
Heraldry

Exploring Origins

Paprzyca / Kuszaba Investigating a Legend



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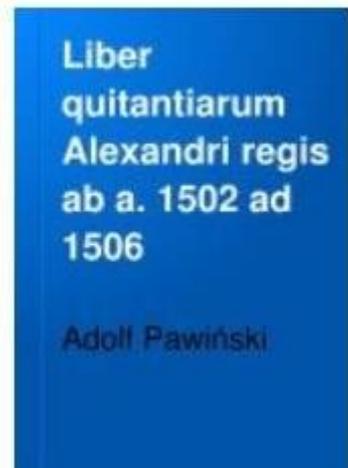
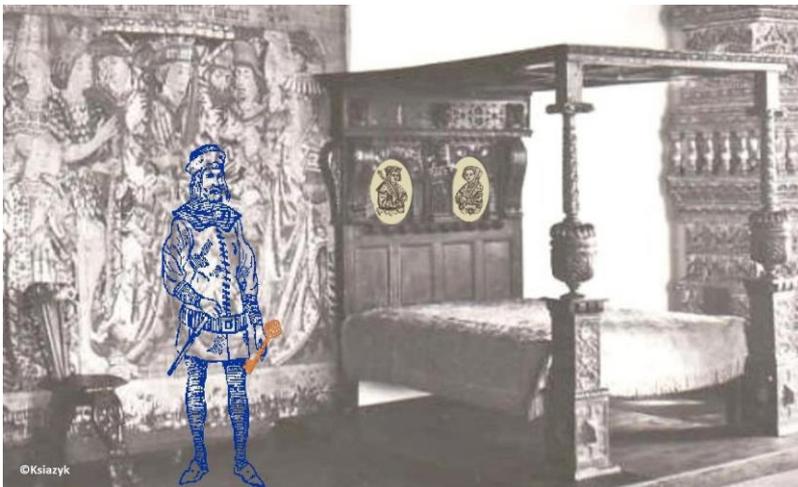
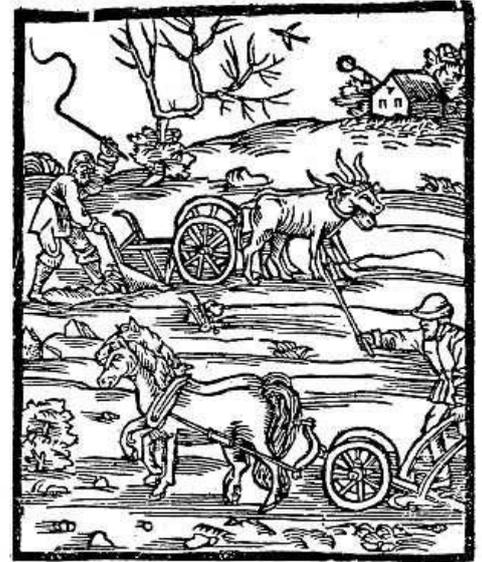
Michał Niwiński

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► Origins

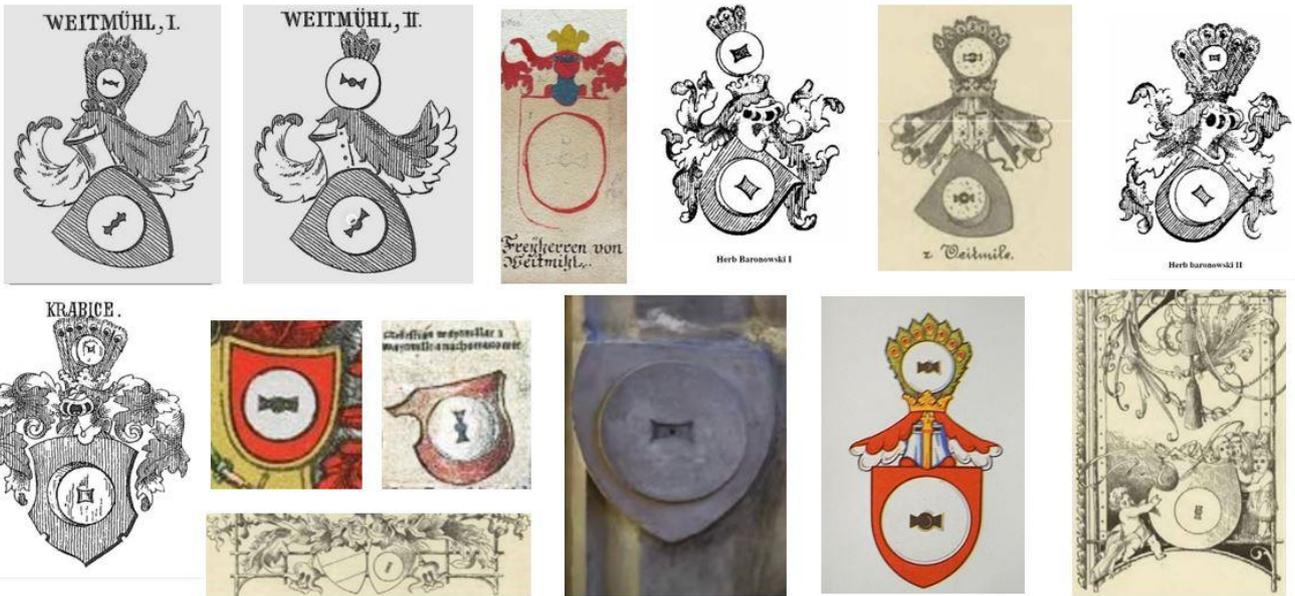
Polish heraldists report that a group of knights came **from Bohemia to Poland** during the years 1230s. They had a millstone of their coat of arms. This foreign clan was named **Kuszaba** but the Poles used the name **Paprzyca**, a word meaning the millrind of a millstone.

After a few years in Poland, some of these Paprzyca knights were rewarded with a land in the area of **Niewino**, a village located in Podlaskie (Eastern Poland). After settling there, they used the name **Niwiński** to reflect this feudal property. Later, two lines of the Niwiński Family used different surnames to differentiate inside the clan. These surnames became the family names Chrebra and Książyk.



Liber Quitantiarum Alexandri Regis ab a. 1502 ad 1506 – *Księga skarbowa króla Aleksandra Jag.* is an ensemble of chronicles reporting royal activities during the reign of **King Alexander Jagiello** from 1502 to 1506. The text refers to money granted by the King to his entourage and mentions **Andrzej Książyk**. At this time, he was **Łoźniczy** of the King, an equivalent of “master of the royal apartment” These chronicles might be the first official mention of the name **Książyk**.

HERALDRY



The millstone coat of arms in Bohemia



The millstone coat of arms in Poland



Czech Republic

Legend of the millstone

In Bohemia, a noble lady made fun of a poor woman who had twin babies, wrongly accusing her of adultery. This noble lady was the wife of Lord Dobrohost also name Veitminar. The Divine Providence punished her. A few months later, she gave birth to nine babies on the same day.

Two old women who attended these multiple births argued that this was an evil spell from two witches who had been burnt in Wischerad a few days before. They convinced the mother to keep one baby and get rid of the eight others. As they were very small, the old women put them in a box (*Krabice* in Czech) with the intention to bury them somewhere in the forest.

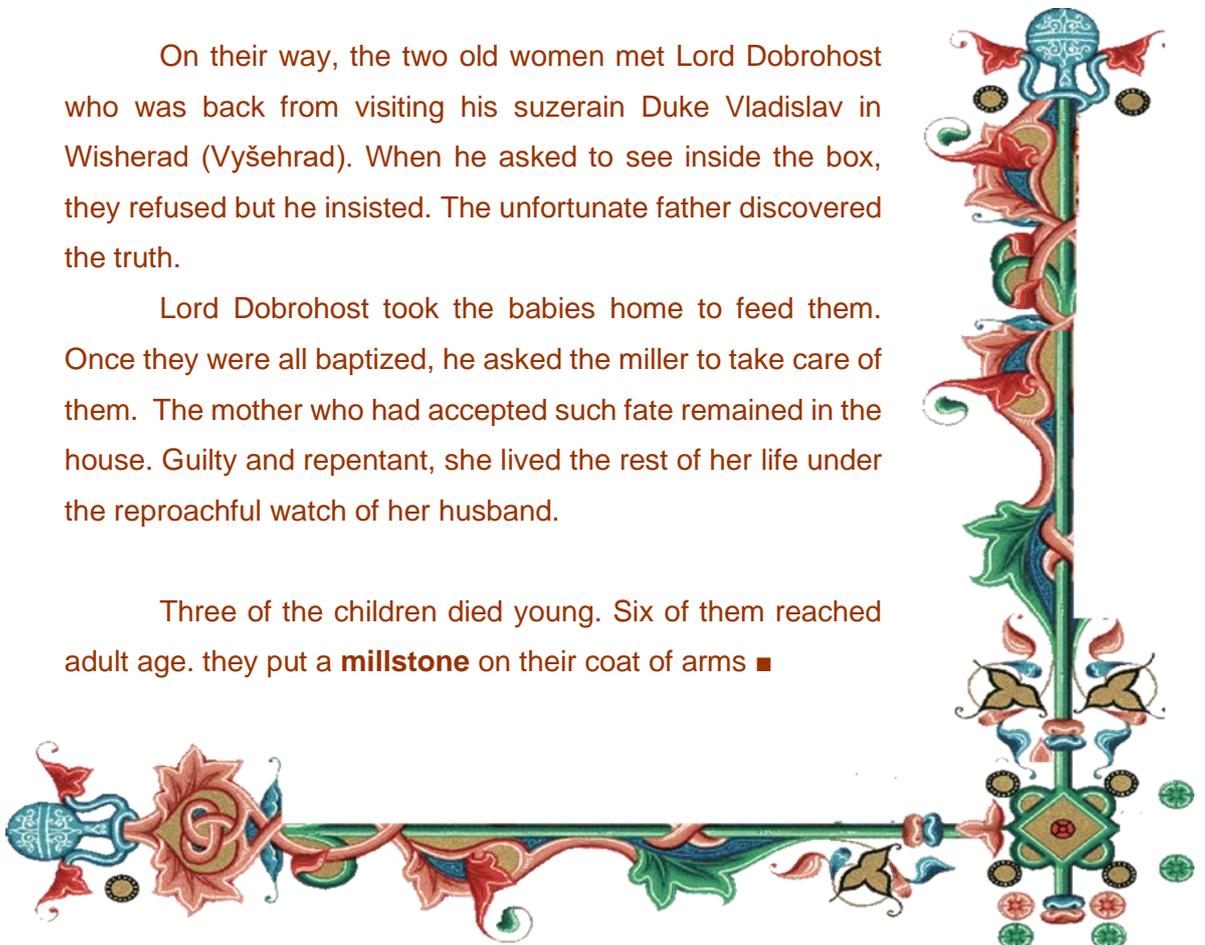




On their way, the two old women met Lord Dobrohost who was back from visiting his suzerain Duke Vladislav in Wishehrad (Vyšehrad). When he asked to see inside the box, they refused but he insisted. The unfortunate father discovered the truth.

Lord Dobrohost took the babies home to feed them. Once they were all baptized, he asked the miller to take care of them. The mother who had accepted such fate remained in the house. Guilty and repentant, she lived the rest of her life under the reproachful watch of her husband.

Three of the children died young. Six of them reached adult age. they put a **millstone** on their coat of arms ■





Poland

Legend of the millstone

Long ago in Bohemia, a Lady gave birth to nine sons the same day. At this time, the popular view was that multiple births indicated adultery. Fearing the reaction of her husband, she kept one boy and asked her maid to drown the eight others babies.

The maid put the babies in a bag. On her way to the river, she met the Lord and father who was riding back home. When he asked the maid what she was carrying, she said that she wanted to get rid of some new-born puppies in the river. The Lord asked to see the dogs and check if anyone of them could be fine for hunting. The unfortunate father discovered the truth in the bag. To protect the eight babies from the mother, he asked the miller living near the river to keep them. The miller raised the boys and the father provided everything for their care and education.



HERALDRY



When the boys became adults, their Lord father organized a feast and invited all his friends. His wife was attending the party. At some point, the Lord asked the guests “*what would deserve a mother planning to drown her babies?*”. All the guests agreed about death penalty for such criminal mother. Then, the husband asked his eight boys to come and he revealed the truth to everybody.

The mother was so ashamed that the Lord decided to pardon her in gratitude for God providence. The guilty wife retired in a convent for the rest of her life. The eight boys opted for a **millstone** on their coat of arms ■

2. ► Time

According to Czech and German historians, the “legend of the milestone” is dated from **1081** (Sinapius, Hellbach, Hefner, Grässe, Sedláček, Heber).

During medieval times, the regions of Bohemia and Silesia were far from being stable. A fragmentation into many independent feudal entities and a complex vassal hierarchy did not help to build peace. Since the late 10th c., the Czech Přemyslid dynasty and the Polish Piast dynasty had been fighting for domination over a territory with fluctuant borders. This confrontation did not end before 1137.

The second half of the 11th c. was punctuated by a succession of disputes, wars, reconciliation and confrontation between the Dukes of Poland and Bohemia. According to their respective interests, this chaotic situation was alternately encouraged, opposed or arbitrated by Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV and Ladislaus I, King of Hungary.

During this time, the German cultural and ethnic influence increased in both Bohemia and Silesia. A massive immigration of German-speaking population contributed to alter the regional balance. This fact explains the *germanization* of many names and places.

Year 1081 in a nutshell

- Władysław I Herman, Duke of Poland, has married the daughter of Duke Vratislaus II of Bohemia. He will become King of Poland in 1085.
- Vratislaus II, Duke of Bohemia, supports the successful military campaign of Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV in Italy. He will become the first King of Bohemia in 1085.
- William the Conqueror is reigning in Britain.
- In France, King Philippe August was crowned the previous year.
- In Spain, King Alfonso VI wages a war of reconquest against local Muslim emirates.
- from Roma, Pope Gregory VII reforms the Church and imposes the pre-eminence of spiritual power in Europe.
- Refusing the *Gregorian reforms*, Henry V, Holy Roman Emperor is excommunicated for the second time.

3. ► Heroes

According to Czech and German heraldists, the legend relates to a noble gentleman named **Dobrohost**. He is the father of the 9 babies born the same day.

There is no details about him but we read that he also used the name **Vaitminar** (§Sedláček), a name later used by **Beneš of Weitmühle** (†1496), Mint Master of the Kingdom of Bohemia and hero of *Králův mincmistr* a modern opera created in Prague in 1936 and 1955.

In the legend, we read that Lord Dobrohost is back from **Vyšehrad** where he visited his suzerain **Duke Vratislaus**. There is no indication regarding the rank of this but this visit highlights a prominent position.



Hochmeister with the blazon of Bohemia - Card game from the court of Ladislaus "Postumus" (d. 1457), Duke of Austria, King of Hungary and Bohemia. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien



HERALDRY



A member of the Přemyslid dynasty, **Vratislaus** (1032-1092) was **Duke of Bohemia** (1061–1092). He received the honorific non-hereditary title of King Vratislaus II in 1085. In 1062, Vratislaus married Swatawa of Poland, a daughter of Duke Casimir I of Poland. Their three sons were successively Duke of Bohemia from 1100 to 1140.



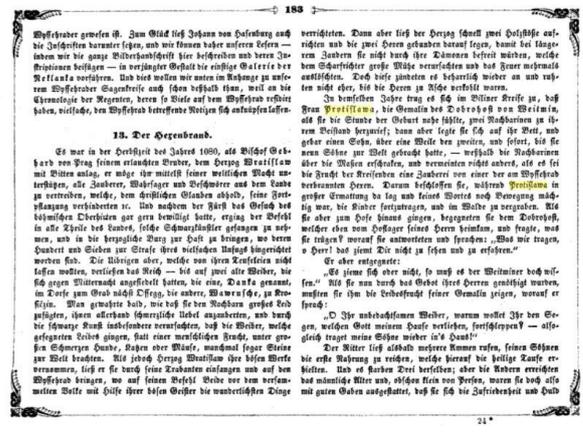
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In the book *Böhmens Burgen, Vesten und Bergschlösser*, Franz Alexander Heber confirms the time (year 1081), the place (Biliner Kreise) and names (Lord Dobrohost von Weitmin and his wife Protislawa). However, he doesn't mention the millstone story.

In Heber gives **Protislawa** a neutral role in the story. She doesn't mock a poor woman with twin babies. Laying in her bed and exhausted by the multiple births of her nine sons, she cannot react to the decision of the two old women.



Women from Bohemia, miniature from the Chronicle of Ulrico di Richentala - Czech Republic 16th



Translation

"In the same year it happened in the Bilin region that Frau Protislawa, the wife of Dobrohost von Weitmin, when she felt her hour of to give birth was near, called two neighbours to her assistance. While she laid on her bed and gave birth to a son, after a short a while came a second, until she had given birth to nine sons. The two neighbours were scared and thought that the fruit this curse was launched by a witch in Vyšehrad. That is why they decided, while Protislawa lay there in great exhaustion and quite unable to speak, to carry the children away and to bury them in the forest. But when they were on their way, they met the Lord Dobrohost, who had just come from his master's court. He asked what they were carrying. To which they answered and said: "*What we carry, O Lord! that is not fit for you to see and experience.*"

But he replied:

"*Fitting or not, the Master must know it.*" When they were now compelled by the command of their master, they had to show him the fruits from the womb of his wife, whereupon he said:

"*O you thoughtless women, why do you want to take away the evidence that God sent a blessing in my house? - so take my sons back in the house!*"

The Master immediately asked several wet nurses to give his sons the first food, then they received the holy baptism. Three of them died but the others reached the adult age. Although they were small in size, they were endowed with good gifts, which were appreciated and acknowledged by all. With them, the Weitminer name increased in goodness and honour.

Source: Franz Alexander Heber - *Böhmens Burgen, Vesten und Bergschlösser* (1844) - [page 183-184.](#)

4. ► Location

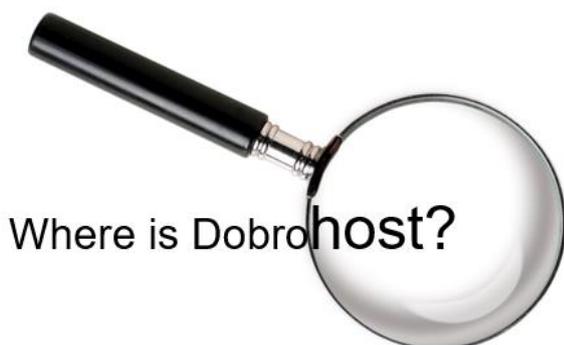
Historians give no detail regarding the location of the legend. The story is generally located either in **Bohemia** (today in Czech Republic) or in **Silesia** (today in Poland). This uncertainty reflects the complex history of the region during early medieval periods as mentioned previously.

The name Dobrohost might refer a place. There are two **Dobrohošť** village in Bohemia (also another one in Slovakia). While this place is indeed in the region of interest, the history of these villages do not mention the millstone legend.

Some Polish heraldists have a dissident opinion and locate the legend in Silesia. Kaspar Nieciecki (1738) specifies the existence of a *Kuřaba* family „na Śląsku” in Silesia. German historian Johann Sinapius (1720) locates the legend in Radoschow, a Polish village in Silesia. Franz Alexander Heber (1844) reports the legend in the **Biliner Kreise**.



Biliner Kreise refers **Bílina** (Bilin in German), a Czech city in north-western Bohemia. Sometime at the end of the 10th century, the Přemyslid administrative castle was built here, which has been preserved in the form of terrain relics in the chateau garden above the town.



Where is Dobrohost?

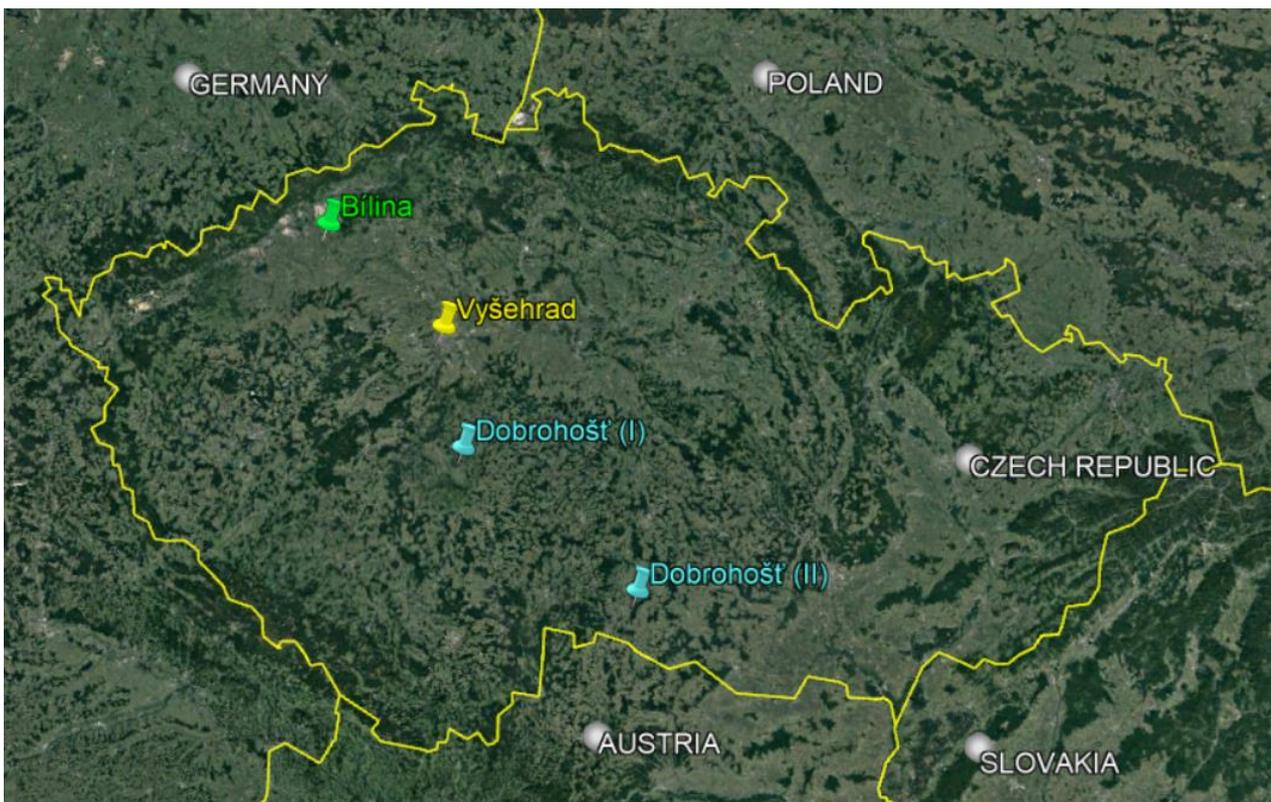
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Wischerad is Vyšehrad, a fortress founded in the first half of the 10th c. south of Prague Castle. The prince and first Bohemian **King Vratislaus II** (1035-1092) moved his residence from Prague Castle to Vyšehrad around 1070. The legend is reported from the year 1081. Photo: Vyšehrad in 1420.



HERALDRY



Bohemia (Bohémský in Czech, Böhmen in German) is today mostly in the Czech Republic. The Central European position of this region was a source of prosperity but also of envy from neighbouring countries. Hence the wars waged by the Přemyslid dynasty to protect territorial domination.

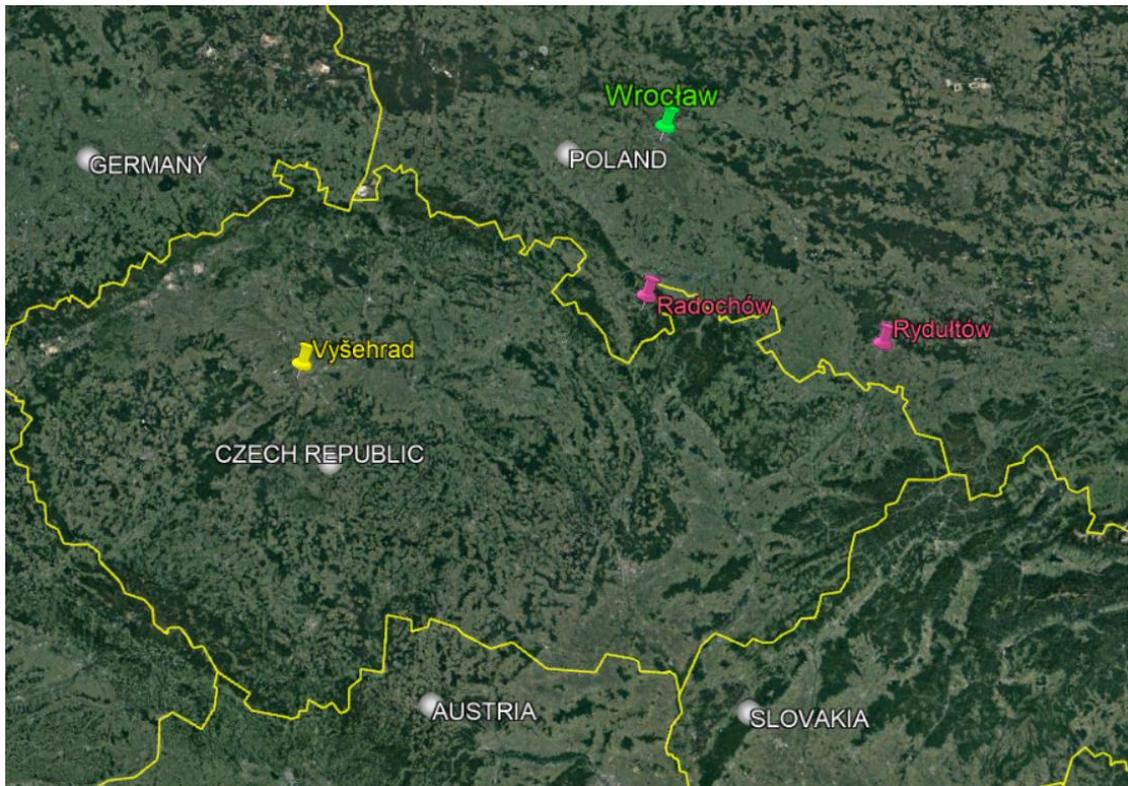


(I) Dobrohošť' (Dobrohoscht in German) is a hamlet in Bohemia, today integrated in the village of Kosova Hora. Located in the Příbram district, this place is some 60 km away from Vyšehrad. In 1081, such distance was considerable and would require a minimum 2-day horse ride.



(II) Dobrohošť' (Dobrohost in German) is a village located in Southern Bohemia. Unfortunately, this village is too far from Vyšehrad (170 km). Moreover, the local History does not mention the millstone legend or the presence of a Lord with this name.

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Silesia (Śląsk in Polish / Schlesien in German) was a very prosperous region in medieval times. Wrocław was a prominent market in central Europe, with a cultural influence that spread across borders.



Radochów (Reyersdorf in German) is a Polish village located in Lower Silesia, a few kilometres from the Czech border. However, the first mention of this village dates back 1362, almost two centuries after the millstone legend/ Moreover, this place is much too far from Wischerad (134 km).

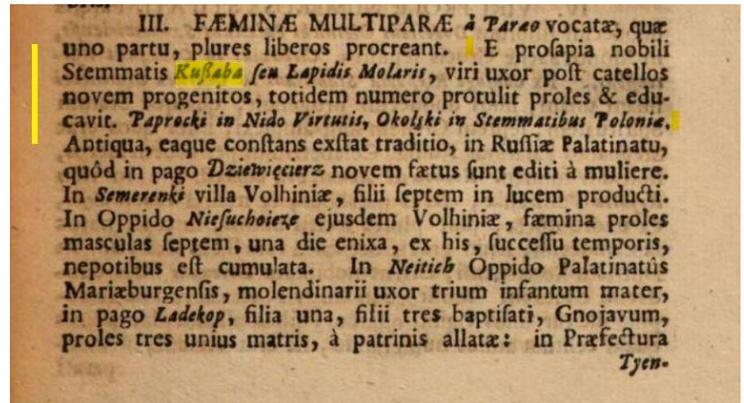


Another place of interest in Silesia might be Rydułtów (Rydultau in German). This town has changed names several times in history. Local historians note the use of **Radoszów** in 1830 and 1845, when Silesia region was under Prussian rule. However, there is no mention of this village before 1228. Today, Radochów is still in use as the name of a neighbourhood in Rydułtów.

5. ► Multiple Birth

The reading of the legend highlight some relevant facts: Protislawa, the mother, lays in bed after the birth of nine babies nonuplets). She is so weak that she cannot react to the decision of the two attending old women. The eight new-born babies are so small that they are packed into a box. Later, the six who survive have a small size. Undoubtedly, this story reflects the reality of a multiple birth.

The most recent recorded nonuplets were born in May 2021: 5 girls and 4 boys weighing between 500g and 1 kg at birth, from a Malian mother who gave birth by c. section in Morocco.



In 1735, Gabriel Rzączyński mentions the multiple birth of nine babies in the noble family **Kußaba** in his book *Curious History of the Natural History of Poland, of Great Ducat the annexed provinces of Lithuania*.

Source : *Auctarium Historiæ naturalis curiosæ regni Poloniæ* (1735) - De feminis multiparis in Punctum X - [page 439](#).



6. ► Miller

The legend doesn't provide details about the miller who take care of the eight babies until they are adults. Still, many elements shape a relevant environment for this role. In the Polish legend, the babies are taken to be drown in the river. Their father save them and asks the miller to protect and nurture them. There is little doubt that the miller was living nearby, working in a watermill.

During the medieval period, paysans had the obligation to pay a feudal duty (usage fees) to the landlord for the compulsory use of the local mill. The miller was in charge of implementing this de facto monopoly. The local lord owned the mill and the miller was a free tenant.

During the medieval period, watermills dominated the landscape. In Central Europe, windmill were not introduced before the 16th c.

The miller had a special position in the social hierarchy of the village. He had some basic skills in reading and counting. He also had basic technical knowledge for the maintenance of a system. In a rural world where 90% of the population lived in serfdom, the miller was respected. He had the authority of a notable and he was frequently a member of local councils. In this regards, the choice of the miller as foster father for eight babies from the gentry makes sense.



Further reading

[From Bohemia to Poland](#)

[Beyond the Legend](#)

[Symbols behind Names](#)

