hora 21. minuto 42. confirmavit et Universitas ipsa deliberato animo et propitio admodum caelo studia inchoavit, Anno Christi 1347. die 6. Aprilis hora 21,

age of the university came to an end in 1409—Huber relates this *mutatio* with no calculation—when German students and professors left, as ungrateful sons, both Prague and their *alma mater*. Incidentally, the representation of the University of Prague as a mother is one of the most common humanist strategies, the institution being represented as helpless and in need of support.³⁸

Similar to other humanist discourses developed in the university literary field, Huber's concept of fateful periods is linked with strategies to acquire patronage; it legitimises and promotes the institution to potential patrons. His era's condition is characterised by the fact that a further short period had passed since the foundation of the University of Prague and a full period of 526 years since the establishment of Bohemian institutional statehood. Both periods predicted that the right moment for change in the management of the university, the crucial agent in state administration, had come; and precisely in 1609 the university was assigned to the administration of new patrons, the Bohemian Utraquist estates—a predicted event that could bring, according to Huber, only further positive change.³⁹ The concluding part of Huber's oration does not dwell on apocalyptic anxiety arising from the forthcoming Judgment Day; rather, it introduces a textual space within which the literary field and its participants may be defined, patrons celebrated and a successful future predicted—one can hardly imagine a more radical reconstruction of a concept originally concerned with apocalyptic fears and anxiety.

Moving to my final example of a text written by university humanists that modifies the concept of fateful periods, I turn to one of the best-known Bohemian humanist orations, *Oratio panegyrica de Boemiae reviviscentia*, by Adamus Rosacius. It was published in 1615, the year in which the seven-year anniversary of a peace treaty between Habsburg brothers Rudolf and Matthias was celebrated together with the six-year anniversary of the new university administration, the so-called Rudolfine Statutes. In consequence, the paratext of this official speech is dedicated both to the emperor Matthias and to the Bohemian Utraquist estates which administered the University, and both are encouraged to protect the fertile and tender *alma mater*. The oration was printed by Paulus Sessius, an official

minuto 34. Hinc vere beata fuit patria nostra, et in ea civitates omnes, in primis Praga, abundabant omnis generis boni corporis, fortunae et animae.”

38 Storchová, *Paupertate styloque connecti*, 163–164, 192, 208, 218.

39 Huber, Adam. *De nobilissima arte medicina*, A5a: “[...] prope penitus succubisset, ut laude potius, quam ignominia digni censeri debeant, jam vero spem et ornandae restaurationis et patriae hae tempora nobis faciunt maximam, quia ab origine sua periodum integram 500 annorum attigit et annis 26 superavit; quia pleno jure Academia a summo Magistratu Ordinibus Regni est reddita, eiusque cura fidelis D. D. Defensoribus commissa, quia favoris Dei in caelo et terra judicia vidimus manifesta.”

printer of many university volumes of this period. In the exordial part of the oration, Rosacius defines and calculates the extent of—and in doing so also co-creates—the Bohemian humanist community and his own position within it. This imagined community of scholars, which besides professors and students also included aristocrats—members of the true nobility (*vera nobilitas*) educated and involved in the university literary field—is presented as the only audience possible of appreciating a speech of such quality.

Table 2 Fateful periods and patronage in *De arte medicina* (1612) by Adam Huberus

<i>Opening historical event</i>	<i>Closing historical event</i>	<i>Period</i>
Coronation of Vratislav I	Foundation of the University of Prague	short period (exactly 263 years)
Foundation of the University of Prague	His present day	short period (exactly 264 years)
Coronation of Vratislav I	His present day, the best expectations under the new university administration	526 years

Rosacius' story of scholarship in general and of the University of Prague in particular includes strong supernatural legitimisation—God himself is the most important founder and supporter of academies. Eden is said to function as an academy; many examples of *dignitas, excellentia et autoritas academiarum et scholarum publicarum* can be illustrated in Holy Scripture; biblical and historical academies were founded on God's direct order, etc. Additionally, the Bohemian estates were inspired by God six years previously when they took on the administration of the university, and this act is said to be a *specimen divini instinctus* testified by celestial signs which appeared during the diet.

The historical narratives developed in Rosacius' oration are of special interest. All histories of learning written at the University of Prague during the second half of the sixteenth century could be characterised by the analogous narrative strategies and figurative speech which were widely shared in the Bohemian academic milieu—all of the plots are based on regular alternating golden and dark ages and follow a clear teleology. The end of the story lies always in the present state, which is seen either as the last day of the dark age (in anticipation of patronage) or as part of a new golden age (in consequence of particular patronage already received).⁴⁰ Golden ages are seen usually as the Christianisation of the Czech lands and as the period from the foundation of the university to the intellectual activities of Jan Hus, which are to be restored—or just carried on, if continuity is maintained—by the patrons' present efforts.

40 Storchová, *Paupertate styloque connecti*, 207f.

Besides the classical turning points, Rosacius stressed that the period following Hussitism had to be seen as a decline and a time of contempt for scholarship.⁴¹ After an incomplete short period of 200 years, this decline ended when the university was united once again with a consistory which meant also a return to the great days of Hus' chancellorship, the time when, among others, a network of Latin town schools was established in Bohemian towns.⁴² The period of 200 years can be calculated to fall between the election of Jan Hus and the edict of Kutná Hora in 1409 and changes in the university's administration in 1609.⁴³ Rosacius relates this 200-year *annus iubilaeus* to *fatales periodi patriae nostrae visitationum*, but they have hardly any eschatological significance; instead of the Day of Judgement, once again they predict the future prosperity of the University of Prague and its scholarly networks.

Thus the concept of fateful periods is related to strategies to present the university to its existing and prospective supporters in the best light possible. The oration culminates in listing all the renowned scholars who worked at the university during the sixteenth century and their appeals to potential patrons. According to Rosacius, only a few patrons merit the privilege of being able to support such a scholarly community and academic institution. Patronage itself can be interpreted in Rosacius' universal history of education as a submission to God's will and participation in the divine historical plan—Jesus Christ himself is seen as the model for a patron of scholars and an ideal founder of academies. To support scholars in general, and the University of Prague in particular, involves emulating Jesus' example, an activity all potential patrons are exhorted to do in the concluding part of the oration.

Moderate eschatological expectations: “Fateful periods” and Czech vernacular humanism up to 1620

Having analysed the historical narratives of the Latin university, I shall compare them with those that emerged from the Czech vernacular which, to a certain extent,

41 Rosacius, Adam. *Oratio panegyrica*, ed. Martínková, 174: “Tunc, tunc didicerunt homines bardi et idiotae, quorum ubique hoc etiam tempore magna est affluentia, magna superfluitas, qui agresti odio literatos viros insectantur, tunc, inquam, didicere, quantam utilitatem ex re literaria caperent, quantum rebus publicis expediret, quanto omnium emolumento esset schola publica frequens; nam antehac Pragenses *rerum domini* fuerunt, quo de Romanis poeta cecinit, et *caput rerum* Praga fuit, ut Roma apud Livium describitur.”

42 Rosacius, Adam. *Oratio panegyrica*, ed. Martínková, 110.

43 Rosacius, Adam. *Oratio panegyrica*, ed. Martínková, 182: “Is vero annus, optimi auditores, fuit 1409, quo nimirum natio Boemica tres illas voces decreto regio acquisivit et M. Ioannem Hussium universitatis rectorem constituit, a qui ducenti anni, quattuor iubilaei, respectu illius 1609, quo similiter hanc universitatem recuperastis, elapsi sunt [...]”

copied the periodic schemes made routine in the curriculum as well as its “academic” and more or less implicitly apocalyptic chronology. Topics such as the frailty of the human condition, and continual changes in world situations in response to human sin, can be documented from the Czech moral educational literature of the time. The authors were connected to the University of Prague and were products of its Latin curriculum with its shared topics and common intellectual tool of the concept of fateful periods as well as the ways in which it was applied to the history of their *alma mater*. Even the term “fateful period” itself was absorbed into vernacular humanism and used without further elaboration; mostly, it served as a sort of chronological scheme for reading scriptural and ancient history, and was used, therefore, without explicit eschatological connotations. The oldest examples of period calculations date back, to my knowledge, to the mid-1570s⁴⁴ and their number increased during the following decade, rather unsurprisingly because that was a time when one of the crucial fateful periods was expected to expire.

One of the first historians to try to calculate it was Prokop Lupáč/Lupacius, a professor of the University of Prague from 1564 to 1569 and the author of a *Rerum Boiemicarum Ephemeris*, a comprehensive volume modelled after Paul Eber’s *Calendarium historicum*.⁴⁵ In his vernacular *Historia o Císaři Karlovi* (History of Charles IV) published in the same year, Lupáč calculated a period of 588 years for changes of dynasties on the Bohemian throne and, without mentioning Melanchthon or the earlier Lutheran tradition directly, defined this as “*anni periodici et fatales quorundam regnorum... as the Latin writers call them*”.⁴⁶

In his vernacular book of 1587, *Vrtkavé štěstí* (Inconstant Fortune), Matouš Sokol used the established university version of fateful periods for his illustrations of historic examples of the common instability of the human condition as well as a vaguely defined wrath of God. In the passage on the regular decline of empires, which “were rotted out and experienced horrible falls,”⁴⁷ Sokol refers to the set of excerpts and quotations and the authorities of Aristides, Phocion, Pompeius and Cratippus used within the university curriculum which could be found also in the above Syrus’ thesis.

44 Codicillus, Petr. *Minucí a pranostika z učení pražského vydaná od M. Petra Kodicilla*, F2a–F3a.

45 Storchová, “*Rerum Boiemicarum Ephemeris* (1584) und die protestantische Geschichtsschreibung.” For more biographical details on Lupáč, see my entry in *Companion to Central and Eastern European Humanism 2/I: Czech lands*, 715–723.

46 Lupáč, Prokop. *Historia o císaři Karlovi*, Bva: “*anni periodici et fatales quorundam regnorum [...] jakž latiníci jmenují.*” All transcriptions to modern Czech were made according to current editorial practice – the phonetic level of early modern Czech remains; the graphic image of each letter was transformed to modern language standards; for example the letter ‘j’ was written in the Older Czech as ‘g’ but pronounced as ‘j’, so according to this editorial practice it is transcribed as ‘j’.

47 Sokol, *Vrtkavé štěstí*, 47a: “*vyvrácený jsouce, hrozných pádu okusili a pocejtili.*”

Table 3 Fateful periods in Sokol's *Vrťkavé štěstí* (1587)

<i>Opening historical event</i>	<i>Closing historical event</i>	<i>Period</i>
Rise of Athens hegemony	Fall of Athens hegemony	490 years
Rise of Lacedaimon hegemony	Fall of Lacedaimon hegemony	500 years
Reign of Solomon	Captivity of Sedechras	505 years
Foundation of the Second Temple	Destruction of Jerusalem	505 years
Reign of Julius Caesar	Capture of Rome by a "Croatian king Sencerichos"	502 years
Fall of Rome, Constantine moved to Byzantium	Reign of Charlemagne	505 years

In contrast with this de-eschatologized and routinised version of the concept of fateful periods, a moderate eschatological discourse based on Melanchthonian chronology became for Daniel Adam and his collaborators not merely a base and focal point for historical interpretation but was also applied to contemporary circumstances.⁴⁸ Consisting of associates of the Prague typographer Daniel Adam of Veleslavín (1546–1599), this circle emerged from the late 1570s to 1599 as a result of the activities of his printing house. Adam was a professor at the University of Prague from 1572 to 1576. From 1580 until his death, Adam wrote, translated, re-worked and published almost 140 volumes, including a typical humanist corpus of casual poetry as well as travel literature and numerous vernacular treatises on medicine, marital concord, household governance and history. The circle of authors and translators liaising with Adam was one of the period's most productive Bohemian centres of Latin, Czech and German intellectual communication and literacy.

Daniel Adam developed his apocalyptic visions in editions from the first half of the 1580s onwards, above all in the preface to the Czech version of Carion's *Chronicle* itself (1584) and to three ancient historical works which came from his press in the mid-1590s. Adam's eschatological interpretation of Bohemian history and conditions in his era must be considered the main source of his ethical programme, a crucial impulse for a Christian moral preoccupation. Adam adapted to this topic the editorial policy of his printing house in order to depict the ways in which God's wrath and impatience had been manifested both in the past and in the present. Besides the concept of fateful periods as applied to Bohemian history,

48 Storchová, "Konkurrierende stories? Zur Konstruktion der Geschichte Böhmens," 131–36; Storchová, "Nation, patria and the aesthetics of existence," 225–54. For Adam's biography and work, cf. my entry in *Companion to Central and Eastern European Humanism 2/I: Czech lands*, 75–84. See also earlier articles about prefaces to Adam's historical editions that do not deal with Adam's eschatology: Beneš, "Kroniky dvě o založení země české"; Beneš, *Historický text*, 89f; Rothe, "Die Vorworte in den Drucken des Daniel Adam von Veleslavín."

I will deal below with some of his historical editions and translations which may be interpreted as practical Christian manuals of conduct in the era of the approaching Last Judgment, for example the 1592 translation of *Jewish History* by Josephus Flavius, a sort of historical parallel to other prescriptive treatises he published.⁴⁹ Works about the Ottomans, especially a translation of Löwenklau's *A New Chronicle of the Turkish Nation* of 1594, were intended as manuals of how to “recognize the coming Antichrist”. The fact that some of these historical books can be seen as a part of one “eschatological ethical project” is also stressed by their uniform layout, a good example of which is found in the ecclesiastical histories by Eusebios and Cassiodoros published two years later. Historical examples of conduct in times of persecution are regarded by Adam as particularly timely because of the coming Judgement Day.

Regarding the ways in which the concept of fateful periods was modified by Adam's circle, we have to focus above all on the typographer's preface to the historical work, *Kroniky dvě o založení země české a prvních obyvatelích jejích* (Two Chronicles on the Origins of Bohemia and its First Inhabitants) of 1585. The first preface in the extent of 66 pages is addressed to Václav of Říčany; it reflects on the importance of history and reviews previous works of humanist Bohemian historiography (Aeneas Silvius, Martin Kuthen, Václav Hájek, Johannes Dubravius). Here Adam applies fateful periods (both half and full) to universal history and the history of the Bohemian lands.

Table 4 Great periods in world history (Adam's preface to *Kroniky dvě*, 1585)

<i>Opening historical event</i>	<i>Closing historical event</i>	<i>Period</i>
Flight from Egypt	Construction of the First Temple	500 years
Construction of the First Temple	Construction of the Second Temple	500 years
Construction of the Second Temple	Reign of Herod the Great	500 years
End of Babylonian captivity	Crucifixion	490 years
Saul's reign	Babylonian captivity	500 years
Life of Ezdrah	Reign of Vespasian	500 years
Rise of Assyrian empire	Fall of Assyrian empire	520 years
Rise of Athens hegemony	Fall of Athens hegemony	490 years
Rise of Lacedaimon hegemony	Fall of Lacedaimon hegemony	490 years

All the events within a particular period of 500 years and a short period of 250 are either classical biblical examples or turning points in the history of the four world monarchies, and ancient polities (the hegemony of Athens, Lacedaimon, the old Roman monarchy, and consulship meaning aristocracy) are borrowed, most likely, from

49 Storchová, “The Jewish War.”

Peucer's edition of Carion. Adam added to the biblical scheme two examples from the history of Hungary and Poland which anticipate the structure of his own fateful period applied to the Bohemian case. He did not, in this case, compare the rise and fall of empires and governmental forms as Melanchthon and Peucer had done but applied fateful periods to the reigns of particular monarchs and dynasties and focussed on significant analogies—for example, in the Hungarian case the coronation of the first king, Stephen, and the birth of the Ottoman emperor Süleymann the Great.

Table 5 Half-periods in world history (Adam's preface to *Kroniky dvě*, 1585)

<i>Opening historical event</i>	<i>Closing historical event</i>	<i>Period</i>
Rise of Median empire	Fall of Median empire	260 years
Reign of Kyros	Reign of Dareios (fall of Persian empire)	230 years
Reign of Alexander the Great	Fall of the Diadochi kingdoms	250 years
Reign of Chlodovicus	Reign of Pepin the Short	237 years

Fateful periods in Bohemian history were constructed and developed in three main categories: political history, church history and the history of Prague. A comparison of events can illustrate which turning points were chosen for Adam's historical narrative to make it a meaningful story with eschatological connotations, structured according to the period scheme and proceeding to the "decline of the world" (*náklonek světa*) and the end of the fourth world monarchy.

Table 6 Bohemian fateful periods – church history (Adam's preface to *Kroniky dvě*, 1585)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Opening historical event</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Closing historical event</i>	<i>Period</i>
896 (not explicitly mentioned, resulting from the context)	Baptism of Bořivoj, Duke of Bohemia	1402	Jan Hus' sermons in the Bethlehem chapel	506 years
894 (not explicitly mentioned, resulting from the context)	Baptism of Bořivoj, Duke of Bohemia	1394	Death of the pre-Hussite theologian Matěj of Janov	500 years
– (no year mentioned)	Death of Bořivoj, Duke of Bohemia	1414, 1416	Deaths of Jan Hus and Jerome of Prague	500 years (?)
969	Death of Dietmar, the first Bishop of Prague	1471	Death of Jan Rokycana, the Hussite archbishop	502 years

As a starting point for Bohemian church history, Adam chose the official acceptance of Christianity in Bohemia that was linked to the work of early Hussite theologians, Hussitism itself signifying the second turning point; an institutional framework of early Bohemian Christianity is also connected to Hussitism when Adam

constructs the period between the lives of the first Bishop of Prague and the Hussite archbishop. Adam also added a history of Prague as the capital of the Bohemian kingdom when he chose and compared the foundations and significant conflagrations of the then-individual Prague towns.

Table 7 Bohemian fateful periods – history of Prague (Adam’s preface to *Kroniky dvě*, 1585)

Year	Opening historical event	Year	Closing historical event	Period
849	First privileges of the Old Town of Prague	1348	Foundation of the New Town of Prague	499 years
1291	Conflagration of the Lesser Town of Prague	1541	Conflagration of the Castle and the Lesser Town of Prague	250 years
823	Foundation of the Old Town of Prague	1316	Old Town damaged heavily by a fire	493 years

Table 8 Bohemian fateful periods – political history (Adam’s preface to *Kroniky dvě*, 1585)

Year	Opening historical event	Year	Closing historical event	Period
1085	First annexation of Silesia	1337	Definitive annexation of Silesia	252 years
1254	Přemysl Otakar I became the Duke of Austria	1503	Birth of Ferdinand I	249 years
1056	Duke Spytihněv expelled “Germans”	1306	“Germans” ruling over Bohemia	250 years
1297	Death of Jutta of Habsburg	1547	Death of Anna Jagiellonian	250 years
1278	Death of Přemysl Otakar II	1526	Death of Ludovicus Jagiellonian	248 years
1085	Coronation of Vratislav I	1305	End of Přemyslid dynasty	220 years
1085	Coronation of Vratislav I	1585	Expected sinister changes in the Bohemian kingdom	500 years

Besides territorial expansion and the coexistence of Czech and German-speaking populations, for Bohemian political history Adam concentrates over and above everything else on the parallels between the lives of rulers representative of different dynasties (Habsburg on the one hand, and the Přemyslid and Jagiellonian dynasties on the other). At this point we look to the moderate eschatological base of the whole interpretation—after Bohemia completed the crucial fateful period in 1585 or 1586—*plena et fatalis periodus*, i.e. 500 years since the first Bohemian king was crowned changes in the polity could be expected and might even be the Doomsday to which further recent changes abroad, unpredictable weather and astronomical signs referred.⁵⁰ Adam also randomly mentioned a danger related to

50 Adam, Daniel. *Kroniky dvě o založení země české*, the first preface, H1a: “A my vesměs téměř všickni svými nezpůsobu a hřichy k tomu napomáháme a den ode dne příčiny dáváme Pánu Bohu, aby s pokutami, kteréž na nás přihotovil, dále neprodléval a nemeškal.” Modern edition in Bohatcová, *Obecné dobré*, 256.

the year 1586 in his prefaces to other volumes produced by his printing house.⁵¹ These reflections, however, never led to total despair, since Adam stressed that God had always protected Bohemia and a small “flock of elected” people living there.⁵²

Conclusion

As many historians have explained, apocalyptic visions began to play an extremely important role in Protestant thinking from the mid-1550s,⁵³ no matter how strongly they varied according to local contexts. The Bohemian case clearly illustrates such local dynamics. I have shown how one of the most important eschatological discourses could be modified during the second half of the sixteenth century both in Czech vernacular writings and by humanists at the University of Prague to meet the cultural expectations related to university instruction. Historical narratives based on fateful periods were applied by university humanists mostly without explicit eschatological connotations; they became part of the university curriculum and were used as one of the “rhetorical training” topics for students. In this way fateful periods served as a tool for shaping scholarly communities; they helped to legitimise scholarly institutions and enabled them to acquire patronage within the literary field.

According to Matthias Pohlig, historiography played a decisive role in the building of Lutheran confessional identity; however, the manner in which they worked with a conceptual framework of fateful periods shows that such a framework could have primarily cultivated the common intellectual identity of university scholars. When compared to later eschatological discourses across Europe, the way in which fateful periods were modified in Bohemia seems to present us with an exceptional example. Humanism at the University of Prague was unusual in its rather closed character, but this fact helps us to reflect upon more conceptual frameworks in which the eschatological discourses may be analysed. We can see that eschatological discourses could be modified markedly within the process of literary production. Eschatological discourses function in texts in various ways and I dare say they deserve more research than has been given to them to date. Not only do they become part of confessional or political propaganda but they can also have an effect upon the humanist scholarly community of the period, helping to legitimise it when it is facing up to other social groups or seeking external sources of support.

51 After 1588 the number of apocalyptic works rapidly increased in all Protestant regions; Pohlig, *Zwischen Gelehrsamkeit und konfessioneller Identitätsstiftung*, 465.

52 For this topos widely shared among Protestant scholars, cf. Pohlig, *Zwischen Gelehrsamkeit und konfessioneller Identitätsstiftung*, 51.

53 Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*; Leppin, *Antichrist und Jüngster Tag*.

In contrast to the mainstream reading of fateful periods as developed by Daniel Adam and subsequently within the literary field of the University of Prague, more explicit eschatological connotations of fateful periods appeared after 1600. The authors of these treatises, many of them religious nonconformists and radical preachers, focussed mostly on such deviations from the “natural order” as monstrous births, floods and storms, and their apocalyptic interpretation can be compared with the eschatology of the same period in western European countries. The concept of *fatales periodi regnorum* was elaborated by Vít Jakeš in the preface to his *Kázání troje léta šestnáctistého osmého činěné* (Three Sermons on the Year 1608) in which he mentioned not only great and half periods, but also periods of 100 and 700 years, and described wars and other predictions of the coming decline of the final world monarchy. From 1615 and, specifically, at the outset of the 1620s, when many former Prague students went into exile, the university interpretation blended with a stronger explicit apocalyptic vision, Old Testament imagination and new calculations.⁵⁴ However, that is another story.

We have seen how the concept of fateful periods and its eschatological implications were made part of the ordinary curriculum at the University and applied to various historical subjects, often in an attempt to acquire the support of patrons or to alarm the membership of the scholarly community. However, to make a final reference to Matthias Pohlig’s monograph, the historical narrative in Carion’s Chronicle and the fateful periods which served as the main chronological structure were in contrast to Luther’s visions, which were never characterised by an explicitly strong apocalyptic dimension. From the very beginning they had a certain potential to be routinised, school-developed or moderated, something which was also to be developed in subsequent controversies on the position of radical millenarism in Protestant theology. Melancthonian historical interpretation did not strongly develop eschatological figurative speech and had the potential to become a sort of “academic eschatology” whereby the coming end of the world was implicitly presupposed in terms of the whole chronological framework. The Bohemian school of humanism followed this reading and, as a result, intensified its intellectual dimension; the question remains whether other examples of such a *Verschulung* could be found in Europe from the 1570s onwards, a period of widely increasing apocalyptic expectation.

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54 Urbánek, *Eschatologie, vědění a politika*, 32f and 85–86.

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