
Priest Ambrož and East-Bohemian Utraquism: Hradec and Oreb

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It is not accidental that the East-Bohemian Utraquists, the Orebiters, and Priest Ambrož have remained among unexplored subjects to whom historical scholarship continues to owe a large debt. There are several popular jubilee pieces, but no substantive monographs treating either the East-Bohemian Utraquists or Priest Ambrož. And let us say it up front - it is unlikely that treatments of such a character could in fact ever appear. There are no source materials that might offer more detailed knowledge. Moreover, no theological writings or sermons have survived, which might have been delivered either by Ambrož or by one of his associates.

My task here is to recapture Ambrož's personality, to note the known episodes of his biography, and to analyze in more detail the problems concerning his death date and the place of his burial. Shortly before his passing, Amedeo Molnár, a distinguished specialist on the Bohemian Reformation, mapped out to some extent the issues of this area in several of his articles.¹

This study will use liberally the surviving sources and quote from them. As for the leading role of Ambrož in East Bohemia's Reformation, aside from its obvious character, we shall accept Molnár's views inasmuch as there is no evidence to question his conclusions. His hypotheses concern, for instance, Ambrož's naming of a Bohemian mountain after Oreb of the Old Testament, his biblical interpretation of the wars of the Bohemian Reformation as holy wars, and his share in authoring Žižka's military ordinance. At present these hypotheses cannot be further confirmed, but new evidence may yet turn up, and in any case the assumptions appear reasonable and compatible with the context of the overall development of the Bohemian Reformation.

Our exploration might fittingly come under the heading of a "near-detective history." I will show shortly why. The principal witnesses are Vavřinec of Březová, representing a moderate wing in the Bohemian Reformation, with his *Husitská kronika* [The Hussite Chronicle],² and the several authors of the annalistic compilation, *Staré letopisy české* [Ancient Bohemian Annals].³ Both of these sources have serious limitations. Vavřinec is chronologically restricted to the period 1414-1421. Also as a moderate Utraquist, he was not wont to befriend the radicalism

1) A. Molnár, "Žižkův kněz," a series of articles in *Kostnické jiskry* 26-31 (1988).

2) Cited in this article is the second Czech trans. of the chronicle, Vavřinec of Březová, *Husitská kronika - Píseň o vítězství u Domažlic*, trans. F. Heřmanský and J. B. Čapek (Prague, 1979).

3) Following František Palacký's edition of 1829, *Staré letopisy české* appeared in several other editions, based on variant manuscripts. Specific editions will be identified in the course of this article.

of the East Bohemians, and to pay special attention to Ambrož and Hradec, or to the circumstances surrounding them. It must be said to his credit, however, that his references to these topics, albeit few, are at least unbiased. *Staré letopisy české* have come to us in several copies and redactions. The problems arising from the complicated relationships are discussed in a study of Jaroslav Kašpar.⁴ The reliability of certain specific reports in the *Staré letopisy české* is undermined by mutual contradictions, and by occasional discrepancies in dating. While such lapses are fairly common in medieval annals (for instance, in the Nestor Chronicle of Kievan Rus), their existence is particularly regrettable in Ambrož's case. Thanks to such contradictions we cannot determine even the time and the place of his death. A sober and somber appraisal of the *Staré letopisy české* states the following:

The overall balance of the evaluative assessment of the *Staré letopisy* is not particularly encouraging... as for the basic issues, including the identity of the copyists and of the original authors, we still depend largely on unsubstantiated assumptions which cannot be confirmed for lack of direct evidence.⁵

Some researchers, understandably inspired by wishful thinking, have claimed the existence of additional source material for Ambrož's Hradec and its story. Along these lines J. B. Čapek offered a daring hypothesis. According to him, a chronicle by Krušinka, the scribe of Hradec, had covered these events, and had been known to the Jesuit Bohuslav Balbín, as well as Bonaventura Pitr, a Benedictine of Rajhrad, but this key witness had suddenly disappeared - without having been published - during the period of the national awakening.⁶

And this exhausts the series of available sources. To be sure, there are scattered references to Ambrož elsewhere in literature of the Utraquist era, but they do not impart any new knowledge. They merely confirm the testimony of the "key" witnesses cited earlier.

The authors of panoramic views of the Bohemian Reformation, above all František M. Bartoš and Howard Kaminsky, have treated the topic of East Bohemian Utraquism very gingerly -- citing what was offered in the sources, but justifiably avoiding unsubstantiated hypotheses.⁷ Nevertheless, every such historian has considered it a lacuna in his work, and regretted that this intriguing subject could receive only a summary, if not a slipshod, treatment in the grand epic of the Bohemian Reformation.

Nothing is known about the personal life of Priest Ambrož prior to 1419, not even the date of his birth, or the identity or social status of his parents. Some time ago Kaminsky advanced the view that Ambrož's name first had appeared in an anonymous anti-Utraquist text, *Sermones ad Bohemos*, from 1417. Amedeo Molnár translated the text and, if Kaminsky's assumption be correct, then "Ambrož would

4) *Ze starých letopisů českých*, trans. J. Porák and J. Kašpar (Prague, 1980) 453 ff.

5) *Ibid.* 466.

6) J. B. Čapek, "K vývoji a problematice bratrstva Orebského," *Jihočeský sborník historický* 35 (1966) 92 ff.

7) František M. Bartoš, *Husitská revoluce*, v. 1: *Doba Žižkova, 1415-1426*, v. 2: *Vláda bratrstev a její pád, 1426-1437* (Prague, 1965-1966); Howard Kaminsky, *A History of the Hussite Revolution* (Berkeley, CA, 1967).

enter the stage of history as early as 1417 as an itinerant preacher of the Bohemian Reformation, and he would be traced to South Bohemia.”⁸

Likewise we lack the knowledge where Ambrož studied, who ordained him, or what his age was at ordination. We know only that in 1419 he was the pastor of the Church of the Holy Spirit in Hradec Králové, and that probably he had held this office for a year or so. In August of that year the city’s inhabitants demolished the Franciscan and the Dominican monasteries. The venting of popular wrath followed the Defenestration of Prague (30 July) and the death of King Wenceslas IV (16 August), when the nobles began negotiating with King Sigismund about the conditions for his accession to the throne of Bohemia. Vavřinec tells us that Ambrož was expelled from Hradec Králové. Since he was already in Prague in November 1419, his exile must have been connected with the August disturbances. Recording the gathering of Utraquist barons at the mountain of Kunětice, ready to conquer Hradec Králové from Sigismund in June 1420, Vavřinec notes: “And they were joined by Ambrož, a priest from Hradec [Králové], recently exiled by Queen Sophie and her officials.”⁹ In Hradec Králové there were many Teutonic aliens, a sizable patriciate, and a strong garrison of the royal castle, all of whom could have contained any popular insurgency led by Ambrož.

Some scholars – notably Frederick Heymann – have assumed that Ambrož left Hradec sometime in July even before the monasteries’ demolition, and that he helped Jan of Želiv to plan and execute the Prague Defenestration.¹⁰ This assumption, however, is not supported by any direct evidence, and the presence of a person of Ambrož’s caliber at the early stage in Prague almost certainly would not have escaped the chroniclers’ notice.

Still prior to Ambrož’s exile, the region of Hradec was affected by the vogue of “mountain pilgrimages” [*poutě na hory*] and in its case the target would be mount Oreb. Initially, the mass demonstrations expressed religious enthusiasm devoid of any military character. Hardly anybody else but Ambrož could lead the pilgrims from Hradec, or give to the promontory near Třebechovice the Old Testament name which also defined the ideology of the inspired climbers. Not surprisingly there are no records about the start of the Oreb pilgrimages inasmuch as similar peregrinations were occurring all over the Kingdom of Bohemia. The most notable one culminated in a gathering in Křížky between Prague and Benešov on 30 September 1419.

All these expeditions were to climax in a monster rally in Prague. In the city, however, the Utraquists controlled only the New Town, Queen Sophie’s royal garrison held the rest – Lesser Town, Old Town, the Castle and Vyšehrad. A part of the pilgrims aiming at Prague, those from South Bohemia, was dispersed or captured. The news of this reversal sparked an uprising in Prague. Vavřinec writes:

Later in the same year on Saturday after the feast of All Saints, or 4 November...several priests and particularly Ambrož of Hradec caused the big bells to be rung so that the people would gather to assist the pilgrims whom the royal barons and officials tried to prevent from reaching Prague. After the

8) HHR 247; Molnár, “Žižkův kněz,” *Kostnické jiskry* 31 (1988).

9) Vavřinec of Březová, *Husitská kronika* 77.

10) For instance, Frederick G. Heymann, *John Žižka and the Hussite Revolution* (New York, 1969).

crowd assembled from the Old and the New towns, the multitude commanded by Mikuláš of Hus marched to the bridge, where the royalists barred their way from the Lesser Town by a cannonade from the Prague castle, from the archbishop's palace and from the Duke of Saxony's house [near the Bridge Tower on the Lesser Town side - JBL]."¹¹

Queen Sophie did not feel safe in the Castle and, accompanied by Baron Oldřich of Rožmberk, fled from Prague. František Bartoš suggests that already during this turmoil Ambrož was surrounded by a contingent of his faithful in an embryonic preview of the Brotherhood of Oreb.¹² It is of interest that Jan Žižka of Trocnov entered the historical stage for the first time during this conflict in which he conquered Vyšehrad. The first manifestation of the Bohemian Reformation's military prowess resulted in an advantageous armistice. The royalist Lesser Town succumbed after a difficult battle of two days. *Staré letopisy české* note the following about Ambrož: "...and so, having collected the booty from the Lesser Town, the Praguers transferred it all to the New and the Old towns. And during the entire night they rang the alarm bells admonished and incited by the priests and particularly by Priest Ambrož, recently exiled from Hradec."¹³

A crusade was declared against the Bohemians in Wrocław on 17 March 1420. This event marked not only the emergence of Tábor, but also the formation of the Brotherhood of Oreb as a military organization in which Ambrož would be a major actor. It is evident that Oreb already enjoyed the stature of a site at which warriors gathered from entire East Bohemia. Vavřinec writes the following:

Afterwards, in the same period [spring of 1420 - JBL], on the initiative of Lord Hynek, known as Krušina of Kumburk, and particularly of the Priest Ambrož of Hradec, a multitude of common people gathered in the circuit of Hradec on a mountain near Třebochovice, which they called Oreb. They stormed, plundered and burnt down the well fortified monastery of Hradiště near Valenčov. Then on the feast of St. Sigismund (30 April) the host entered Prague, to assist its inhabitants, preceded by priests carrying the eucharistic body of Christ. The city of Prague welcomed them respectfully and joyfully with its own procession of participants of both genders, also carrying the body of Christ. The guests received plentiful provisions, and quarters near the Church of St. Apollinaire in order to defend the city against the garrison of Vyšehrad. In this same period the Praguers elected Lord Hynek Krušina of Kumburk as the captain who would command them in any military engagements.¹⁴

Staré letopisy české preserved virtually the same version of the events: "In the same year Lord Krušina gathered a host near Třebochovice where Priest Ambrož, Matěj Lupáč and others were also present. All of them proceeded to Mnichovo Hradiště, and having conquered, plundered, and burnt the monastery, they

11) Vavřinec of Březová, *Husitská kronika* 36.

12) Bartoš, *Husitská revoluce* 1:75.

13) *Starší letopisové čeští od roku 1378 do 1527 čili pokračování v kronikách Přibíka Pulkavy a Beneše z Hořovic z rukopisů starých vydané*, ed. J. Charvát and F. Krčma, in František Palacký, *Dílo* (Prague, 1941) 2:47.

14) Vavřinec of Březová, *Husitská kronika* 54.

marched on to Prague in order to assist the inhabitants against King Sigismund. And they assaulted the castle of St. Wenceslas whereby many lost their lives.”¹⁵

The assault on the Prague Castle referred to an attempt at recapturing the fortified promontory which Čeněk of Vartenberk had treacherously surrendered to King Sigismund, impressed by the latter's temporary successes. In the meantime, Sigismund's crusaders poured into Bohemia, conquering Jaroměř, and in the beginning of May even Hradec Králové. Sigismund entrusted command over Hradec to Aleš of Holic, and proceeded toward Kutná Hora on 12 May. Although Prague was also seriously threatened by the crusade, the situation in East Bohemia required an energetic move, inasmuch as Sigismund's hold on Hradec posed a lethal threat to the Utraquist cause in a substantial part of the country. The Utraquist barons opted for a daring intervention which result in the reconquest of the town on 26 June. This was one of the first of Sigismund's major defeats in Bohemia which would be multiplied many times during the subsequent decade. Vavřinec's description is sufficiently expressive so that it may now be quoted without further ado:

Then in this same period Lord Aleš of Vřesov, a great champion of truth and of Christ's law, together with Beneš of Mokrovousy and Jiřík of Chvalkovice, also advocates of communion *sub utraque* and of other truths, took under advisement that in Hradec and in its surroundings monks and priests, who opposed the Law of God, grievously oppressed the true Christians and cruelly forced these faithful to abjure the truth. Inspired further by a heartfelt sorrow over the shameful rapes inflicted by the champions of falsehood, both foreign and domestic, on the faithful virgins and matrons, and – as one may assume – at the behest of God, [the earlier mentioned lords] gathered from the neighborhood a multitude of peasants and miners at the Kunětice mountain above Pardubice with the intent to terminate the intolerable atrocities and to vindicate the righteousness of the communion *sub utraque*. They were joined by Ambrož, a priest of Hradec, whom Queen Sophie and her officials had previously expelled. He then had lived in Prague, but he set out to join them, disregarding the risks of travel, and his sermons and his distribution of Christ's holy body and blood *sub utraque* transformed the warriors' mournful and weeping demeanor into joy and merriment. Finally, on Tuesday after the feast of St. John the Baptist the priest ordered ladders to be brought along, and set out on a march with the lords Aleš, Beneš and Jiřík, and with the assembled host, pretending to aim at Podlažice. When evening came, their move toward Podlažice was reported by spies to Hradec. The inhabitants of Hradec, freed from worry, relaxed their guard that night. Approaching the town at dawn, [Ambrož's troops] placed their ladders against the walls, and, with only few defenders to resist and the rest in confusion, the attackers captured the battlements with ease. Some of the evil-doers fled into the castle or into the towers of the gates. In the light of the day, which was 26 June, the assailants had become masters of the town to the resounding acclaim and joy of the friends and advocates of truth. They removed from the town the captured enemies of truth, as well as those who had hidden in the castle or in the towers and subsequently surrendered. The

15) *Staří letopisové čeští* (1941) 52.

town was entrusted to the friends and advocates of the Law of God. Then the victors elected the above-mentioned Aleš, Beneš and Jiřík as captains, divided among themselves the movable properties of the expelled opponents, and distributed the exiles' houses among those who had proved their loyalty to the law of Christ. The town was carefully guarded day and night.¹⁶

A question arises, posited by many historians and not yet satisfactorily answered to this very day, namely what was the real character of Oreb and the Orebiters. Was Oreb just a random gathering place which impressed its name on a militant throng without a subsequent role as a significant military site, or was Oreb – at least temporarily – a fortified hub, or a camp, similar to Tábor in South Bohemia? In a way the Orebiters' almost constant engagement in the field -- their itinerant existence -- might have negated the need for the namesake mountain to serve as a military base.

Without aspiring to give a definite answer, I am inclined to share the view of J. B. Čapek which endorses the existence of a fortified encampment on Mt. Oreb. The following summarizes his reasoning: (1) Against the argument that Oreb served for nothing else but liturgical rites, one can point out that, in fact, armed Utraquists had gathered there before setting out to assist Prague in the spring of 1420. (2) It is well known that Bohemia had many sites for liturgical gatherings, but only Tábor near Sezimovo Ústí and Oreb near Třebechovice impressed their names on large-scale military throngs, or brotherhoods. (3) It has been proven that the eastern side of Oreb was capped by a guard house [*hejda*]. (4) The fort of Třebechovice would have been indefensible without satellite fortifications on Mt. Oreb. It is erroneous to assume that Hradec Králové was the sole and sufficient site for the Utraquists' military musters in East Bohemia. The city was primarily a townspeople's stronghold and at times so fickle that even Ambrož's influence ebbed there on occasions. The Orebite host was regularly layered by a crucial stratum of rural folk – gentry and peasantry. Hradec Králové might have played an important role in Orebitism, but clearly not an exclusive one.¹⁷

Let us now return to the story of Ambrož, the foremost figure among the Orebiters.

The year 1420 was marked for the Utraquists by the victorious battle of Vítkov, by the repulsion of Sigismund, and by the amalgam of their theological and political programmes in the Four Articles of Prague. The crucial victory over Sigismund was attained in the battle at Vyšehrad only thanks to the great zeal of the Orebite military brotherhood. A detailed description of the Orebiters' contributions would far exceed the parameters of this study. They remained reliable allies of Jan Žižka and participated during those years in the radical wing of the Bohemian Reformation.

Ambrož reentered the stage of history in 1421 in connection with two major events. The first one dated to the end of May when the Silesians invaded Bohemia from the north, and the East Bohemian brotherhood encountered them at Broumov. Despite the Utraquists' superiority, their commanders the unreliable Čeněk of

16) *Ibid.* 77-78.

17) See Čapek, "K vývoji a problematice bratrstva Orebského."

Vartenberk and Hynek Krušina negotiated a peace agreement and the Silesians intimidated by the Utraquists' advance rapidly and peacefully re-crossed the border. This happened almost certainly against the wishes of Ambrož who, like his warriors of God, was accustomed to persist in resolute action to the end. Let us listen to the testimony of Vavřinec which in this case is [perhaps not *ed.*] a model of objectivity:

...the Silesians were overpowered by fear and horror and they dispatched pleas for a negotiated peace with the Bohemians. Lord Čeněk and Krušina, therefore, did not permit the troops to press on to Silesia, and, in response, Priest Ambrož, the leader and pastor of Hradec, caused such a commotion among his people that had not the two lords immediately fled, the peasant warriors would have probably chopped them to bits, or mashed them with their flails. The warriors finally calmed down and returned home. Nevertheless, Priest Ambrož arrived on the eve of St. John's feast (23 June) to Prague and inveighed against Čeněk charging him with faithlessness and responsibility for giving up the conquest of Silesia when he ordered his people to retreat. The priest presented other baseless accusations, but – due to divine will and direction – Lord Hynek Krušina then arrived to Prague and convincingly proved Lord Čeněk's and the barons' innocence. Even so the people remained divided, some siding with the accuser, others with the defender.¹⁸

In the same year (1420) Priest Ambrož participated from 1 to 8 June in the Diet of Čáslav, which revoked formally and definitely the country's allegiance to King Sigismund, solemnly adopted the Four Articles of Prague, and elected a collegium of twenty governors to rule the country. About that time an event occurred which testified to Ambrož's zeal for orthodoxy and the observance of the Four Articles. Like Žižka, he favored the persecution of heretics with fire and sword. Yet, he insisted on first attempting to save those in error by instruction and persuasion. Two chiliastic priests of Tábor, Martin Húska, known as Loquis, and Prokop the One-Eyed, were fleeing from Žižka's power to Moravia. The Captain of Chrudim, Diviš Bořek of Miletínek, later a participant of the Barons' League in the battle of Lipany, captured the two refugees. Only an intervention by Ambrož saved them temporarily from death by fire, inasmuch as a denial of real presence of Christ in the eucharist further augmented their transgression of chiliasm. Having, however, subsequently identified them as authentic heretics, Ambrož did not hesitate to sanction their drastic punishment. A contemporary testimony is as follows:

...and if it were not for Ambrož, the priest of Hradec, he [Bořek] would have annihilated them immediately by the power of flames, but on Ambrož's intercession he released them into the priest's hands. Ambrož had them conveyed in shackles by cart to Hradec Králové. He held them for almost two weeks, hoping to convert them from heresy to the true faith. When, however, he failed to move them, the priest transported them to Roudnice on Sunday before the feast of John the Baptist, and transferred them as infected by heresy to Konrád [of Vechta - JBL], the overseer of the spiritual matters of the kingdom, that he would examine them according to the meaning of the Scripture and appropriately punish them.¹⁹

18) Vavřinec of Březová, *Husitská kronika* 236.

19) *Ibid.* 239.

In August of that year Húska and Prokop were then actually encased in a barrel and consigned to flames in Roudnice.

The year 1422 revealed the first major signs of crisis. Although Sigismund's army was once more decisively defeated by Žižka this time at Havlíčkův Brod on 10 January, in Prague an arbitration commission composed of military captains undermined Jan of Želiv's power and had him surreptitiously executed on 9 March. Subsequently the conservative trend became even more pronounced. On 16 May Zikmund Korybutovič arrived in Prague, as a representative of Vitold, the Duke of Lithuania, and the captains of Tábor acknowledged him as sovereign in June. Ambrož's authority was seriously weakened in Hradec Králové in the summer of 1422. Zikmund Korybutovič entered the city, had the town councillors arrested, and appointed as captain of the town the more conservative Diviš Bořek of Miletínek, who was simultaneously installed as the count palatine of the royal castle of Hradec. The uncles of Zikmund Korybutovič, the Polish and the Lithuanian kings, in the meantime negotiated with King Sigismund. Zikmund Korybutovič stayed alternately in Hradec and in Prague, until he left the country altogether in March 1423.

Following disagreements between Žižka and the community of Tábor at the beginning of 1423, the famous warrior left for East Bohemia and joined the Orebite brotherhood. He needed for his military community in the field a stable and secure rear base, not one agitated by theological disputes like Tábor. This led him to a close rapprochement with Ambrož who guided the East Bohemians firmly and without digressions. In April 1423 an assembly of the military brotherhoods was called to Havlíčkův Brod, and it established a new military community, the Lesser Tábor. This entity needed a geographic focal point. Hradec Králové was held by the increasingly conservative Diviš Bořek of Miletínek. When in June 1423 Diviš set out on military campaign to Moravia, entrusting the city to his brother Jetřich, Ambrož's followers carried out a coup against the existing government. Diviš attempted to recover his power base, but this time he had to face both Žižka and Ambrož, and his contingent of barons suffered an utter defeat at Strachův Dvůr near Hradec on 4 August. Amedeo Molnár has argued that Žižka's military ordinance was composed in the same year and almost certainly with theological input by Ambrož. There is no hard evidence for this claim, but certain articles of this code – the right of God's warriors to impose capital punishment and others – indicate that Molnár's hypothesis is not far from the truth. A unique memento, which has been preserved, attests to the close alliance and friendship between Žižka and priest Ambrož. It is a letter which Ambrož addressed to his friend and ally in the field, warning him against a sneaky assassin. This is the only text securely identified as containing the authentic words of Ambrož. I will, therefore, quote it in full:

May God, the Lord Almighty, be with you, with all the faithful brethren, and with us sinners through his holy grace and sustenance. Oh, brother Žižka and our dearest brethren! May you know that we have captured one from the party of Opočno, a rather significant person, who revealed to us for certain that there is an individual in the field with you, who is to murder you. He is to receive ninety score of groschen and was already paid thirty. Pavel with dark curly hair, who delivers this message, knows the would-be assassin for sure. The messenger can fully inform you about the identity and methods of the conspirators, and point out the designated assassin to you. We implore you

to trust this Pavel concerning the matters which he will discuss with you at our behest. May the Lord Almighty preserve you for his own glory and for the benefit of all the faithful congregations. Given in Hradec Králové at 3 a.m. on Monday, the feast day of St. Katherine (22 November) by the hand of your Priest Ambrož. Janek Hvězda, the mayor, the town councillors, and your Priest Ambrož.²⁰

The opening months of the year 1424 were marked by major victories of Žižka's troops over opponents both foreign and domestic. Already in January he defeated -- with Ambrož present -- the notable barons *sub una* Jan Městský, Půta of Častolovice, and Arnošt of Černčice at Česká Skalice. Although serious disagreements developed among the Táborites, the Praguers and Žižka, overtly the Utraquists' unity had not yet dissolved that year. In the fall all agreed on a joint expedition to Moravia against Sigismund and his son-in-law Albrecht. And there something happened that to a certain degree accelerated the disunity in Utraquism and in a significant manner presaged the future tragedy of Lipany. At the siege of Přebyslav the great commander Jan Žižka of Trocnov died suddenly. With a lofty terseness the annalist's words describe these portentous moments thus:

In the same year [1424 - JBL] right after the reconciliation of the Duke and the Praguers with Žižka, the latter with his brethren proceeded to Moravia. On the way, Žižka paused at the castle of Přebyslav to conquer it. There brother Žižka was afflicted by the lethal disease of plague, and gave an admonition to his dear faithful brethren and to the Bohemians, to Lord Viktorín, Lord Jan Bzdinek, and Kuneš [of Bělovice] that --in fear of the Good Lord -- they would be constant and faithful in the defense of God's truth to merit their just rewards. And then brother Žižka, commending his soul to God, ended his life on Wednesday (11 October) before the feast of St. Gallus. His people adopted the name of Orphans, as if they had lost their father. Seizing the castle of Přebyslav, they consigned to flames all its defenders, altogether sixty individuals, and they burned and demolished the castle itself. The Priest Prokůpek and Priest Ambrož conveyed the dead Žižka to Hradec Králové and buried him in the Church of the Holy Spirit near the main altar.²¹

Thus Ambrož maintained his loyalty to Žižka to the very end, accompanied his comrade in arms on his last journey, even buried him in his own church. Whatever subsequent disposal of Žižka's remains might have occurred, the report of the initial burial by *Staré letopisy české* can be considered reliable, inasmuch as no contrary evidence has been found. It is only uncertain whether Ambrož actually participated in Žižka's last campaign or whether he traveled to Přebyslav to retrieve the warrior's cadaver. This, however, is an inessential detail.

The documentation of Ambrož's life is scanty for the years 1424-1433. It is known that he stayed in Hradec and occasionally accompanied the Orphans on their military forays. During a campaign in Kłodzko he acted very harshly. We have the memoirs of a merchant, Martin Bolkenheim, who witnessed the Orphans' conquest of the town of Wünschelburg [Radkov] in 1425. Hoping to induce the

20) *Listy bratra Jana a Kronika velmi pěkná o Janu Žižkovi*, ed. and trans. František Bartoš (Prague: Blahoslav, 1949) 20.

21) *Starí letopisové čeští* (1941), 72.

Orphans to leave, the inhabitants set their town on fire and sought refuge in a stone tower. The Orphans waited out the conflagration, and in subsequent negotiations they agreed to release women and children for free and men for a ransom, but refused to show any mercy to the priests. Wishing to save their clerics, the Wünschelburgers dressed them as women and gave them children to carry. The children, however, disgruntled by the switch, began to cry and thus the ruse was discovered. Under the guidance of the local pastor Nicholas Megerlein, his colleagues from several neighboring parishes and their chaplains had also hidden in the tower. Ambrož offered pardon to Megerlein, if he converted to Utraquism. When the latter demurred, he was put to death by fire with all the other priests. The sole explanation for Ambrož's wrathful harshness was his conviction of acting as a warrior of God. Another known incident from the life of Ambrož dates to 1433 when he interceded to free from the gallows a convicted highway man, Čeněk of Sendražice, when just before the execution a maiden Markéta stepped forward with an offer to marry the convict. According to the customary law the criminal was to be pardoned in such a case, but the city councillors hesitated. Only Ambrož's intervention made them yield and the wedding could be celebrated.

Dramatic events marked the last years of Priest Ambrož. It is well known that where the weapons wielded by the *sub una* and Sigismund had failed, treachery would succeed by the means of an inner schism and the fratricidal battle at Lipany. It is also well known that when the Council of Basel offered to negotiate with Utraquist Bohemia in 1432 the discussions were to be governed by the so-called Judge of Cheb [*iudex in Egra compactatus*] which stipulated as the criteria of truth the following: the Law of God, Christ's practice, the practice of the apostolic and primitive church, together with the teaching of church councils and church doctors that were consistent with the Law of God. A Utraquist delegation actually negotiated in Basel in January 1433 but without any concrete results. A delegation of the Council, in turn, came to Prague in May 1433, where it made contacts with individual Utraquist factions and sought to sow seeds of discord among them. A diet in Prague selected Ambrož together with Jan Rokycana, Peter Payne, Prokop the Bald, Mikuláš Biskupec, and Oldřich of Znojmo to defend the Four Articles of Prague against the delegates. This appointment indicated Ambrož's high standing by placing him in the company of the foremost Utraquist theologians. Ambrož participated in the discussion with the conciliar delegation from May 1433 till May 1434, insisting on a scrupulous adherence to the criteria of the Judge of Cheb. In the meantime, however, the Orphans' status and his own had deteriorated. When the New Town of Prague also succumbed to the conservatives, Ambrož had to seek safety in Hradec where he was joined in refuge by Priest Jakub Vlk, a devoted friend and successor of Jan of Želiv in the New Town. The dismal events of those years are well known. The fratricidal battle of Lipany on 30 May 1434, the barons' treacherous negotiation with Sigismund, and at last the Diet of the Land in Jihlava which declared peace with the Church of Rome, recognized the *Compactata*, and accepted Sigismund as King of Bohemia on the meager condition of returning the crown jewels and the land registers. Deception and disunion had done their work. Ambrož, however, was still in Hradec and the city did not send delegates to the Jihlava Diet. It was not the only one, among other towns Kolín, Tábor and Stříbro likewise did not submit in Jihlava. Sigismund dispatched a punitive expedition against Hradec, led by Diviš Bořek of Miletínek, once an ally, now an enemy of the

town. Priest Ambrož enlisted for defense his friend the knight Zdislav Mnich of Roudnice, and installed him as captain. *Staré letopisy české* describe the situation as follows:

In the same year [1434] on Thursday 27 September on the eve of St. Wenceslas's feast Priest Ambrož, having brought by his decree Zdislav Mnich of Roudnice to Hradec, appointed him a captain against the Emperor and, taking counsel together, they expelled several of the townspeople. Then at once Ambrož ordered the demolition of two churches, those of St. Nicholas and St. Peter. Subsequently, they confronted Lord Diviš who warred on the city in the pay of Emperor Sigismund. In consequence, they demolished by fire the flour mills on Diviš's entire estate.²²

The situation of Hradec Králové deteriorated politically when it was formally declared a malefactor of the land. Nevertheless the city's protector Zdislav Mnich scored significant successes on his several forays. In particular, Vilém Kostka and his henchmen were killed during a raid at night on 6 November 1436. Even Diviš Bořek abandoned the siege and fled to Kunětická Hora. A new actor appeared on the scene in the person of Priest Bedřich of Strážnice, a Taborite captain and now Sigismund's adherent. He traveled twice to Hradec Králové in order to persuade Ambrož to submit to Sigismund and to accept the Four Article of Prague in their watered down form of the *Compactata*. Bedřich's mission failed and the priest ended up in imprisonment in Mýtská Tower at the behest of Ambrož who viewed his purpose as an incitement to betray the Law of God.²³ Bedřich was a lucky man to escape a more lethal fate inasmuch as Ambrož also looked askance at what he considered his conspiring with Sigismund in other matters.

What could not be attained either by weapons or by diplomacy was accomplished – as often happen during the Bohemian Reformation – through shameful treachery. Zdislav Mnich concluded from a visit to Prague that Ambrož's resistance could not succeed and decided to forsake his patron's cause. Through a treacherous dealing of the town's captain Hradec Králové passed over into Sigismund's hands on the night from 3 to 4 March 1437. This dramatic event is also describe in detail by the *Staré letopisy české* :

In the same year [1437] on the third Sunday in Lent [3 March] when the inhabitants of Hradec Králové realized that armed men and mercenaries were assembling and conspiring against them and planned to search their cellars, they surrounded themselves with reliable men and after the eighth hour of the evening they began to scream and seized power in the city. They assaulted the priests' house and Priest Ambrož injured his leg as he slid down the wall. His adherents were captured and locked up in jail. Thus the inhabitants regained control over their lives and property. Almost three hundred mercenaries of cavalry and seven hundred of infantry were in the city. Then those townspeople who had been exiled were readmitted. Priest Martin Prostředek assembled those now escaping the city and took them to Lord Roháč of Dubá in the castle of Sion because Lord Roháč refused to

22) *Ibid.* 94.

23) On Bedřich of Strážnice see Amedeo Molnár, *Na rozhraní věků: Cesty reformace* (Prague, 1985) 23-112.

acknowledge the Emperor as his sovereign and did not even wish to hear about him. In consequence, he engaged in war against all who recognized the Emperor as their monarch.²⁴

As a reward for his treason, Zdislav Mnich received Sigismund's promissory note for 1,000 groschen secured against the tax revenue from the circuits of Hradec and Chrudim. Ambrož's friend and comrade in arms from Prague, Jakub Vlk, who had found refuge in Hradec Králové, was put in prison. On 21 March 1437 the city of Hradec Králové granted recognition to both the *Compactata* and to King Sigismund, who then confirmed new town councillors, albeit with a dispensation from the requirement of their annual rotation. Roháč of Dubá continued to resist Sigismund from his castle of Sion. Nevertheless, even his fate was sealed. Sion succumbed on 6 September 1437, and three days later Roháč together with his associates perished on the gallows in Prague. Priest Martin Prostředek was among those executed. The political events of the following period were no less dramatic than those on which our attention has focused. For the purposes of this study, however, the most important issue is the subsequent fate of Ambrož. The testimony of the *Staré letopisy české* clearly indicates that our hero lost political power, his partisans were jailed, and he suffered a leg fracture while fleeing. Considering the seriousness of his injury it is hard to imagine how and where he could have escaped. In another redaction of the *Staré letopisy české* we can read the following:

In that year [1437 - JBL] on the third Monday in Lent [4 March] the inhabitants of Hradec began to negotiate with the Emperor. They reached an agreement and expelled Priest Ambrož so that he might govern no more. And so Priest Ambrož jumped down from a wall, and those who adhered to him were put in jail.²⁵

There is no direct report of his arrest during his escape from Hradec. The quoted segments of the *Letopisy* permit several conclusions. Perhaps, it is most logical to assume that he was captured, his leg healed in captivity, and subsequently he was released, or transferred, or exiled. It remains a mystery why, as a rebel, he was not hanged or burned after his capture. There is no evidence for the assertion of the regional historian V. Koleč that "Ambrož, having broken his arm and leg, was captured and taken to the jail of New Town of Prague."²⁶ Likewise Koleč's dating – 12 February 1436 – is erroneous as is incidentally the case with most of the other data in his study.

With the coup in Hradec, Ambrož disappears from our radar screen. Reports of his death and burial are problematic with the principal sources contradicting each other. Irreconcilable differences as to date and place exist between the reports of the (1) Wrocław (Vratislavský) manuscript of the *Staré letopisy české*, customarily designated as R, and (2) of the manuscript b of the *Staré letopisy české*, edited by Palacký. The Wrocław manuscript dates Ambrož's death to 1438, as it is clear from the context of the report: "And at that time Priest Ambrož died, as well as the scribe Krušina, who recorded the events of those years in chronicles, and in particular what happened in the circuit of Hradec, as it is also amply noted in this chronicle [i.e.,

24) *Ze starých letopisů českých*, trans. J. Porák and J. Kašpar (1980) 124-125.

25) *Staré letopisy české: Křížovnický rukopis*, ed. F. Šimek and F. Kaňák (Prague, 1959) 126.

26) V. Koleč, *Bratři Orebští* (Hradec Králové, 1921) 27-28.

Staré letopisy české]. Both are buried in Jaroměř.”²⁷ This is followed by a report of Peter Payne’s arrest by Burián of Gutštejn, which occurred on 1 November 1438. The time of death is, therefore, given as October 1438 and the report admits no doubt. The report of manuscript b differs and its contents appear more trustworthy: “In that year Priest Jakúbek Vlk died in Kolín on the feast of St. James [25 July] ... And in the same year Priest Ambrož died in Kolín on the feast of St. Gallus [16 October]...”²⁸ Manuscript b places the event certainly in the year 1439 inasmuch as its report is sandwiched between other events which undoubtedly occurred in that year. The dating of manuscript b is accepted by numerous scholars, including Rudolf Urbánek.²⁹

When and where did Ambrož really die, and in what locality is he actually buried? It is possible to trust Manuscript b and to assume that Ambrož found refuge with Bedřich of Strážnice in Kolín. Not in vain did Bedřich name his new castle at Kolín *Lapis refugii* [Rock of Refuge]. The probability of this scenario is strengthened by the mention of Ambrož’s comrade in arms, Jakub Vlk, who was with Ambrož in Hradec in the time of the coup of March 1437. It is quite possible that Bedřich as a sophisticated politician and diplomat overlooked Ambrož’s uncouth behavior of November 1436, and offered asylum to him and to Vlk, knowing full what would be the fate of the duo had they stayed in Hradec. Bedřich’s strong political position, based on his services to Sigismund – which would earn him the appellation of traitor by some future historians – would have made such a daring gesture feasible. Anyway this case of risk taking would not have been an isolated instance in Bedřich’s career. Later, he would offer asylum at Potštejn to the Taborite priest Kvirín. The recklessness of this measure is indicated by the fact that following Bedřich’s death in 1459 Kvirín would be arrested and tortured to death in 1461 at the behest of King George of Poděbrady. Returning to the fate of the priestly pair, we now ask what was their burial place. Was it the church or the cemetery in Kolín? As for the death day, 16 October is consistent even with the Wrocław manuscript, which does not give an exact date, but the antecedent events in this manuscript indicate that 16 October would be probable. It is more difficult to decide between the years 1438 and 1439. The other part of the Wrocław report sounds also rather trustworthy. Krušinka, as the official scribe of Hradec Králové, was a personality too well known, to be subject of a fictitious report. Moreover the compiler of the *Staré letopisy české* used Krušinka’s chronicle as his source. If we admit the veracity of the Wrocław manuscript, why then, however, would Ambrož be buried together with Krušinka in Jaroměř? It would mean that Ambrož spent the last two years of his life in Hradec, presumably in prison. Even this possibility cannot be excluded. The Wrocław manuscript, of course, does not state where Ambrož died which allows us to combine the reports from both manuscripts – he died in Kolín and was translated to Jaroměř. Then, of course, it becomes necessary to ask why he was not buried in Kolín. Personally, after some hesitation I incline to revise my earlier view presented elsewhere,³⁰ and to accept the death date of 1438 and the burial in Kolín. Many controversies have revolved around the question whether Ambrož’s remains rest in

27) *Staré letopisy české: Z vratislavského rukopisu*, ed. F. Šimek, intro. F. Bartoš (Prague, 1937) 84.

28) *Starší letopisové čeští* (1941) 109.

29) Rudolf Urbánek, *Věk poděbradský* v. 1; *Dějiny české* 3,1 (Prague, 1915) 438.

30) Jan B. Lášek, “Kněz Ambrož z Hradce a jeho poslední útočiště: Příspěvek k dějinám východpříčeského husitství,” *Theologická revue CCŠH*, 9 (1976), 142 ff.

the church of St. Nicholas in Jaroměř. It is, however, a fact that this entire hypothesis rests exclusively on the cited report in the Wrocław manuscript. The annalist, however, might have – writing several years after the event – intentionally given the name of Jaroměř, although he knew that Ambrož was not there, in order to preserve his protagonist from interventions disturbing his last resting place. Yet, it is also necessary to admit that the *Staré letopisy české* are on the whole reliable and trustworthy, and at the time of their writing -- and more particularly during their final redaction -- it would not have been useful to conceal the location of Ambrož's grave. The available findings from the reconstructions of St. Nicholas in Jaroměř do not support the idea of Ambrož's burial there. The church has undergone many architectural rearrangements and repairs. We have no way of knowing what happened during the Counter Reformation, but the more recent excavations have not uncovered any appropriate skeletons. The identification of Ambrož's remains would not have been a difficult nut to crack, as the known fracture of his leg bone would have been a dead giveaway.

Be it as it may with Ambrož's grave and with his death date, today we remember this important witness of the Lord with the gratitude of a Christian community which, in its pluralism, is the successor of the old Orebites. It is not essential whether the 560 years elapsed from his death in 1999 or in 1998 because, as we all know, for the Lord one day is like a millennium and a millennium like one day. What is essential is that in a difficult time for the Bohemian land Ambrož listened to the word of God and, along with Jan Žižka of Trocnov, fulfilled its command. We believe that Ambrož, like the other faithful brethren, received a reward according to their faith and according to their works on earth in implementation of that faith.

(Translation from the Czech by Zdeněk V. David)