MASTER NICHOLAS OF DRESDEN
THE OLD COLOR AND THE NEW
SELECTED WORKS CONTRASTING THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH
AND THE ROMAN CHURCH

Edited, Annotated, and Translated by
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FOREWORD

This edition was prepared in my seminar in medieval history at the University of Washington, in 1961. Each of the three students and myself took part of each text and carried out the work of transcription, collation, annotation, and translation; then each individual's work was checked by the seminar as a whole. Thus the actual edition is the product of our joint enterprise. The introductory essay and prefaces, however, were written by myself, and the indices were prepared by Patricia Rosenberg, who also undertook the exacting task of typing the final copy.

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Finally, I should like to record the present status of the other editors: Dr. Boba is Assistant Professor at the University of Washington; D. L. Bilderback is Assistant Professor at Fresno State College; Patricia Rosenberg is humanities reference librarian at the University of Oregon.

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A mode of national self-assertion, and by the beginning of the fifteenth century a good deal of the intellectual life of the University consisted of Czech-German controversies in philosophy, where the Czechs' Wyclifite realism was opposed to the Germans' nominalism, and in theology, where the Czechs' espousal of Wyclifism was met by German orthodoxy. But although much of the dynamism that would carry the Czech reform movement forward into revolt, revolution, and reformation undoubtedly derived from this fruitful struggle, the concomitant conversion of an international community of scholars into a battleground of nationalities had unfortunate consequences. At one point in the complicated political maneuverings connected with the Schism and the Conciliar movement, King Wenceslas IV wished the University of Prague to support his withdrawal of obedience from Pope Gregory XII; the Germans refused but the Czechs agreed, and won for their reward the Kutná Hora Decree of 1409, which reversed the power relationship at the University by giving three votes to the Czech Nation, only one vote to the three German-dominated Nations combined. In consequence most of the German masters and students left Prague, some founding the University of Leipzig, others going elsewhere; henceforth Prague's University would be an instrument of the Czech reform party, a national institution. But at the same time the international matrix that had engendered and nourished the reform movement seemed to disappear, leaving the paradox of an ecumenically oriented movement that held its actual existence as a local, ethnically limited phenomenon.

And yet the universalism implicit in the idea of reform did not fail to assert itself, alongside the national element and sometimes in opposition to it. The international community of the medieval establishment, the university, was replaced by an International of heresy. Disaffected elements from far-off as well as neighboring lands began to move into Bohemia, sometimes as individuals who joined the Czechs, sometimes as groups that maintained their alien identity, but generally serving to nourish the springs of revolt and revolution with the fruits—ideas, emotions, attitudes—of generations of heretical experience. The end result was perhaps less pleasant for the Czech nation than interesting to the historian, but it is in any case
probable that the greatest act of the Czech people—
Hussitism—required this international concentration of
ideas and energies for its realization, just as it also
required a continuing international orientation to pre-
serve itself from provincial insignificance. Nor is it
surprising to find that the German nationality was
well represented in the new Prague and in the reformed
Bohemia that began to take shape; whatever of na-
tionalistic prejudice the Hussites maintained, and
expressed in such phrases as “Our born enemies the
Germans,” was counterbalanced by the idealism that
John Hus had aptly voiced when he wrote, “A good
German is dearer to me than an evil brother.”

Thus it could happen that for a half-dozen of Hus-
sitism’s most decisive years, from 1412 to 1417, an
important role in the reform movement was played by
a group of Germans in Prague, known as the “Dres-
deners” or the “Dresden School.” The history of
this group in Dresden is not at all clear, but we can
surmise why they left: on 18 October 1411 Bishop
Rudolph of Meisen, Dresden’s diocesan, issued a de-
cree forbidding the teaching of the Bible and Dece-
rum in secondary schools, and soon after that we find
the Dresden School relocated in Prague, no doubt in
direct consequence. There is evidence that the masters

1 The phrase appears in Prague’s manifesto of 3 April, 1420, summoning faithful Czechs to resist the Crusade (Archiv český, 3 (1844), ed. Fr. Pałucki, p. 212).
3 The most important discussions of this group in the modern literature are Jan Sedláček’s Mikuláš z Drážďan (Brno, 1914); F. M. Bartoš’s “Vznik a počátky táborské,” Husitév a círva (Prague, 1931), pp. 113–153; Josef Pekař’s “Jak se vznikl Mikuláš z Drážďan,” Vznik táborské, I. Ch. I of Zloka a jeho doba, I (Prague, 1927), pp. 1–31. The first two will be referred to as “Sedláček” and “Bartoš.” A sound summary of Sedláček’s work, with some additional material, is offered by J. Th. Müller, “Magister Nikolaus von Dresden,” Zeitschrift für Brüder-
geschichte, 9 (1915): pp. 80–109. Less valuable, because not
so current of Czech scholarship, is H. Böhmer’s “Magister
Peter von Dresden,” Neues Archiv für Sachsische Geschichete
und Altertumskunde, 56 (1915): pp. 212–231; cf. Bartoš’s re-
4 Sedláček, p. 4; Bartoš, p. 130 f. A note at the end of one of
the texts of the Tobite, in MS Prague Cathedral A 79/5, f. 261, reads: “Ista scripta ad hunc sensum hereticum
collecta sunt redacta in hunc formam per Drazensenses, qui de
Drazen expulsi, plurimos sedeterunt.” And an anonymous
account, published by K. Höfler, Geschichte der hau-
tischen Bewegung in Böhmen, III, Fontes rerum austriacorum,
I, Abt. (Vienna, 1865), 7: p. 156, says: “Circa annum Domini
MCCCCXXI in civitate Drazeni, Missiosnis diocesis . . . Petrus
et Nicolau puerorum eruditorum in ipsius nominata civitatis
drazeni schola plurimas curiosas quosque questiones ilia
non sunt veriti juxta capita sua contra auctoritatem sacre scriptu-
erum et sanctorum decretorum sinistre definiere . . . Que
corum doctrina cum ad aures viri clarissimi domini Joannis
episcopi . . . pervenisse, mox ipsos Petrum et Nicolauum cum
corum doctrinae refrentibus exclamabat usurps et eliminabat de
episcopatu Missensi.” Bartoš shows that the account has the
name of the bishop wrong, and indeed some of its other infor-
mation is dubious (e.g., that Nicholas was Peter’s associate in
of this school did indeed introduce theological and
canonical subject-matter into the curriculum of what
was supposed to be simply a preparatory school teach-
ing grammar and other basic arts; more to the point
no doubt is the fact that the higher subjects were
 taught with a strongly anti-Roman tendency. 25
John Drádr of Dresden, a disciple of the school who fell into
the hands of the inquisition in 1425, told his examiners 26
that he had done his basic studies in Dresden, under
Master Frederick and Master Peter, who had taught
him, among other things, that Christ, not the Pope or
even St. Peter, was the head of the Church Militant.
He refused on principle to swear an oath, did not read
his canonical hours, held that ordination as priest was
sufficient license to preach anywhere, believed that
priests should live without wealth, according to the
manner of Christ, and should not exercise secular
dominion, nor should the Church have accepted such
dominion from the Emperor Constantine; he rejected
the validity of Roman excommunications and the claims
of the Roman hierarchy to obedience, and he held that
it was necessary only to believe what was in the Bible.
That Drádr also confessed to a belief in utraquism
—that communion should be given in both kinds to the
laity—may be probably taken as an indication of what
he had learnt in Hussite Prague; although there are
sources that identify utraquism as among the doctrines
of the Dresden School in Dresden, and indeed as a prime
contribution of that School to Hussitisme, these testi-
monies are suspect and, for the most part, late. 27 But
if Drádr’s confession be taken generally and as a
whole, it suggests at the very least that an extremely
radical anti-Romanism was cultivated by Masters Fred-

25 Dresden: there is no mention of Frederick Eppinge—see below. A Czech rhyme chronicle also reports that the Dresdeners
had been expelled from Dresden (ed. Pałucki, Štěrbovitý čeští, Scripторes rerum hodiernarum, (Prague, 1829), 3:472).
26 See the anonymous account quoted in note 4. It specifies
that among the “curious questions” raised by the masters in
Dresden “was an laicos sit porrigenda componio duplici speciei, a
probably incorrect report (see note 6, below), and it lists the
doctrines they favored in Prague as: “purgatorium post hanc
tem animarn non esse. Quod sanctorum suffragia non sunt
invocanda. Quod papa sive Romanus pontifex sit antiquus
cum cleroy sibi subjeto et quod communio eucharistic sub
duplci specie laicos sit administranda, et cetera plures . . .
sinistre, quas deceperant, fantasie.” Whether these heresies
were also taught in Dresden is not stated; but compare Drádr’s
confession, below.
27 The record of his interrogation, along with four of his
agitational missives, is published by J. E. Kapp, Kleine
Cf. the discussion by H. Haupt, “Walderseem und Inquisition
im spätesten Deutschland,” Deutsche Zeitschrift für Ge-
Sedláček’s “Počátkové kalixci,” Canzis českého muzea,
52 (1911): p. 247 & passim; also Böhmer, op. cit., for a system-
atic discussion of the main Latin sources.
reminds us of nothing so much as the doctrines of John Wyclif,7 the very doctrines then being advocated in Prague by the more radical members of Hus’s party. Pursuing this point further, we may observe that Master Peter of Dresden may have been among the Germans who had left Prague in 1409,8 that Master Frederick—Frederick Epping, to give him his full name—probably had been,9 and so by his own statement, had been Drändorf.10 And these are the only names that we can identify certainly with the Dresden period of the school’s activity. The most reasonable supposition would be that in the decade preceding 1409 some of the German masters and students at the University of Prague agreed with the Czech reformers rather than with most of their own compatriots, that these German radicals read the works of Wyclif with the same sympathy, perhaps enthusiasm, as was displayed by Hus, and that for some reason, when the time of exile came, these men gathered at Dresden, which thus became a heretical counterpart to Leipzig as a place of refuge,11 and a German parallel to Prague as a center of Wyclifite anti-Romanism. In any case, according to this reconstruction, the abnormal situation in Dresden lasted only for about a year and a half; when action was taken against the German radicals by Bishop Rudolph they naturally returned to Prague, which had become even more of a center of radical reform.

Once in Prague, the Dresdener quickly formed or

7 Although Wyclifism shared its basic points of anti-Romanism with other reform tendencies of the time, it was especially distinguished by its emphasis on the primacy of the Bible, the Lex dei, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the internal contradictions in both the theory and practice of the juridical ecclesiology of the High Middle Ages. The elaborate and often penetrating use of standard sources—the Fathers, the scholastics, the canon law and the canonists—in an anti-Roman sense is also characteristic of Wyclifism. On all these points the Dresdensers seemed close to the Englishman’s system; but much more work of textual analysis will be necessary before a more definite conclusion can be pronounced.

8 Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, Historia bohemia, ch. xxxv: “Petrus Dresdensis, qui cum αλίξα Textunlus paulo ante [sic], before 1414 Bohemiam reliquit.” To be sure, Aeneas says that Peter was infected by Waldensianism, not Wyclifism.

9 In his posticio on excommunication (note 15, below) he wrote, “ideo ex permissione matrix meae, alme universitatis studii Praagensis, inicita conclusionem clausum essum quaestus articulos duos . . .” (p. 107).

10 Kapp, op. cit., pp. 37 f: “Item interrogatus, an ne studuit in aliquibus studiis privilegiatis. Respondit quid sic, silicet in studio Praagensi & Lipzensi.” Most of the Germans who left Prague in 1409 migrated to Leipzig. Since Drändorf was in Prague by 1412 (note 135, below), and had studied in Dresden under Frederick and Peter, who also came to Prague at that time, we cannot refer his Leipzig studies to a period before that date; since he was only eighteen years old in 1409 (loc. cit.), he could hardly have studied at both Prague and Leipzig in the period before that year, nor indeed was Leipzig a university before 1409.

11 See the preceding note.


13 The best account is in V. Novotný, M. Jan Hus, život a dílo (Prague, 1921), pp. 123 ff.


15 It is included in the Tractatus responsivus composed by John Hus or Jakobek of Stříbro, and edited by S. Harrison Thomson (Prague, 1927), pp. 103-133. On the question of authorship of the Tractatus itself, a question turning in part on the author’s relationship to Epping, see Bartoš, “M. Jan Husis tractatus responsivus,” CCMI, 1 (1927), pp. 23-35. See also: Bartoš, p. 131, n. 56.