

Kateřina Horníčková / Michal Šroněk (eds.): From Hus to Luther

This very fine and important book appeared in the Czech language as *Umění české reformace (1380-1620)* Prague: Academia, 2010, as a volume consisting of 556 pages and featuring 241 images. The book is a notable achievement with contributions from twelve scholars including the editors. There are three main differences between the Czech and English editions. The first is a short contribution from František Šmahel in English asking the question "was there a Bohemian Reformation?" The second difference relates to the written texts. More detailed information was available in the entries for the original book while the English version contains only the introductory essays. The excised texts were written as introductory scholarly texts to the field including the cultural production of the diverse reformation groups in Bohemia in a general sense while omitting controversial points and focusing on the continuity of the phenomena. The third difference is that there are only 56 images in the English edition in contrast to the 241 images in the Czech edition. It is unfortunate that so many of the images have not been included. Presumably cost and permissions were at issue.

The title of the Czech edition "Art of the Czech Reformation" is very precisely accurate. The English title is less so. The book extends its treatment almost 75 years after the death of Luther but the references to Jan Hus and Martin Luther are convenient historiographical markers and should be understood as such. Among major and important topics we find solid elaboration of the visual cultures associated with the Hussite movement, the Bohemian Reformation, the vagaries and challenges of the idea of images as religious issues, the reality and implications of iconoclasm, liturgy, literature, architecture, inscriptions, and manuscripts within the concept of the visual arts. In consequence, the reader is immediately alerted to the breadth and complexity of the idea of visual culture in its myriad forms. It is a pity that the visual history of Bohemia at the end of the Middle Ages has been so egregiously ignored outside Czech scholarship. However, the scholarly terrain is not quite as desolate as the several bibliographies within the book might suggest. For example, with respect to the iconography of the Hussite age, this writer has published seven studies between 1993 and 2013 (four articles and three book chapters). The volume *Public Communication in European Reformation: Artistic and Other Media in Central Europe* (2007) edited by Milena Bartlová and Michal Šroněk, the availability of a facsimile edition of the important Jena Codex in major languages (2009), a number of essays by Czech art historians in English including Jan Royt, Milena Bartlová, and Milena Bílková are germane along with Horst Bredekamp's monograph *Kunst als Medium sozialer Konflikte: Bilderkämpfe von der Spätantike bis zur Hussitenrevolution* (1975). These are either not noted or only cursorily mentioned.

Words like "ordainment" (173) though not improper is better rendered as "ordination" and "reredos" (again though not incorrect on 114, 116) is also better rendered as "retable." One cannot say "Unitarian" with respect to the Unity of Brethren (119). The *Unitas Fratrum* had little in common with Unitarianism. There are a few colloquialisms throughout but this is a minor matter. There is no consistency in the book when it comes to proper names. Some are Anglicized, others appear in Czech. Matthew and Matěj, John and Jan, George and Jiří are examples of different spellings of the same name. It is doubtful that a non-specialist would know that medieval Prague was made up of several towns. The book would have benefitted from the inclusion of an index as well as a map of the historic Czech lands. These are minor quibbles.

The visual culture of the Hussite period is a vital component in the age of reform and the pictorial representation of these factors support a comparative analysis with the visual images which play such a key role in the propaganda of the Reformation. The work of Bob Scribner a generation ago revealed the complexity and inherent importance of visual images for a more nuanced understanding of religious practice and Reformation. The culture of medieval Europe was primarily visual. In societies in which literacy was very limited, communication did not simply rely on written texts but functioned through seeing and hearing, through creating visual images and preaching. Despite iconoclasm, there is still a vibrant visual history of the Hussite movement which has waited robust analysis and interpretation in a major language. A number of the contributors possess respected international competence in the

field of pictorial understanding and visual history and the essays making up this book explore the forms, functions and impact of visual imagery in Bohemia as it promoted the Hussite cause, reformed religious practice as well as underscoring its receptivity and broadening support. Beyond Czech-language scholarship, this is unexplored territory.

The strengths of the volume far outweigh any weaknesses. The editors have accurately delineated the important fact that the broad movement of Czech religious reform, which preceded the European Reformations and enhanced those better known events, must not be ignored. The book also deftly sets forth an argument supported by evidence that the religious situation arising in the Czech lands added a unique dimension to the multiple religious worlds of late medieval Europe. Another important element established by this book supports the thesis that the Hussite movement was not simply or even predominately iconoclastic and indeed fostered an appreciation of art and visual culture. Kateřina Horníčková, Michal Šroněk and the other contributors have presented a compelling case for including non-Catholic and non-Protestant factors in the age of Reformation. The essays present preliminary cases for a broader comparison with the larger cultural and artistic aspects of the Reformation period. The book does not make claims of a comprehensive analysis. What the volume does achieve is a cogently expressed and easily demonstrated greater scope for understanding the didactic, performative, and artistic dimensions of visual culture between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. The possibilities for engagement with a broader international audience have taken a major step forward.

The book certainly fills a gap in the market. The English-language text has not been completely updated following its 2010 publication. A survey of Czech language historiography is not sufficient as few scholars outside the Czech community read that language. As it stands, there is no other volume in the English language which can compete with this one. The book is accessible to a broad international audience many of whom may know very little about the Hussite factions and the rest of the relevant history and context. Apart from specialists who are intimately acquainted with Czech scholarship and the historiography, there is no other book on the diversity of the visual arts in the Czech context available in English. The volume is a credit to the editors and an important contribution to understanding late medieval and early modern European visual culture and the Czech dimensions of that culture. Both cannot be praised too highly. This book can be recommended as a serious and significant contribution and no one wishing to be better informed about the vibrant visual culture which marked central European history between the rise of the Hussites and the Battle at White Mountain should overlook this volume.

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Rezension von:

Thomas Fudge
University of New England, Armidale

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