

Vojtěch Raňkův of Ježov (Adalbertus Rankonis de Ericinio) and the Bohemian Reformation

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In the discussions about the Bohemian Reformation and its origins, there has been neglect – in my opinion an improper one – of the notable fourteenth-century Czech savant, a philosopher and theologian, as well as a high Bohemian ecclesiastic, Vojtěch Raňkův of Ježov (Adalbertus Rankonis de Ericinio). This slight might have originally occurred in historiography because Palacký in his research did not get around to including him among the Bohemian precursors of Hus¹ and – even though subsequent historical scholarship both illuminated his life story and made accessible his extant writings² – Vojtěch has remained outside the main current of attention within the context of the Bohemian Reformation research. After all, even Jan Hus himself, in his Bethlehem sermon of 1410, remembered as his predecessors “only” Konrád Waldhauser, Milíč of Kroměříž, and Matěj of Janov.³ It is true, he had mentioned Vojtěch Raňkův in late 1409, but in a different context. It was in his speech of late 1409 in memory of Prague University’s founder, Charles IV, when he referred to Vojtěch – among the deceased professors of the Theological Faculty – as “the most illustrious orator” [*rhetor limpidissimus*].⁴ Finally, the relative neglect of Vojtěch as Hus’s precursor was partly caused by the fact that Vojtěch tended to attract largely the attention of those scholars who were oriented toward the Roman Church, and who saw no reason to exclude him from the “orthodox” fold.⁵

- 1 František Palacký, “Předchůdcové husitství v Čechách” [The Precursors of Hussitism in Bohemia], in: idem, *Radhost, Sběrka spisů drobných II* (Prague, 1872) 297-356. Originally, Palacký delivered this text as a lecture to the Historical Section of the Royal Bohemian Society of Sciences as early as 1842. In 1846 it was published in a German translation in Leipzig, but pseudonymously under the name J. P. Jordan.
- 2 His writings were published from the estate of R. Holinka and J. Vilímovský by Jaroslav Kadlec, *Leben und Schriften des Prager Magisters Adalbert Rankonis de Ericinio* (Münster, 1971) 356 pp. The edition contains a substantial introduction that includes an overview of the existing historical research concerning Vojtěch.
- 3 Johannes Hus, *Sermones in Bethlehem*, ed. V. Flajšhans, VKČSN (1939) 147.
- 4 Johannes Hus, *Positiones, recommendationes, sermones*, ed. A. Schmidtová (Prague, 1958) 126. Vojtěch’s inclusion among the professors of the Prague Theological Faculty may not be entirely correct because, according to Kadlec, he never taught there, although – due to his office as Cathedral Scholastic – the University belonged under his care. In addition, Kadlec refers to the record in a (currently lost) manuscript in the episcopal library of Košice (sign. V), which calls Vojtěch: *Pragensis studii sacratissime theologie profesor*.
- 5 This was true not only of J. Kadlec, but also, for instance, of J. V. Polc, who dealt with Vojtěch in his studies of Jan Jenštejn; see J. V. Polc, *Česká církev v dějinách* [The Bohemian Church in History] (Prague 1999).

And yet, the course of Vojtěch's life suggests a series of close ties with the lives and labours of those who traditionally and rightfully belonged among the so-called precursors of Hus. Let us briefly recapitulate these facts. Vojtěch was born around the year 1320 and his father, Ranko or Raněk owned a small estate in Ježov not far from Mladá Vožice. As a future priest, Vojtěch probably received his basic education at the Cathedral of Prague. At a time when Prague still lacked a university, he registered at the University of Paris, where his presence is recorded in 1344, as a member of the English university nation, within which students from Bohemia were customarily included. There he became Master of Arts in 1346.⁶ He continued to work at the Faculty of Arts, conducting – as *magister regens in artibus* – relevant courses and lectures. He became procurator of the English university nation, and gained admission into the Sorbonne College, thus gaining a measure of financial security. Finally, in 1355, he attained the office of rector of the entire University of Paris. As a member of the Sorbonne he prepared a catalogue of largely philosophical books held by the library that he administered and used. As rector, he promulgated the statutes that established the obligatory rules for lectures at the Faculty of Arts.⁷ Afterwards, having received the promise of a position from Pope Clement VI in 1349, he went to Avignon, where he was even recorded as a papal penitentiary in 1362-1364. In Avignon, he obtained a canonry at the Cathedral of Prague, but had to sue three times to secure the income.

Simultaneously, in the customary way, he continued in Paris to pursue the study of theology, receiving the degree of Bachelor of Theology in 1363, and preparing his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard in 1365. The commentary did not survive, but we are informed about his expounding the *Sentences* in Paris to sizable audiences from one of Vojtěch's two extant letters that he sent to Konrád Waldhauser from Paris in that year.⁸ In our context, these letters are of particular interest because they document Vojtěch's personal sympathies and attitudes, and also testify that – although far from home – he followed the events in Prague. The first letter of 7 June 1365 expresses Vojtěch's admiration for the person and the activities of Waldhauser, who at that point was the parish priest of the Týn Church in the Old Town of Prague. Waldhauser is here compared to the Prophet Elijah; he is “the herald of evangelical truth,” removing vice by word and by example, although some try to

6 F. Tadra, “Mistr Vojtěch, professor učení Pařížského a scholastik kostela Pražského,” [Master Vojtěch, professor of Paris University and scholastic of the Church of Prague] in: ČČM 53 (1876) 537-572; J. Kadlec, *Mistr Vojtěch Raňkův z Ježova* (Prague, 1969) and J. Kadlec, *Leben und Schriften...*

7 Concerning the catalogue of books, or rather its fragment in Vojtěch's own hand, see P. Lehmann, “Mitteilungen aus Handschriften VII. 1. Adalbert Ranconis de Ericinio,” in: *Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil. – hist. Klasse* (1942) v. 10, pp.3-28. – The statutes are published in Kadlec, *Leben und Schriften* 101-102.

8 The letters were published in Kadlec, *Leben und Schriften* 332-339.

hinder his work, and even have impudently and falsely accused him of heresy. Vojtěch encourages Waldhauser in his labour, which he compares to David's struggle with Goliath, and stresses his own unique friendship for Waldhauser. Sent to Prague by a messenger, this letter fell into the hands of Vojtěch's and Konrád's common enemies among the mendicant orders, causing the author and the addressee considerable troubles. Vojtěch recalls these circumstances in his second letter to Waldhauser from December of the same year. If not deliverable directly to the addressee, this second letter was to be handed to no one else other than to Milíč of Kroměříž, the preacher at St. Giles's Church in Prague, whom Vojtěch considered his own most special friend (*amicus specialissimus*). Vojtěch wrote, concerning the Minorites, that they boycotted his lectures on the *Sentences* in Paris, and pejoratively called him "second Armachan" (*secundus Armachanus*).

Vojtěch was here evidently referring to his friendship with the Archbishop of Armagh, Richard FitzRalph, with whom he had become acquainted earlier, perhaps in 1347 or in the period of 1353-1354 when he had travelled from Paris to Oxford. He even obtained from this important "precursor" of Wyclif a holograph copy of his book *De pauperie Salvatoris*, in which he noted that it was written against the mendicant orders at the behest of Pope Clement VI. When subsequently he became involved in the conflict with the mendicant orders in Paris, he earned the just-mentioned sobriquet. It is obvious that Vojtěch was well-informed about the difficulties that Waldhauser experienced from the mendicants, when he opposed alms-giving to mendicant orders, pointing out that the mendicants squandered the funds – gained in trade for prayers – on sumptuous feasts and drinking bouts.⁹ Already in his first letter from Paris, Vojtěch expressed a wish to make Waldhauser's acquaintance, because he esteemed him highly; although not knowing him personally, he knew of his reputation and holiness. In his second letter he emphasized his desire not only to meet Waldhauser and his adherents, but also to join them in their labours for the advancement of truth.

Vojtěch actually returned to Prague in 1366, and it is most likely that he actually met Konrád, who died only three years later in December 1369. It is also probable that we can situate in this period Vojtěch's admiring recognition of the talents and preaching skills of Milíč of Kroměříž, whom he had remembered in Paris, and to whom – as to his "special friend" – he had sent greetings through Waldhauser. These words of recognition are recorded in the contemporary anonymous *Vita Milicii*, thus: "[Milíč] never thought a whole day about a sermon, but he thought it through in two hours, if it was long – in two, and most frequently in one hour. Amazed at this, a certain Master of Sacred Theology, by

9 See F. Loskot, *Konrád Waldhauser, řeholní kanovník sv. Augustina, předchůdce M. Jana Husa* [Konrád Waldhauser, Canon of the Order of St. Augustine: A Precursor of Master Jan Hus] (Prague, 1909) 43ff.

the name of Vojtěch, a very learned man, said – as though he wished to take an oath: ‘What, having to preach to learned and enlightened men, I can hardly compose in one month, Milíč puts together in his mind in a single hour’.”¹⁰ Also here we can assume with justification that Vojtěch had opportunities to meet and cooperate with this “Father of the Bohemian Reformation” in Prague from 1366 to 1371, when Vojtěch departed to Avignon. Another indirect testimony of their mutual friendship and trust is the fact that Milíč before his departure for Avignon in 1374 – where he went to rebuff accusations of heresy – entrusted the care of his beloved religious establishment of “Jerusalem” specifically to Vojtěch, despite the fact that the latter was not even in Prague at that moment.¹¹

In Prague, Vojtěch himself took up the appointment as canon of the metropolitan chapter at St. Vitus’s Cathedral and, after three years, he became its Scholastic. This high function bestowed on him a supervisory role over educational institutions. In this connection, he provoked a dispute with Heinrich Totting of Oyta, a German professor at the University of Prague, when he questioned his theses promulgated at the Theological Faculty of the University. On that basis, Oyta was accused of heresy and forced to travel to Avignon, and to stay there for two years, until August 1373, when the charges were dismissed. Vojtěch thereby aroused resentment against himself in University circles, as well as from Archbishop Jan Očko of Vlašim and probably also from Charles IV.¹² Vojtěch likewise went to Avignon, and did not return directly to Prague, but instead travelled to Paris, where he received a doctor’s degree in theology, apparently on the intercession of Jan of Jenštejn and the King of France.¹³ He dared to return to Bohemia only in 1375.

10 *Vita venerabilis presbyteri Milicii*, in: FRB I, 406.

11 Peter C. A. Morée, *Preaching in Fourteenth-Century Bohemia: The Life and Ideas of Milicium de Chremšir (+1374) and His Significance in the Historiography of Bohemia* (Heršpice, 1999).

12 Vojtěch sent a long explanatory letter from Paris, dated 25 April 1372, to the University of Prague, of which he apparently never became a member, and which he somewhat tended to underestimate in comparison with the University of Paris; see Kadlec, *Leben und Schriften* 267-277. In this letter, Vojtěch proclaims that “for all that he has attained with God’s help and will have attained, he is obliged to the University of Paris,” and he would be an ungrateful son if he belittled his spiritual mother and teacher and concealed her fame. Nobody, therefore, should consider him guilty, if he sets the University of Paris before the Prague one, although it was falsehood that he ever talked about the Prague University with the pope or the cardinals in a pejorative way or accused it of erroneous teaching, as his opponents testified about him before the Emperor, the Prague Archbishops, and other dignitaries. – It is difficult to establish the real reasons for Vojtěch’s assault on Heinrich Oyta. One cannot exclude a certain scholarly vanity, and it is possible that a certain role was played by Vojtěch’s “anti-German” attitudes that in a way reflected the tensions among the University nations of the Prague *alma mater*. In the case of Vojtěch’s subsequent dispute with Jan Klenkok (see *ibid.* 29), it is probably necessary to look at the involvement of that member of the order of Augustinian Hermits in the attacks on Milíč of Kroměříž, a circumstance that hitherto has not been considered in this context. In any case, there is no doubt about Vojtěch’s strong Bohemophile standpoint that will be noted later.

13 For detailed documentation, see Kadlec, *Leben und Schriften*, *passim*.

Of interest is the fact that in Paris Vojtěch apparently gained as a disciple Matěj of Janov, who had started studying there in 1373. Vojtěch was thus able to render material assistance to his pupil who was his compatriot from Southern Bohemia, inasmuch as Janov was only two hours distance on foot from Ježov.¹⁴ In fact, this assistance continued in a still major way after Matěj's return to Prague in 1381, when he failed to receive the remuneration from a paid canonry at St. Vitus's Cathedral and, as a *pauper philosophans*, lived in Vojtěch's house, apparently until the latter's death.¹⁵

In this context, it is necessary to mention Vojtěch's close friendship that connected him with another "precursor of Hus," who was also an admirer of Waldhauser and a friend of Milíč – the South Bohemian yeoman and distinctive thinker, Tomáš Štítný of Štítné. Around the year 1376, Tomáš presented Vojtěch, "the man of astounding reason and amazing memory," with a set of six treatises, *Knížky šestery o obecných věcech křesťanských* [Six treatises on general Christian matters], requesting him to review and correct them. Vojtěch checked over his Czech-written works, in order to correct any erroneous views, and it is most probable that he also helped Tomáš with the Czech philosophical and theological terminology, which Štítný was forced to create in his original works and compilations, as well as in his numerous translations into Czech. Štítný pointed out that Vojtěch was pleased with his writings, and consequently it is incontestable that the diffusion of reformist ideas in the Czech language – that Hus resumed in 1412 and Jakoubek of Stříbro three years later – had gained, already late in the reign of Charles IV, the encouragement and support of a prominent ecclesiastic of the Bohemian church, who ostentatiously displayed his Bohemophile stand in other ways as well.¹⁶

The last years of Vojtěch's life were marked by a great conflict with Archbishop Jan Jenštejn. Its cause lay in the archbishop's decision to introduce a new religious feast day, the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which he proclaimed at the Synod of June 1386. Jenštejn did so without prior consultation with the Cathedral Chapter, and Vojtěch protested against his action in the name of the Chapter. Subsequently, the dispute was augmented by two more issues: the concept of purgatory and the collection of escheatage. The question of purgatory was debated by Vojtěch and Jenštejn on the basis of an inquiry that King Wenceslaus IV posed to Vojtěch at a feast in the Křivoklát Castle. The two participants in the dispute left behind rather contradictory testimonies, from which it can be deduced that Vojtěch viewed purgatory in a broader sense

¹⁴ Ibid. 49.

¹⁵ V. Kybal, *M. Matěj z Janova, jeho život, spisy a učení* [Master Matěj of Janov: His Life, Writings, and Teaching] (Prague, 1905) 18. Matěj of Janov was also appointed one of the executors of Vojtěch's last testament. See below.

¹⁶ See, for instance, how he formulated, in his last testament of 1388, the establishment of a scholarship for study in Paris or Oxford.

of the word, while the archbishop understood it in the traditional sense of the purgatory of souls (*purgatorium animarum*). The dispute about the escheatage is undoubtedly the most interesting from the viewpoint of social and political concepts. The archbishop adopted a position that opposed the collection of escheat on the archiepiscopal estates (in cases of no male survivors) as a denial of natural rights, and labelled the practice an abuse. On the other hand, Vojtěch argued that the collection occurred in accordance with the existing valid laws. The dispute, therefore, assumed a paradoxical character. Vojtěch, an advocate of ecclesiastical poverty, claimed for the Church incomes which – to say the very least – were controversial. Simultaneously, the archbishop renounced the dues, and turned into a fervent defender of human equality in the biblical sense, for the sake of love for one's neighbour, and also because God had created all humans according to his own image, and they all were descendants from Adam and Eve.¹⁷

When Jan Jenštejn wrote his responses in 1388, Vojtěch already expected the approach of his own death. He composed three last testaments. In the first one, he donated his library to the Břevnov Monastery, which was to be his burial site.¹⁸ In the second one, he bequeathed his not inconsiderable financial holdings to a fund from which student scholarships were to be granted for philosophical or theological studies either in Paris or at Oxford. The candidates, however, had to have two Czech-speaking parents. The awarding of stipends was entrusted to the Cathedral Scholastic, but again with the proviso that he must be Czech-speaking, otherwise the function would be assumed by the Dean of the Chapter with the participation of three more Canons. The execution of the testament was entrusted to two barons from the Rožmberk family, who were Vojtěch's neighbours in Hradčany, and to Kramář Kříž, who later would participate in founding the Bethlehem Chapel, and in whose house Vojtěch had

17 For a detailed discussion of the conflict in all of its three aspects, see Kadlec, *Leben und Schriften* 30-46. See also J. V. Polc, *De origine festi Visitationis B. M. V.* (Rome, 1967); J. V. Polc, "Sociální nauka Jana z Jenštejna" [The Social Teaching of Jan Jenštejn], in: J.V.Polc, *Česká církev v dějinách* 255-69, J.Kalousek, "Traktát Jana z Jenštejna proti Vojtěchovi Rankovu o odúmrtích" [The Treatise of Jan Jenštejn against Vojtěch Raňkův Concerning Escheatage], in: *Zprávy ze zasedání Královské české společnosti nauk* (Prague, 1883); M. Boháček, "Právní ideologie předhusitského zastánce selské svobody" [The Legal Thought of an Advocate of Peasant Freedom Before the Bohemian Reformation], in: SH 8 (1961) 103-132. (This article is devoted to M.Kuneš of Třebovle, Vicar-General of Archbishop Jan Jenštejn z Jenštejna, whose position on the issue of escheatage he supported with legal argumentation.) – Vojtěch presented his standpoint in the great conflict in his *Apologie*, and Jenštejn responded in several treatises. At the time of the conflict, Jenštejn no longer served as Chancellor of Wenceslaus IV.

18 The original of this testament is deposited in the Archives of the Prague Metropolitan Chapter (in the administration of APH). From Vojtěch's rich library only fragments were preserved, but even these are extraordinarily valuable from the viewpoint of tracing Vojtěch's intellectual interests. See Kadlec, *Leben und Schriften* 58 and I. Hlaváček, "Studie k dějinám knihoven v českém státě v době předhusitské" II, in: AUC-HUCP VI-2 pp. 48-61, publishes the list (discovered by Hlaváček) of books sent by Vojtěch from Avignon.

composed his last will.¹⁹ Before his death, Vojtěch attempted to regain from the Cistercians the former “Jerusalem” of Milíč, which Charles IV had taken away from Milíč’s disciples and entrusted to the Cistercians. As administrator of the property, Vojtěch entrusted one of the Rožmberks, as well as Matěj of Janov and Kramář Kříž, with the task of recovering the buildings and plots of land for the disciples of Milíč. This plan did not succeed and, as a result, the decision was made to erect the Bethlehem Chapel. Vojtěch, of course, did not live long enough to see this resolution, having died on 15 August 1388.²⁰

Vojtěch’s literary legacy has been preserved rather fragmentarily and, in a way, haphazardly. We must presuppose the existence of certain theological works, because their composition was a prerequisite for obtaining the doctorate of theology, such as biblical commentaries and a *Commentary on the Sentences* of Peter Lombard, the last of which is directly mentioned by Vojtěch in his letter to Waldhauser; and from Jan Jenštejn’s polemics we know about his treatise, *De scismate*. We can also assume that he wrote a relatively large number of philosophical works, particularly commentaries to those works of Aristotle, the explication of which was obligatory in the Faculty of Arts, especially since we know that Vojtěch stipulated the way of their explication in Paris by his rectorial statutes.²¹ Of his philosophical works we have available only five brief *quaestiae* from the period around 1346, when Vojtěch was completing his studies at the Arts Faculty in Paris. Of potential importance from the viewpoint of political theory is the *quaestia*, which addressed the question of whether the monarch should be the servant of his realm (*Rex est servus regni?*), and which in the end received a negative answer. Its significance, however, is compromised by the fact that the *quaestia* was primarily a scholastic exercise that was to prove the candidate’s knowledge, including, of course, Aristotle’s *Politics*.²² The other four *quaestiae* also demonstrate the broad range of Vojtěch’s knowledge, especially *quaestia* that opens with an interesting *Praise of Philosophy* [*Laus philosophiae*], which inevitably brings to mind the later *Praise of the Seven Liberal Arts* by Jerome of Prague from 1409.²³ Vojtěch reaches the conclusion in

- 19 The original of this testament is deposited in SA Třeboň. It was published in J.Loserth, *Nachträgliche Bemerkungen zu dem Magister Adalbertus Ranconis de Ericinio* in: MVGDDB 17 (1879) 198-213.
- 20 A.Podlaha, *Paběrky z rukopisů metropolitní kapitoly v Praze* [Odds and Ends of the manuscripts of the Prague Metropolitan Chapter] II, *Zlomek závěti již Mistr Vojtěch Raňkův činí pořizení o odkazu, který mu byl Milíč učinil* [A Fragment of the Testament by Which Master Vojtěch Raňkův Made Provisions for the Legacy of Milíč] in: VČA 18 (1909) 328-331.
- 21 The absence of the above-mentioned theological works is presumed in the list prepared by Kadlec, *Leben und Schriften* 68-69. Vojtěch’s commentaries on Aristotle were not found despite the extremely thorough search of manuscript collections in Paris by W. Seřko, *Reperotium commentariorum medii aevi in Aristotelem Latinorum quae in bibliothecis publicis Parisiis asservantur, Tomus I-II* (Warsaw, 1982) 231, 248.
- 22 *Quaestia*, “Utrum philosophus moralis habeat concedere istam de virtute sermonis: Rex est servus regni?” was published in Kadlec, *Leben und Schriften* 91-94.

Praise that philosophy teaches the truth, and in the *quaestio* he defends in his own way the reliability of rational knowledge. It is of interest that he quotes here another of “Wyclif’s precursors,” Robert Grosseteste, and polemicizes with William Ockham, with whom Wyclif also engaged in polemics.

Also with Vojtěch it is necessary to seek the focus of his philosophical and theological thought in the broader context of his activity and works. While we have mentioned much, it is still necessary to call attention to his sermons. Some are extraordinarily important from the social and political viewpoint, such as his funeral oration over the body of Charles IV, in which he called the deceased emperor “The Father of His Country;”²⁴ or his welcoming speech in Prague for Legate Pileus of Prata, who brought the cardinal’s hat for the retiring Archbishop Jan Očko. In this speech he urged the high ecclesiastical dignitary to heal the schism, and “the plague of cursed simony,” as well as to appoint in churches modest and fearless priests who would lead immaculate lives and would gain respect not for fine garments and haughty demeanour, but for erudition and defence of the faith.²⁵ In this sermon one can find distinct points of contact and coincidences with the reformist strivings of Prague preachers who are related to Vojtěch. The same is true of his synodal oration from the year 1385 when Archbishop Jan Jenštejn appointed him synodal preacher while the two of them were still on friendly terms.²⁶

In this article, of course, there is neither time nor space to analyse and evaluate in detail even the small fragment of Vojtech’s works that have been preserved till this day. That will be the object of further research. What is there to say in conclusion? Once in connection with the edition of the *Three Synodal Sermons* of Milíč of Kroměříž, we discovered with my colleague Milan Mráz in Milíč’s text and in his advocacy of frequent lay communion the embryonic formulation of the Bohemian Reformation’s programme – of all the Four Articles of Prague. In my opinion, we can establish the same for the work of Vojtěch, particularly if we take into account also his assessment of the need for frequent communion by the laity in his *Determinatio de frequenti communione*, which Matěj of Janov inserted into his own *Regulae*.²⁷ Vojtěch’s work, in fact, summed up and underpinned the reformist striving of the so-called precursors of Hus, all of whom belonged to his circle of friends.

Translated from the Czech by Zdeněk V. David.

23 *Laus philosophiae cum quaestione: Utrum naturalis philosophus per rationem naturelem possit habere noticiam evidentem de aliqua veritate.*

24 Published in Kadlec, *Leben und Schriften* 155-174; for a Czech translation, see J. Vilfkovský (ed.) *Próza z doby Karla IV [Prose from the Time of Charles IV]* (Prague, 1938) 65-71.

25 See Kadlec, *Leben und Schriften* 174-181.

26 *Ibid.* 185-196.

27 *Ibid.* 199-230, and *Regulae* 2:86-92.