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### **The review of the habilitation thesis of Dr Jindřich Marek**

The thesis of Dr Jindřich Marek, published in 2017<sup>1</sup>, offers a complex study of the life, work, and literary legacy of Václav Koranda the Younger, a Prague intellectual and prominent figure of the Utraquist Church. Undoubtedly, in the history of the late Hussite movement, Koranda occupies the central place as administrator of the Utraquist Church, a busy polemist and eager promotor of Hussite doctrine. For almost two decades after the death of Archbishop Jan Rokycana in 1471, Václav Koranda the Younger played a key role in the administration of the late Utraquist Church and exerted a significant influence on its organizational development. With great commitment he was concerned about the integrity of mainstream Hussite doctrine, and worked hard to settle religious and disciplinary controversies within the Utraquist Church. Dr Marek's study takes for granted Koranda's leadership, making it the starting point of the research presented in his dissertation. The reconstruction, or rather re-examination of Koranda's biography is just only one side of Marek's thesis, as its main focus lies elsewhere. Koranda's career provides a pretext for a modern case study on the developments of literary culture in the period of confrontation between scholastic traditions and humanistic ideas. In the opinion of Dr Marek, Koranda's writings and book collection, which are so extensively preserved, offer a fertile research area for such a study. To complete his research objectives, Marek scrupulously collected and analysed all available source materials either produced by Koranda himself, or directly associated with his activities. A vast body of sources were researched in order to examine the intellectual and literary profile of the man who became a prominent figure of the

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<sup>1</sup> Jindřich Marek, *Václav Koranda mladší. Utrkvistický administrator a literat* (Praha: Lidové Noviny, 2017), pp. 259.



Utraquist Church and the champion of Hussite doctrine under the reigns of King George of Poděbrady and King Ladislas Jagiellon.

Koranda's life and work have been intensively studied for a long time, but no systematic research on his writings and library was completed before the 2017 publication of Marek's book. Thus, Marek's dissertation fills this important gap in the historiography of the Hussite movement, offering a comprehensive study of Koranda's life and literary legacy. His work is composed of introduction, six sections (oddly, they are neither termed chapters nor numbered), conclusions, and four annexes. The introduction (*Uvod*) provides a brief presentation of Václav Koranda the Younger as an important figure of the Czech late medieval history. It also overviews source materials for the study Koranda's life, and addresses key research areas covered in the book.

The first section (*Písemná kultura poděbradského a jagellonského období*) discusses methodological approaches to the study of medieval literacy, and presents paradigms of research on religious and social communication in the pre-Reformation period. Dr Marek shows that the interesting results of research are offered by a multifaceted analysis of the literary legacy of a single writer and book collector. In his opinion, Václav Koranda's writings and books provide the good opportunities for a fruitful research on the developments of literary culture in Bohemia at the turn of late Middle Ages.

Section Two (*Životní dráha Václava Korandy mladšího*) overviews Koranda's life, re-examining his social status, early work, studies and work at Prague University, participation in the 1462 delegation to Pope Pius II, administration of the Utraquist Church, late university career, and death. First of all, this section is intended to reconstruct the chronology of Koranda's life which has been presented in a number of earlier studies and encyclopaedic entries. In a chronological order, Dr Marek discusses particular details of Koranda's biography, confronting well-grounded historiographical findings with a fresh examination of available sources. Biographical data are presented in short subsections which offer critical overviews of the most important phases of Koranda's life.

Section Three (*V čele utrakvistické církevní správy*) treats in more detail Koranda's work as administrator of the Utraquist Church. Here, Dr Marek examined Koranda's service in the Lower Consistory, and his relations with Bishop Augustine Luciani, who after his arrival to Prague in 1489 took over the leadership of the Utraquist Church. A meticulous study of documents and letters related to Koranda's work in the Lower Consistory constitutes the most



valuable part of this section. It offers a comprehensive analysis of dozens of cases presented to the Lower Consistory during Koranda's administration, throwing light on the functioning of Utraquist parishes all across the kingdom of Bohemia. Marek's remarks on the structure and content of these extant records are of great significance. His research demonstrated that Koranda not only organized the work of the Utraquist Consistory, but also played the key role in introducing the system of its record-keeping.

The fourth section (*Polemika s papežem a českými katolíky*) is focused on Koranda's polemical writings addressed to the representatives of the Roman Church. Here, Dr Marek analyses several texts Koranda penned to promote Hussite doctrine and to rebuke charges of Catholic polemicists. In detail, he discussed the circumstances in which these writings were produced, and examined Koranda's polemical strategy. Koranda's writings addressed to a dozen of Catholic opponents constitute the most coherent corpus of his texts, giving insight into his theological opinions and polemical discourse. They also testify to Koranda's leading position in the Utraquist Church, showing him as an active promotor of Hussite teaching and a vociferous critic of the Catholic Church. On the one hand, Marek's study demonstrates that Koranda was not an original thinker, and most of theological arguments in his texts came second-hand. But on the other, it shows that Koranda a hot-tempered polemicist who was prone to reply to the assaults on the Utraquist Church he loved so much. It is rather a pity that Dr Marek researched Koranda's texts only as single literary items. A comprehensive analysis of all these writings should offer a more complex view to Koranda's theology and strategy of argumentation. Dr Marek demonstrates a good understanding of such research opportunities, but intentionally his approach to Koranda's writings is not focused much on theological issues.

Section Five (*Polemika s radikální reformací*), the shortest in the book, deals with Koranda's polemical works against radical groups of the Bohemian reformation: the Bohemian Brethren (*Jednota bratrská*) and the followers of Mikulaš Vlášnický, the so-called *mikulašenci*. In contrast to the previous section, a number of sources analysed here is limited. At first sight, it might look that the problems of radical Hussite communities did not catch much of Koranda's attention. Contrary to such presumption, Dr Marek argues that Koranda closely watched the activities of radical reformers, and as administrator of the Utraquist Church was updated about the spread of their doctrine. The records of the Lower Consistory, Marek researched for his analysis, provides information about new converts to the Bohemian Brethren and growing influence of the community of Priest Nicholas. Manuscript research carried out in the Clementine Manual Book enabled Dr Marek to analyse Koranda's minor writings against



radical reformers. These texts reveal his hostile approach to their sectarian doctrine. Koranda regarded radical reformers as heretics who strayed away from the mainstream of the Hussite movement and posed a serious threat to the integrity of the Utraquist Church. His treatment of the Bohemian Brethren was much influenced by Rokycana's treatise, which supplied him with basic arguments against the doctrine of Petr Chelčický and his followers. In his dealings with radical reformers Koranda acted first of all as a high-ranked official of the Utraquist Church, who was not curious to learn more about their teachings, but rather expected secular authorities take action and suppress their activities.

The sixth section of the book (*Korandova knihovna*) is devoted to Koranda's book collection. Though much based on Marek's earlier studies, it does offer a complex analysis of the library that was created by this prominent Prague scholar and the leader of the late Utraquist Church. A painstaking research of Jindřich Marek and other Czech historians has made it possible to identify 71 manuscripts and old prints which once belonged to Václav Koranda the Younger. In recent years Dr Marek was busily working on a definitive inventory of Koranda's books, and the results of his research are presented in the Annexes to his publication. Marek's examination of Koranda's library gives fresh insight into the developments of literary culture in late medieval Bohemia. He identified not only particular pieces of Koranda's book collection, but conducted their in-depth analysis, profiling Koranda's intellectual horizons and literary interests. According to his conclusive remarks, the books Koranda possessed, though only partially preserved, showed him as a conservative scholar who was strongly attached to scholastic culture and was barely interested in humanistic ideas. Marek's acute observations on the presence of Latin and Czech books in Koranda's library testify to the growing role of the Czech language as an instrument of social communication in the pre-Reformation Bohemia. No less important remarks concern the ratio between manuscripts and old prints in Koranda's library. Of great significance are Marek's observations on the marginal notes made by Koranda in his books. They reflect Koranda's reading habits and "interaction" with texts that attracted his particular attention. These marginalia, which are sometimes quite lengthy, cast fresh light on Koranda's knowledge and mentality. In particular, they reveal his great interest in theology, history, and astrology. Marek's observations on Koranda's marginal notes shall be counted among major scholarly accomplishments of his thesis. They show how Koranda studied his books and annotated them with his explanatory comments. Dr Marek discussed in more detail only a dozen of such notes. That is why a more systematic study on Koranda's marginal comments would be required to demonstrate how he used the books he read in his own writings.



The questionnaire adopted by Dr Marek in his analysis of Koranda's library enabled him to raise a number of intriguing problems concerning the transformations of literary culture in the period of transition from the Middle Ages to the early modern era.

I wish to point out here some important findings of Marek's research concerning Koranda's life, work, and literary legacy. Due to scarce source materials Koranda's early life looks obscure. Dr Marek collected and analysed all available information concerning his origins and social status. This research allows him to argue that Koranda was not a priest but a secular who had a wife and children (p. 20). Actually, first details of Koranda's biography are associated with his studies at Prague University. A single mention Koranda made about his mentor Kristian of Prachatice (KMK, N 58, f. 87r), who died in 1439, testifies to his studies at Prague in 1430s (p. 21). Unfortunately, as Marek's research demonstrates, no further details concerning this early phase of his life are available. Koranda's studies were interrupted in unknown circumstances, and resumed as late as 1450s. Dr Marek assumes that for some time

Koranda worked as a scribe in an unidentified Prague chancery. This assumption rests on Koranda's own comment in his later polemic with Hilarius of Litoměřický, the Catholic administrator of Prague Archdiocese, and is confirmed by a paleographical analysis of his handwriting. Contrary to various interpretations and proposals, there is no hard evidence to determine what chancery employed him (pp. 19-20). Rather oddly, Marek discusses this detail of Koranda's life separately, before dealing with his university career. It looks to me a tempting hypothesis to seek a coincidence between the interruption of Koranda's studies and his employment as a professional scribe in one of Prague chanceries. Due to the high costs of living in Prague and university fees, it was common for poor students to make a break from studies before earning any academic degree. Owing to their scriptural skills, some of them found employment in chanceries. Only a small percentage of such students resumed their studies and received academic degrees. Koranda's career might fit into this model of university career, but Dr Marek did not develop this hypothesis.

In his study Marek demonstrates that Koranda's life gained a new momentum after his return to Prague University. In 1454 and 1458 respectively, he earned BA and MA degrees which allowed him to start teaching at Charles University. In 1460s Koranda became one of the leading scholars at Charles University but it is hard to determine what boosted his academic career at that time. Dr Marek reconstructed Koranda's work at Prague University, but most of



his findings confirm previous research. It is a pity that he did not attempt to discuss in more detail the background of Koranda's promotion to a significant position at Prague University. Koranda was not only a man of critical and hard work, but he also enjoyed much popularity among his university colleagues. His elections to the positions of dean of Arts Faculty and rector testify to his high position at the university. Koranda's work at Prague University became a springboard to his career in the Utraquist Church. In 1460s he became a key polemist who defended Utraquist doctrine against Catholic opponents and radical reformers. Dr Marek noted that in the second half of the fifteenth century Charles University was transformed into a Czech national institution and functioned as an intellectual centre of the Utraquist Church, but he did not draw any further conclusion of this statement for his analysis of Koranda's career. In the period under discussion, Prague academic elites closely collaborated with the leadership of the Utraquist Church. A number of Prague scholars took the lead in the Hussite reformation and significantly contributed to the emergence of the Utraquist doctrine. In my opinion, Koranda's career reflects pretty well such a symbiosis of these two Utraquist institutions. Koranda's participation in the 1462 delegation to the Holy See reflected not only his high position at Prague University, but also in the Utraquist Church. Following earlier research, Dr Marek argued that in the Czech delegation Koranda, together with Václav Vrbenský, represented Prague University. The membership of this important mission was a great honour for Koranda, who had earned his MA only four years earlier. It would of great interest to learn how in such a short period after his MA promotion, Koranda made his advancement to the group of leading Prague scholars, who could be entrusted with the prestigious mission to the Holy See. It may be argued that that he had an influential protector outside the university, who wished him to join the 1462 delegation to Rome. At first glance, his natural protector might have been Archbishop Jan Rokycana who played a key role in the negotiations with the papacy. Unfortunately, due to patchy materials, nothing certain is known about the relationship between Koranda and Rokycana at that time. Koranda's later appointment to the position of administrator of the Utraquist Church, after Rokycana's death, indirectly testifies to the fact that he might have belonged to the close circle of Rokycana's collaborators. Dr Marek ignores, however, a possible impact of Rokycana on Koranda's career. Anyhow, the 1462 mission to Rome was a great moment in Koranda's life and his personal experience of the meeting Pope Pius II echoed in his later polemical writings.



Contrary to the title, Marek's thesis does not belong to the genre of historical biographies. Owing to mostly official and polemical source materials related to Koranda and his activities, it would be hard to produce such a work. Koranda's own writings are almost completely devoid of autobiographical details concerning his private life, career, and mentality. Thus, the writing of a biography of Václav Koranda the Younger posed, poses and will pose a challenge. Being aware of such limitations, Dr Marek did not attempt to create a coherent biographical study of his protagonist. Instead, after the critical overview of Koranda's life, his study is focused on Koranda's own writings and his books which are preserved in great abundance. His meticulous analysis of Koranda's polemical treatises, letters, documents and marginal notes gives in-depth insights into his intellectual horizons, reading habits, and scriptural skills. That is why, it is more plausible to consider Marek's thesis a literary biography of Václav Koranda the Younger.

Following in the footsteps of earlier historians, Marek argues that Koranda was not an original thinker and his religious ideas were heavily based on the writings of the first and second generations of Hussite theologians, from Jan Hus and Jakoubek of Střibro to Jan Rokycana and Martin Lupáč. Refuting the charges of Catholic opponents, Koranda extensively exploited their arguments that in his eyes satisfactorily framed definitive concepts of Hussite teaching. As Marek demonstrates, Koranda's surviving writings present him as an eager and uncompromised defender of Hussite doctrine who put pen to paper to refute arguments both of Catholic polemicists and radical reformers. In his works, Koranda stressed the significance of the Four Prague Articles which constituted the core of Hussite theology. He had no doubts that the Utraquist teaching he learnt and taught was a definitive theological programme which needed to be reminded and promoted. The Catholic Church was the main target of Koranda's polemics. That is why continuing the tradition of earlier Hussite polemic, he criticized the Catholic Church for deviating from God's truth contained in the Holy Scriptures. With particular passion, he attacked the papacy, the Roman curia, and religious orders, which – in his opinion – lacked scriptural legitimacy and were tainted with simony, corruption and avarice. Strongly convinced of the orthodoxy of the Utraquist doctrine, he did not seek any compromise with the Catholic Church. As administrator of the Utraquist Church he defended the religious status quo in Bohemia, and was hostile to any attempts of King Ladislas Jagiellon to strengthen Catholicism. As noted above, in the most extensive part of his dissertation (pp. 45-98), Dr Marek analysed in detail the most important polemical writings of Koranda, produced as response to Catholic texts. These included his polemics with Stanisław of Velvar, Hilary of Litoměř, Wolfgang



Rabenstein, Hanuš of Kolovrat, Ondřej Kuliš, and Jan Zajíc of Házmburk. Dr Marek examined the content of Koranda's writings and the context in which they were written. His observations regarding Koranda's style are very interesting, for his research demonstrated that Koranda effectively applied various rhetorical means to expose ignorance and incompetence of his opponents.

Koranda's opus maius, *Traktát o velebné a božské svátosti oltařní* offers a thorough explanation of the Utraquist teaching on the Eucharist, but from the theological point of view it is „a patchwork quilt”. The significance of this work lies elsewhere. *Traktát o velebné a božské svátosti oltařní* was published in 1493 as the first Czech book, and its main purpose was to promote the Utraquist doctrine among Czech readers. Writing this treatise Koranda intended to present key arguments supporting the Utraquist theology concerning the Sacrament of the Altar. Choosing the Czech language for his work, Koranda endorsed the traditions of Hussite vernacular theology. As Marek pointed out, in his polemical treatises and letters Koranda used to give priority to the Czech language. He preferred to respond to the charges of his opponents in the Czech vernacular, and only occasionally, in the discussions with some Catholic polemicists, he wrote in Latin. There is no doubt, that the use of the Czech language in theological debates, as reflected by Koranda's writings, marks a significant shift in the system of social communication in the fifteenth-century Bohemia.

One of the greatest achievements of Dr Marek's thesis is his analysis of the entire literary legacy of Václav Koranda the Younger. A great merit of his research is the creation of exhaustive inventories of Koranda's writings and books, which have been published in the form of annexes. They bring a complete list of all treatises, letters and documents written by Koranda. The catalogue of books from Koranda's library offers a helpful tool for research not only on interests and reading habits of their owner, but also on the transformations of literary culture. In an exemplary manner, Dr Marek conducted codicological and library studies, identifying the texts that make up surviving handwritten and printed books from Koranda's library. His scrupulous study of the external form of the books, their binding, monograms, foliation, as well as glosses, testifies to his high-quality analytical skills. Identifying the stock of books in this library allowed him to indicate Koranda's interest in theological topics, especially in relation to the debate on the sacrament of the Eucharist. Of great significance are his conclusions linking the presence of astrological books with the influence of Kristian of Prachatice, Koranda's university mentor. The comparative studies of the fifteenth-century libraries of Prague and Krakow intellectuals allowed Marek to characterize Koranda's book collection, which was



predominated by writings specific to scholastic culture. In more detail, Dr Marek examined a very rich set of comments written by Koranda personally in the margins of his books. These, sometimes quite extensive, marginal glosses allowed him to draw conclusions about the method of introducing explanatory notes as well as making cross-references to other texts. I am much impressed by Marek's findings which shed light on Koranda's comprehensive erudition and critical mind. Mark's remarks on the glosses in Koranda's books show the opportunities of further systematic research on these source materials to study in more detail the views of their owner, and the changes in book culture at the turn of the Middle Ages. The great value of Marek's thesis is the publication of numerous photos of Koranda's documents, letters and books. These photos allow readers to get acquainted with the external features of the sources, and are closely associated with the analysis carried out in the work. I am convinced that Marek's research on the composition and content of Koranda's library will give a strong stimulus to further comparative studies on this unique book collection.

Summing up, I affirm that Dr Jindrich Marek's study on Václav Koranda the Younger is a significant scholarly achievement, which meets the requirements for habilitation theses. It is an original and competent work which complements his postdoctoral research on Koranda's life and writings. Dr Marek reached for a whole set of sources, and his research shed new light on Koranda's academic, polemical and organizational activities. In his dissertation, Dr Marek combines excellent analytical skills with extensive knowledge of the religious and intellectual culture of the late Middle Ages. His critical re-examination of Koranda's biography and literary legacy shall remain a point of reference for other scholars researching the life and career of this Prague intellectual and key figure of the late Utraquist Church.

I have no doubts that in terms of analytical skills and erudition, Dr Jindrich Marek is a fully fledged researcher and therefore ask to admit him to further stages of the habilitation procedure.