
Was the Pyx of Mělník (with the Image of Christ on the Mount of Olives) Utraquist?

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The pyx of Mělník is famous above all for the exceptional quality of its goldsmith's art and the mastery of the engraving. Its sole sculptural decoration on the cylindrical lid is the image of Christ with the sleeping apostles on the Mount of Olives. The silver pyx dates to the turn of the sixteenth century. This receptacle for hosts has the shape of a cylindrical vessel with a lid, and weighs 0.6 kg with a diameter of 12 cm. It is at present deposited in the vault of the municipal government of Mělník. It was first described in literature as an Utraquist utensil by Antonín Podlaha in 1899, and later Zoroslava Drobná included it in her study of Utraquist art objects in 1951.¹ The style of the liturgical vessel – in the context of late Gothic art work – was analysed by Jaromír Pečírka, Emanuel Poche, Dana Stehlíková, and by the historian of Mělník, František Purš, who included also its Latin descriptions from earlier church inventories.² Bohuslav

¹ Antonín Podlaha, *Soupis památek historických a uměleckých v politickém okresu Mělnickém* [List of Historical and Artistic Monuments in the District of Mělník] (Prague, 1899), 18–20; Zoroslava Drobná, "Husitské památky v našich muzeích," [Hussite Mementos in Our Museums] ČNM 120 (1951) 89–106.

² Jaromír Pečírka, "Mělnická pyxida," in: *Umělecké poklady Čech* [The Art Treasures of Bohemia] II (Prague, 1915) no. 248; writes: "The art of the goldsmiths experienced a second flowering under the Jagellonian King. The treasury of St. Vitus's Cathedral is enriched by products of that period. It holds – in addition to the silver busts of Sts. Adalbert, Wenceslaus, and Vitus, donated by the King c. 1486 – late Gothic reliquaries and chalices, among which belongs, on the formal side, also the "olearium" [i.e., the Pyx] of Mělník. Small angels with musical instruments coincide, not only in their form, but also in their purpose. There is also a crown of thorns from cut metal. The *olearium* was originally considered a Bohemian work, but its models may be sought in Germany. *Olearium*: Silver, partly gilded, wrought, cut. Size: 14 cm, diameter 11 cm. Formerly in the Provost's Church, now in the town hall, municipal office" – the *Olearium* consists of two parts. The lower part, borne by three angels with string instruments, encircled on a gilded casing by a loose wreath of cut silver flowers, resembling the blooms and leaves of thistles. A similar ornamentation is on the embroidered appliqué of the Utraquist ciborium in Hradce Králové; Pečírka, *Umělecké poklady Čech* II (1914), č. 127, p. 6. The upper edge is decorated by a wreath of downward turned Gothic lilies. A group from the Mount of Olives on the lid is fenced in by gilded wires. The figures are partly gilded, namely, the upper garments, the entire figure of Christ except for his hands, and St. John's hair. Together with the Mountain, they are attached to the lid by silver nails. Occasionally, defects were pointed out on the formal side. The group

Čermák has called attention to the fact that in his list of the precious works of art in the church of Mělník in 1746, the dean of the Church, Matěj Dědek, described a silver Gothic monstrance 18 pounds in weight and – in his own words – a silver hostiarium “*Pixis argentea inaurata cum figura Christi orantis in horto*.”³ Further, Dědek enumerated six silver chalices, two silver Utraquist chalices, three silver patens, two silver candelabras, a silver cross with relics, a silver gilded ciborium, two gilded brass monstrances, a silver gilded receptacle, a silver lamp, a silver *hostiarium (olearium)*, a silver hand of St. Ludmila, and a silver reliquary of St. Sigismund. Although the researcher concentrated on the architectural history of the church, still he noted under the year 1588 that there was much talk about the church treasure. At that time, Vavřinec Zajčček complained about priest Řehoř Lomnický, who saw the treasure thanks to Jan Baroch. He added that he furnished the chalice, donated by Martin of Malá Strana, to priest Řehoř for the Easter holy days “because – according to the wishes of the donor, priest Martin – the divine services should be performed with this chalice on the Lord’s feast days.” The chalice stayed in the church until 1810, when it was “handed over” with other liturgical objects according to the imperial edict. Around the foot of the chalice the following is inscribed: “*Sacerdos Martinus Melnicensis Administrator sub utraque specie communicantium. Anno 1565*.” Further, on one side the following was written: “*Pater Joanes, Mater Joanna, Fratres Joanes et Alexander*” and three imperial crowns, the other side was engraved with the inscription: “*Sorores Dorothea, Barbara et Ludmilla*” and beneath the town coat of arms. The townspeople ransomed the monstrance and the pyx in 1810. The rest of the objects were confiscated and in the same year transferred to governmental offices to cover military expenses.⁴

on the Mount of Olives, however, compensates for the formal defects by its immediacy and its inward content. An extreme expression of the naturalism and beauty of the late Gothic goldsmith’s art, it is at the same time the last prayer, sent to the high vaults of Gothic cathedrals, having little in common with the tranquillity and the firm line of the Renaissance. The *olearium* of Mělník was given various designations: *chrismarium*, *ciborium*, *receptacle for hosts*, *ostensorium*. Apparently, it served as a receptacle for the holy oils. He notes that in reports from 1746 and 1797 the *olearium*, as well as the monstrance were in Mělník. Needing funds for the costs of war during the time of the emperor Francis II, the objects – like all other items of that type – were threatened with confiscation. In 1810 the townspeople paid the emperor 407 gulden in ransom and the objects were duly deposited in the town hall. The *Olearium* was exhibited in the first exhibition of *Arkadia* in Prague in 1861, in the art crafts section of the World Fair in Vienna in 1873, and in an exposition in Prague in 1891; Emanuel Poche, “*Pozdně gotická umělecká řemesla*” [Late Gothic Art Crafts], in: *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění* [The History of Bohemian Plastic Arts] I/2 (Prague, 1984) 613–634, see p. 616, illustration 445. – The description of the Mělník pyx is by František Purš, “*Mělnické poklady*,” [The Treasures of Mělník] (Mělník, 2003) 18–19; Dana Stehlíková (ed.), *Bohemia Sancta* (Prague, 2004).

³ Bohuslav Čermák, *Proboštský chrám sv. Petra a Pavla na Mělníce* [The Provost’s Church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Mělník] (Mělník, 1899) 27.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

The Pyx and Its Models

The pyx stands on a tripod formed by angel-musicians, playing the lute, the psaltery, and the harp. The surface of the vessel is covered by freely conceived, elongated, and elaborately undulating, leaf-like ornaments with relatively large blossoms, the pistils of which have the shape of large targets, surrounded by smaller, simple, bifurcated flower leaves, and by similar larger undulating, leaf-like ornaments. They are produced by a technique of cut silver plate. A motif of lilies decorates the upper narrower band, beneath which, all the way down, there is a fine motif in the form of small spheres. The suffering of the praying Christ is adored by kneeling angels playing string instruments that symbolise the future passions. Wood symbolises the wood of the cross, the strings the outstretched arms of the Redeemer, and the pegs, which hold the strings, recall the nails, with which Christ was crucified.⁵ It was noted that the figural decoration of the moderately convex lid – comprising the diminutive sculptural group with Christ on the Mount of Olives – is unique. An earlier example is a likewise cylindrical pyx from the monastery of the Benedictine nuns in Ebersdorf, Germany, dating to around 1400. On a convex lid 8 cm in diameter, there stands the figure of St. Maurice, a soldier, holding the sacred spear with a banner and the sacred sword. The small cross on his chest resembles that of the Knights of Malta.⁶

On the pyx of Mělník [Fig. 1], Christ kneels and prays in front of a rock topped by a chalice; sleeping apostles are in the front part. The scene is situated in the Garden of Gethsemane, bordered by a fence with an interwoven silver wire. St. Peter rests lying down and supporting his moderately elevated head with his right arm; in his left hand, he holds a diagonally placed sword, which reaches from the waist all the way to the left foot. He is dressed in a fashionable undergarment and a cloak. Opposite him, along the garden fence, St. James sits asleep, and likewise supports his head with his right arm. His identity is indicated by his longer, compactly arranged hair, and his beard, divided in the middle. His cloak falls over his lap and is undulating in a fan-like manner. St. John sits toward the centre of the lid, supporting his chin with his left arm. He has the typically youthful appearance, and his face is framed by short undulating hair. Kneeling in the middle of the lid, Christ prays with clasped hands; his elongated face resembles a rather older man with prominent cheekbones; it is framed by long hair and by a beard around the mouth. A markedly upright back characterises the figure of the Redeemer, who is covered by a garment tied into a knot at the shoulder and articulated by elongated sharper bowl-like undulations. Placed on a rock promontory,

⁵ Björn R. Tammen, *Musik und Bild im Chorraum mittelalterlichen Kirchen, 1100–1500* (Berlin, 2000) 323–326.

⁶ Dietmar Lüdke, "Pyxis aus Ebersdorf," in *Die Parler und der Schöne Stil I*, ed., Anton Legner (Cologne, 1978) 228.

the chalice is supported by a long thin prop. It has a high stem with a nut and a cap, and it towers over the top of the Mount of Olives. Looking from above, the group of the apostles with Christ fills half of the lid; the other side has remained empty. The garments of Christ and the sleeping apostles do not evince any strikingly sharp undulations, which would correspond to the dynamically conceived vernal décor of the pyx's surface. Perhaps, the goldsmith employed an older method for casting the figurines; workshops had used such practices since the twelfth century. The application of an antiquated method impedes the determination of the provenance and the dating of the artifact. Hermann Fillitz calls attention to a tin pyx in Styria, and suggests an application of the older method of casting the figures in this case as well. Nevertheless, the character of tin as a cheaper material led him to the conclusion that this fact explained why there was such a relatively small number of extant pyxes, used routinely for serving the mass.⁷

A pyx was used to hold consecrated hosts and had originally served for the delivery of the sacrament to the sick. Subsequently, it usually served for distributing the hosts to the faithful for communion. The earliest ones were constructed from ivory, richly decorated with a relief of figural and ornamental motifs.⁸ The function of the pyx and its placement on the altar is documented by an illumination with the Annunciation in the coronation Gospel readings from the 1080s, where the cylindrical vessel with a lid stands between two burning candles.⁹ The dimensions of the pyx increased with the late Gothic emphasis on frequent communion. It continued to stand on the altar with other vessel used in the mass. As a rule, the pyx was to be constructed *ex solida decentique material*; this was true of the material used in the Pyx of Mělník.¹⁰ Johann M. Fritz, in a collection of articles on the medieval goldsmith's art, mentions other examples of ciboria and pyxes with figural ornamentations.¹¹ A ciborium from Gdańsk [Danzig] is of a particular interest. Its polygonal surface bears an etching with scenes from the Passion, among which there is a scene with Christ on the Mount of Olives that is reminiscent – in its composition – of the Pyx of Mělník.¹² The item, however, dates to the early fifteenth century, and its composition apparently derives from early woodcuts. Another pyx, from the Church of St. John the Baptist in Göttingen,

⁷ Ciborium with the Man of Sorrows on the cloth cover, St. Oswalden im Freiland, the parish church, late fifteenth century, see Hermann Fillitz, "Kunstgewerbe," in: *Gotik in der Steiermark* (Graz, 1978) 304–319, here 310.

⁸ Joseph Braun, *Das christliche Altargerät in seinem Sein und seiner Entwicklung* (Munich, 1932) 467.

⁹ Pavol Černý, "Zobrazení Zvěstování Panny Marie v Kodexu vyšehradském a Kodexu hnězdenském" [Depictions of the Annunciation in the Codexes of Vyšehrad and Gneзно], in: *PRO ARTE. Sborník k poctě Ivo Hlobila* [PRO ARTE: a Festschrift for Ivo Hlobil], Dalibor Prix, ed. (Prague, 2002) 41–49.

¹⁰ LThK 8:910.

¹¹ Johann M. Fritz, *Goldschmiedekunst der Gotik in Mitteleuropa* (Munich, 1982)

¹² The Pyx of Gdańsk in Fritz, *Goldschmiedekunst*, 265–266, illus. 551–556.

also resembles the Mělník Pyx with its cylindrical shape. Decorated by small medallions with angels, it dates to the first half of the fourteenth century.¹³ Yet another similar pyx is in the Treasury of Osnabrück Cathedral. It is furnished with supports to give it stability. Its cloak bears legible inscriptions, and Christ, as crucified on Golgotha is situated on its lid. Its probable author is Johannes Dahlhoff, who may have created the vessel around 1458.¹⁴

Royal Donors

As noted earlier, Zoroslava Drobná in her article (1951) classified the Mělník Pyx – just as Antonín Podlaha, prior to her – among Utraquist artifacts together with the Pyx of Hradec Králové [Fig. 2].¹⁵ The latter Pyx attracted much scholarly attention because of the engraved image of the Lamb of God on the inner side of its lid [Fig. 3]. The blood from the wound of the victorious Lamb (holding a banner) gushed upward into a chalice placed on the Mount of Olives. The identification of the two vessels as Utraquist was suggested by the fact that the two dowry towns (both Mělník and Hradec Králové) were seats of the Queens of Bohemia, and their inhabitants belonged to the communicants *sub utraque* in the fifteenth century. Mělník was the residence of the last Queen, Johanka of Rožmitál, the widow of King George of Poděbrady, until her death in November 1475.¹⁶ Johanka donated 3,000 scores of Bohemian ducats (a substantial amount at the time) for the reconstruction of the Provost's Church Sts. Peter and Paul. She, however, remained a dedicated communicant *sub una* her entire life. Her funeral was arranged by her son, Jindřich of Minsterberk.¹⁷ She ordered for her husband, King George, a prayer book, which she gave him for Christmas of 1466.¹⁸ On folio 5v of the manuscript, there is a full-page painting of the Mount of Olives with an almost en face portrayal of kneeling Christ, whose open arms express his humility and resignation, with which he had accepted the Father's will, and

¹³ The pyx from the Church of St. John the Baptist in Göttingen, *ibid.*, 272, illus. 612.

¹⁴ The pyx of Osnabrück in Fritz, *Goldschmiedekunst*, 309, illus. 884. Figures adorn also the lids of chalices and pitchers, which were undoubtedly used just like the lids of ciboria. See, *ibid.*, 273–274 illus. 623 chalice; 275 illus. 637 chalice; 274 illus. 625, goblet with lid; 274 illus. 626 goblet with lid; 274 illus. 627 chalice.

¹⁵ Drobná, "Husitské památky v našich muzeích," ČNM 120 (1951) 85f; Podlaha, *Soupis památek historických a uměleckých*, 18; Poche, "Pozdně gotická umělecká díla," 621–622.

¹⁶ Čermák, *Proboštský chrám*, 20–22. Viktorie Wachsmannová, *Mělník* (Prague, 1960) 3; Pavel Zahradník, "Dějiny kláštera obutých augustiniánů v Pšovce u Mělníka" [The History of the Calced Augustinians in Pšovka near Mělník], in *Mělník – Pšovka*, ed., Renata Špačková (Mělník, 2004) 7–35.

¹⁷ Čermák, *ibid.*, 21. Purš, *Mělnickj poklady*, 21. Stehlíková, *Bohemia Sancta*.

¹⁸ Jaroslav Pešina, "Modlitební kniha Jiřího z Poděbrad" [Prayerbook of George of Poděbrady] in: *Sborník k sedmdesátinám Jana Květa* [A Festschrift for Jan Květ on His Seventieth Birthday] (Prague, 1965) 133–146.

the chalice of bitterness, standing on the very rocky peak of the mountain. The other notable features of the illumination are the unusual wooden fence of the Gethsemane Garden and the closed group of the sleeping apostles. The Manuscript is dated by Queen Johanka's dedication on Christmas Eve 1466.

It is likely that Queen Johanka's donation included the tower-shaped monstrance in Mělník, produced with unusual skill and adorned with the figures of Sts. Peter and Paul, Vitus and Wenceslaus, and with the Man of Sorrows at a pillar, bracketed by two angels. The figures are placed under a canopy; the angels bear the *arma Christi*. Thanks to the statuettes of the two apostles, it can be assumed that the monstrance was intended for the church of Sts. Peter and Paul.¹⁹ We know that both the Utraquists and the *sub una* arranged for expensive monstrances, because the exhibition of a host in the monstrance had become requisite for the adoration of the body of Christ, especially on the feast of Corpus Christi, observed on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. We do not know, where exactly Queen Johanka was buried, but the provost's – later, the dean's – church in Mělník was certainly the place, where the masses and memorial prayers for the deceased Queen were regularly performed.²⁰ Customarily, masses for the deceased person of a high social status were said according to a certain schedule. For that purpose, a definite sum was stipulated and covered by a perpetual income.²¹

The Burghers of Mělník

Let us return to the pyx of Mělník, which is conventionally dated to around the year 1500.²² In all likelihood, the image of the Passion with Christ on the Mount of Olives and with the chalice was connected with the deposition of hosts in the pyxes and perhaps also with the adoration of the blood of Christ, which – as a relic – belonged to the Kings of Bohemia.²³ Soon after the outbreak of the Bohemian wars of religion, Mělník adopted the declaration of the Four Articles of Prague, especially because, as early as March 1421, the Hussite troops burnt and sacked the nearby monastery of Augustinian Hermits. A transition to Utraquist liturgy was undoubtedly facilitated by

¹⁹ Concerning the monstrance, see Purš, *Mělnické poklady*, 14–18. Poche, “Pozdně gotická umělecká řemesla;” 614. Stehlíková, *Bohemia Sancta*.

²⁰ Čermák, *Proboštský chrám*, 22. The regular annual masses, and requiems were frequent reminders of Johanka's life and works, especially of her stay in her dowry town of Mělník.

²¹ Tomáš Borovský, “Čas středověkých testamentů,” in: Kateřina Jiřová and Eva Doležalová, *Pozdně středověké testamenty v českých zemích* [Late Medieval Testaments in the Bohemian Lands] (Prague, 2006) 55–71.

²² See Purš, *Mělnické poklady*; Poche, “Pozdně gotická umělecká řemesla;” Stehlíková, *Bohemia Sancta*.

²³ Olga Pujmanová, “The Vyšší Brod Crucifixion,” *Bulletin of the National Gallery in Prague* V-VI, 1995–1996, 54–61. (Emperor Charles IV received relics of the Holy Blood in Mantua.)

the Prague Archbishop, Konrad of Vechta (1421–1431), who joined the Utraquists and who had earlier held the office of Provost in Melnık.²⁴ During the consolidation of political conditions under George of Podebrady and especially the Roman Catholic, but tolerant Vladislav II Jagellon, it is more than likely that our pyx was regularly exhibited on the altar of the town church. The image of a chalice evoked not only the approach of Christ’s Passion, but also the legacy of the Last Supper and of communion from a chalice. There can not be an absolute certainty that the Mount of Olives symbolised the communion for laypeople in both kinds but, knowing that the priests of the Melnık church of Sts. Peter and Paul celebrated Utraquist liturgy until the early seventeenth century, we could consider the pyx as an artifact acquired by the Utraquists.²⁵

We can find relevance to our quest in the wooden altar of Novy Bydzov [Fig. 4]. The altar is tripartite with two wings, painted on both sides, with an image of the Last Supper in the middle. The inner side of the left wing portrays the priest Jan Hrazdovsky, holding a chalice [Fig.5], and the inner side of the right wing depicts the priest Vaclav Hrazdovsky, who holds an open pyx and is lifting its lid by grasping the figurines which adorn the top of the lid [Fig.6]. The altar was procured by priest Jan in memory of his brother, the priest Vaclav. Both of the priests wear cassock, surplice and stole and a black soft cap (biretta) typical of the time. The altar was destined for the Utraquist Church in Novy Bydzov; its paintings date to around 1530.²⁶

We can pose the question whether the Pyx of Melnık was destined unambiguously for the Utraquist Church of the royal and dowry town of Melnık, which, as we saw, had been supported by King Vladislav II Jagellon prior to 1490. The patricians of Melnık and the nobles of the near surroundings likewise influenced the furnishings and probably also the liturgy in the Church

²⁴ Vaclav V. Tomek, “O cirkvi strany pod obojı v letech 1415–1622” [On the Church of the Party *sub utraque* in 1415–1622], *CM* 22 (1848) 463–468; Wachsmannova, *Melnık*, 3. – The residents of Melnık sought the protection of Lord Jan Smiricky and together with the Praguers fought on side of the Barons’ League against the Taborites at the battle of Lipany (1434). Melnık was the site of the congresses and diets of the Utraquist party in the years 1438, 1439, and 1442.

²⁵ About the bequests of King Vladislav to the Provost’s Church of Sts. Peter and Paul, see ˇCermak *Probostsky chram*, 20–23. Utraquist priests served in Melnık for two hundred years (probably until 1622). – Karel Zamastil, *Kolegiatnı kapitula melnicka* [The Collegiate Chapter in Melnık] (Melnık, 1896).

²⁶ Concerning the altar, see Jaroslav Pešina, *Ceska malba pozdnı gotiky a renesance* [Bohemian Painting of Late Gothic and the Renaissance] (Prague, 1950) 134. The two priests are identified by ribbons with the following inscriptions: on the left wing: “Knyez Jan vlastni bratr geho ucinil pamatku po smrti geho a ke cti chwale bozi,” and on the right wing: “Pamatka knieze Waczlawa Hrazdovskeho a ffaraze bydzovskeho modle se zan panu Bohu.” Aside from the garments of the two priests, the Utraquist iconography is also represented by the middle plate with the Last Supper. The altar was displayed in the exposition *Umenı reformace v ˇCechach* [The Art of the Bohemian Reformation] Prague, Hrad 16 December 2009–4 May 2010. Kateřina Hornickova and Michal Šronek edd., *Umenı reformace v ˇCechach* (Prague, 2010).

of Sts. Peter and Paul and especially the town council – the judge, the mayor, and the councillors, further the merchants, the proprietors of prosperous vineyards, masters of guilds, members of brotherhoods, and other burghers. In addition, the rich benefactors of the Church included the owners of a nearby castle, later rebuilt as a mansion. A valuable insight is provided by the Book of the Last Wills and Testaments [*Kniha kšaftů*] from 1491–1536.²⁷ The administration of the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul was the responsibility of the director of building, who was usually one of the town councillors. He took care of the liturgical vessels, kept in the sacristy, as well as mass garments, books, candles, and wax. He paid the craftsmen, assured the normal course of religious services, guarded the financial solvency of the church, and administered the donations for prayers and masses by those who had made bequests in their testaments.²⁸

Many of the liturgical objects belonging to the Church in Mělník are included in the earlier-mentioned list of Dean Dědek from 1746. As noted earlier, beside the pyx, the chalice and the image of Crucified Christ are also listed, which artefacts may suggest in their iconography the influence of Utraquist priests that served in the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul. One can, however, connect unambiguously only the chalice, with the earlier-cited inscription, with a Utraquist priest.²⁹ As also mentioned earlier, the introduction of Utraquist priests in Mělník may have occurred thanks to the Mělník Provost and later Archbishop of Prague, Konrád of Vechta, who died in 1431. It is, however, uncertain whether services were conducted by both an Utraquist priest and a priest *sub una*.

The Augustinian Monastery

Moreover, Pavel Zahradník established through a careful examination of historical documents that the burghers of Mělník once more (around 1450) supported the Augustinian monastery, the operation of which was restored relatively soon after it had been destroyed, as noted earlier, during the Bohemian wars of religion in 1421.³⁰ The church in the monastery celebrated liturgy *sub una* also for lay faithful, as it was customary in other churches of mendicant monasteries. It is, therefore, evident that communicants of both types lived

²⁷ Jan Kilián, “Mělnické registrum kšaftovní z let 1491–1536” [The Register of Testaments in Mělník from 1491–1536] – a hitherto unused source, in: Jíšová-Doležalová, *Pozdně středověké testameny v českých zemích*, 231–241.

²⁸ Čermák, *Proboštský chrám*, 21.

²⁹ Concerning the inscribed chalice, see Čermák, *Proboštský chrám sv. Petra a Pavla na Mělníce*, 23.

³⁰ Idem., 19. Veronika Macháčková, “Církevní správa v době Jagellonské (na základě administrátorských akt)” [Ecclesiastical Administration in the Jagellon Period (Based on the Acts of the Administrators)], FHB 9 (1985) 235–284.

in the town, but it can be assumed that liturgies *sub una* were conducted only in the monastery church and not the town one.³¹ It is, therefore, necessary to explore whether the pyx had not originally belonged to this Augustinian monastery near Mělník.

King Vladislav II transferred the hereditary right to the monastery in Mělník to the Court Master Albrecht of Kolowraty on 22 February 1502. A document from 1506, preserved in a copy, was deposited by the monastery's prior Tomáš in the Registers of the Land [*Desky zemské*]. He stated that "in our church dedicated to St. Lawrence" one could find, until the present, documents, testifying to the glorious past and accomplishments of the Kolowrat family, which had been guarded by the monks and would be cared for by them in the future. Albrecht of Kolowraty died in 1510 so that he had not acted for long time as the protector and benefactor of the monastery.³² As for an interest in expensive objects of goldsmiths' art, we can find it in Albrecht's ancestor, Hanuš of Kolowraty, who had served as Administrator *sub una* in Prague from 1468 to 1483.³³ In 1465, he ordered a precious missal for the Cathedral of St. Vitus from the goldsmith of Hradčany, Master Martin. Working on the missal cover, Martin employed a variety of techniques of goldsmithing, among them enameled wires, in creating figural statuettes of angels and of the patron saints of Bohemia, and relief scenes from the lives of Christ and the martyrs (fashioned in mother-of-pearl). The central relic – a fragment of the Holy Cross – was surrounded by precious stones, set in gold; other relics rested in glass-covered medallions. The lower clasp of the missal bore the Kolowrats' emblem of a bipartite eagle.³⁴ It is likely that Albrecht of Kolowraty, as a proprietor and benefactor of the Augustinian monastery, would donate precious liturgical vessels to the monastery, but there is no way to prove that his donations included the famous Pyx of Mělník. Nevertheless, he was undoubtedly in touch with the goldsmiths not only in Prague, but also in Nuremberg and Augsburg, from whom he ordered artefacts for his own use. Poche, Stehlíková and Purš have sought analogies of the famous Pyx of Mělník exactly among the goldsmiths' workshops of these cities.³⁵

The monastery changed its owner after the death of Albrecht of Kolowraty, and – following a period of decline – reached a new prosperity under prior Fridrich de Michaelis from Venice, who led the monastery from 1560 to 1593. Opposed to the riches and the activities of the prior, the burghers of Mělník complained to the Emperor, accusing the monastery's competition for their economic losses. During the entire sixteenth century, liturgical services were

³¹ Zahradník, *Dějiny kláštera obutých augustiniánů*, 7–35.

³² *Ibid.*, 7.

³³ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁴ Macháčková, "Církevní správa v době Jagellonské," 235–284.

³⁵ On the missal, see Poche, "Pozdně gotická umělecká řemesla," 615.

conducted daily; on feast days sermons were preached in Czech by monks of Czech origin.³⁶ In 1611, the monastery was suddenly attacked and sacked by new military recruits from Mělník. The outrage is depicted on a copper etching of the same year.³⁷ The devastation was described by prior Caribdius: “The monastery was occupied, plundered, all that [the invaders] saw, they broke, cut ancient altars to pieces, carried away and smashed the most holy sacrament with its case, trampled on many precious relics, opened the graves of the dead, pulled out the bodies, took away the ornaments and jewels of the deceased, and so they plundered and completely destroyed a poor monastery without any cause...” The report listed the names of the principal perpetrators, who were subsequently punished; one was executed, others tortured.³⁸

For our purposes, the testimony of the contemporary captain of the manor of Mělník, Matyáš Lvovický of Lvovice, is most interesting. He testified that the recruits “...immediately broke the small door to the cemetery and some of them crawled through the windows into the rooms of the reverend prior, where they behaved in a wilful fashion. They seized whatever they particularly liked from rifles, garments, tin utensils, a small box with the Body of Christ³⁹ (which they dumped on the ground and stamped upon) to chalices.” Lvovický further wrote that he saw how that monastery was sacked and plundered and, in its church, sections of windows were broken, then they collected liturgical vestments, they broke open the monstrance and the little box [*škatulka*] with the [Sacrament], and they abominably spilled the [Sacrament] on the ground and stamped on it with their feet. Not daring to touch it, still in their presence I sent for the priest, who preached in the same monastery, to collect [the remnants of the Sacrament]. Later we found the mentioned little box, thrown away with other objects behind the fence.

The recruits tried to kill the prior, but the captain hid him in the castle. The prior later returned and attempted to restore the monastery which, however, was again decimated in 1619. After the Battle of the White Mountain (1620) the situation calmed down, and the monastery was rebuilt in the Baroque style.⁴⁰

I was intrigued by the report of “a small box [*škatulka*] with the Body of God,” i.e. the Sacrament, which might have been our pyx. We do not know its external appearance, or the time of its origin, or the identity of its possible donor. Thus, the report does not supply sufficient information to determine whether the pyx, salvaged from behind the fence, could have been the pyx with Christ on the Mount of Olives. The author of the report, Matyáš of

³⁶ Purš, *Mělnické poklady*; Poche, “Pozdně gotická umělecká řemesla,” Stehlíková, *Bohemia Sancta*.

³⁷ Zahradník, *Dějiny kláštera*, 16–17.

³⁸ Bohuslav Čermák, “Mědiritina, znázorňující drancování kláštera sv. Vavřince pod Mělníkem roku 1611” [Copper Etching Depicting the Sack of the Monastery of St. Lawrence near Mělník in 1611], *PA* 35 (1925) 515–516.

³⁹ Here and following the Czech text reads “*drahé Boží tělo*” [the dear Body of God].

⁴⁰ Zahradník, *Dějiny kláštera*, 20 ff.

Lvovice, might have well saved our “*škatulka*,” and the pyx might have found its way into the treasury of the parish church of Sts. Peter and Paul prior to 1746. I do not know, whether a record of the pyx with figural ornamentation was included in a list of the church properties from the beginning of the seventeenth century. As a rule, only the inventory of 1746 is cited.

Utraquist Altars

As we saw earlier, support for a Utraquist identity of the Pyx of Mělník could be found on the wings of the altar in Nový Bydžov, which depict two Utraquist priests and siblings, holding a chalice and a pyx. As we may recall, the pyx held by the priest on the right wing closely resembles the pyx of Mělník with its circular shape and the figural ornamentation of the lid, which probably depicted the Man of Sorrows. The priest is lifting the lid by holding the figure of Christ.⁴¹ It is likely that, in a similar way, the priest opened the pyx in the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul which was supported by both Utraquist and *sub una* monarchs. In the Mělník Church, there also was – in all probability – a wooden altar from the beginning of the sixteenth century, which depicted the blood, springing from Christ’s wounds, and collected into a chalice by four angels.⁴²

In addition, I wish to call attention to the Utraquist altar in Vliněves, because Smil of Vliněves was numbered among the owners of the Augustinian monastery of Mělník in 1506. On the altar of Vliněves, the right wing portrays St. Adalbert with a chalice and host at the altar and, behind him, Jan Hus with the heretic’s cap, holding a book. Hus assists St. Adalbert at mass and lifts up his chasuble at the elevation, just like the priest on the wooden altar of Bernt Notke, depicting the mass of St. Gregory from the early sixteenth century.⁴³ Whether Smil of Vliněves, as a communicant *sub una*, can be connected with the Utraquist altar is uncertain, but we know that an interpenetration of the Utraquists and the *sub una* was, at that time, quite common in the rural areas of Bohemia. The relatively small panel with the Bohemian patron St. Adalbert and Master Jan Hus belonged to a larger wing altar of which another seven panels, painted on both sides, are extant. The middle of the altar, however, is missing. The portrayal of St. Adalbert at the altar attracts attention by the

⁴¹ Pešina, *Česká malba*, 134; Horníčková – Šroněk, *Umění*.

⁴² Pešina, “Ukřižování mělnické” [The Crucifixion of Mělník] in *Ibid.*, 125 col. 1510; Horníčková – Šroněk, *Umění*.

⁴³ Pešina, “Křídla oltáře z Vliněvsí, po 1529,” in *Česká malba*, 124. See also Uwe Westfeling, *Die Messe Gregors des Grossen* (Cologne, 1982) 44. – Jiří Fajt and Jan Royt, “Svatý Vojtěch ve vrcholném a pozdním středověku” [St. Adalbert in the High and Late Middle Ages], in: *Svatý Vojtěch*, [St. Adalbert] (Prague, 1997) 38, 108. – Jan Royt, “Renovatio regni. Zum Charakter der Kunst in Böhmen unter den Jagiellonen,” in: Dietmar Popp – Rober Suckale (eds.), *Die Jagellonien* (Nuremberg, 2002) 227–232; Horníčková – Šroněk, *Umění*.

fact that the saint, while holding the chalice and the host in the right hand, is as if pointing back with his left hand toward Hus, who stands behind him.⁴⁴

The nearby Church of St. James in Libiš was the initial site of the late Gothic wing altar – *archa* – in the middle of which, under the tabernacle, was perhaps originally placed the image of the Man of Sorrow, who is extracting a host from the wound at his side with one hand, and is holding a chalice in the other hand. Nowadays, this part of the altar is considered more recent or even as an *ex post facto* insertion. The inner wings depict scenes from the Passion – the Crucifixion, Christ on the Mount of Olives, the Scourging of Christ, and the Bearing of the Cross. A painting on the predella shows two angels holding the *vera icon*. The patron of the church, St. James the Great, bracketed by the prophets Isaiah and Joel, is depicted on a triangular extension. The altar dates to around 1500.⁴⁵

Lingering Uncertainty

From the viewpoint of style – according to Poche, and more recently Purš and Stehlíková – the Pyx of Mělník exhibits many similarities with the artefacts which originated in the goldsmiths' workshop of Prague. The scholars called attention, above all, to the reliquary busts of Sts. Adalbert, Wenceslaus, and Vitus and other ornaments, destined for the Cathedral of St. Vitus.⁴⁶ The short distance from Mělník to Prague suggests that the goldsmiths' artefacts could be produced as well by other members of the Guild of St. Eligius.⁴⁷ Certain analogies of the figural group on the Mělník Pyx are noticeable in a small alabaster group with Christ on the Mount of Olives, held by a private owner in Rottweil, Germany.⁴⁸ The vogue of the images of the Mount of Olives and their diversity are documented during the fifteenth century by two premier artefacts: the Mount of Olives in the Church of St. Maurice in Olomouc (from around 1430), and the Mount of Olives in Brno-Modřice

⁴⁴ Pešina, "Křídla oltáře z Vlněvsí, po 1529," 124; Horníčková – Šroněk, *Umění*.

⁴⁵ Pešina, "Oltář Libišský, po 1500" [The Altar of Libiš, after 1500] in *Česká malba*, 115–116; Horníčková – Šroněk, *Umění*.

⁴⁶ Purš, *Mělnické poklady*; Poche, "Pozdně gotická umělecká řemesla;" and Stehlíková, *Bohemia Sancta*.

⁴⁷ Hana Pátková, *Z Noyonu do Prahy. Kult sv. Eligia ve středověkých Čechách* [From Noyon to Prague. The Cult of St. Eligius in Medieval Bohemia] (Prague, 2006); Michaela Hrubá, "Bratrstva a cechy z pohledu měšťanských testamentů" [Brotherhoods and Guilds from the Viewpoint of the Burghers' Testaments], *Documenta Pragensia* 18 (2000) 27–47; Hana Pátková, "Pražská bratrstva mezi husitstvím a reformací" [Prague Brotherhoods between Husitism and the Reformation], *Documenta Pragensia* 18 (2000) 13–35.

⁴⁸ Annette Kollmann, "Technologische Studien zu Alabastr-Skulpturen des 15. Jahrhunderts aus Württembergisch Franken," in: *Festschrift für Hans Westhoff zum 60. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart, 2000) 161–183, illus. 20.

(from around 1470).⁴⁹ Likewise the monumental ensemble of statues on the Mount of Olives, located in the hospital church of the Holy Spirit in Landshut, Germany, has a similarly conceived group (as the Mělník Pyx) with the apostles, and especially the praying Christ with the typically straight back.⁵⁰ Also in Poland, we note an ensemble on the Mount of Olives, influenced by the work of Veit Stoss, which in certain details is reminiscent of the diminutive statuettes on the lid of the Mělník Pyx.⁵¹ Finally, we can call attention to the relief of the Mount of Olives at the Church of St. Michael in Vienna.⁵²

In my opinion, it is impossible to determine for certain, whether the Pyx of Mělník was intended for the use of Utraquists or of the party *sub una*. In any case, it belongs among the superb artefacts of the late medieval goldsmiths. It is the minute ensemble on the Mount of Olives from the turn of the sixteenth century that places the Pyx of Mělník among the entirely unique examples of medieval goldsmiths' work and devotion in Bohemia.

Translated from the Czech by Zdeněk V. David
with editorial help by Marek Červený

⁴⁹ The monumental ensemble of statues in the Church of St. Maurice, in Brno-Modřice, and that by Veit Stoss in the Nuremberg Church of St. Sebald belonged among the outstanding artefacts which represented the town churches and contemporary piety. See Ivo Hlobil, "Středoevropský (Pražský) sochař, Olivetská hora" [Medieval (Prague) Sculptor, the Mount of Olives], in: *Od gotiky k renesanci. Výtvarná kultura Moravy a Slezska 1400–1550* [From the Gothic to the Renaissance. The Artistic Culture of Moravia and Silesia], v. 3, Olomoucko [The Region of Olomouc], ed., Ivo Hlobil (Olomouc, 1999) 284–291; Kaliopi Chamonikola, "Olivetská hora z Modřic u Brna" [Mt. of Olives in Modřice near Brno], in: *Od gotiky k renesanci. Výtvarná kultura Moravy a Slezska 1400–1550*, vol. 2, Brno, ed. Kaliopi Chamonikola (Brno, 1999) 350–355.

⁵⁰ Vor Leinberger, *Landshuter Skulptur im Zeitalter der Reichen Herzöge 1393–1503* (Landshut, 2001).

⁵¹ Magdalena Stawowiak, "Późnogotycki drewniany Ogrojec w kościele Wszystkich Świętych w Ptaszkowej – domniemane dzieło Wita Stwosza" [The Wooden Late-Gothic Gethsemane in All-Saints Church in Ptaszkowa, a Presumed Work of Wit Stwosz], *Folia Historiae Artium*, NS 10 (2005) 89–115.

⁵² Lothar Schultze, "Erasmus Grasser – Umkreis, Ölberg, Wien, Michaelskirche, um 1480–1494," in: Artur Rosenauer, ed., *Spätmittelalter und Renaissance. Geschichte der bildenden Kunst in Österreich* (Vienna, 2003) 3:113–114.



Fig. 1
Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane (c. 1500)
Pyx of Mělník: City Hall of Mělník
Photo: Prokop Paul



Fig. 2
Pyx of Hradec Králové and communion spoon (c. 1500)
Museum of Eastern Bohemia, Hradec Králové
Photo: František Krejčí



Fig. 3
 Agnus Dei (c. 1500)
 Pyx of Hradec Králové (inside lid)
 Museum of Eastern Bohemia, Hradec Králové
 Photo: František Krejčí



Fig. 4
 The Altar of Nový Bydžov (c. 1530)
 The Last Supper and the priests Jan and Václav Hraždovský
 Municipal Museum, Nový Bydžov
 Photo: Jitka Walterová



Fig. 5
The Altar of Nový Bydžov (c. 1530)
Priest Václav Hraždovský with pyx
Municipal Museum, Nový Bydžov
Photo: Jitka Walterová



Fig. 6
The Altar of Nový Bydžov (c. 1530)
Priest Jan Hraždovský with chalice
Municipal Museum, Nový Bydžov
Photo: Jitka Walterová