

# Waking the dead : discovering Jerome of Prague ... and his beard!

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THOMAS A. FUDGE

## Waking the Dead: Discovering Jerome of Prague ... and his Beard!

Visiting a ducal court in Lithuania, Jerome was distinguished by his great bushy beard.<sup>1</sup> According to a court record, he spread many heresies about while wearing a long beard.<sup>2</sup> From a Franciscan prison a letter-writer wondered how the bearded Jerome was doing.<sup>3</sup> An inquisitor read a long indictment wherein he characterized Jerome as “dressed as a layman with a big beard.”<sup>4</sup> Responding to a sermon preached against him, Jerome was described as having a pale face, a clear voice, and a large beard.<sup>5</sup> When consigned to the secular authorities for execution, onlookers described him as “a stout, strong man, with a large, thick, black beard.”<sup>6</sup> When the pyre was set ablaze one source goes to the bother of noting that Jerome’s beard was also on fire.<sup>7</sup> Fifteenth-century depictions of the heretic emphasize the beard.<sup>8</sup> Rediscovering Jerome also includes coming to terms with a beard.

Sustained scholarly consideration of Jerome of Prague (c. 1378–1416) has been limited. In 2012, when I first thought about a research project devoted to Jerome I was not sure it was possible write a book. I decided to plunge into the existing scholarship and writings of Jerome to see what could be done. I discovered there was little outside Czech-language scholarship. Bathasar Ludwig Daniel Heller (1805–1878), a German Evangelical Lutheran cleric, who held a doctorate in theology from the University of Leipzig and an honorary doctorate from the University of Göttingen, had written a small book.<sup>9</sup> In French, Joseph Pilný, had produced an even shor-

<sup>1</sup> PALACKÝ, František (ed.): *Documenta Mag. Joannis Hus vitam, doctrinam, causam in constantiensi concilio actam et controversias de religione in Bohemia annis 1403–1418 motas illustrantia*. Prague: Tempsky 1869, 506–507.

<sup>2</sup> HARDT, Hermann von der (ed.): *Magnum oecumenicum constantiense concilium*, 7 vols. Frankfurt: C. Genschii, Helmestadi 1699–1742, vol. 4, 673.

<sup>3</sup> NOVOTNÝ, Václav (ed.): *M. Jana Husi Korespondence a dokumenty*. Prague: Nákladem komise pro vydávání pramenů náboženského hnutí českého 1920, 263.

<sup>4</sup> Jean de Rocha in: HARDT: *Magnum oecumenicum constantiense concilium*, vol. 4, 628–691

<sup>5</sup> Dietrich Vrie, in: HARDT: *Magnum oecumenicum constantiense concilium*, vol. 1, pt. 1, 201–202.

<sup>6</sup> BUCK, Thomas Martin (ed.): *Chronik des Konstanzer Konzils 1414–1418 von Ulrich Richental*. Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag 2010, 68.

<sup>7</sup> HARDT: *Magnum oecumenicum constantiense concilium*, vol. 4, 770–771.

<sup>8</sup> Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Codex St. Georgen 63 (Pap. Germ.), Bl. 20; and Prague, National Library, MS XVI A 17, fol. 124r.

<sup>9</sup> HELLER, Ludwig: *Hieronymus von Prag*. Lübeck: Aschenfeldt 1835, 135pp.

ter study subtitled “A liberal speaker of the Middle Ages.”<sup>10</sup> The most substantial piece in English was an essay written seventy years ago by Reginald R. Betts.<sup>11</sup> Paul Bernard took a very limited look at Jerome in the Austrian context in 1958, and Renee Neu Watkins undertook an examination of the divergent views of Jerome’s death in 1967.<sup>12</sup> That was the sum and substance of scholarship in English. There are valuable essays in German and French by very qualified scholars but nothing approaching a book-length analysis. The only scholars who can be said to have contributed anything of note on Jerome are the France-based Polish émigré Zénon Kaluza (1936–), and the Czech scholars František Šmahel (1934–), Vilém Herold (1933–2012), and Ota Pavlíček (1983–). Kaluza’s work is in French consisting of several very astute essays, but chiefly devoted to philosophical concerns.<sup>13</sup> The heart of scholarship on Jerome has been undertaken by Czechs. Šmahel is the doyen of Jerome scholars but his two monographs are in Czech and there are no plans for translations into a major language.<sup>14</sup> A third volume is a critical edition of Jerome’s work with a valuable introduction in German while the texts are mainly Latin.<sup>15</sup> Herold’s work is not unlike Kaluza’s but with greater knowledge of the Czech context.<sup>16</sup> Pavlíček’s work consists of several published essays but his main contribution is his doctoral thesis which remains unavailable.<sup>17</sup> The rest of

<sup>10</sup> PILNÝ, Joseph: *Jérôme de Prague: Un orateur progressiste du Moyen Âge*. Geneva: Perret-Gentil 1974, 74pp.

<sup>11</sup> BETTS, R.R.: *Jerome of Prague*, in: *University of Birmingham Historical Journal* 1 (1947) No. 1, 51–91.

<sup>12</sup> BERNARD, Paul P.: *Jerome of Prague, Austria and the Hussites*, in: *Church History* 27 (1958), 3–22 and WATKINS, Renee Neu: *The Death of Jerome of Prague: Divergent Views*, in: *Speculum* 42 (January 1967), 104–129.

<sup>13</sup> These have been gathered together in KALUZA, Zénon: *Études doctrinales sur le XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle: Théologie, Logique, Philosophie*. Paris: Vrin 2013. See also *Les querelles doctrinales à Paris: Nominalistes et réalistes aux confins du XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles*. Bergamo: Lubrina 1988.

<sup>14</sup> ŠMAHEL, František, *Jeronym Pražský: Život revolučního intelektuála*. Prague: Svobodné slovo 1966 and *Život a dílo Jeronýma Pražského*. Prague: Argo 2010.

<sup>15</sup> ŠMAHEL, František/SILAGI, Gabriel (eds.): *Magistri Hieronymi de Praga. Quaestiones, Polemica, Epistolae* (= *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 222). Turnhout: Brepols 2010.

<sup>16</sup> HEROLD, Vilém: *Magister Hieronymus von Prag und die Universität Köln*, in: *Miscellanea Medievalia* 20 (1989), 255–73; *Der Streit zwischen Hieronymus von Prag und Johann Gerson – eine spätmittelalterliche Diskussion mit tragischen Folgen*, in: WŁODEK, Sophie (ed.): *Société et Eglise: Texts et discussions dans les universités d’Europe centrale pendant le moyen âge tardif*. Turnhout: Brepols 1995, 77–89, and *Wyclif und Hieronymus von Prag: Zum Versuch einer ‚praktischen‘ Umwandlung in der spätmittelalterlichen Ideenlehre*, in: KNUUTTILA, Simo/TYÖRINOJA, Reijo/EDDESEN, Sten (eds): *Knowledge and the Sciences in Medieval Philosophy*, 3 vols. Helsinki: Akateeminen Kirjakauppa 1990, vol. 3, 212–23.

<sup>17</sup> PAVLÍČEK, Ota: *La figure de l’autorité à travers Jean Hus et Jérôme de Prague*, in: *Revue des sciences religieuses* 85 (2011) No. 3, 371–389; “*Scutum fidei christianae*”: *The Depiction of the Shield of Faith in the Realistic Teaching of Jerome of Prague in the Context of His Interpretation of the Trinity*, in: *The Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice* 9 (2014), 72–97, (hereafter BRRP); *Two Philosophical Texts of Jerome of Prague and His Alleged Designation of Opponents of Real Universals as Diabolic Heretics*, in: BRRP 8 (2009), 52–76; “*Ipsa dicit, quod sic est, ergo verum*”:

the historiography on Jerome, which is rather piecemeal, exists in Czech, French and German. Czech is a nonfactor inasmuch as very few scholars have facility in that language. Thus it remains a closed book. A proper consideration of Jerome requires acquaintance with the original Latin and Czech sources and familiarity with German, French, English and Czech scholarship. Judging from Anglophone and German historiography, Jerome was good and dead, buried, and forgotten. My work between 2013 and 2016 proved to be an exercise in waking the dead and discovering a figure of historical significance.

What makes Jerome important is that increasingly there have been appropriations of Hussite history both by medievalists and scholars working on Reformation topics but they usually deal only with Jan Hus on account of the fact that no comprehensive book on Jerome in an accessible language is available. My research and the resulting volumes brings existing scholarship up to date and makes available in English and German a fulsome interpretation of this important but neglected medieval thinker.<sup>18</sup> Though burned, Jan Hus not only survived, he prevailed. But the memory of Jerome was lost. Over time, the two figures became one reinvented as a result of Hussite hagiography and elevation of their memory to the pantheon of popular saints and national heroes. Once that occurred, one figure remained bearing the name of Hus. This metahistorical, composite, figure borrowed from Jerome the violent impulsiveness that was suitable to the period of the Hussite wars and the temporary triumph of the Taborite moment in Czech history.<sup>19</sup> In terms of church reform, the steadfastness of Hus was more desirable than the instability of Jerome. Hus was featured as a man of faith who came to overshadow the modern humanist philosophy which Jerome had championed. We do not know what either man looked like but traditional images were merged. The rotund, clean-shaven, Hus eventually yielded to the bearded face of Jerome which seemed to later ages to be more worthy of a prophet and more Christlike. It is necessary to separate the two figures from each other and to destroy the assumed subservience of Jerome to Hus.<sup>20</sup> Liberation from medieval

*Authority of Scripture, the Use and Sources of Biblical Citations in the Work of Jerome of Prague*, in: BRRP 10 (2015), 70–89, and *La dimension philosophique et théologique de la pensée de Jérôme de Prague*. Thèse de doctorat, Université Paris-Sorbonne; Charles University, Hussite Faculty of Theology. Paris/Prague 2014, 621pp.

<sup>18</sup> FUDGE, Thomas A.: *Jerome of Prague and the Foundations of the Hussite Movement*. New York: Oxford University Press 2016 and *Hieronymus von Prag und die Grundlagen der Hussitischen Bewegung*. Münster: Aschendorff Verlag 2017.

<sup>19</sup> KAMINSKY, Howard: *The Greatness of a Small Nation: The Hussite Moment of Bohemian History*, in: WOJCIECHOWSKA, Beata/KOWALSKI, Waldemar (eds.): *Rycerze, wędrowcy, kacerze: Studia z historii średniowiecznej i wczesnonowożytnej Europy Środkowej*. Kielce: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jana Kochanowskiego, 2013, 297–306.

<sup>20</sup> ROUBICZEK, Paul/KALMER, Joseph: *Warrior of God: The Life and Death of John Hus*, trans. Ruby Hobling. London: Nicholson and Watson 1947, 264.



bonds is clearest in the intellectual breadth of Jerome. An examination of the sources reveals that the life and work of Jerome of Prague has been egregiously overlooked outside Czech historiography which is unfortunate as he represents an important chapter in the understanding of late medieval European history.

My research has endeavored to present a scholarly evaluation of the life, work, and influence of Jerome of Prague. The results delineate the controversial nature of Jerome's thinking with respect to divine Ideas and reform. There were two legal proceedings, at Vienna between 1410 and 1412 and at Constance in 1415 and 1416 in which Jerome was a defendant. Jerome's appearance before the Council of Constance must be closely scrutinized. Jerome's defense of Wyclifite thought, his battle with Jean Gerson and his tumultuous journeys across Europe provide context for understanding his place in the later Middle Ages. Jerome is an important figure in the history of Prague, Charles University, in the development and shape of later medieval heresy and the beginnings of the Hussite movement. As a colleague of Jan Hus, Jerome must be numbered amongst the most important of the Czech personalities in the religious history of Bohemia. He provides an intellectual bridge between the Middle Ages and the European reformations.

Jerome can be characterized as an intellectual knight-errant. A survey of the salient factors which brought him to international prominence, which caused sustained conflict in the religious and social worlds of the later Middle Ages, and which reveals Prague as a hotbed of intellectual dissent, introduces Jerome as an historical character. Of special note is the fact that Jerome's fate is understandable only against the shadows cast by John Wyclif and Jan Hus and the acrimonious university disputes surrounding realism and nominalism. Jerome's life and work is especially important for understanding international events such as the condemnation of Wyclif, the Hussite Revolution, and conciliarism, especially related to the Council of Constance.<sup>21</sup>

The period between 1380 and 1410 marks a watershed in the intellectual history of Charles University and there is sufficient evidence to sustain the argument that the same period marks the apex in the history of philosophy in the Czech lands. Jerome is important for identifying the philosophical phantoms which haunted theological inquiry. Jerome's role in numerous intellectual confrontations which were regarded by the Latin Church as dangerous to the faith provides evidence for his reputation as a Wyclifite thinker at the forefront of academic discourse across Europe. For example, Jerome argued that nominalism prevents proper understanding of reality.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> FUDGE: *Jerome of Prague and the Foundations of the Hussite Movement*, 8–33.

<sup>22</sup> See Jerome's *Quaestio duplex de fomis universalibus*, in: ŠMAHEL/SILAGI (eds.): *Magistri Hieronymi de Praga. Quaestiones, Polemica, Epistulae*, 47–48.

The thorny and perplexing matter of late medieval philosophy and theology especially in its presumed relation to heresy and religious reform is illuminated by investigating Jerome's activities. Within that elaboration or upon that framework there is an even more urgent brief and that is to concisely and cogently lay out a convincing identification of the philosophical phantoms which bedeviled theological inquiry which helps to provide an explanation for why these phantoms prompted such savage response to Jerome. It is essential to shed light on the question of how, and in what way, metaphysical realism led to theological error.<sup>23</sup> The question of how abstract "ideas" influenced the shape of religious practice and produced heresy can be illuminated by asking and answering the question: what were the implications of philosophy on theology and Christian doctrine?<sup>24</sup>

Jerome was the quintessential wandering scholar who as much as anyone promoted Wyclifite thought across the European continent. Jerome's vexatious presence at universities in Prague, Paris, Cologne, and Heidelberg have too often been overlooked. Some late medieval thinkers considered the light of French universities in eclipse while the light of wisdom shone bright in Heidelberg, Vienna, and Prague where the glorious truth was evident.<sup>25</sup> Henry of Langenstein died before Jerome became known and may have had reservations about the latter's impact on these *studia generalia*. In all of these universities Jerome became involved in acrimonious disputes with prevailing authority structures. The emerging intellectual debates prompted two important events in Prague at the beginning of 1409. The first was the annual university *Quodlibet* wherein Jerome played a leading role and left no doubt about the function of philosophy in religious reform. The second was the "decree of Kutna Hora" wherein the control of Prague university was transferred from the Germans to the Czechs.<sup>26</sup> This resulted in an exodus of German scholars and students. Thereafter, the university became a promoter and defender of reform. Following the footsteps of Jerome from Paris, to Cologne, to Heidelberg, to Prague, and taking into account his disturbing and developing reputation as he engaged in formal university-sanctioned disputations which become highly contentious and were soon outlawed, we discover a pattern wherein the scholar is routinely pitted against established academic and ecclesiastical structures. In each case, Jerome became a fugitive as he escaped censure.

<sup>23</sup> HEROLD: *Wyclif und Hieronymus von Prag: Zum Versuch einer 'praktischen' Umwandlung in der spätmittelalterlichen Ideenlehre*, vol. 3, 212–223.

<sup>24</sup> FUDGE: *Jerome of Prague and the Foundations of the Hussite Movement*, 34–72.

<sup>25</sup> Letter to Friedrich von Brixen in SOMMERFELDT, Gustav (ed.): *Zwei Schismatraktate Heinrichs von Langenstein*, in: *Mitteilungen des Institut für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 8 (1904), 469.

<sup>26</sup> ŠMAHEL, František/NODL, Martin: *Kutnohorský dekret po 600 letech*, in: *Český časopis historický* 107 (2009), 1–45; and a critical edition of the decree edited by FRIEDRICH, Gustav: *Dekret Kutnohorský. Poměr jeho rukopisných textů*, in: *Český časopis historický* 15 (1909), I–XII.

Along the way, he made enemies of powerful men which would have future consequences.<sup>27</sup> They may have been annoyed with his beard but they were definitely upset by his ideas.

An important prelude to Jerome's confrontation with Latin Christendom occurred in Hungary and Austria in 1410. At Buda, he was imprisoned by Emperor Sigismund after delivering a provocative sermon at the Hungarian royal court. Thereafter, he voluntarily went to Vienna where he stood trial on charges of heresy. The existence of the trial protocol enables a reconstruction of the proceedings of the court case. The implications of suspect philosophical ideas, Jerome's bellicose personality, and the politically-motivated fear of heresy in the later Middle Ages are important factors in the trial at Vienna. The court protocols have been preserved in the Vatican and despite limitations are nonetheless a valuable resource.<sup>28</sup> Factors of heresy and intrigue in Vienna became an important stepping stone in the career and in the case of Jerome of Prague; a stepping stone which led to the cornerstone which we encounter later at the Council of Constance.<sup>29</sup>

One of the obvious factors in Jerome's turbulent career is iconoclasm. The rejection of visible symbols and their violent removal is a necessary component to movements or ideas of reform. In the Middle Ages, iconoclasm was often illegal, technically speaking, and its commission was considered blasphemous or sacrilegious. This was certainly the case in late medieval Bohemia. Expressions of discontent, indicative of religious crisis, might be prompted by social grievances or theological disagreement. Various forms of "image breaking" occurred in late medieval Bohemia and Jerome plays a key role in those episodes. The acts attributed to Jerome were inspired by theological conviction and a logical approach to criticizing religious practice. Iconoclasm is not simply the destruction of religious items but can be revolutionary. It is an act of violence. It is a rejection of that which is attacked. Further, it is a repudiation of either the symbol itself or those or that which sponsor the symbolic code. Jerome appears to have embraced the idea that violence against clerics was both necessary and expected if reform was to be taken seriously. While maintaining the crucial distinction between religiously, or theologically-inspired iconoclasm, and those occurrences which were primarily a result of militaristic acts, even in the context of the Hussite wars, iconoclasm was mainly a result of the former and Jerome is once again a figure who must be taken into account.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> FUDGE: *Jerome of Prague and the Foundations of the Hussite Movement*, 73–111.

<sup>28</sup> Rome, Vatican Library, MS Ottobonianus 348, fols. 260–280. The text has been edited and published in: KLICMAN, Ladislav (ed.): *Processus iudiciarius contra Jeronimum de Praga habitus Viennae a. 1410–1412*. Prague: Česká akademie císaře Františka Josefa pro vědy, slovesnost a umění 1898.

<sup>29</sup> FUDGE: *Jerome of Prague and the Foundations of the Hussite Movement*, 112–140.

<sup>30</sup> FUDGE: *Jerome of Prague and the Foundations of the Hussite Movement*, 141–163.

Eventually, Jerome became a nuisance on a European scale. The Council of Constance was the largest and most magnificent of all medieval assemblies. Jerome was brought to formal trial here before all of Christendom. Issues of theology, reform, heresy, and politics form a necessary context for understanding the council as well as the trial of religious dissenters. Inasmuch as many of the same priests and prelates arrayed against Jerome were also active in the trial of Jan Hus, there is opportunity for useful comparison and contrasting in two trials which came to the same end but by divergent means. What emerges as especially important is Jerome's conflict with Jean Gerson.<sup>31</sup> The ghost of Jan Hus and the specter of John Wyclif haunt the hearings and play decisive roles. The previously mentioned philosophical controversies return to the forefront at Constance.<sup>32</sup> What becomes apparent during the proceedings of the Council are the political motivations of heresy and it is evident that heresy was not simply a matter of theology.<sup>33</sup>

After almost a year in prison, Jerome was finally permitted a public hearing. We have a number of contemporary accounts of his dramatic appearance before the sage men of Christendom. Jerome's extemporaneous speech captivated his hearers and some sources tell us that he was extremely persuasive. However, Jerome sealed his fate by defending Hus and by retracting the recantation he had entered into the previous autumn. The intervening months may be described as a time in which Jerome endured a battle for conscience. Once the uproar at his brazenness subsided, he was remanded to prison and given five days in which to reconsider his position. The implications were momentous. In September 1415 Jerome had renounced his ideas, had agreed with the condemnations of John Wyclif and Jan Hus, and had pledged obedience to the church. On 26 May 1416, he reversed himself and withdrew his recantation. This has a parallel with Thomas Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury in 1556 at Oxford. The factors in the battle for conscience which Jerome waged in a prison tower over the winter months must be brought together to explain why Jerome considered life unworthy and instead chose martyrdom.<sup>34</sup>

When the trial of Jerome resumed, it was quite clear that the defendant would not retreat from his convictions. The customary "general sermon" which featured in all heresy trials was delivered by Giacomo Balardi, Bishop of Lodi.<sup>35</sup> The trial of Jerome came down to a standoff between truth

<sup>31</sup> KALUZA: *Le chancelier Gerson et Jérôme de Prague*, in: *Études doctrinales sur le XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle: Théologie, Logique, Philosophie*, 207–231.

<sup>32</sup> FUDGE: *Jerome of Prague and the Foundations of the Hussite Movement*, 164–213.

<sup>33</sup> FUDGE, Thomas A.: *The Trial of Jan Hus: Medieval Heresy and Criminal Procedure*. New York: Oxford University Press 2013, 31–72.

<sup>34</sup> FUDGE: *Jerome of Prague and the Foundations of the Hussite Movement*, 214–233.

<sup>35</sup> The text of the sermon appears in GOLL, Jaroslav et al. (eds.): *Fontes rerum bohemicarum*, 8 vols. Prague: Nákladem nadání Františka Palackého 1873–1932, vol. 8, 494–500. There is an



and authority. Neither side, Jerome nor the medieval church, would budge. Jerome had opportunity to respond to the sermon and did so defiantly and without remorse. He was then condemned and the pageantry of death unfolded. To some he was a Christian martyr but to others he was the “athlete of Antichrist.”<sup>36</sup> By modern, western, democratic, legal standards, the trial of Jerome of Prague was unfair and unjust. There can hardly be debate on this. However, modern, western, democratic, legal standards have no relevance in a discussion of medieval heresy, criminal procedure or the trial of Jerome. We must not judge fifteenth-century events and ideas by comparing them to modern conventions.

Waking the dead and discovering Jerome of Prague can be facilitated by several lines of inquiry. None is more astute than considering a dangerous letter written on the day he was sent to the pyre.<sup>37</sup> The writer was Gian Francesco Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459). In a codex made in the 1450s, we find a depiction of Poggio in his seventies which was probably based on a true likeness.<sup>38</sup> Since we are concerned with a letter, it may be relevant to note that Poggio was a man of letters. No fewer than 558 letters survive. These were written to at least 172 addressees including friends, enemies, acquaintances, and strangers. These personal letters address topics like religion, literature, marriage, politics, public scandals, and nature. Poggio is best accessed by means of Latin. Here one is immersed in his wit, humor, passion, and intellect which is not always or reliably reflected in translation. His epistle about Jerome shaped memory and established a perpetual reminder of this Czech intellectual. Who was this writer?

Poggio began studying to be a notary at age sixteen at Florence where he was influenced by the Latin style of Petrarch, a fourteenth-century scholar and poet, sometimes considered the “father of humanism.”<sup>39</sup> He was further influenced by the revival of classical studies (Greek and Latin), as well as the search for lost texts. By 1403 Poggio went to Rome, entered the papal service, and remained in that employment for fifty years. He never proceeded to holy orders. He worked as a papal secretary and *scriptor* in the Papal Curial office that dealt with canon law and granted pardon for grave sins by means of absolutions, dispensations, and indulgences (Sacra

analysis in FUDGE, Thomas A.: *Jan Hus Between Time and Eternity: Reconsidering a Medieval Heretic*. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2016, 99–116.

<sup>36</sup> “Missa Wiklefistarum,” Österreichische Nationalbibliothek MS 4941, fols. 262r–263v. Edited in: LEHMANN: *Die Parodie im Mittelalter*, 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Hiersemann 1963, 217–223.

<sup>37</sup> HARTH, Helene (ed.): *Poggio Bracciolini Lettere*, 3 vols. Florence: Leo S. Olschki 1984–1987, vol. 2, 157–163.

<sup>38</sup> Illuminated portrait initial, attributed to Francesco d’Antonio del Chierico, tempera and gilding on parchment: POGGIO: *De varietate fortunae*, (completed in 1447), Vatican Library, Urb. Lat. 224, fols. 1r–53v at fol. 2r.

<sup>39</sup> MOMMSEN, Theodore E.: *Petrarch’s Conception of the ‘Dark Ages’*, in: *Speculum* 17 (1942) No. 2, 226–242.

Paenitentiaria Apostolica). Poggio was a member of the papal curia under the administration of one of the corrupt (or bad) popes, Baldassare Cossa. Cossa had been elevated to the See of Peter in 1410 taking the name John XXIII and Poggio worked for him as a papal secretary. Many Vatican and Lateran registers are entirely in Poggio's hand. These include official letters to kings, bishops, abbots, priests and civil officials across Europe dealing with matters ranging from papal bulls to letters of permission (i.e. safe conducts). Poggio wrote documents in 1440 granting the English king Henry VI leave to establish Eton College. Throughout the medieval period, books were written by hand by scribes and notaries. Poggio's handwriting is famous for its style which appears to have been based on Carolingian miniscule emerging from the court of Charlemagne more than a half millennium earlier.<sup>40</sup> His personal letters (noted earlier) can be supplemented by the innumerable official correspondence extant in Vatican archives which have never been researched adequately. At age fifty-five, he married a seventeen year old girl, Selvaggia. They had six children. The marriage attracted criticism including a rebuke from the papal office. Having committed matrimony, Poggio wrote a tract titled "Should an old man take a wife?"<sup>41</sup> Before his marriage, Poggio had fathered twelve sons and two daughters.

The revival of classical studies and renewed interest in Greek and Latin led to the search for lost texts. Poggio and his humanist friends were devoted to discovering and/or copying classical texts. The search and discovery of lost manuscripts from the ancient world appears to have been his true passion. Poggio and his colleagues were exceptionally skilled to identify Quintilian, Petronius, Lucretius, Vitruvius, Cicero and others. Much of this research was conducted in monastic libraries in eastern France, the Rhineland, and Switzerland between 1410 and 1420. And this is where his path crossed Jerome's. He accompanied Pope John XXIII to Germany to attend the Council of Constance which sat between 1414 and 1418. This junket provided Poggio opportunity for research for lost books in monasteries such as St. Gall, Fulda, and Cluny. Here he was involved in significant textual discoveries. Poggio discovered in Fulda (and possibly stole) the *De re rustica* of Columella, an ancient handbook of farming. The likelihood of theft was not uncommon. The legend of the famous "Flacian knife" (*culter flacianus*), hidden beneath a flowing cloak which was allegedly used by Matthias Flacius Illyricus to cut out portions of books in sixteenth-century libraries, is a notorious example.<sup>42</sup> Poggio's greatest find came in January 1417

<sup>40</sup> DUNSTON, A.J.: *The Hand of Poggio*, in: *Scriptorium* 19 (1965) No. 1, 63–70.

<sup>41</sup> SHEPHERD, William (ed.): *Poggii Bracciolini Florentini dialogus an seni sit uxor ducenda*, Liverpool: George Harris 1807.

<sup>42</sup> GRAFTON, Anthony: *The Footnote: A Curious History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1999, 162.



with the discovery, possibly at Fulda, of the complete text (7,400 lines) of the long poem *De rerum natura* written by the Epicurean philosopher Lucretius. Fragmentary traces were found in a library at Herculaneum, but Poggio's discovery is the sole copy to have survived from Roman times.<sup>43</sup> Why does the book-hunter write about a heretical philosopher?

Poggio witnessed the death of Jerome on 30 May 1416 during the proceedings of the Council. Writing in the immediate aftermath of that event with what must have been considerable emotion, Poggio recommended Jerome to the ages with the comment "this was a man to remember."<sup>44</sup> Jerome assumed a place in the pantheon of Czech heroes, and his name became linked with the violence of religious discourse and practice in the later Middle Ages. To some, he was the "athlete of Antichrist," who disturbed the tranquility of the faith and perpetrated grievous errors and heresies that according to the Chancellor of Paris University, Jean Gerson, resulted in "matters still more controversial."<sup>45</sup> Poggio Bracciolini disagreed. It is important to recall that Poggio was a member of staff in the papal court. By the time the Council convened, Jerome's name was known across Europe. By the time the Council disbanded, his voice had been silenced, and the body of the man who wore a controversial big, black, bushy, beard had been reduced to ashes. In consequence, Jerome became a revered martyr to some and a notorious heretic to others.

Poggio's letter of 30 May 1416 was addressed to Leonardo Bruni. It had been written at Constance just after Poggio returned from the baths at Baden.<sup>46</sup> We have some information about these baths from a letter he dispatched twelve days earlier to Niccolò Niccoli (18 May 1416).<sup>47</sup> Poggio describes the baths and his route from Constance. He had gone by boat down the Rhine about forty kilometers to Schaffhausen. Then, on account of a steep drop of the river over a cliff, he had to portage about fifteen kilometers to the castle of Kaiserstuhl close to where a bridge connects Germany to Gaul. From there, he proceeded to Baden. Approximately one kilometer from Baden, Poggio arrived at a villa which had about thirty baths. He describes the bathing practices which surprised him. The detail in his correspondence is significant for appreciating his letter about Jerome. Coming from this retreat, he attended a momentous event in the cathedral of Constance, which prompted his dangerous letter.

<sup>43</sup> For a readable account of Poggio's activities, see GREENBLATT, Stephen: *The Swerve: How the Word Became Modern*. New York: W.W. Norton 2011.

<sup>44</sup> "O virum dignum memoria hominum sempiterna!" HARTH: *Magnum oecumenicum constantiense concilium*, vol. 2, 162.

<sup>45</sup> HARTH: *Magnum oecumenicum constantiense concilium*, vol. 4, 217; and FRB, vol. 8, 342.

<sup>46</sup> The letter written to Leonardo Bruni is one of fifteen extant letters from Poggio to Leonardo (1416–1438) and there are also twelve from Leonardo (1404–1431) to Poggio.

<sup>47</sup> HARTH: *Magnum oecumenicum constantiense concilium*, vol. 1, 128–135.

Poggio witnessed the death of Jerome and his speeches when arraigned before the Council which he characterized as an epic performance for the ages. He referred to Jerome as a man of considerable eloquence and learning. "I have never seen anyone who argued a case, especially in a capital case where one's life was at stake, with eloquence as near to that of the ancient writers whom we so greatly admire."<sup>48</sup> Poggio observed that Jerome's argument was so profound and convincing that practically everyone was inclined to err on the side of mercy and vote to acquit. This remark is doubtful. The hearings were attended by men like Paris University Chancellor Gerson, papal lawyer Michael de Causis, the Prague University master Štěpán Pálec, *Rota* notary Dietrich Niem, Vienna University professor and Dean of the Faculty, Nicholas Dinkelsbühl, Polish archbishop Mikołaj Trąba, Heidelberg University official Johannes Lagenator, German theologian Dietrich Kerkerling, and others who had previously crossed paths with Jerome in Paris, Cologne, Heidelberg, Buda, Vienna, Prague, and elsewhere over the previous fifteen years. Now face to face with their nemesis, Jerome's enemies were ready for the wandering scholar. In discovering Jerome, Poggio's assertion can only be taken as rhetorical flourish and hyperbole.

Poggio admits he cannot write a detailed account of the case and has chosen instead to present an edited version. Though Jerome was arraigned on charges of heresy, Poggio admires the eloquence and the persona exhibited by the defendant. Poggio quickly concluded there was no heresy in Jerome, though he also admitted he was unqualified to judge theological guilt or innocence but that Jerome's claims of false, biased, and fabricated evidence lodged against him were convincing. Jerome's impertinence, his charisma, and reckless daring were all on display but cloaked in astonishing eloquence. The man on trial for his life exhibited no fear. When onlookers tried to shout him down or officials attempted to force him to observe other protocols in his replies, Poggio noted Jerome handled all of it with panache and amazing fortitude, undercutting the integrity of the case against him, calling into question the veracity of those who had submitted sworn testimony against him, and did not say anything unworthy or heretical. With wit, sarcasm and the force of argument, Poggio tells us Jerome persuaded many to his point of view. Interrupted by hostile detractors, the defendant simply dismissed the interruption with the curt admonition to shut up. An analysis of surviving university debates provide sound evidence to support Jerome's reputation as a first-rate philosopher. The quality of mind and sweeping intellectual abilities were on display in Constance. For example, the *puer-senex* topos deriving from late antiquity (e.g. Ovid), and found in the Middle Ages, supposes an ideal person who possesses both the priorities of youth and the maturity of old age in ba-

<sup>48</sup> HARTH: *Magnum oecumenicum constantiense concilium*, vol. 2, 157.

lance. The topos was reflected by Gregory the Great in his life of St Benedict where he remarked: “he was a man of venerable life [but] even from the time of his youth he had the understanding of an old man.”<sup>49</sup> Poggio seems to characterize Jerome in a similar light. Rediscovering Jerome sheds light on a forgotten superior mind.

There was much opposition to allowing the defendant to speak at length to the court, but he proceeded with aplomb. He called to his side a veritable litany of venerable figures from classical and biblical narratives. The skill with which Jerome lectured his hearers made a deep and lasting impression on Poggio. Hyperbolically, Poggio submitted that Jerome had waxed so eloquent that everyone now hoped he might acquit himself by retracting whatever objections had been assigned to him, submit to the authority of the church, ask forgiveness, and pledge fidelity to a purer form of the faith. Poggio tells us instead of this penitential posture, Jerome “fell to praising Jan Hus.” This created an uproar. Jerome was repeatedly interrupted by protests and noise. He remained undeterred. Going on the offensive, the eloquence of the large man with the big beard caused his detractors to fall back in silence. When the crowd swelled against him, he shouted out and prevailed. He refused to back down or modify his language. In everything, Jerome stood firm displaying an absolutely courageous and fearless spirit. Poggio marvelled at the legendary memory displayed by the defendant. A year in prison bereft of books and even the light of day had neither dulled his recall nor clouded his mind. Of course, this prodigious memory must be nuanced. As an intellectual while in prison the life of the mind would have sustained him. Knowing, at some stage, that his final appearance before the Council would be the performance of a lifetime, he would have rehearsed. His resolute stand courted death. While he never mentioned the beard, Poggio concluded, “this was a man to remember.”

At length, when the Council was unable to prevail upon Jerome to repent, to change his mind, turn from heresy, and seek sanctuary in the safety of the church, he was condemned and relaxed to the secular authorities and consigned to the fire. He was unshakeable and went to his death with a cheerful countenance. Poggio wrote, “no Stoic ever displayed such a steadfast mind when death struck him down.”<sup>50</sup> He was a wonderful man, in every respect, save for alleged heretical ideas, and it was a shame he had to perish. Nevertheless, his death was the sort of passage one might find described in a book of philosophy from the ancient histories. Gaius Mucius Scaevola did not offer his hand to be burned nor did Socrates drink the

49 “Fuit vir vitae venerabilis ... ab ipso pueritiae suae tempore cor gerens senile.” VOGÜÉ, Adalbert de (ed.): Grégoire le Grand. *Dialogues. Texte, critique et notes* [Sources chrétiennes, no. 251, 260, 265]. Paris: Cerf 1978–1980, book 2, chapter 1.1. The idea is discussed more broadly in: CURTIUS, Ernst Robert: *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans., Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2013, 98–101

50 HARTH: *Magnum oecumenicum constantiense concilium*, vol. 2, 163.

hemlock more willingly than did Jerome of Prague present his entire body to be burned. The letter is a panegyric reminiscent of the “tranquil Socrates” and the “imperturbable Cato.”<sup>51</sup> Poggio’s narrative has nothing in common with the German chronicler Ulrich Richental’s later insistence that Jerome died screaming.<sup>52</sup> Jerome was the eloquent philosopher who persevered to the end and who willingly gave his life for truth and justice. This is what Poggio thought Jerome should be like, a contrast to the conservative, reactionary Baroque mentality of the Council. In the hands of the Czech chronicler Petr Mladoňovic, Jan Hus was a medieval Jesus, the suffering servant, a martyr of Christ-like quality. In the hands of Poggio, by contrast, Jerome was less a Christ figure than an exemplar of the ideal philosopher. It is possible to regard Poggio’s letter as a carefully-contrived account of courtroom drama and capital punishment horror but that would miss an important point. Poggio created an ideal man who faced death fortified in his faith and convictions. Unvarnished virtue becomes the main component in the narrative and functions as a template for reading and understanding the death of Jerome as narrated by Poggio. Poggio downplays any factor which might suggest heresy on the part of the defendant and apart from the unrestrained affirmation of the righteousness of Hus, Jerome is a titan of integrity and fortitude. There are precedents for this sort of selective reading. Hagiographical accounts of the life of King Wenceslas II of Bohemia (1271–1305) ignore his extramarital affairs (and many illegitimate children) while drawing attention to the fact that he heard twenty Masses a day.<sup>53</sup>

Earlier interpreters of Poggio suggest he was dismissive of the theological subtleties occupying Council delegates, contemptuous of arcane debates, silently ridiculed the intricate and irrelevant proceedings involving the suspected heretics Hus and Jerome. If so, that cynicism vanished in late May 1416 when Jerome reached the climax of his trial. Here, at last, was a glimmer of daring discourse and intellectual excitement in a world of regressive insecurity. In seeking to present that point of view, Poggio shaped the historical narrative though it would be too strident to conclude he distorted history into an unrecognizable caricature. Ranke’s dictum *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist* (what exactly happened) cannot be found in this letter. Certainly, he redacted the story of Jerome to construct an interpretation. His letter to Leonardo Bruni must be read as an interpretive version of truth, fact, and history. Rather than simply reporting events and outcomes, Poggio sought to discover what sort of man Jerome really was, to discover the reasons why he refused to submit to the Council and under-

<sup>51</sup> WATKINS: *The Death of Jerome of Prague*, 120.

<sup>52</sup> BUCK (ed.): *Chronik des Konstanzer Konzils 1414–1418 von Ulrich Richental*, 68.

<sup>53</sup> EMLER, Josef (ed.): *Petra Žitavského Kronika Zbraslavská* (Chronicon aulae regie), in: FRB, vol. 4, 4.



stand what motivated Jerome to embrace the stake as a means of eternal life rather than clinging to mortal life. Poggio may have chafed at the pedantic proceedings of the council but he was esteemed. When Cardinal Zabarella died on 26 September 1417, Poggio Bracciolini delivered the funeral oration.<sup>54</sup>

The standard accounts of the case of Jerome at Constance, such as the anonymous *Acta*, are more objective and more strictly historically accurate than the rendition provided by Poggio. However, they are also less critical about the assumptions which underlay the legal process and more likely to accept the ethos which pervaded the Council. In the face of men like Jerome, Jean Gerson saw the reflection of the devil. Peering back across the cathedral precincts, Jerome saw in those same men the forces of evil which he and Hus alone were willing to oppose. They defended truth and justice, not the community of popes and prelates. Poggio approached Jerome from an altogether different point of view than other chroniclers and notaries. He interpreted Jerome from the perspective of the moral tradition of the classical philosophers wherein eloquence was not merely the ability to speak in charming prose but was instead a reflection of justice itself with a firm commitment to ideas such as perseverance, truth, and dignity. This is what caused Poggio to present Jerome as a hero worthy of admiration. These are the garments in which Jerome was interred.

So far as Poggio was concerned, the judges in the trial were unfair. He also argued that many people in history had been unjustly condemned, including Socrates, Boethius, Soranus, Seneca, Plato, Anaxagoras, Zeno, and Rutilius, along with Saint Jerome, Elijah, Daniel, numerous prophets of the biblical narratives, Susannah, and many others. Poggio was also convinced that the court witnesses had perjured themselves. Waking the dead means evaluating such claims. Jerome argued he was not a heretic, that Hus was not a heretic, that Hus was a good man who focused chiefly on reforming abuses within the church. By implication, Jerome considered himself a good man, not opposed to the true church but interested in seeing irregularities corrected. Many extant sources reflect these convictions, though not agreeing with them. All this raises questions about truth and reliability.<sup>55</sup> The letter by Poggio has been described as an excellent example of humanist writing but also as a “text of perpetual truth.”<sup>56</sup> The latter must be contested. It seems more prudent to conclude that in the hands of Poggio, the historical Jerome has been replaced by a philosophically ideal Jerome who endured myriad tribulations, including being burned alive with an air

<sup>54</sup> The oration appears in FUBINI, Riccardo (ed.): *Poggio Bracciolini Opera omnia*, vol. 1. Turin: Bottega d’Erasmus 1964, 252–261.

<sup>55</sup> FUDGE: *Jerome of Prague and the Foundations of the Hussite Movement*, 293–297.

<sup>56</sup> NEDVĚDOVÁ, Milada: *Hus a Jeronym v Kostnici*. Prague: St. nakl. Krásné lit., hudby a umění 1953, 269.

of calm and resolute constancy. Even his objectionable beard had been consumed.

Why was the letter dangerous? The narrative was so laudatory that Poggio was warned by a colleague who feared he had revealed altogether too much regard for a man who was a convicted heretic. Leonardo Bruni suggested that Poggio should write a bit more cautiously about such matters.<sup>57</sup> If Jerome was excoriated on account of his defense of Hus and loyalty to a man already sent to the pyre, then Leonardo may have feared his friend Poggio exhibited altogether too much favor for Jerome and might also find himself in some difficulty should his views be brought to the broader attention of Council officials. What is clear is that in the humanist hands of Poggio Bracciolini, Jerome of Prague is no longer a heretic, but the ideal philosopher. This, too, is puzzling when trying to explain Jerome's neglect by subsequent generations.

Excavating Jerome from the forgetfulness of the past also draws renewed attention to the better known Poggio. Does this letter also reflect an announcement of a humanist for hire? Poggio is in between jobs. Pope John XXIII has been deposed and Martin V has yet to be elevated. Is Poggio advertising? If so, why focus on a heretic? Might his missive about Jerome be understood as a private letter intended for public consumption? As a notary, is Poggio providing testimony or witness for the other point of view, just in case? At the time Jerome was condemned there was much uncertainty at the Council and a vacuum in Christendom. The papacy had been ousted. The Council was struggling to assert authority, gain control and introduce stability within western Christendom. Can Poggio's letter be regarded as a position paper representing the moderates at Constance? Baldassare Cossa may have been a bad pope but Poggio's correspondent Bruni wrote that while he lacked any spiritual credentials, his strength of character was more fitting of a king or emperor.<sup>58</sup> And Cossa kept men like Bruni, Poggio and Vergerio close to him (until his troubles started at Constance). Was Poggio writing to show off, to display his knowledge and mastery of classical learning and motifs? Given the vacuum of power in which Poggio was working, is it possible to view his letter as evidence that his context was one where expression of dangerous ideas was a way for him to demonstrate his expertise over controversial subject matter, his mastery over the dark art of heresy, controlling the dangerous subject with his textual expertise? If so, then his letter is not so much a job application but more like an opportunity; a moment of intellectual freedom that permitted him to write dangerously, in what was ostensibly a private letter (that he

<sup>57</sup> ARETINI: Leonardo Bruni, *Epistolarum Libri VIII*. Hamburg: Theod. Christoph. Felginer 1724, bk. 4, letter 7, 129–130.

<sup>58</sup> BRUNO, Leonardo: *History of the Florentine People*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. by James Hankins. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2007, 344.



knew might become public) as a vehicle for his erudition. Perhaps waking the dead is more complex than imagined.

The expanse of six hundred years since the time of the Council of Constance has not dented the impressions of Jerome of Prague which remain vividly imbedded in the surviving records. Discovering Jerome reveals a man who was reckless and romantic, daring, egotistical, impulsive and exaggerated, fearless and violent, both in language and action. He was a man who possessed keen intellect, deep erudition, a persuasive voice, one filled with energy, enthusiasm, and outspoken zeal. Boundless drive took this intellectual outlaw from one end of Europe to the other and he seems never to have wearied of challenge, debate, disputation, and argument. The culture of memory and commemoration around the figure of Jerome of Prague can be explored by questioning the reliability of eyewitnesses and interrogating the sources which contain the remembrance of an executed heretic. There is a rich liturgical tradition in Bohemia in the fifteenth century, an iconographical heritage, questions around his influence in the developing Hussite Revolution, along with the ways and means by which he was remembered.<sup>59</sup> These are all predicated upon the portraits of Jerome which were constructed at Constance. The shaping of his death as a martyrological or hagiographical event means that sources such as the *passio* set forth by Petr Mladoňovic, the semi-official account of the hearings at Constance written by an unknown notary, the lengthy letter written by the Italian humanist Poggio Bracciolini on the day Jerome was executed, and the second-hand reflections by Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini in his influential "History of Bohemia" are essential for understanding the posthumous life of Jerome. Waking the dead and rediscovering this unfortunately-neglected man must take into account these sources.

The main findings of the research tend to validate the observation made by Richard FitzRalph that within medieval philosophical discourse there were a certain stagnancy but Jerome appears to present an exception.<sup>60</sup> There can be no argument that Jerome was a Wyclifite. Jerome was a philosopher, not a theologian, and an independent thinker. His life and thought reveals the role of philosophy in faith. Unlike Hus, Jerome traveled widely, engaged in numerous acrimonious disputations, exhibited a reckless and restless but powerful personality, and we also discover that his offensive big, black bushy, beard became a regular source of comment. He, not Jan Hus, emerges as the face of the emerging Hussite movement. He played a prominent role in the iconoclasm of the early Hussite movement and was a bona fide agitator from one end of Europe to another. Dis-

<sup>59</sup> FUDGE: *Jerome of Prague and the Foundations of the Hussite Movement*, 254–300.

<sup>60</sup> FITZRALPH: *Summa de Questionibus Armenorum*, in: HAMMERICH, L.I.: *The Beginning of the Strife Between Richard FitzRalph and the Mendicants, with an Edition of his Autobiographical Prayer and his Proposition Unusquisque*. Copenhagen: Levin and Munksgaard 1938, 20.

covering his neglect by many scholars (including Czechs) is therefore puzzling. Shakespeare wrote: "Hector is dead: there is no more to say."<sup>61</sup> Is it possible that Jerome may have prompted this sort of sentiment in Poggio Bracciolini? However the question is adjudicated, in terms of the history of ideas Jerome of Prague is a man worthy of being remembered.<sup>62</sup>

### *Abstract*

*This paper examines the historiography of Jerome of Prague (c. 1378–1416), a late medieval itinerant Czech intellectual who wore an infamous great beard, and discovers that outside Czech-language scholarship there has been little serious study of Jerome. This can be partially explained to the extent that Jerome's historical identity was lost in the memory of his better-known colleague Jan Hus. A brief analysis is offered of Jerome's contribution to the history of ideas and the world of late medieval philosophy. This is best seen in two separate heresy trials. An important contemporary letter by Poggio Bracciolini underscores why Jerome was a man worthy of being remembered.*

<sup>61</sup> *Troilus and Cressida*, Act 5, scene 11.

<sup>62</sup> I am grateful for audience responses to lecture versions of this paper in Australia, Germany and Switzerland and especially to Eliza Kent, David Kent, Jason Stoessel, Douglas Rogers, Matthias Trennert-Helwig, Ota Pavlíček, Olivier Ribordy, Barbara Hallensleben, and Guido Vergauwen.