CHAPTER TWO

Writing Women Out: Amazons and Barbarians

Well into his history of the Goths, Jordanes, the sixth-century author who claims to be summarizing a lost history by Cassidorus, enters a long excursus on the valor of Gothic women who, according to his tale, were actually the Amazons. He explains that after their menfolk had left on a military expedition, they were drawn into battle by neighbors.[1] Having been taught by their men, they strongly resisted and defeated the enemy. Emboldened by their victory, they chose two among them, Lampeto and Marpesia, as leaders. While Lampeto remained to defend the borders of their own *patria* (a peculiar choice of words under the circumstances), Marpesia led her army of women to conquer Asia. Then follows a long account drawn primarily from Orosius and Justin of the deeds of the Amazons up to the time of Alexander the Great. Jordanes breaks off this narrative abruptly, however, to ask, "Why does an account concerning the men of the Goths pay so much attention to women?"[2] This is indeed an interesting question, but Jordanes himself provides no answer: instead he returns to the great and praiseworthy deeds of men.

Rather than following Jordanes, let us reflect on his question and ask what Amazons are doing not only in this early and widely influential account of the origin of a people but also, as a second point of reference, in the early-twelfth-century account

of the origins of the Czechs by Cosmas of Prague.[3] Indeed, Amazons seem to be an integral part of the account of origins of European peoples from at least the sixth to the twelfth centuries. Although most prominent in Jordanes and in Cosmas, they are also present in Paul the Deacon's account of the Lombards,[4] they appear in passing in the so-called *Chronicle of Fredegar*,[5] they are present in Bede's *History of the English Church and People*,[6] and in Adam of Bremen's account of the bishops of Hamburg,[7] and in other origins of medieval peoples. In later, vernacular texts such as those of the Alexander legends, they were stock figures in accounts of antiquity. Our question is, "Why are Amazons an integral part of the origins of peoples?"

Amazons as Goths

Walter Goffart has a simple answer to their presence in Jordanes: Amazons in Jordanes are mostly there for comic relief.[8] Additionally, since he envisions Jordanes's history of the Goths as actually a love story about the marriage of Goths (the female) and Romans (the male) to create a new, unified people, the Amazon strain in the Goths must be extinguished for them to revert to their proper femininity.

An alternative response, not as naive as it may sound, is that there actually were female warriors among the barbarian peoples encountered by the Romans and Byzantines. Thus, as good ethnographers, Roman and post-Roman authors simply described them. We mustn't dismiss this possibility out of hand: Not only do Amazons figure prominently in classical ethnographic accounts and origin legends from the time of Herodotus through the Middle Ages, but Roman accounts of campaigns against Celtic and Germanic enemies regularly mention women on the battlefield. Later, Avar and Slavic armies reportedly included women.[9] Warrior women figure in vernacular oral traditions and

emerge in both Scandinavian literature and in Middle High German texts such as the *Nibelungenlied* and histories such as Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum.*[10] Finally, archaeological evidence of women buried with weapons occurs widely. In Sauromatian-Sarmatian burials from the sixth to fourth centuries B.C.E., archaeologists have found tombs of women buried with swords and daggers and at least one skeleton of a young woman bow-legged apparently from riding, supplied with a quiver containing forty bronze-tipped arrows, an iron dagger, and hanging around her neck, a leather pouch containing a bronze arrowhead.[11] From the early Middle Ages, some sixteen Avar women's graves were excavated in southern Slovakia that contained none of the usual female ornaments and grave goods but instead horses, normally typical of high-status men.[12] Such finds have led historians and archaeologists to conclude that women in nomadic societies may well have had a military role that led to or reinforced legends of Amazon warrior maidens.

But even if women warriors existed among some barbarian peoples, this is insufficient reason for their considerable place in accounts of the origins of peoples. It is one thing to say that a phenomenon existed. It is quite another to say why of all of the phenomena that existed, one is singled out for extensive description and discussion. Thus, bracketing the question of evidence of the real existence of warrior women, we must ask what our authors were doing with this image in their texts.

Here Walter Goffart was correct to observe that gendered language is part of a wider strategy that is part of an argument, not merely a description. However, Jordanes's argument depended on a received tradition that had already established Amazons as Goths. Yet, Jordanes did not share the ideological perspective that caused this identification in the first place, and thus his report of these warrior women fits awkwardly into his narrative. He isn't sure why they are there himself, as evidenced by both his question and his abrupt abandonment of the Gothic

Amazons. Here he is faithful to a tradition that he does not understand. Subsequent medieval authors such as Cosmas, writing about the origins of peoples, will restore meaning to such accounts, drawing both on Jordanes and on the earlier classical traditions of Amazons to redefine the meaning of these women warriors in the prehistory of their peoples. Our first question then is to understand how Amazons became Goths in the first place, to answer the question Jordanes could not. In other words, how did Amazons appear in barbarian history, and how did they disappear?

As Walter Pohl has remarked, the legend of the Amazons, for all its popularity in traditional historiography, enjoys no fixed meaning: its ambiguity and its inner contradictions kept the story alive, so that many texts are in fact polyphonic and contain traces of controversy on the subject.[13]

One should add that the ambiguity and contradictions of the story also facilitated its strategic employment as a means to address other, even troubling and controversial issues, particularly concerning gender relationships. This can be observed at two key moments in the development of Amazons within European origin myths, the moment when the Amazons became Goths, and the moment when Bohemians became Amazons.

Jordanes had to write about Amazons because he knew, from his reading of the *Historia Augusta* or of others who had read it, as well as from Orosius, that the Amazons were in fact Goths.[14] From the time of Herodotus, Amazons were a stock element in any ethnographic account. For these early historians and ethnographers, however, they existed at the beginning of history, or perhaps just before the beginning of history.[15] They existed on the margins not only of time but also of space: they were initially relegated to distant Anatolia near the river Thermodon, or else in Libya, Thrace, and western Asia Minor, regions peripheral to the Greek world. Interestingly, they were both ferocious warriors and founders of cities. Their story was regularly used to empha-

size the failure of men to act properly and the need to reassert appropriate hierarchy: the battle with the Amazons, the *Amazonomachia*, was a violent and erotic restoration of order. However, the existence of the Amazons, and their reappearance in heroic accounts from Heracles to Alexander, perhaps indicated the continuing struggle within Greek society both against the monstrous disorder that a society of warrior women represented and against the equally monstrous solution of female annihilation.

By the third century, however, the chronological and spatial distance separating civilization from a world in which such monstrous women could exist was closing fast. According to the *Historia Augusta*, it closed completely in 271 when Aurelian's legions, crossing the Danube in pursuit of the Goths, killed the Gothic king along with five thousand of his warriors and returned to Rome with Gothic prisoners.[16] The *Historia* continues that in 274, when Aurelian organized his triumph after having reunited the two halves of the empire, he included in the triumph, along with captive rebels and barbarians from the far corners of the realm, "ten women who, dressed in male attire, had been captured fighting among the Goths, after many had died, and whom a placard indicated to be of the gens of the Amazons—for placards indicting the names of their peoples were carried before all."[17]

The vivid description of Aurelian's triumph, which unfortunately Michael McCormick tells us is quite implausible, at least in the extraordinary detail recorded in the *Historia Augusta*, presents the "smoking gun": Gothic women, captured in battle, explicitly identified as living members of the *Gens Amazonum*.[18] What else was Jordanes/Cassiodorus, who knew the text, to think?

But we need to ask what Aurelian, or rather perhaps the author of the *Historia*, was saying with these Amazons. Why should they appear now? We must remember that while we may be interested in the ten Amazons in the triumph, they were only a

sideshow in what is, in the account, an enormous spectacle: three royal chariots, twenty elephants, four tigers, giraffes, eight hundred pairs of gladiators, and captive barbarians including Blemmyes, Axomitae, Arabs, Indians, Bactrians, Hibverians, Saracens, Persians, Goths, Alans, Roxolani, Sarmatians, Franks, Suebians, Vandals, and Germans. But the real prizes were Tetricus and his son, the Gallic emperors defeated by Aurelian shortly before, a defeat that ended a long-lasting division of the empire in the west, and, most important, Zenobia, the ruler of Palmyra and the military genius who had led the most successful separatist movement in Roman history. Aurelian's defeat of Tetricus had been a walk in the park: Tetricus could barely maintain his control even while Aurelian was busy in the east, and he surrendered to him quickly when Aurelian turned his attention to the west. But Zenobia was something else: here was a real Amazon queen in all but name. The second wife of Odaenathus of Palmyra, after her husband's death she assumed power in the name of her infant son. She defeated a Roman army sent by Emperor Gallienus and then went on to conquer Syria, Bostra, Egypt, and most of Asia Minor. At first Aurelian had accepted this as a fait accompli, but in 271 Zenobia proclaimed her son Augustus, formally splitting the empire. She destroyed the first army sent against her and finally could be defeated and conquered only by Aurelian himself. She was a warrior who had ruled, according to the *Historia augusta*, "not in feminine fashion or with the ways of a woman, but surpassing in courage and skill, not merely Gallienus, than whom any girl could have ruled more successfully, but also many an emperor . . . Zenobia was ruling Palmyra and most of the East with the vigour of a man."[19]

The author of the *Historia* employs Zenobia in the way that other authors had for centuries used Amazons: the strength of Amazons is the direct result of the failure of men. Concerning Gallienus he writes: "Now all shame is exhausted, for in the weakened state of the commonwealth things came to such a pass

that, while Gallienus conducted himself in the most evil fashion, even women ruled most excellently."[20] In the words of Edmond Frézouls, "Rome had reached bottom: the age of Gallienus was the age of sub-men and of Amazons."[21] Nor was Zenobia the only woman whose martial abilities and ambitions shamed the male commanders. The *Historia augusta* asserts that it was Victoria, the widow of the Gallic Emperor Victorinus, who had put Tetricus up to the emperorship in Gaul. The author even claimed that Zenobia told Aurelian that she had written to Victoria, suggesting a partnership in power: a woman ruling the east and another the west. Victoria had died prior to Aurelian's campaign in the west, so she could not be paraded along with Zenobia and the Amazons. Still, the *Historia* presents Aurelian's victory over women in the east, west, and, with the Gothic Amazons, center, in a manner consistent with Aurelian's official title, *Restitutor Orbis*. Restitution of the world means the restitution not only of rebellious provinces of the empire and the defeat of barbarian neighbors: it means the restitution of the proper power relations between men and women. Just as the rule by women had been a sign of the shame into which the empire had fallen, the sight of Amazons and Zenobia in chains meant the restoration of the world. Thus did the Amazons become Goths.

The Amazons and Goths continued to be closely identified in the fifth century, although within a Christian tradition the age of the Amazons did not necessarily mean a time of male weakness. Orosius, writing his apologetic histories, understood the Amazons as Goths, inserting a standard version of their history taken largely from Justinus, the author of what might be called the best-selling Western Civilization textbook in late antiquity.[22] Here they begin as Scythian women whose husbands have been slaughtered by their neighbors. They conquer almost all of Europe and Asia. However, unlike the author of the *Historia augusta*, Orosius breaks with the traditional use of powerful

women such as Amazons, namely to emphasize the failure of men to rule with appropriate strength. Indeed, he is even willing to attribute a positive role to Gallia Placidia, the sister of the Emperor Honorius captured by the Goths, in bringing about peace between the barbarians and Romans.[23] In keeping with the polemical direction of his whole work, he connects the power of the Amazons to the blindness of paganism:

> O Grief! The shame of human error! Women, fleeing from their native land, entered, overran, and destroyed Europe and Asia. . . . The blame for the oppression of the times was nevertheless not to be imputed to the utter worthlessness of men.[24]

Rather than evidence of male failure, Amazons are one more symptom of the evils of paganism. Even though he is writing after the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410, his presentation of the Goths of his time is of a mild, relatively pacific people compared with their Amazon ancestors. He contrasts the violence of the Amazons to the recent settlement of Goths within the empire, "those men whose wives had destroyed the greater part of the earth with measureless slaughter."[25]

By the sixth century then, Jordanes/Cassidorus, writing about the Goths, had to include the Amazons. However, they had lost the meanings that they had had for earlier authors. Jordanes had no interest in Aurelian and the ideological position of the *Historia augusta.* Nor does he continue the classical tradition of using Amazons to emphasize the degeneracy of male authority in the past. At the same time, he is not contrasting pagan and Christian values as was Orosius. But because he found Amazons among the Goths, just as he had found them among Orosius's Scythians, they had to appear in his history of the Goths.[26] Here again they arise because of a vacuum of male leadership. However, the men are away on an expedition, not annihilated by their neighbors. While the Gothic army is away, a neighboring people

attempts to carry off their women. The rest of his account closely follows Orosius and Justinus but necessarily becomes lost in the history of the Goths. Amazons do not, after all, make for good ancestors, as they either kill or send away their male offspring.[27] Jordanes thus cannot bring his Gothic Amazons into the origins of the Goths again. After his abrupt question of why he is even writing about them, he abandons them for the rest of his text.

Jordanes's Amazons remain a largely unintegrated element in his history of the Goths. But through his text, and through similar use of his sources, Amazons reappear in a wide spectrum of subsequent histories of peoples. They do so, however, as in Jordanes, at the beginning, or even before the beginning, of the people, and their defeat or destruction marks the beginning or reconstitution of the proper order of the world.

Czechs as Amazons

The place of Amazons in the origin account of the Bohemians or Czechs illustrates the increasing complexity of the subsequent instrumentalization of the topos of early Amazons in the early history of a people. By the time that Cosmas of Prague wrote his Bohemian chronicle at the start of the twelfth century, Amazons had become necessary characters in virtually any prehistory of a people. Cosmas however, unlike Jordanes, restores them to their antique role of social criticism, but with a unique twist.

The whole chronicle follows the history of Bohemia and its Premysl dynasty until the year of Cosmas's death, 1125.[28] It begins, in a manner common to other such histories, with the story of the tower of Babel, and then moves to Europe and a region he calls *Germania*, flowing with milk and honey but devoid of people. The first humans to enter the region are lead by Boemus, after whom his followers name the region. The first

generations lived in a prelapsarian paradise, when no one knew the word *meum* but only *nostrum.*[29] This was also an age of gender equality:

> At that time the virgins of this land came to maturity without control [*sine iugo*] and carried arms like Amazons and, choosing commanders for themselves, fought just like young male soldiers and penetrated into the forests to hunt in a manly way, and they did not allow themselves to be chosen by men, but they chose whom and when they wanted, and like the Scythians men and women did not wear different dress."[30]

This paradise did not last, and communal property ceded to private, as conflict and injustice entered this society. Still, there were neither judges nor princes, and when people had conflicts, they spontaneously brought them to those persons who were in morals and honor deemed to be the greater. Among these was one Crocco, whose reputation for dispute settlement was such that people from far and near came to him to settle their conflicts. At his death Crocco left no sons, but rather three daughters. And here our story begins.

The first two daughters were Kazi and Tetka. Kazi was another Media of Kolchis, universally acclaimed for her skills with plants and medicinal incantations.[31] Tetka, the second daughter, was equally praised for her sharp intelligence.[32] However, she taught the ignorant people to adore deities and instituted sacrilegious rites. The youngest daughter, Libuše, was the most marvelous of the three: wise in council, powerful in speech, chaste in body, outstanding in morals, second to none in her concern for justice, affable to all, a glory and decoration of the female sex. But, Cosmas adds, "since no one is in every way good, this praiseworthy woman—oh sad human estate—was a *phitonissa*, that is, a seer.[33]

Libuše is a complex character who both fascinates and repels Cosmas. She was so universally beloved that she was made the judge of all quarrels. But it happened that two wealthy men came

before her to settle a property dispute. She lay, "as is the wanton softness of women when they do not have a man whom they might fear, on her elbow on her soft and richly decorated bed."[34] She judged the case justly without regard to the persons, and gave her verdict. The one who lost, however, complained that it was an intolerable injury that a woman should render justice. "We know that a woman, either standing or seated on a throne understands little, so how much less must she understand lying in a bed. A bed is more suited to receiving a husband than speaking martial justice." He goes on to exclaim that it would be better for men to die than to accept female rule and that such as they, meaning the Czechs, are cut off from other nations and peoples because they lack a ruler and virile severity.[35]

Libuše, hiding her shame and anger, admitted that she was and would remain a woman and that since she did not judge them with an iron rod, and since they did not live in terror, they rightly despised her. "For where there is fear, there is honor. Now you need a rector who is stronger than a woman."[36] With this she sent them home and told them that whomever they would choose the next day as lord, she would accept as husband. But that night she called together her two sisters to divine the future by their magical arts. The next day, after she had warned the people of the dangers of having a duke ("O you unfortunate people, who do not know how to live free, and that no good person loses freedom except along with life"), she continues her famous caution against princes, largely drawn from the first book of Kings and from Sallust; extols the value of liberty; and catalogs the impositions and demands that would be made by a ruler on their sons and daughters, even on the livestock.[37] Yet, the people persist in their demand for a duke, and she indicates to them that they will find a man in the village of Staditz on the banks of the Bila, plowing with two oxen. This man, whose name was Premysl, would be the first of the Premysl dynasty. "His name in Latin means thinking thoughts out or outsmarting. His

children will rule all this land forever and beyond."[38] Emissaries did as they were told, found Premysl, and brought him back to marry Libuše, assume the position of duke, and, again through her prophetic powers, identify and found the city of Prague.

Cosmas's text has long been the object of scholarly attention, either as evidence of pre-Christian Slavic religion, of distant memories of matriarchy among the west Slavs, or simply as an elaborate critique of the Czech dukes of Cosmas's time.[39] One can also ask about the extent to which this account reflects social and cultural reality: some see the account of Libuše as confirming that female seers accompanied Slavic armies in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This is certainly not impossible, as one accompanied a Polish army as late as 1209.[40] Were there women warriors in Slavic or other Central and Eastern European societies? As fascinating as these questions about the reflection of reality in the text may be, they are not ours. Instead, our purpose is to consider how Cosmas attempts to make sense of inherited traditions, whether Czech and local or classical and universal; how his text is a sort of midrash, searching out the meaning of Libuše for his day and his audience.

If the much-debated *Legenda Christiani* indeed dates from the tenth century, then Cosmas may be elaborating on a tradition at least two hundred years old. According to this text, the Slavs of Bohemia lived like an unbridled horse, without law, prince, or city until, stricken by a plague, they turned to a certain *phitonissa* for divination and advice. Having received her counsel, they established the city of Prague. Then, still following her advice, they found a wise and prudent man named Premysl, whose occupation was agriculture, and appointed him prince or ruler, joining him in matrimony to the *phitonissa.*[41]

If this was the bare tradition received by Cosmas, we can follow how he transformed it, elaborating a story that preserved its essentials while transforming the meaning into a commentary on the relationship between ruler and people. Central to this

transformation is Libuše, a carefully constructed figure whose story is deeply informed by Cosmas's reading of classical texts, among them Ovid, Horace, Stacius, Virgil, and the Bible (especially the Acts of the Apostles and the critique of kingship in the first book of Kings), but also Boethius, Sedulius, Regino of Prüm, and other early medieval authors.[42] Cosmas's Libuše is not a naively reported figure from Slavic folklore: whatever her distant origins, in his text she recalls in particular the female judges of the Bible—especially Deborah, "who used to sit under a palm tree and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment—and at the same time a *phitonissa*, or medium. Again, this tradition is complex and recalls both the Sybiline oracles and the *phitonissa* to whom a desperate King Saul turned for knowledge of the future. The resulting image is anything but the simple reporting of traditions concerning Libuše and Premysl.

Clearly, he is extremely ambivalent about Libuše. On the one hand she is the paragon of female virtue and demonstrates herself superior to the men of her time. She is, with Premysl, the ancestor of the Bohemian dukes, including Duke Vladislav I (1109–17 and 1120–25). Her judgment, like her prognostications, is true. And yet, he constantly disparages her softness, her lack of a male to control her, and most significantly he characterizes her and her sisters as furies. They practice the magic arts, and she is, he says twice, a *phitonissa*, a seer. He compares her to the Cumaean Sybil.[43]

The term *phitonissa* is perhaps the way into a deeper understanding of the tensions and problems within the person of Cosmas's Libuše. *Phitonissa* is a medieval variant of *pythonissa*, a term derived from Pythia, the high priestess who uttered the responses of the Delphic Apollo. She was in term named for the Python, the vast serpent slain near Delphi by Apollo and well known to Cosmas from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Like Hercules' Scythian consort or Melusine, the snake woman who is the

mother of the Lusignan family, there is perhaps something serpentine about her.

Moreover, the choice of *phitonissa*, rather than the more positive *prophetessa* or some more classical choice such as *vates*, has a specific resonance: the term is postclassical. It first appears in Jerome's translation of the *Vulgate* and refers to the medium consulted by King Saul in 1 Chronicles 10, 13, referred to as a *mulier habens pythonum* in 1 Samuel 28, that is, a woman possessed. But is Libuše possessed? Cosmas does not explicitly say so. However, like the Hebrew medium who summons the ghost of the prophet Samuel, Libuše, as a wielder of magical arts, is a transgressor of divine order intimately involved with kingship and royal succession. And yet, like Libuše, the *pythonissa* summoned by Saul is not an altogether negative figure: first she attempts to refuse the royal request, just as Libuše attempted to reject the people's demand that she find them a duke. After Saul faints from hunger and fear at the announcement of his imminent death, she kills her fatted calf for him and cajoles him into taking some nourishment. Peter Damien, in a letter to Abbot Desiderius of Montecassino, praises the *phitonissa* (he uses the same rare spelling as Cosmas) for returning good for evil.[44]

Moreover, both women prophesy the truth: the spirit of Samuel (or rather, according to most medieval commentators, a phantasm of Samuel) accurately predicts the death of Saul the next day. Libuše too predicts the truth: she finds the future duke, the city of Prague, and even foresees the Bohemian saints Wenceslas and Adalbert.[45] She exercises occult powers, but she does so with justice and in pursuit of truth. This paradox of female authority that is somehow illegitimate (or perhaps paralegitimate) and yet positive hovers over Cosmas's whole chronicle.

At the same time that Libuše is arranging the future of the Premysls and founding Prague, the Bohemian Amazons are establishing nearby their own city, Devin, the city of the virgins. The young men, unable to conquer the city by force, resort to

stealth: under the guise of peace they enter the city of the virgins for a feast but in the night rise up, rape and carry off the girls, and burn Devin.

Significantly, as Herwig Wolfram has pointed out,[46] the foundation account ends with the defeat and capture of the warrior maidens by the young men and concludes: "And from that time forward, after the death of Princess Libuše, our women are subject to the authority of men."[47] In a very real sense, then, Libuše and the Amazons belong not to the history of the Bohemian lands but to their prehistory. Her death and their defeat are preconditions for the start of history.

However, Cosmas's emplotment of the Amazons does not simply adopt the classical tradition on which it draws. Unlike the *Amazonomachia*—or indeed the grizzly slaughter in the Czech language, the *Dalimil Chronicle* of 1314—the violence is restrained: the Amazons are not killed; they are married, albeit with the violence of rape. The foundation of male rule is thus more reminiscent of the Roman rape of the Sabine women than the destruction of the Amazons. Nor is Libuše destroyed or even condemned. Her power may be suspect, but she works for the good of society. This is in a real sense Cosmas's dilemma: woman's power may not conform to the proper order of the world, but it both can be potent and can advance the cause of justice.

This is the same dilemma that he faces when dealing with the most powerful woman of his day. For just as the author of the *Historia Augusta* wrote of Amazons when he really was concerned about the queen of Palmyra, when Cosmas wrote about Libuše and the Bohemian Amazons, he was reflecting on Mathilda of Tuscany, another woman who exercised judgment and settles disputes in his chronicle.[48] Cosmas's description of her could almost fit Libuše: she rules Lombardy and Burgundy after the death of her father, "having the power to elect and to enthrone or to dismiss 120 bishops."[49] Not only was Mathilda the woman who most famously brought about the temporary recon-

ciliation of Pope Gregory VII and Emperor Henry IV at Canossa, but equally important from Cosmas's perspective, she reconciled Cosmas's patron Bishop Jaromir of Prague (d. 1090) and his brother the duke and later King Vratislav (1061–92) and brought about the former's restoration to his see. Here, as in the case of Libuše, Cosmas confronts the positive effects of female power. At the same time, he reports an apocryphal story in which Mathilda is accused of using *malificium* to prevent Duke Welf of Suabia from performing his marital duties on their wedding night. Again, one sees the uneasy combination of virtue and magic.[50]

However, in Cosmas's text, Libuše and the Amazons are much more than simply figures of Mathilda. Unlike Jordanes, Cosmas, well educated in the classical tradition at Liège, understood that Amazons flourish in times when men are not ruling as they should. And yet his point about Libuše and the Amazons is not to characterize simply the necessary dominance of men even over competent, virtuous women but rather to gender the Bohemian people as feminine and thus in need of a strong ruler. The age of Libuše prefigures the future relationship between the Bohemian populace and its dukes: lordship is harsh, its powers coercive and destructive. And yet without lords, societies, like women without husbands, are prey to their own weaknesses. Even the best woman must cede power to men; even the Bohemians must accept the power of their dukes.

Still, Cosmas is no run of the mill medieval misogynist. Libuše may represent the need of the Bohemians for ducal control, but she remains both a figure of justice and guidance to her people and her husband. Just perhaps this is in part owing to Cosmas's own situation: although a canon of the Cathedral of Prague and a deacon, he was married and had at least one son, Henry. His wife Bozeteha died in 1117 shortly before he finished the first section of his chronicle, and he remembered her in book 3 as "the inseparable companion in all my undertakings."[51] Of course, before we assume this to be simply the outpouring of his

grief and recognition of his wife's equality and companionship, we must recognize that the line is itself a reminiscence of a poem attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine that begins: "Age iam precor mearum comes irremota rerum."[52] Thus his wife, no less than Libuše, becomes an intertextual reference. And yet in the crafting of this epitaph, no less than in the crafting of his women at the beginning of his chronicle, we can recognize an elderly man using gendered categories to criticize his contemporaries, warn his ruler, and remember his wife.

In conclusion, we see how malleable was the motif of Amazons at the origins of peoples: Although firmly established as part of the prehistory of peoples, what this prehistory meant could change. It could be employed to criticize weak lordship, but it could also criticize a society that because of its failings needed stern authority. As its uses shifted with different social and cultural motivations, the texture of misogyny also varied: Cosmas is much less unambiguously opposed to the public role of women than most previous or subsequent authors. His powerful women belonged, unlike those of the third century, to a world that was genuinely attractive even if it, in the end, had to be destroyed in order for divinely willed order to be created.

Libuše and the Czech Amazons may have been legendary, but not only legendary women could be relegated to the prehistory of families and dynasties. The following chapter traces the progressive effacement of two very real and very powerful women to whom subsequent generations of males owed their status and power.