

MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

Collection of medieval manuscripts of the Czech Reformation

Ref N° 2006-51

PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

1 SUMMARY

The collection of medieval manuscripts of the Czech Reformation (i.e. mostly Hussite manuscripts or so-called Hussitica and the manuscripts of the Unity of Brethren) is an artificially created collection of primary importance for Czech, European and world history. There are several factors, which make this collection unique. First, the manuscripts contain primary historical narrative, which maps the early stages and development of one of the key turning points of the history of European and world civilisation. Undoubtedly the Reformation initiated a number of essential processes, which resulted in political, cultural and social transformation of Europe, led to emergence of a new chapter in intellectual history (humanism, development of science, spreading education to the broader masses catalysed by the invention of the book press, etc.) and created a new religious landscape of Western Christianity (the emergence of protestant churches and of important reform movement inside and outside of the Church). Second, in terms of quantity there is no other library in the world with such a collection. Last, but not least, the collection is unique because it preserves a type of manuscripts, which due to the time of their origin and frequent use, is far less common than other groups of medieval manuscripts.

The Reformation is a generic name for the processes in the Christian Church culminating in the 16th century, which aimed at the transformation of the Church and return to the Christianity free of centuries of practice and traditions. The Reformation was a movement characterised by complex origins and causes, many-sided factors and actors, and rich results and consequences. The Reformation had number of predecessors – Bernard of Clairvaux, Cathari, Albigenses, Waldenses (the first protestant church formation), Franciscans. The initial phase of the Reformation took place at universities, namely in Oxford and Paris but later also in Prague. This is reflected in the works of an important English theologian John Wyclif, which were soon brought by Czech students to Bohemia and today they represent an important and unique part of our collection. The reform movement in the Czech territories called the Czech Reformation or more often the Hussite Movement (after the spiritual leader of the reform movement, Jan Hus). The Czech Reformation, which since mid 14th century gradually gained momentum and which is considered part of the second phase of the European reform and critical movements, reflected the general crisis of European and (at a small scale) Czech history. The main part of the collection consists of the works of the key priests and lay-preachers, which inspired the process of the Czech Reformation. The most important of those was the university teacher Jan Hus, the spiritual father of the entire Czech reform movement. The collection contains tracts and sermons outlining the main concerns of the Reformation movement. The Czech reform movement led to formation of new protestant church structures, utraquism and the Unity of Brethren (“Unitas fratrum”). In Central Europe the Unity of Brethren represents a unique phenomenon; it is the oldest Czech protestant church with its own belief system and unprecedented organisational structure. It took active part in the main stream of the German-Swiss Reformation, founded by M. Luther. In this phase, i.e. in the mid 16th century, the reform movement involves the whole of Europe; it changes the status quo of the medieval world and creates a new system of understanding and perceiving of the world in all strata of society.

2 DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR

2.1 Name (person or organisation)

Czech Commission for UNESCO

Jaroslava Moserová – Chairperson

2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated

None

2.3 Contact person (s)

Jaroslava Moserová – Chairperson of the Czech Commission for UNESCO

2.4 Contact details (include address, phone, fax, email)

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3 IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

The Collection of medieval manuscripts of the Czech Reformation (so called Hussitica and manuscripts of the Unity of Brethren) dates back to the period of the 14th to 16th century and is owned by the Manuscript and Early Printed Books Department of the National Library of the Czech Republic.

3.2 Description

The collection of medieval manuscripts of the Czech Reformation (i.e. mostly Hussite manuscripts or so called Hussitica and the manuscripts of the Unity of Brethren) is an artificially created collection of primary importance for Czech, European and by extension also for the world history. The manuscripts cover the period from the 14th to 16th century. The reform movement in the Czech territories started in the second half of the 14th century with the preaching of key priests such as Jan Milič z Kroměříže and Matěj z Janova and lay preachers such as Tomáš ze Štítného. The Czech Reformation was directly influenced by the works of the English priest John Wyclif, which were brought to the Czech Lands by Czech students studying at English universities and partly preserved to the present day in our collection. The collection also contains the works of the German preacher Konrad Waldhauser, who was - in contrast with John Wyclif – actively involved in the Czech Reformation. The works of Jan Hus are of extraordinary importance, he became one of the leading figures of the Czech Reformation and his example was invoked by many of the younger reform priests. Though the manuscripts of his works were dispersed into the various libraries in the world, in our collection we preserve the most important originals and copies made by Hus' contemporaries and pupils. The collection also contains later manuscripts of tracts and sermons of leading figures of the Hussite movement (Jakoubek ze Stříbra, Jan Rokycana, etc.) as well as the works of the critics and opponents of the Hussite movement (Oldřich Kříž z Telče, Hilarius Litoměřický). The Czech Reformation culminated in the 16th century in formation of the Unity of Brethren (so called Čeští bratři), a unique phenomenon in the Central European context (see the works of Jan Chelčický, Jan Blahoslav, etc.). The Unity of Brethren was in touch with the key European reform figures Martin Luther, Philipp Melancthon and Martin Bucer and others; the mutual ties between the Czech and

European reform movements were fully developed in the younger generation of the Unity of Brethren, which substantially transformed the reform thoughts of Luther's pupils. All the manuscripts of the collection are to a certain extent related to the intellectually fruitful environment of the medieval universities – in this aspect it is the largest collection in the world – while reflecting all the important aspects of the Reformation. The collection is unique in its intellectual and thematic “uniformity”, which enables unparalleled mapping of this exceptional moment in world history.

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4 JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

4.1 Authenticity

Authenticity of the collection is established as it consists of original manuscripts only.

4.2 World significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability

The manuscripts represent a unique collection in the world for following reasons: First, the Czech Reformation, which is captured in an unparalleled way in the collection, influenced the early stages of the German-Swiss Reformation and played an active part in its further development. A number of the reform thoughts contained in these manuscripts had a significant impact on the formation of the cultural and social world heritage. One of the key consequences of these reforms was the formation of the protestant churches, which has been crucial in determining the culture of a number of nations of the world. They also had impact on the border of Europe and enabled further expansion of European nations in the spheres of politics and culture.

The uniqueness of the collection is also guaranteed by its common and unified storage, near to its place of origin. The manuscripts linked to the university environment were from the larger part stored in the Jesuit college Klementinum (representing today the oldest part of the fonds of the National Library of the Czech Republic) or were acquired as whole collections by the National Library from the dissolved libraries of the monasteries. This common storage enables easier and more transparent reconstruction of the entire intellectual process of the Reformation.

The quantity of the manuscripts is another important aspect of the uniqueness of the collection. This is the largest collection of the manuscripts from the given period of the Reformation, which is particularly important given the original “low” quality of the manuscripts and their frequent use.

4.3 Criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style

- a) The time-period of the manuscripts (i.e. from the second half of the 14th century until the 16th century) covers the emergence, development, and full realisation of the reform movement. One of the focuses of the collection is represented by 15th century manuscripts illustrating the early period of the Reformation, the so-called Czech Reformation. In this group of manuscripts, the personalities linked with the university environment expressed their reform views and confronted them with the standpoint of the then united Christian (i.e. catholic) Church. The second focus of the collection is represented by the 16th century manuscripts, that is to say from the period of the expansion of German-Swiss Reformation. These manuscripts illuminate the key thoughts of the Reformation and present the process of the Reformation (as well as the reform branches of the society and the church) as a sovereign and doubtless historical fact. Given the age of the manuscripts, their number is truly surprising and represents one of the unique European collections.
- b) There are only few libraries in the world holding a collection of Reformation medieval manuscripts, which were created, used and preserved directly at the place of their current storage or in its immediate proximity. The present-day National Library of the Czech Republic evolved through substantial enlargement from the former Jesuit library (from mid 16th century till the end of 18th century). This Jesuit library was used –in addition to the requirements of the Jesuit Order – for scientific purposes by the philosophical and theological faculty, which in the period of the 16th to 18th century became the main educational institutions in the humanities under the supervision of the Jesuit Order. These faculties continued the work of their predecessors, the philosophical and theological faculties established in the 14th century. The philosophical faculty, founded in 1348 by the Holy Roman Emperor and Czech King Charles IV, is the oldest university in Central Europe and is considered to be one of the most important European universities. The university environment represented a basis, from which the important ideas of the world cultural heritage

emerged and marked the intellectual climate of the medieval and early modern society; they served for long time as a vehicle of cultural and scientific development of that society.

- c) The collection of the manuscripts of the Czech Reformation is composed of the works of various authors. There is number of important personalities among the authors (John Wyclif, Conrad Waldhauser). Among the Czech authors, particularly the works of the spiritual leaders of Hussite movement and the Unity of Brethren (Jan Chelčický, Tomáš Štítýný ze Štítného, Matěj z Janova, and others) stand out, while the importance of the work of the leader of the early phase of the Reformation, Jan Hus, can not be overestimated.
- d) The medieval manuscripts of the Czech Reformation have exceptional value as part of European and world cultural heritage. The manuscripts testify to the turning point of European cultural and political history, which led to the birth of transformed European society. The authors of the collection were exceptional personalities and most of them are considered to be leading figures of individual phases of the Reformation. A large part of the collection consists of manuscripts that exist only in this one original or the direct copy of the original. It is only due to this collection that the works of a number of exceptional personalities of this phase of the European and world history was preserved.
- e) On the one hand the collection of the manuscripts has a unified style: it is a collection of medieval manuscripts with direct link to one phase of the Reformation, to the Czech Reformation, containing tracts and sermons. On the other hand, the collection lacks uniformity: the manuscripts are the works of various authors, from various phases of the Reformation and their thematic focus varies as well. This lack of uniformity, however, enables better understanding of the entire process of the Reformation and represents this process in all its diversity and as it was perceived by the academic as well as general public. Due to this testimony, it is possible to uncover all the specific features of this European and world phenomenon.

4.4 Issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management

The collection is a unique testimony about one of the most important milestones of European society, i.e. the Reformation. This is the largest collection in the world, which is reflected by the great interest of scholars. The use of these manuscripts, however, is limited due to their current deteriorating state. This is caused by the low quality of materials used in the production of these manuscripts, which were traditionally created in less luxurious editions and served mainly for practical use. As such they were considered to be substandard and destroyed more often than other medieval manuscripts. Their current state requires a higher degree of protection and more profound intervention of restorers. Systematic digitization of these manuscripts is another possible way of their protection. The digitization of the manuscripts enables easier access by users, increases the interest of the academic community, spreads their knowledge across the globe and last, but not least, it prevents frequent lending leading to their gradual destruction. The National Library of the Czech Republic listed among its core goals the protection, stability and safe storage and greater public access for the readers from the entire world of its manuscript heritage. All these efforts at preservation and increased care for the collection offer a hope that this unique heritage will be preserved for the future generations.

5 **LEGAL INFORMATION**

5.1. Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

National Library of the Czech Republic

Statutory organ: Mgr. Vlastimil Ježek – Director General of the National Library of the Czech Republic

Klementinum 190

110 00 Prague 1

The Czech Republic

The collection is part of the holdings of the Manuscripts and Early Printed Books Department (department of the National Library).

5.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details, if different to owner)
The National Library of the Czech Republic (Manuscripts and Early Printed Books Department)

PhDr. Zdeněk Uhlíř–Director of the Manuscripts and Early Printed Books Department

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5.3 Legal status:

(a) Category of ownership

The Collection is owned by a public organisation (National Library of the Czech Republic)

(b) Accessibility

The collection is fully (without any restrictions) accessible to the public directly at the Manuscripts and Early Printed Books Department. The digital copies of many items from the collection are accessible through the Manuscriptorium Digital Library.

(c) Copyright status

There are no copyright restrictions applying to originals with the exception of digital copies of manuscripts, which according to the copyright law, are subject to the copyright of the publisher (National Library of the Czech Republic) for 25 years since the date of their first publication. The copyright to the digital copies is owned by the National Library of the Czech Republic

(d) Responsible administration

The collection is property of the National Library of the Czech Republic. It is an integral part of the holdings of the National Library – Manuscripts and Early Printed Books Department

(e) Other factors

The items concerned represent a closed and highly protected collection. Its further storage and use is controlled by the specific rules of the National Library. In accordance with the mission and tasks of the National Library, the collection is considered a permanent part of the library holdings.

6 MANAGEMENT PLAN

6.1 Is there a management plan in existence for this documentary heritage? YES/NO

Yes. The summary Management Plan is attached.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 Provide details of consultation about this nomination with (a) the owner of the heritage (b) the custodian (c) your national or regional *Memory of the World* committee

Consultation was carried out with representatives of the National Library of the Czech Republic, the Manuscripts and Early Printed Books Department and the Restoration Department.

PART B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION

8 ASSESSMENT OF RISK

8.1 The current state of the manuscripts indicates the necessity of increased level of protection.

The Manuscripts and Early Printed Books Department thus decided upon following measures:

1. More consistent renovation processes, which should concern the entire collection of the manuscripts and preserve the actual stay of the manuscripts.
2. Digitization is one of the possible ways of high quality preservation and better accessibility of the manuscripts for the readers. The entire collection will be gradually digitized.
3. Gradual digitization of the entire collection is one of the priorities of the Manuscripts and Early Printed Books Department. This process will enable greater access of broad group of users and will eventually lead to better protection of the manuscripts as the level of their physical lending will be reduced.

9 ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION

9.1 The Department takes following steps in its effort at preservation of the collection:

1. The renovation works must continue with the goal of preserving the manuscripts.
2. As our effort at greater care for the manuscripts is motivated by preserving of and ensuring access to the collection for the future generations, the process of digitization is very important.

PART C - LODGEMENT

This nomination is lodged by:

(Please print name).....

(Signature)..... (Date).....