
Želivský's Head: Memory and New Martyrs Among the Hussites

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In his *Histories*, Herodotus argues in order to preserve the memories of great achievements he would use stories generated by makers of great events. His arch rival Thucydides denounced the use of “myth” as unscientific and of little value for proper historians and pure history.¹ In order to discover the answer to Ranke’s great query: *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist* – what exactly happened – one must decide either for Herodotus or Thucydides. I lean towards Herodotus. Myths are sacred stories shared by those finding meaning of the highest importance embedded therein. These are stories arising in the past about past events but having future reference. Such stories are essential for partly because they are remembered.²

Telling stories raises the question of memory. From antiquity humans have pondered the notion of memory. Aristotle’s treatise *De memoria et reminiscencia* argues memory is distinct from other types of cognition. The object of memory has to do with things past. One consideration centres on the reliability of mental images upon which memory is dependant. After 1268 Thomas Aquinas wrote a commentary on this treatise. Other medieval writers reflected on the idea of memory and its functions.³

Stories of the type alluded to are found in martyr narratives. The notion of martyrdom is conspicuously present in early Hussite history. The essential elements are detectable: a prevailing notion of martyrdom, defenders of the official church were prepared to punish alleged heretics with the death penalty, there was no shortage of men and women prepared to die for their faith in Reformation Bohemia, and the memory of these deaths was recalled by survivors and characterized as holy deaths.⁴ The early Bohemian Reformation had martyrs aligned with the martyrs of old and referred to as “new martyrs” faithful to God and the gospel to the point of death. The memory and retelling of stories of martyrdom reveals that recollection is not passive. Hussite memories of these new martyrs were active and may be said to have been a cognitive craft, which from the monastic Middle Ages was called *memoria*. The importance of *memoria* can be seen inasmuch as it was practiced in

¹ That original controversy has been repeated: Tacitus v. Livy; Valla v. Lactantius, Montesquieu v. Machiavelli, Gibbon v. Bossuet, Ranke v. Scott, Mommsen v. Niebuhr, Wilamowitz-Mollendorf v. Burkhardt, Mathier v. Michelet, Brackmann v. Kantorowicz, and so on. See Joseph Mali, *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography* (Chicago, 2003).

² On this Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *Other People’s Myths: The Cave of Echoes* (New York, 1988).

³ In Aristotelis libros, *De sensu et sensato, De memoria et reminiscencia commentarium*, ed., Raimondo M. Spiazzi, (Turin, 1973) 86-115.

⁴ I refer to the categories of “conceptual prerequisites” outlined by Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge and London, 1999) 26-7.

all aspects of the ancient and medieval trivium.¹ Martyrs were remembered and the memories actively informed religious movements.

Between 1412 and 1422 the Hussite Revolution and the early Bohemian Reformation took shape. The context for the events of martyrdom requires interpretation but the narratives are straightforward. This essay examines several narrative accounts of martyrs in Reformation Bohemia suggesting how these stories were told, in what context and for what purpose.

Jan Želivský, Prague, 1422

On 8 March 1422 the Prague preacher, and renegade member of the Praemonstratensian Order, Jan Želivský, received a request from Prague city magistrates asking him to appear at the city hall in the Old Town where his opinion on a matter of some urgency was desired.² Želivský could not be located. By the time he was found some two hours later the schedule had changed. The preacher was asked to come on the following day. Next day, after the sermon, Želivský went to the city hall with Priest Vilém.

Discussions between Želivský and the gathered lords concerning a military decision ensued. The mayor of the Old Town asked the meeting if everyone invited had appeared and it was discovered two were absent: Jerome Šrol and Jiří the glover.³ Some consternation arose and further efforts were made to secure the presence of the two. Once it became clear the missing men could not be located an official with deputies entered the chambers abruptly placing those present under arrest. The arrested were shackled but Želivský was first allowed to confess to a priest and made confession to the aforementioned Priest Vilém. When this was finished, the others likewise made confession. All ten condemned were summarily executed by decapitation. This was on Monday, 9 March, the day of SS. Cyril and Methodius.

Želivský was a victim of an adverse political climate but also a sacrifice to the changing theological winds in Prague. In 1418 he eclipsed Jakoubek of Stříbro as the more influential voice in Prague. Želivský's murder in 1422 is an act in which Jakoubek must be implicated; albeit passively. That point is not without controversy. Jiří Kejř argues Jakoubek cannot be charged with the demise of Želivský and his companions and that he did not incite the town councillors to move against

¹ Of importance on these points is the recent study *The Medieval Craft of Memory*, eds., Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski (Philadelphia, 2002).

² The principal source for the murder of Želivský is a contemporary account likely written by the priest Vilém. Text appears in SRB 3:480-5. Hereafter, Priest Vilém, "The Murder of Jan Želivský." Secondary sources include Božena Kopiczková, *Jan Želivský* (Prague, 1990), David R. Holeton, "Revelation and Revolution in Late Medieval Bohemia," *CV* 36 (1994) 29-44, František Šmahel, *Die Hussitische Revolution* (Hannover, 2002) 1:604-35 and 2:1188-1233 and Amedeo Molnár, "Želivský, prédicateur de la révolution," *CV* 2 (1959) 324-34.

³ Šrol was a zealous adherent of Jan Hus from his student days and thereafter aligned himself closely with Želivský and was influential among citizens of the New Town. Shortly after the tragic events in March 1422 he was elected town councillor in the new city government.

Želivský.⁴ Publicly, Jakoubek had attacked Želivský accusing him of bearing responsibility for the turmoil and bloodshed and the chief reason so many had been “led astray” throughout the kingdom. Evidently Jakoubek railed upon Želivský: “You are to be blamed for all those disturbances and for all this bloodshed. You have betrayed the Bohemian and Moravian lands.”⁵ Subsequent to this outburst Jakoubek filed a complaint against Želivský personally advising the city councillors to do something about the situation: “You are too half-hearted and careless! Be more diligent and stop him.”⁶ It is likely Jakoubek regretted his actions once aware of the consequences.⁷ Contemporary records reveal a meeting on 15 March at the Old Town city hall during which accusations were levelled against Jakoubek and others not for direct conspiracy in the case of Želivský’s murder but moral culpability for the deed.⁸

Be that as it may, Želivský was dead. Efforts made to conceal the deed were quickly revealed. A riot ensued. Residents of the New Town attacked the Church of Our Lady of the Snows. News reached the city hall. The magistrates took flight. Meanwhile, the captain, Lord Hašek of Valdštejn rode into the square attempting to pacify the multitudes by asserting Želivský was quite safe.⁹ Unconvinced, the crowd asked to see the priest. Hašek’s hesitation was immediately denounced by a howling mob: “Ha, ha, you treacherous unfaithful lord. You and the other villains have murdered our dear preacher.” With similar words Hašek was vilified as a “treacherous son of a bitch.”¹⁰ Hašek decided to follow the example of the magistrates spurring his horse for the city gates with the inflamed mob close behind.

The situation deteriorated further. Several hundred soldiers armed with crossbows were dispatched to the area via Železná Street. The mob threw themselves against the soldiers with such force the soldiers fled in confusion knocking one another down. An alarm went up from the city hall. The enraged throng stormed the gates of the city hall. Doors, windows and rooftops were assaulted and the determined crowd forced their way into the precincts of the municipal buildings. Not all magistrates succeeded in escaping before Želivský’s followers were upon them. Seven responsible for the clandestine executions, including a judge, were killed. Then the body of the slain priest was discovered.

The severed head was seized and carried outside the city hall to a dunghill where “some of the brothers” showed the head to the gathered multitudes. “When the people saw the head of Priest Jan they set up such a clamour and great outcry and such uproar the like of which I do not know if anyone could truly describe it

⁴ See Jiří Kejř, *Mistři pražské univerzity a kněží táborští* [The masters of Prague University and the priests of Tabor] (Prague, 1981) 62.

⁵ AČ 3: 237-9.

⁶ Priest Vilém’s rendition of the interaction in AČ 3: 238.

⁷ Frederick G. Heymann, *John Žižka and the Hussite Revolution* (New York, 1969) 314.

⁸ This was the argument advanced by Priest Vilém. See AČ 3: 237.

⁹ Hašek of Valdštejn engineered the fall of Želivský and was behind the conflict resulting in the battle at Malešov in 1424. He was later implicated in the widening gap between the Praguers, Korybut and the radical brotherhoods. Having defected to Sigismund he became the highest ranking officer in Moravia but in so doing incurred the wrath of all Hussites. See UB 1: 381-2. See also comments in František M. Bartoš, *The Hussite Revolution 1424-1437*, ed., John Klassen, trans. J. Weir (New York, 1986) 6.

¹⁰ Priest Vilém, “The Murder of Jan Želivský,” 483.

adequately.”¹¹ The scene must have been extraordinary. In the chaos created by the confirmation that Želivský was indeed dead and the massive sense of consternation caused by the display of his severed head, a young boy climbed upon the dunghill and seized the head from the hands of those holding it up. Fleeing, head in hands, he hurried through the streets “in a strange rage” with the throngs chasing him.¹² At length, the vicar of Březnice, a priest named Jan, caught the boy. A wrestling match ensued. The priest attempted to take the head but the boy was unwilling to surrender it. Finally, the priest prevailed wrestling the head away from the boy. Holding the head, the priest walked through the streets.

While Želivský’s head was carried through the streets of Prague in various hands, a continual lamentation arose from the crowd with much emotion. “It happened once again that great cry and the wringing of hands by women and children together with a great shout by the men so much so that a good many of them fainted because of their great grief.”¹³ Contemporary sources report armed men were so overcome they dropped their weapons in the streets and some people “even forgot who they were.”¹⁴ Meanwhile, Priest Jan from Březnice continued to walk around holding up the head of Jan Želivský. It seems the priest was so grief-stricken he could say nothing either to console or calm the people.

While Želivský’s head held the attention of the mob, others retrieved the murdered priest’s body. Placing it on a bier they carried it through the streets to similar lamentation and loud shouts. The body was taken to the cloister at the Church of the Our Lady of the Snows where he formerly preached and secured in the chapel. This was done to calm the restless crowd persuading them to return home. It is unclear where the head was at this point but presumably it too was placed under lock and key.

Late the following day Hussite priests prepared Želivský’s body for burial. The corpse was placed in a coffin and brought out before the altar. The *Te Deum* was sung and Priest Jakub, formerly Želivský’s assistant, spoke from the pulpit on the text concerning the martyrdom of St. Stephen from the Acts of the Apostles. After the homily the body of the murdered priest was taken to a grave site amid great lamentation.

All was not over. When the body was ready for committal “it happened again and a very loud and indistinguishable cry went up.”¹⁵ One priest took the head of Želivský and climbed into the pulpit holding the head up for the people to see. Witnesses say the priest tried to address the people to the effect of how they should recall and practice the good words they had heard from Želivský when he spoke from the same pulpit. However, loud cries and sustained lamentation prevented the priest from saying anything intelligible or understandable. Finally, the head was placed with the body. The reappearance of the severed head profoundly affected the people. “Some had to be dragged away as though half dead from the church. Some went mad and have been lying in their beds as though ill.”¹⁶ In the end,

¹¹ Ibid. 483-4.

¹² Loc. cit.

¹³ Loc. cit.

¹⁴ Loc. cit.

¹⁵ Ibid. 484-5.

¹⁶ Ibid. 485.

Želivský was buried (head and all!) beneath the pulpit from which he had preached. One account concludes: “May our Lord God be praised forever that he has glorified Bohemia with such a martyr!”¹⁷

The murder, death or martyrdom of Jan Želivský is reported in other fifteenth century sources. The *Chronicon veteris Collegiati* reports that on account of the execution common people from both New and Old Towns of Prague plundered the colleges sacking libraries. The author adds the comment that his books were stolen in the riot. Additionally, Prague Jews were molested, two elders of the town suffered the same fate as Želivský and his colleagues and on the following day five city councillors and several others were killed.¹⁸ There is no mention of the head being carried through the streets.

Elsewhere, reports claim Želivský was beheaded along with twelve others. This time the head of the slain priest does play a role in subsequent events. “Priest Gaudentius carried his head on a plate around Prague and incited the people to revenge.”¹⁹ According to this account, armed men from the New Town marched on the Old Town demanding the body of the martyred priest be turned over to them. In these three accounts Želivský is either explicitly or tacitly regarded as a martyr. Other accounts, hostile to the Hussites, portray Želivský differently thus his death was of no significance though the author does rightly report the Hussites of Prague did regard the murder as a deed worthy of remembrance. Denounced as a “would-be priest” and an “impious monk” Želivský appeared in Prague “prepared for any crime”. His sermons seemed to indicate that “he had no common sense” and once he was removed from his pulpit managed to worm his way into another.²⁰ This was the man who four years before his own death presided over the murder of a number of town councillors which was a “horrible spectacle.”²¹

Having gained significant political power he became a despot. This was the reason for his elimination in March 1422 along with eleven others. However, an error on the part of those cleaning up the mess revealed the affair, prematurely, to the wider public. “Their servants were not careful enough, and when they were washing in the yard they let the blood of the murdered run down a spout into the square.”²² When common people in the Old Town square saw this effusion of blood they concluded the worst and a riot began. This later account corresponds in several details to the contemporary record. Armed people stormed and conquered the city hall. Eleven burghers were killed. The university was sacked and its library demolished. The head of Jan Želivský plays its own role once more.

In the midst of the uproar caused by the execution of this popular priest, there were women who considered Želivský a saint. Retrieving his head they carried it through the streets of Prague with great reverence for several days and great

¹⁷ Loc. cit.

¹⁸ *Chronicon veteris Collegiati* in Höfler 1:86.

¹⁹ SRB 3:50.

²⁰ Aeneas Sylvius, *Historia Bohemica*, c. 36. I cite from the following edition: Dana Martínková, Alena Hadravová and Jiří Matl, eds., *Aeneae Silvii Historia Bohemica* [Fontes rerum Regni Bohemiae I] (Prague, 1998) 104.

²¹ Aeneas Sylvius, *Historia Bohemica*, c. 37, 106. On that event see Howard Kaminsky, “The Prague Insurrection of 30 July 1419,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* 17 (1966) 106-26.

²² Aeneas Sylvius, *Historia Bohemica*, c. 44, 126.

lamentation accompanied this sustained procession especially around the churches. Multitudes accompanying the displayed head shouted the priest was blessed – a holy man – and one filled with God. Moreover, Želivský was proclaimed as a man who had died for the truth in defence of the faith inherited from the fathers. Denouncing his assailants who dared put their hands upon the holy priest the people declared that Želivský's enemies were an impious and sacrilegious lot who were not only despised by the people but on account of their wretched deed were now also recipients of divine hatred. Once the riot settled down the followers of the slain priest saw to it that the head of Jan Želivský was embalmed and kept among a collection of other holy relics.²³ It appears the stories of Želivský's martyrdom were told and recorded to serve several purposes. First, to remember their own company of witnesses. Second, to inspire Hussites to similar acts of commitment and devotion. Third, to identify and denounce their enemies. Fourth, to provide a link in the argument that they represented the true faith. These components can be seen clearly in the stories of other martyrs to the Hussite cause. For comparative purposes several other stories in the decade preceding Želivský's death are considered.

Jan Hudec of Slaný, Martin Křidélko and Stašek Polák, Prague, 1412

The year 1412 brought the fledgling Hussite movement its first martyrs. The immediate background to the violent summer events in Prague can be traced to the proclamation of a crusade and the offer of plenary indulgences to all who lent assistance to the undertaking. On 9 September 1411 Pope John XXIII published a crusade bull against King Ladislaus of Naples who favoured John's papal rival, Gregory XII. Denouncing Gregory as a heretic, blasphemer and schismatic, plenary indulgences were offered to all who contributed financially to the crusade.²⁴ The dean of Passau, Wenceslaus Tiem was named one of two principal indulgence sellers in Prague. Tiem arrived in May, was received favourably by King Wenceslaus and went to work. Jan Hus withstood the business in strident terms in preaching and writing.²⁵ He denounced the methods employed saying, "the papal legate sold entire deaneries, towns and cities to the extent of his ability to unworthy priests who were living in concubinage or in taverns. These then used the indulgences to impose taxation on the people without restraint."²⁶ Elsewhere he ascribed to the bull unreasonable powers:

By the apostolic authority given to me, I absolve you from all sins as long as you truly repent and confess before God and me. If you are unable to assume the project [of the crusade] personally but desire to contribute... I grant to you the

²³ Ibid. c. 44, 128.

²⁴ Text in, "Bulla indulgentiarum Pape Joannis XXIII," is in *Historia et Monumenta Ioannis Hus atque Hieronymi Pragensis, confessorum Christi...*, vol. 1 (Nürnberg, 1715) 212–13.

²⁵ "Quaestio Magistri Ioannis Hus, disputata... de indulgentiis sive de Cruciata Papae Ioannis XXIII, fulminata contra Ladislaum Apuliae regem," in *Historia et Monumenta* 1:174ff. See *Contra Cruciata*, in MIHO 22: 129–39.

²⁶ Novotný 124.

complete remission of all sins, punishment and guilt. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.²⁷

Riots ensued, including one on 24 June, in which many were punished. Hus strenuously deplored the repression.

When faithful Christians with good intentions warn priests about lies in their sermons they are arrested, abused by priests in the churches, beaten and broken before being dragged off to student dwellings where they are whipped. Monks from the monastery of Our Lady of the Snows in the New Town, as well as those from other monasteries, have behaved in this fashion.²⁸

Several sources provide details of the events in Prague which produced the first “Hussite” martyrs.²⁹ On 10 July 1412, three laymen, followers of Jan Hus, publicly protested the sale of indulgences in several Prague churches including St. Vitus’ Cathedral in the castle, the Týn Church and St. James’. Evidently, they heckled the preachers at all three venues. The three – Jan Hudec of Slaný, Martin Křidélko and Stašek Polák – were arrested and imprisoned on Sunday 10 July. Upon hearing the news, Jan Hus went to the city hall personally with other university masters and about two thousand students. Hus interceded with the magistrates not to deal harshly with the three young men claiming that he, and not them, was the originator of the resistance to the indulgences trade in Prague. Hus in fact had preached a sermon against the practice of indulgences in the Bethlehem Chapel on 17 June and was responsible for the organization of a public disputation held in the Karolinum. Obtaining a pledge from the councillors, Hus and his followers dispersed. Next day the three were executed at the customs house.³⁰

Immediately thereafter, Master Jan Jičín arrived in the square with a large crowd of masters and students.³¹ Town magistrates issued threats but the crowd

²⁷ Hus, “De indulgentiis sive de Cruciata Papae Ioannis XXIII,” 233. While the implication may be suggested, the formula Hus quotes cannot be found in the text of the bull.

²⁸ Mistrá Jana Husi Sebrané spisy (Prague, n.d.) 1:112.

²⁹ SRB 3:16-19, František Šimek and Miloslav Kaňak, eds., *Staré letopisy české z rukopisu křížovnického* [Old Czech Annals from the manuscript of the Order of the Cross with the Red Star] (Prague, 1959) 45-6, Šimek, ed., *Staré letopisy české z vřatislavského rukopisu* [Old Czech Annals from the Breslau manuscript] (Prague, 1937) 10-11 and SRB 3:15-19.

³⁰ At the corner of Old Town square and Železná Street at the house called “U jednorožce [At the unicorn]”.

³¹ Jan of Jičín, university master in Prague later the only master to affiliate with the Tábórite wing of the movement, should be numbered with Jakoubek of Střibřo and Nicholas of Dresden as leaders in the ideological revolt against the authority of the Roman Church. He, along with several other masters, supported Jan Hus in the summer of 1410 in a vigorous defence of the works of John Wyclif. Later actively involved in the inauguration of Utraquist practice. “In that year [1414] the masters and bachelors from Dresden lived... in Prague and maintained a school there. Master Peter and Master Nicholas, English [Peter Payne], Nicholas Loripes had been expelled from Dresden on account of the fact that they had given in secret the blood of the Lord. They influenced Master Jičín to do likewise in giving the blood of the Lord and he followed this counsel and persuaded Master Jakoubek and many other priests to do likewise.” Old Czech Chronicles in SRB 3:472. It is of some significance to note that Jan of Jičín was one of the very few priests at Tábóro who maintained a fairly orthodox position on the sacrament of the altar. Jan Příbram, “The Lives of the Tábórite Priests”, in

boldly announced they were prepared to endure punishment. Arrests followed immediately but the authorities feared greater dissension from the restless crowd and did not harm anyone else. With some daring the people took the bodies of the three men and carried them “with great boldness” in procession from the Old Town Square to Bethlehem Chapel to the sound of the antiphon *Isti sunt sancti*.³² Pious women wrapped the bodies in white linen. Next day they were buried in the chapel with the rites of martyrs. Chroniclers relate Jan Hus in Bethlehem Chapel claimed the bodies of the martyred more valuable than their weight in gold. Hus’ lieutenant, Jerome of Prague, was later accused of being a prime instigator of the protests.³³ At the Council of Constance in 1415, Hus was accused of ordering the bodies of the three to be carried to Bethlehem Chapel and at their funeral ordering the mass for the dead not be sung but rather the martyr’s mass. Further, it was alleged Hus later remarked in a sermon he would not surrender their bodies for any amount of money. Hus denied he ordered the procession and the singing. Jan Náz, a Prague canon and one of King Wenceslaus’ diplomats asserted at Constance that King Wenceslaus ordered the execution of the three men. Hus contested that point. Štěpán Páleč, another Prague master, declared Hus canonized the three as holy martyrs. As proof, Páleč read from Hus’ book *De ecclesia*, chapter 21: “simple laymen and priests who are instructed by the grace of God can teach many people through good example and publicly contradict the lies of Antichrist but will perish with the sword. This is to be seen in the case of three laymen who opposed the deceitful helpers of Antichrist and were slain with the sword.”³⁴ In a sermon shortly after the tragedy, Hus referred to the deaths of the three noting this was the price for calling into question papal authority.

The father of all this was Štěpán Páleč. He was the doctor who once loved the truth and was my faithful and beloved friend and the second was Stanislav [of Znojmo]. They rose up against us for the reason that we declined to give our approval to the papal bull which proclaimed the crusade... to exterminate King Ladislaus... . In this bull the pope... promised the forgiveness of sins and of all punishment to any one who would obey or who would contribute money. There were those who risked their very lives in withstanding the preachers who alleged that the pope was our lord on earth and who can distribute the remission of sins and punishment as he sees fit, as well as take up the sword of iron in the manner of a secular ruler. Among these were Martin, Jan and Stašek who were beheaded and were buried in the Bethlehem Chapel in the name of God. There were others who were arrested, tortured and thrown into jail.³⁵

Other sources indicate the three men “decapitated in the city of Prague because of their favourable Hussite and Wyclifite attitude” were venerated even

Jan z Příbramě: život kněží Tábořských, ed. Jaroslav Boubín [Podbrdsko, fontes 1] (Příbram, 2000) 79. He was active in theological discussions throughout the 1420s.

³² Reported in SRB and Šimek, ed., *Staré letopisy české z vřatavského rukopisu* 11.

³³ Hardt 4:676.

³⁴ Petr of Mladoňovice, *Relatio de Mag. Joannis Hus causa*, in Matthew Spinka, *John Hus at the Council of Constance* (New York, 1965) 218–20. Hereafter *Relatio*.

³⁵ Sermon for the Seventh Sunday after the Birth of Christ, in *Mistr Jan Hus Postilla*, ed., J.B. Jeschke (Prague, 1952) 75.

though they were heretics.³⁶ The priest Jan Želivský referred to them in a sermon on 19 November 1418 and again on 23 July 1419 drawing attention to several cases of “Hussite” martyrdom: Hus and Jerome in Constance, those burned in Olomouc and the deaths of the laymen in the Old Town of Prague.³⁷ Jakoubek noted the incident as well in his sermon on the new martyrs in 1417 or 1418 asserting the condemned boldly went to their deaths joyfully and with happy faces.³⁸ These were the first to die for the Hussite cause; the first in an Utraquist calendar of martyrs.

Lay Preachers in Olomouc, 1415

Before events at the Council of Constance bore fruit of official anti-Hussite repression, events were underway in other parts of the Bohemian kingdom to deal with religious dissent. On 29 June 1415 two lay preachers in Olomouc were burned for promulgating the “errors of Jan Hus”.³⁹ One of the martyrs was named Jan and the other’s name is unknown. Olomouc was a staunch Catholic city in Moravia but the royal captain of Moravia, Lord Lacek of Kravaře was a Hussite sympathizer. Masters of the university in Prague where Jan had previously studied filed a protest with Lord Lacek claiming Jan was a “genuine and faithful defender of the law of God” and the deaths were unjustified.⁴⁰

These lay preachers were added to the litany of Hussite martyrs and remembered as victims of malice and Antichrist. According to Jan Želivský, “to kill from malice is murder and this is what has transpired [in several places] and everyone who consented [to such deaths] are murderers [including] those who were burned in Olomouc.”⁴¹ Preaching in 1417 or 1418 Jakoubek of Stříbro commented: “The two were hastily burned in Olomouc by those inhumane and cruel enemies of the gospel and the cross of Christ who were inflamed with hatred and wrath and without any proper trial which has for some time been customary. On account of these circumstances, if we test them by the gospel, we believe faithfully that they have been raised from death to life.”⁴² Indeed, they lived in the memory of the Utraquists and were commemorated as martyrs of the gospel.

³⁶ *Documenta* 638–9.

³⁷ MS Prague, NK V G 3, f. 218r and f. 19v.

³⁸ In FRB 8:231–43.

³⁹ There is a brief account of the event by Václav of Jihlava, in Johann Loserth, ed., “Historische Auszeichnungen aus der Hussitenzeit des Stadtschreibers Wenzel von Iglau” MVGDB 19 (1881) 87–88.

⁴⁰ *Documenta* 561–2.

⁴¹ See for example the reference in the postil of Jakoubek of Stříbro (1415–1416), MS. Prague, NK VIII E 3, f. 70v where he refers to the “duo in Olomucz sunt combusti nisi quia veritas prosternitur et anticristus in malicia sua prosperatur.” Želivský likewise makes reference in a sermon to “those burned in Olomouc.” Sermon for 23 July 1419 in MS. Prague, NK V G 3, f. 19v.

⁴² The text of the sermon is in FRB 8:231–243.

Jan Hus, Constance, 1415

The *passio* of Jan Hus at the Council of Constance on 6 July 1415 is the cornerstone of Bohemian martyrologies and constitutes a separate study.⁴³ In practically all sermons and stories of the Bohemian martyrs after 1415 Hus features prominently. The martyrdom of Hus became the stimulus for the development of the celebration of the Bohemian Martyrs of which there are numerous sources.⁴⁴

Betrayed by King Sigismund, Hus was bound over for trial and eventual condemnation at Constance.⁴⁵ The details of the trial can be passed over but on 6 July Hus was made to listen to a sermon of condemnation preached by the bishop of Lodi on the text in Romans calling for the body of sin to be destroyed with extensive comment on the evils of heresy and how it is the duty of the authorities to exterminate it.⁴⁶ Displaying no defiance, Hus knelt and prayed for his enemies but was openly jeered.⁴⁷ He was defrocked in an elaborate ceremony with relevant curses to the effect that he was contumacious in his heresy, was the wicked Judas, and thus his soul was turned over by the church to the Devil. He was compelled to wear a paper crown on which were three demons and the inscription: "This is a heresiarch."⁴⁸ He was denied a priest or a confessor on the grounds that he was a heretic.⁴⁹ Hus seems not to have been bothered and is reported to have exclaimed: "Lord Jesus Christ, I am willing to bear most patiently and humbly this dreadful ... death for Thy gospel..." He was urged to save his life by recantation but declined.⁵⁰ The fire was kindled and Hus died singing. Care was taken to destroy all traces of his body and clothing, as Petr of Mladoňovice reported, to prevent the Bohemians from taking them as relics. The account of Hus' death concludes with the assertion that the martyr was an "eminent preacher of the evangelical truth" and the account has been made so that "his memory might be vividly recollected" and a faithful witness to the truth be preserved so that "the memory of the Master, its most steadfast champion, may thus live in the future."⁵¹ Records of Hus' *passio* were read

⁴³ The best source for Hus' death is Petr Mladoňovice, *Relatio* 87-234.

⁴⁴ Extant sources have been catalogued by Václav Novotný in FRB 8: lxxii-lxxiii, cxx-xclviii, 243-246 and 419-472. The work of David Holeton is an essential supplement. See especially his "The Office of Jan Hus: An Unrecorded Antiphony in the Metropolitan Library of Estergom," in *Time and Community* [Festschrift for Thomas J. Talley], ed., J. Neil Alexander (Washington, 1990) 137-152 and "O felix Bohemia – O felix Constantia: The Liturgical Commemoration of Saint Jan Hus," in HENC, 385-403.

⁴⁵ In the Czech version of the *Passio* Hus referred to his safe-conduct from Sigismund and when he turned to the king Sigismund blushed deeply. FRB 8:121-49 at 135.

⁴⁶ The sermon appears in FRB 8: 489ff.

⁴⁷ *Relatio* 229.

⁴⁸ *Relatio*, 230-1. For a recent consideration of this see Milena Kubíková, "The Heretics's Cap of Hus", in BRRP 4 (2002) 143-50.

⁴⁹ Hus's last occasion to confess appears to have been several weeks earlier when he asked for and was granted a confessor. Jiří Kejř, "Teaching on Repentance and Confession in the Bohemian Reformation," BRRP 5,1 (2004) 93-4.

⁵⁰ *Relatio* 233.

⁵¹ *Relatio* 234.

from the first anniversary of the event and sermons regularly referred to the sufferings of the true martyrs.⁵²

Jerome of Prague, Constance, 1416

Hus' disciple Jerome followed his colleague to Constance sharing his fate on 30 May 1416.⁵³ Brought bound before his accusers some shouted "let him be burned, let him be burned."⁵⁴ At a hearing on 26 May 1416 Jerome addressed the assembly. Among lengthy comments he referred to Socrates, Plato, Zeno, Anaxagoras, Virgil, Seneca, Rutilius, Boethius, Moses, Elijah, Daniel, Susannah, John Baptist, Stephen and apostles who had suffered as martyrs defending truth.⁵⁵ One eyewitness noted Jerome was fearless and seemed even to welcome death so much so that Poggio Bracciolini considered him "worthy to always be remembered."⁵⁶ This recalls comments by Petr Mladoňovice concerning Hus the previous year.

His detractors did not agree. Jacob Balardi Arrigoni, Bishop of Lodi, took to the pulpit again (he had performed a similar service in the case against Hus the previous year) and preached "a fine sermon" from the Gospel according to Mark arguing Jerome must be rebuked on account of the hardness of his heart and for his unbelief.⁵⁷ Pleading he preferred mercy rather than wrath, Bishop Jacob denied any wish to pierce the fire with a sword but asserted crimes undertaken publicly should not be punished behind closed doors. The guilty should be punished in hopes of saving many and this was more expedient than allowing the errors of one to infect many. Jerome was castigated as a contumacious heretic. Addressing the Catholic lords, the bishop asked them to look at the boldness of men like Jan Hus and Jerome who are base and of no repute and no one knows even where they came from. Jacob launched a diatribe against Jerome accusing him of having dared to attack the Bohemian realm, inciting nobility to trouble and upheaval. Jerome encouraged knights to overturn the venerable and proper constitution of the Bohemian lands and by doing so fomented dissension among ordinary people. Jerome became as a "mob leader" of armed gangs perpetrating murder, iconoclasm, and much violence and evil. Jacob suggested the Bohemian land would have been happier had Jerome not been born. Recalling Christian deviants from a millennium earlier – Arius, Sabellius, Faustus and Nestorius – Jacob denounced Jerome as an even greater heretic. He noted the rumours of Jerome's

⁵² See Jakoubek of Stříbro's sermon of 1417/18 in FRB 8:231-243 and in the homilies of Jan Želivský, Amedeo Molnár, ed., *Jan Želivský: Dochovaná kázání z roku 1419* [Jan Želivský: the extant sermons from the year 1419] (Prague, 1953) 56, 96, 129, 240.

⁵³ Chief sources for his life are trial records in Vienna (1410) and Constance (1416). For the former, Ladislav Klicman, ed., *Processus iudiciarius contra Jeronimum de Praga habitus Viennae a. 1410-1412* (Prague, 1898) and Hardt 4, cols. 635-771. Secondary sources include František Šmahel, *Jeroným Pražský* (Prague, 1966) and R.R. Betts, *Essays in Czech History* (London, 1969) 195-235.

⁵⁴ Hardt 4:215-18.

⁵⁵ For the official version of the speech see Hardt 4:752-62.

⁵⁶ Latin edition in *Documenta* 624-9. Reference on 628.

⁵⁷ The note that it was a fine sermon comes from the *Gesta* of Cardinal Guillaume Fillastre whose diary of the Council of Constance is useful. Text appears in Louise R. Loomis, *The Council of Constance* (New York, 1961) 83.

heresies had reached England, France, Hungary, Poland, Russia and elsewhere. The Bishop of Lodi declared Jerome should have been tortured severely in order to force him to confess his wickedness.⁵⁸ The Bishop of Lodi concluded his sermon and Jerome was sentenced to die. “This sacred synod has decreed that this Jerome be cast out as a rotten branch that is dry and has no life. It declared that he is a heretic and relapsed into heresy and is excommunicated, damned and condemned.”⁵⁹

Jerome was crowned with a tall paper hat on which were painted several red demons in the same manner as Hus. He received his hat with the words, “our Lord Jesus Christ wore a crown of thorns for me when he died. I will wear this hat for him with joy because I love him.” Hostile onlookers remarked that he received a “crown of disgrace, a crown of horror and a crown of turpitude”.⁶⁰ As he was led to the place of death he sang the liturgy through completely. He was stripped naked, tied to the stake and covered with wood. Then he addressed the gathered crowd: “I shall die now because I do not agree with the Council that Master Jan Hus was properly and justly condemned by the Council. For I know very well that he was a true preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ.” It is reported that he suffered a great deal in the flames singing and confessing his faith and from time to time when the smoke parted his entire body and long beard could be seen on fire and huge blisters appeared on his body. An eyewitness from the Bohemian lands noted that “while he burned he remained alive in the fire in great martyrdom for as long as it might take one to walk slowly from St. Clement’s [Church in Prague] across the bridge to St. Mary the Virgin’s [Church].⁶¹ On one hand Jerome was held as a great and longsuffering martyr but a papal official remarked ruefully that Jerome remained stubbornly in his errors until his last breath “thus remaining in death as he had in life in his devilish and damnable beliefs.”⁶² Jerome was to the end a “miserable heretic” whose “unhappy soul” was taken by the fire and “burned eternally.”⁶³ Poggio Bracciolini paid high tribute to Jerome by noting he was not afraid of the flames or the painful torment or even death itself. “None of the Stoics endured death with such endurance and strength of spirit.”⁶⁴

Jan Krása, Breslau, 1420

In the winter of 1420 a Prague merchant named Jan Krása was in Breslau on business. King Sigismund was at that time engaging in punitive action against a number of people in that city and Krása was arrested and put in jail on account of the truth.⁶⁵ Some accounts relate Krása had a cell mate named Mikuláš whom he

⁵⁸ The sermon is in Hardt 1:203ff. The bishop was an Italian Dominican.

⁵⁹ Hardt 4:766-71.

⁶⁰ Theodore of Vrie normally resident at an Augustinian house in Saxony taught theology, opposed ecclesiastical corruption, defended conciliarism and opposed Hussites. Hardt 1:202.

⁶¹ Hardt 4:771. St. Clement’s is in the Old Town of Prague and St. Mary’s in the Lesser Town across the Vltava River via Charles Bridge a distance of some 650 yards.

⁶² The opinion of Dietrich von Niem in Hardt 2:454.

⁶³ Theodore of Vrie, in Hardt 1:202.

⁶⁴ Documenta 629.

⁶⁵ Vavřinec of Březová, “Historia Hussitica”, in FRB 5:358-9.

tried to convert to the true faith. Krása seemed aware his death constituted martyrdom. “Dear brother Mikuláš! The martyr’s crown is approaching, Let us endure this small difficulty given to us by our dear Lord for an eternal reward, remembering the Lord Jesus went through a cruel death for us and saved us with his innocent blood and how that martyrs went through difficult deaths, including virgins.” Krása admonished his companion to confess the truth and stand firm. On Thursday before Lent both men were taken from jail. Their legs were tied to horses with the intention both men be dragged to their deaths. The papal legate urged them to denounce the Hussite faith. Mikuláš, “fearing death, recanted and denounced the truth”. He was released and disappears from Hussite records of martyrdom.

Krása was not dissuaded. He remained contumacious in his beliefs. The horses were ordered on and Krása was dragged slowly over the cobblestones of Breslau. The executioner in charge frequently halted the procedure. Many accompanied the gruesome scene. The legate urged Krása to reconsider his position. “Abandon this heresy. Leave this teaching the Bohemians have started. Do not die. Save your life.” Krása refused declaring he would happily suffer death for the holy teachings of the Hussites. This went on for some time to no avail. No amount of persuasion could cause Krása to dissent from his inclinations. He was dragged further and burned to death. One chronicle account remarks he was executed for refusing to admit Jan Hus had been properly and justifiably condemned.⁶⁶ Jerome of Prague had said as much.

The death of Jan Krása was widely held among Hussites as martyrdom and the incident appears frequently in literature of the period, both Hussite and hostile. Fragments of a contemporary but hostile rhymed chronicle mentions in passing the incident in Breslau.⁶⁷ Hussite sources connected Krása’s death with a general persecution of the “four articles” of truth. Describing Krása as “an ardent follower of truth” King Sigismund was denounced as an enemy of truth who tortured Krása to death because the latter refused to abandon the practice of utraquism.⁶⁸ Even the Tábórites did not hesitate to mention the martyrdom of Krása as was reported in a lengthy speech made by “one of the hardline Tábórites called Šimon the Blacksmith”, a layman.⁶⁹ Elsewhere, in the polemical “Complaint of the Bohemian Crown to God Concerning the Hungarian King and the Council of Constance” Krása is presented as a “beautiful and steadfast devotee” of the faith who was treated like a murderer or arsonist on account of the law of God, dragged through the streets, burned and his remains thrown into the Odra River.⁷⁰ Texts in that same genre complain that innocent adherents of the law of God were unjustly condemned. Some were forced to recant – like the aforementioned Mikuláš – but Krása “a man deserving of praise” and a “godly knight steadfast in the faith” refused to denounce the truth was ordered dragged to death, then burned, then drowned. “His name was Krása [meaning beauty] and this was a suitable name for him because this man was beautiful for you [God] and, I believe, graceful and precious. Renouncing worldly

⁶⁶ “Historia Hussitica,” in FRB 5:359.

⁶⁷ MS. Třeboň, State Archives A 16, ff. 223r-v.

⁶⁸ See the satirical anti-Hussite manifesto in UB 2: 525-7.

⁶⁹ Text in MC 1:29-33.

⁷⁰ Jiří Daňhelka, ed., *Husitské skladby budyšínského rukopisu* [The Hussite compositions of the Budyšin manuscript] (Prague, 1952) 23-31 at 27.

laurels he received the crown of heaven. By losing this ungrateful life he surely obtained the eternal one.”⁷¹

The national assembly at Čáslav in June 1421 issued numerous statements against Sigismund, upheld the Hussite faith noting Krása was killed “for receiving the communion of the body and blood of the Lord” and that such retributive action was shameful and disgraceful.⁷² Bohemian barons published a letter on 20 April 1420 decrying the death of Krása whom they characterized as an “innocent and devout man” murdered for no other reason than that he “communed in the blood of the Lord.” The nobles judged this “a severe dishonour and disgrace.”⁷³ The opinion was not isolated. In diplomatic correspondence with foreign authorities the Hussites recalled the deed. “Most recently in Breslau as a disgrace and blemish upon our kingdom, he [Sigismund] ordered the famous citizen of Prague, Jan Krása, pure in faith and most constant in virtue, be drawn by horses until his flesh was off the bones and his body torn to pieces, and that he be damned and burnt, because of an incident involving communion.”⁷⁴ References to Krása’s martyrdom could be multiplied but he is frequently named among the martyrs who gave their lives in defence of the faith and whose lives and sacrifices lived on in the memory of the Hussite movement.⁷⁵

Master Václav, his vicar, three old peasants and four children, Arnoštovice, 1420

During the crusade progression in the spring and early summer of 1420 headed for Prague there were numerous atrocities associated with the invasion of Bohemia by foreign and hostile armies. Some of these deaths qualify for inclusion in narratives concerning martyrdom. Such is the case with an incident occurring on 6-7 July.⁷⁶ A contingency of forces under the command of the Duke of Austria rode with a strong army through Bohemia en route to Prague. Sixty men turned off at the village of Arnoštovice. A chronicler records soldiers arresting some loyal to the Hussite doctrine of the chalice. These included the local priest, Master Václav, a “man well-favoured by God” along with his unnamed vicar. Both men were placed on a horse and taken to the village of Bystřice where the duke had camped. Both were presented as “contumacious heretics”. Throughout the night the two were led back and forth and threatened with death by fire unless they renounced their faith. The two refused and suffered torture.

⁷¹ “Accusation of the Czech Crown in Verse,” in Daňhelka 43-60 at 47.

⁷² The proceedings of the Diet can be found in AČ 3:226-30 but the reference to Krása appears in a list of fourteen indictments issued by the diet to Sigismund. See “Historia Hussitica”, in FRB 5:489-91 at 490.

⁷³ AČ 3:210-212.

⁷⁴ Letter to the Doge and Council of the Republic of Venice, 10 July 1420 in UB 1:39-43 at 40.

⁷⁵ Apart from texts dealing with Krása in a religious or theological sense, he is mentioned in chronicles. See for example, SRB 3: 33 and “*The Very Fine Chronicle of Jan Žižka, the Servant of King Václav*”, in František M. Bartoš, ed., *Listy Bratra Jana a Kronika velmi pěkná a Janu Žižkovi* (Prague, 1949) 36-44 at 38-9., passim.

⁷⁶ “Historia Hussitica”, in FRB 5:385-6.

When morning came, Master Václav, his vicar, three aged peasants and four children – aged seven, eight, ten and eleven – were taken to the stake because, as the chronicler wrote, they “stood firmly for the truth”. A crowd gathered to implore the condemned to repent and renounce their stubborn heresies and save their lives. However, Priest Václav, being a “true shepherd of the sheep” declined on behalf of them all. “Far be it from us to do what you suggest. We do not wish to die a single death, but if it were possible we would die a hundred of these deaths before denying the clear truth of the gospel.” The fire was lit and the nine victims perished singing songs, the children in the arms of Priest Václav. In the Hussite memory all “received the martyr’s crown as is faithfully believed. So, we miserable ones, what shall we do? Even those who are not scholars, peasants and children, rise up and through a martyr’s crown take over heaven.”

Vojtěch and another priest, Chelčice, 1420

At the same time that martyrs were being added to the Utraquist faith at Arnoštovice, crusaders added others from the village of Chelčice.⁷⁷ The priest there, Vojtěch, was reputed to be intolerant of any deviation from the true practice of the sacrament even though he was allegedly not sympathetic with the excesses of the Táborites.⁷⁸ “On account of the chalice” he was arrested along with another anonymous priest and taken from Chelčice to České Budějovice and turned over to the authority of the city council and remanded as heretics. They were dispatched immediately to the tower. For many days, evidently, efforts were made to convince the two to forsake the heretical faith of the Utraquists and return to the graces of the official church. After three fruitless weeks the authorities gave up and being unable to dislodge the two priests from their faith and loyalty to the utraquist mass took them outside the city and burned them to death. The chronicler made this remark: “All honour be yours, O Lord, for allowing these to endure to the end who fear you and who do not shrink back from all kinds of torture.”

Numerous stories can be added to the dossier of martyrs in Reformation Bohemia: Nicholas of Dresden, called a “priest of Christ”, was burned in Meißen in 1417 and thereafter remembered as a martyr for Christ.⁷⁹ Two years later the priest Jan Nakvasa and other Hussites were martyred in Kouřim on account of the chalice. The death of the priest is vividly written: his hands were pierced with sword tips, ropes were drawn through his body, he was tied to a tree, straw and wood piled around him and he was set ablaze and suffered martyrdom.⁸⁰ In 1420 more than 1,600 adherents of the new faith were thrown into mine shafts at Kutná Hora. One particular shaft near the Church of St. Martin was derogatorily called “Tábor”. These victims were hailed as faithful ones who endured “great trouble, tribulation, grievance and torment” being tortured with “cruel imprisonment, hunger, thirst and death.” Those who were opposed to the doctrines and practices of the Bohemian

⁷⁷ Ibid. FRB 5:386-7.

⁷⁸ Questioned by Kaminsky in his *A History of the Hussite Revolution* 168.

⁷⁹ Molnár, ed., *Jan Želivský: Dochovaná kázání z roku 1419*, 126-7. See also Bartoš, *Husitství a cizina* [The Hussite movement and foreign lands] (Prague, 1931) 141-2.

⁸⁰ “Historia Hussitica,” in FRB 5:352-5.

Reformation pursued their adherents as heretics. Those captured were sent to the extermination centre at Kutná Hora. Pro-Hussite writers noted that for the great sins perpetrated at Kutná Hora the city was destroyed by “divine revenge.”⁸¹ There were those who warned the people of Kutná Hora that “severe retribution from God” would follow if they continued to persecute the saints of God. The names of at least four priests are known to us but these four – Master Jan Chodek, parish priest of Kouřim, Jakub, Martin and Leonard – were seized and thrown to their deaths in the mine shafts. Many other lay people were killed at the same time.⁸² All of this happened during the night of 9 January 1421.

In Memory of the New Martyrs

Before the military period burst upon Bohemia the Utraquist priest Jakoubek of Stříbro preached a sermon in Bethlehem Chapel based upon the text of Matthew 5:10, “blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Preached on the eve of the promulgation of a crusade bull against the Hussite heretics in Bohemia, the sermon is among the first in a long series of homilies on the theme of martyrdom, extolling the faithfulness, righteousness and sacrifice of the steadfast martyrs who laid down their lives in dungeons, in the fires of the stake and at sword point in defence of the true faith. Jakoubek mentions specifically Jan Hus, Jerome, Martin, Jan and Stašek, Jan of Olomouc and his unnamed colleague. The sermon comes too early to refer to Jan Krása but it should not be doubted Jakoubek would have included him. The same might be said for the martyrs in Arnoštovice, Chelčice, Kouřim and Kutná Hora. The same cannot be said of Želivský and one is left to ponder Jakoubek’s response to the posthumous life of Želivský’s head. However, the seven he names are regarded as “blessed”, having suffered in defence of righteousness thus inheriting the kingdom of heaven.

Jakoubek’s sermon contains several clues concerning the contextualizing and understanding of the martyr tradition in Prague. He refers to Hus as a “second Elijah” who sacrificed everything, including himself, for the salvation of others. His faithful teaching “is still alive.” Hus is a “holy man” dishonoured in the same manner as Christ. Notwithstanding this, he remains one of God’s “faithful knights.” His *passio* is recalled with a sense of triumph. His spirit reached upwards with the flames all the way to heaven and he entered paradise with the angels just as Elijah did. He is Master Hus of “blessed memory.” Jerome and Hus are linked together as holy men and as saints and Jerome like Hus was raised to God.

The Prague and Olomouc martyrs are catalogued as “five blessed brothers in Christ.” These men lived “lives which were pure, humble, voluntarily modest, poor and in the spirit of the gospel, innocent and dove-like.” Jakoubek eulogizes the five as experiencing “blessed holiness” to a greater extent than masters and priests. He links all five in suffering to Christ. “The aforementioned five brothers, God bless them, after piously taking the Blessed Sacrament, lived without hypocrisy and

⁸¹ Ibid. FRB 5:352.

⁸² Ibid. FRB 5:355.

without dissimulation, in humbleness, patience, and truth, keeping in clear remembrance the poor, distressful, and painful life of our Lord, the redeemer and his dishonourable crucifixion.” Moreover, as other testimonies concerning Hus and Jerome confirm, these five, according to Jakoubek, eagerly looked for all possible opportunity to suffer death for the cause of Christ and the gospel. The three beheaded in Prague went to their deaths “joyful and with cheerful faces.” The sermon reaches its climax in a clear appeal to the inspiration generated by such holy people and a call for motivation in the wake of their sacrifice.

It is improper to boast of it unnecessarily, quite the contrary, we should renounce all impiety and secular desires and live on in this world in continence, piously and justly, and not be led from our faith in the gospel either by strange teachings, brought in from elsewhere, or by unnecessary philosophising. It has been written about this, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise ones and repudiate the cleverness of the clever ones’ (1 Corinthians 1:19). But let each and every one of us hold to the wisdom and teaching of the gospel. Let us get rid of the pride, and miserable dissimulation which we have inside us. Let us abandon all lusts, enticements, drinking and drunkenness and all secular futilities. Let us take off our extravagant, expensive clothes, and change ourselves inwardly in our hearts, as well as our behaviour and conduct both before God and among people. Let us become humble and may each of us become another person, to live a new life and to acquire, with the help of our Lord, this blessed double patience for Christ and his gospel, in order to be able, after the death of our bodies, to eternally rejoice with Christ in the company of the victorious Church, together with these and other blessed martyrs. Let us follow the one, who himself is the way, the truth and the life. Now, glory to him, as well to the Father and the Holy Spirit forever! Amen.

Noted previously, records of Hus’ *passio* were read from 1416 onwards. Other evidence proves Hus and Jerome were regarded as saints in some Bohemian churches. Reports reached the Council of Constance, which sat until 1418, that pictures of the two martyrs were circulating throughout the Bohemian kingdom. Chroniclers commented the martyrs of the faith in Bohemia were now among God’s saints. Juridical citations make clear priests and laity alike venerated the Bohemian martyrs. Similar evidence can be gleaned from hostile sources and some of these reflect situations somewhat removed from Bohemia.⁸³ While many Bohemians venerated their martyrs, their detractors, like the canons of Olomouc, denounced the new religious movement as heretical pointing out that divine services were held specifically commemorating these martyrs and it was further alleged that Hus and Jerome were considered more important saints than the apostles of Christ. Moreover, the “feast of St. Jan Hus” was described as a liturgical atrocity.⁸⁴ The manuscript evidence for the formal celebration of the martyrs as well as visual images have been studied elsewhere.⁸⁵ What can be stated without equivocation is

⁸³ Source references can be found in Thomas A. Fudge, *The Magnificent Ride: The First Reformation in Hussite Bohemia* (Aldershot, 1998) 125-6 on which the preceding is based.

⁸⁴ Complaint appears in Johann Loserth, ed., “Gleichzeitige Berichte und Actenstücke zur Ausbreitung des Wiclifismus in Böhmen und Mähren von 1410 bis 1419,” AÖG 2 (1895) 386-91.

⁸⁵ Holeton’s works are the place for a consideration of the Hus feast and other liturgical matters. On visual images see Fudge, *The Magnificent Ride* 226-51.

the conclusion the memories of the martyrs in Utraquist communities suggests a “strong and immediate sense of solidarity between the Bohemian nation and its martyrs.”⁸⁶ Admittedly, Hus is the central figure and while other Bohemian martyrs or saints are referred to, these are often nameless.⁸⁷ In the mind of Utraquists, the martyrs who died for the faith went to heaven. All Bohemia should remember and rejoice.⁸⁸ In liturgical practice, Bohemian martyrs were incorporated into the “great cloud of witnesses” tradition and were remembered as “the triumphant faithful in Bohemia” who persevered to the end standing firm in the truth of God’s law.⁸⁹ What is important in terms of memory with respect to martyrs in Utraquist Bohemia is that there is a legion of martyrs whose deaths brought grace and comfort to the Bohemian people.” Additional evidence demonstrates the Bohemian martyrs were understood to act in the role of intercessors for Bohemia.⁹⁰ These were apostles and martyrs who while innocent were persecuted. False prophets conspired to persecute the true prophets who became the new martyrs. The canons, priests, monks and nuns persecuted Master Jan Hus just as the magistrates and councillors persecute faithful Christians.⁹¹

Evaluation

There are several ways to evaluate martyr narratives though we lack particular information on other aspects of the function of these stories within Utraquist communities. First, it is possible to detect a desire for relics. In the cases of Hus and Jerome, the authorities took care to ensure that all parts of their bodies and belongings were completely destroyed and did so explicitly “so that the Bohemians would not regard [them] as relics.”⁹² A similar exercise was carried out with respect to Jerome and the officials ordered that “his bed, blanket, breeches, hood and other belongings” be confiscated and destroyed by fire.⁹³ Aeneas Sylvius comments that Želivský’s head was added to a collection of relics in Prague.

The fifteenth century does not feature the extensive collections of martyrologies which can be found in the next century like those of John Foxe, Jean Crispen and others. However, as the foregoing suggests numerous stories circulated about those who had suffered and died for the Utraquist faith. What is impossible to determine apart from the liturgical celebrations of Hus and the mention of other martyrs is how these stories were told (if they were), in what context and more importantly how they were received. We can determine responses to the events themselves, if not to the later telling and retelling of the stories produced from the events. The development of the feast of St. Jan Hus and the specific Bohemian martyrs mass along with the outrage expressed by several

⁸⁶ Holeton, “The Office of Jan Hus,” 142.

⁸⁷ Holeton, “O felix Bohemia – O felix Constantia,” 391-2.

⁸⁸ MS Jičín, Statní okresní archiv, fond Archiv města Sobotky, 1497-1945 (1951) kniha 11, Inv. Č. 22 ff. 309r-313v [Graham No. 25]

⁸⁹ I follow Holeton’s summary of the *Clericalis turma* in his “O felix Bohemia,” 395.

⁹⁰ Holeton, “O felix Bohemia – O felix Constantia,” 396.

⁹¹ Želivský’s sermon notes (1419) MS. Prague, NK V G 3, fol. 39r.

⁹² *Relatio* 33-4.

⁹³ Hardt 4:771.

hundred Bohemian barons who withstood the Council of Constance are obvious. Moreover, records from the period indicate that men and women were prepared to lay down their lives in imitation of these martyrs. Their recorded reluctance to agree with the condemnations of Hus and Jerome is witness. Reactions to the slaying of the three men in 1412 and to Želivský's death in 1422 makes clear the emotional component latent in communities of martyrs. In some cases, assessments must take into account the visual images produced by these same communities. There are dozens of extant images of Hus and several of Jerome and there is a very fine illumination of Hussite adherents being thrown to their deaths in the mine shafts of Kutná Hora.⁹⁴ The use and dissemination of such images is suggestive but constitutes another study in itself.

Additionally, one must consider how the remains of the martyred were treated. In many cases death by fire eliminated all trace of the martyrs. This is true of the Olomouc lay preachers, Hus, Jerome, Nicholas of Dresden, Krása, and those killed in Arnoštovice, Chelčice and Kouřim. One can only speculate about the hundreds of corpses at the bottom of mine shafts but their retrieval would have presented extraordinary challenges. However, the martyrs in 1412 and Jan Želivský were executed by beheading. In both cases, common people were determined to secure the remains. In 1412 they defied direct orders from city officials, wrapped the bodies in white linen, carried them in solemn procession and the martyr's mass was sung over them. In Želivský's case, the city hall had to be assailed and once broken into, the body, as well as the head, was displayed publicly in various ways. It can be asserted that the particular veneration of the head of Jan Želivský implied it was not carried about by the hair.

The new martyrs became embedded in the memory of Utraquism. This memory was facilitated by communities. The memory of the martyrs helped form the identity of the Utraquist movement. An important query is what sustains memory? In the period between 1412 and 1422, deep social and religious change characterized Bohemia. The memory of the martyrs was crucial in retaining some stability. Certainly there were vibrant oral traditions but as time passed eyewitnesses and first hand testimonies receded. Especially in a revolutionary climate, this did not take decades to occur. It became imperative that records of the martyrs be preserved. It is through these records, written, visual and aural, that we know details of the Bohemian martyrs. The martyr narratives which are extant fall into three distinct categories: First, those compiled by eyewitnesses like Petr Mladoňovice's account of Hus' *passio* and Priest Vilém's rendition of the end of Jan Želivský. Second, stories remote in time and space. An example would be the letter of the Olomouc canons at the end of 1416 noting the veneration of the Bohemian martyrs. Third, reluctant records from eyewitnesses and those remote in time and space. The former would be some of the contemporary records from the Council of Constance – written by Ulrich von Richenthal, Dietrich of Niem and others – while the latter is accessed in the writings of Aeneas Sylvius who visited Bohemia more than twenty years after the events he writes of. In none of these cases were writers consciously wishing to hold up these characters as holy or martyrs. Nevertheless, their

⁹⁴ Smiškovský gradual, MS Vienna, ÖNB Mus. Sam. 15492 fol. 285r [Graham No. 128] The image is a detail at the bottom of the page of the "Common of Martyrs".

narratives are of some value to the communities which did venerate those who surrendered to death for their faith.

The shaping of identity through the prism of martyr narratives must take into account the probable synthesis of personal memory, national theodicy and other motivations. Proponents of Hussite doctrine were convinced God was on their side and Bohemia had been selected for divine purposes. Prague became the city of the Lord and songs lauded its domination.⁹⁵ The thrust of the early Bohemian Reformation linked national interests, social ideology and religious issues. Martyr narratives could not avoid the broader influence of these considerations. Scholars agree Petr Mladoňovice's chronicle is tendentious and Vilém had sufficient motivation to portray Želivský in the best possible light. How these stories were used by others once known and recorded reflects the agendas pursued by the diverse Hussite communities. The martyrdom of Jan Hus prompted a liturgical feast in Prague but not at Tábor, even though the latter utilized martyrdom as much as the Praguers but the motivation was different. Thus, it is possible to see the shaping of collective memory via the codification of oral transmissions and traditions. Memory and identity shape each other and in Reformation Bohemia martyr narratives played a key role. All of the stories which have come down from that period were based on memory regardless of when they were recorded unless they were composed on the spot which was most unlikely.

The greatest methodological hurdle lies in extracting from evidentiary material late medieval answers to modern queries. To what extent were martyr narratives used? What response did these usages elicit? How did memories of martyrs interact with late medieval society? Gaps in understanding the process remains and can be seen as regrettable silences or historiographical challenges. It is clear Jan Hus was burned to death. Priest Jakub was thrown alive into a mine shaft. The head of Želivský was carried onto a dunghill, placed on a plate, carried down city streets and taken into pulpits. These were the "new martyrs". The stories were part of the Hussite myth. According to Herodotus they must be considered. Less clear is how these events shaped Hussite memory and how that memory shaped Hussite identity.

It is clear that the "new martyrs" in Reformation Bohemia were liquidated primarily on suspicion of heresy. In the twelve cases examined, at least eight – the lay preachers in Olomouc, Hus, Jerome, Jan Nakvasa, the mine shaft victims of Kutná Hora, Jan Krása, Priest Václav and his followers, and the priests at Chelčice – were grounded upon clear issues of heresy. Sometimes the verdict remained quite general – as in the cases in Olomouc and in the final verdict against Jerome – while in other instances the heresy is enumerated specifically. For example, the executions at Kouřim and at Arnoštovice are put down to eucharistic irregularities which must be understood as utraquism. It is further revealing that in several other cases – Jerome and Jan Krása – their deaths were predicated in part upon their refusal to acquiesce in the condemnation of Jan Hus. In the four remaining cases – the trio in 1412, the priests at Kutná Hora, Nicholas of Dresden and Želivský – heresy does prevail. The three men in 1412 were put to death on account of their vigorous opposition to the sale of indulgences in Prague. It is not difficult to connect

⁹⁵ For example, "Arise, arise, great city of Prague," in Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Dějiny husitského zpěvu* [A history of Hussite song] (Prague, 1913) 909.

their stance with positions assumed by Hus resulting in due course in charges of heresy. The priests at Kutná Hora defended the mine shaft victims and must surely have been practicing utraquists themselves. The canons of the Council of Constance declared that utraquism was heresy. Canon law and papal decrees from the twelfth century onwards made defense of heretics a heresy as well. In the case of Nicholas of Dresden we lack information concerning his final days. However, if his known work and views persisted to the end the charge of heresy would seem rather unsurprising. Only in the case of Želivský, are we left with what appears to be clear political motivation. That assumption, however, is thin. Jakoubek of Stříbro did lead a group of people to the Old Town city hall in an effort to dislodge the city council which was made up of a solid block of support for Želivský.⁹⁶ The march was not successful but it was not long before the agenda of Jakoubek prevailed and the radical brotherhoods supported a policy to eliminate Želivský from political power. Religion cannot be divorced from the equation. Mainstream Táborite and Orebite doctrine eschewed the fringe theology of emphases like the Pikharts and Želivský came under the damning suspicion of leaning in that unfavourable direction. Though all of those condemned along with Želivský affirmed their distaste for eucharistic heresy as held by the Pikharts they were put to death. Clearly, the Táborites, Orebiters and Jan Žižka were not opposed to Želivský's theology per se, but they did have worries about his political and military aspirations. There is a certain amount of hypocrisy in that stance if the position and power of the priests at Tábor is examined in light of the "four articles". What can be said is that apart from Želivský's case, all of the others are rooted deeply in suspicions of heresy.

In many cases we possess materials indicating the nature of public reaction to martyrdom. In Želivský's case, we have a very detailed account of the subsequent riot and the strange veneration of his head. The bodies of the three intrepid indulgence protestors once killed were courageously retrieved, wrapped in white linen and carried in solemn procession through Prague streets to the intonation of the martyrs' memorial. When Jan Hus was put to death, hundreds of Bohemian barons signed protests dispatched to the conciliar venue. His *passio* became a standard component in the liturgical life of some Utraquist communities and his feast celebrated among the more conservative heretics. This has some relation to the medieval Christian preoccupation with relics. Želivský's head was placed among collections of relics according to some sources, and even if that is false his body and head were treated as holy objects. The same may be said of the bodies of the three martyrs in 1412. Records are clear the executioners at Constance took particular care to ensure no traces of Hus or Jerome survived, either body parts or belongings. Authorities were sensitive to the possibility Bohemians might carry off such objects and turn them into relics. It was bad enough pictures circulated and songs were sung about the martyrs.

In other cases a self-conscious awareness of martyrdom existed in the minds of those who suffered for their faith. The letters composed in prison by Hus make this clear.⁹⁷ Jerome made similar statements. Jan Krása admonished his cell mate to prepare for martyrdom as this would provide passage to heaven. Priest Václav comforted those being burned with him and testified that all were prepared to die for

⁹⁶ This according to the accusations advanced by Priest Vilém in AČ 3: 237.

⁹⁷ Novotný and in English, Matthew Spinka, *The Letters of John Hus* (Manchester, 1972).

conviction rather than survive in compromise. Confronted with impending doom, Želivský gave God thanks he had been allowed to suffer at the hands of his own countrymen.

The impact of these deaths on Hussite communities can be gauged partly from the language used in the sources describing their fate. Želivský was a martyr whose death glorified the Bohemian lands by divine will. The three who opposed indulgences were said to have died with happy faces. The Olomouc lay preachers were lauded as faithful defenders of God and true Christians. Hus was remembered as a champion of truth and its fearless defender. Jan Krása was recalled with the accolade he surrendered claim to earthly laurels but that renunciation yielded a heavenly crown. The anonymous martyrs from the Arnoštovice area were reported to have given witness to their resolve to die – even a thousand times – in deference to the truth. Others were said to have honoured God through their steadfast endurance. In the case of Želivský's tragic end a theological imperative was developed as a means of redemption though there is no evidence it was ever taken up.

God's justice requires the priest Jakoubek of Bethlehem and his helpers be sentenced in the same manner as he and his helpers condemned the faithful ones. No priest of wicked opinion and no bloodthirsty priest should be allowed to officiate at Mass or preach unless first vindicating himself before the community with public repentance. Because he [Jakoubek], with his helpers, is a priest of evil opinion and a bloodthirsty one, he and his helpers should not officiate at Mass or preach unless he purging himself from this through public repentance.⁹⁸

Martyr narratives often follow particular patterns and some even fit into particular genres, hagiographical or otherwise. These can be seen in the stories about the "new martyrs" of Bohemia. What is striking and instructive are the special features evident in these stories. Jan Hudec of Slaný, Martin Křídélko and Stašek Polák were wrapped in white and carried to a martyr's mass before interment in a chapel. Jan Hus died singing steadfast in his resolve not to recant. Iconographically (though this would constitute a separate study), Hus comes more and more to resemble Christ and his sufferings and, along with other martyrs, takes on sacramental and religious connotations to the extent of intercession and liturgical memory. Martyrs were engaging in *imitatio Christi*. The priest martyred at Kouřim had his hands pierced with sword tips reminiscent of the crucifixion. Krása spent his last hours in prison trying to persuade others to accept the Utraquism. When those efforts failed, Krása remained undeterred.

Priest Želivský's story is the most remarkable and unique. The contents of the narrative which survives says much about popular religion in the later Middle Ages, popular devotion to Želivský, the veneration of holy objects and the importance of bodies. The story of Želivský's head is indicative of the significance of the new martyrs in the memory and in the identity of Hussite communities.

¹⁰² AČ 3:239 as formulated by Priest Vilém.