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Master Jan Hus in polemics and in prison : summary

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SUMMARY

Master Jan Hus in Polemics and in Prison

This collection of translations follows up on a book published by Masaryk University Press in 2015 with the title “Mistr Jan Hus v polemice a za katedrou”. In this new volume, we also firstly present two translations of Hus’s polemics, *Contra occultum adversarium* and *Contra predicatorem Plznensem*. Both these texts were written in 1411, when the controversy between the Church and the reformation tendencies of the university and a part of the clergy, especially that of Prague, began to escalate. They were a contribution to the then discussion about the essence of being a priest, about a priest’s tasks, and even about the obligation of secular power to correct the vices of the clergy. As a testament to Hus’s art of argumentation, these texts belong to his most quick-witted and elaborate ones: within these, the author proves his ability to work with the tools of formal logic, as well as with ‘authorities’. He does not only quote the Bible, although it remains his primary referential text, but also the propositions of the Church Fathers, the foremost medieval theologians, and the canonical law. All these polemics also testify to the fact that Hus was well versed in the rules of contemporary rhetoric: he uses figures of speech and various ways of rhetoric embellishment with diligence. The final part of *Contra predicatorem Plznensem* deserves particular attention, as this is where the reader encounters the verses of an anonymous Latin medieval poem *De vetula*, which Hus thinks to be, in accordance with contemporary opinion, a work by the classical Roman poet Ovid. He uses this poem as a weapon against the immoral pride of the clergy of his day. – Our translation also features related texts from Hus’s correspondence, assigned to the polemics.

Above all, we want to present new translations of the ‘small Constantiensia’ – seven treatises, composed under unimaginable conditions in a Dominican jail in Constance between the beginning of the year and 5 March 1415. They are catechetical tractates, which Hus dedicated to his jail wardens, young Italian clergymen, touchingly bearing witness to Hus’s endurance, perseverance, and firmness, as well as to his endowment for teaching and pastoral work, his struggle, and his responsibility. Their objects are basic lessons for simple medieval laymen, for example the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, the capital vices, repentance, or matrimonial problems. The most voluminous of these tractates discusses the Eucharist, that is, the administration of the body of Christ; let us also note that he does not mention the communion under both kinds, as he devotes other works to that topic. Two of Hus’s Constance treatises, the tractates *De matrimonio* and *De sacramento corporis et sanguinis Domini* were translated into Czech in the Utraquist community in the following century. We placed these old translations in the book beside our new translations; it will therefore be apparent, what interested the old translators more, what less, and what they perhaps even chose to omit. Mainly, these are evidence of Hus’s ‘second life’.

We also offer a translation of a treatise somewhat hesitantly ascribed to Hus, *Contra cantores Francigenas in ecclesia*. A large part of this text is composed of an extensive quotation of Cistercian authors from the 13th century, followed by an enumeration of nine bad consequences of choral chanting in the style of *ars nova*, in polyphony, mensural singing, and rondels. Hus recommends expelling these singers from the churches, appealing to the precautions of the archbishops of Prague and nodding to the Prague synodic resolutions.

The last part of our translation collection consists of poems praising Hus, written in the Czech and partially also the German community in the 16th century – the time of the Lutheran reformation and of the development of renaissance humanism in Western Europe. These poems are, much like the old translations of Hus’s Constance treatises, interesting and mostly unknown illustrations of the reception of Hus’s activity. Among them, the reader will find poems of Conrad Celtes, a famous humanistic *poeta laureatus*, who lived between 1459 and 1508. As a part of his journeys, he visited Prague in August 1491; several of his epigrams concerning Bohemia come from this visit. He was a Catholic and viewed the Czech Hussite tradition with critical restraint, but also with a kind of admiration.

The appendix allows the user to familiarize oneself with some of the Latin originals of the translated texts: it presents a new critical transcription of the Latin *Contra cantores Francigenas in ecclesia* and original texts of the translated poems based on the edition of V. Novotný in the 8th volume of the *Fontes rerum Bohemicarum* series.

The original Latin texts included in this book have predominantly been published in modern, critical editions. The only exception is the tractate *Contra cantores Francigenas*, which, so far, has only been made accessible as a non-critical and an incomplete transcription of a Viennese manuscript. For the first time, we also include the accompanying Czech texts (the translations of the tractates *De matrimonio* and *De sacramento corporis et sanguinis Domini*).

For the first time, we have translated the following into modern Czech: the polemic *Contra occultum adversarium* and a related letter from Master Hašek to Hus, the tractate *Contra cantores Francigenas*, and the poems from the 16th century praising Hus. The polemic *Contra predicatorem Plznensem* and the ‘small Constantiensia’ (*De mandatis Domini*, *De peccato mortali*, *De cognitione et dilectione Dei*, *De tribus hostibus hominis et septem peccatis mortalibus*, *De penitencia*, *De matrimonio*, *De sacramento corporis et sanguinis Domini*) have already been translated by Milan Svoboda in the collection “M. Jana Husi Sebrané spisy 5”. This translation was published in 1904, and its translator was at that point not yet able to use the critical editions of the texts, the modern literature concerning the topic, newer dictionaries of medieval Latin, or the editions of the sources quoted by Hus, not to mention the electronic databases, making the work of today’s translators much easier. A new translation of these texts is necessary, not only because Svoboda’s translations are not easily available, but mainly because their archaic language, the antiquated literary Czech from the beginning of the 20th century, is alien to the reader of today. Its comprehensive difficulty is confusing and demotivating. It was not easy to interpret these texts, so distant to the modern mentality, into contemporary speech; a special chapter in the introduction of this book explains the various challenges the translators had to overcome.

