

LITERARY REACTION TO CONVERSION. THE CASE OF JIŘÍ SOVKA OF CHRUDIM

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1 Introduction

Religious conversions were nothing extraordinary in the Bohemian lands of the Jagellonian era. The most common were shifts from Utraquism to Catholicism, including some important cases of powerful lords.¹ Because the Estates codified Compactata in the land law and series of electoral capitulations, even conversions of important members of high nobility have not caused much commotion; it was considered a private thing of each nobleman and part of the political life. The conversion only rarely meant a radical change of lifestyle, thinking and social networks of the nobles.² For example, Vilém of Pernštejn famously converted from tolerant Utraquism to Catholicism, yet not much changed on his large estates and he was even still supporting Brethren.³ But Compactata has never been sanctioned by the Papacy, so it was complicated to remain in international social networks for Utraquists. It is therefore not surprising that many conversions to Catholicism had their roots in stays abroad.⁴ The situation was quite different for clergymen. The doctrinal issues played a much greater role in the life of priests than laymen. The priestly conversions were a matter of public concern and could cause serious political and religious disturbances. The converts often became bitter enemies of Utraquism and leading polemicists against their former faith.⁵ The most prominent ex-

¹ For best overall survey of religious life of the Jagellonian era see MACEK, Josef: *Víra a zbožnost jagellonského věku* (now on *Víra a zbožnost*). Praha 2001. One of the most important and curious cases is conversion of sons of the hussite king George of Poděbrady who converted relatively soon after their father's death. FELCMAN, Ondřej – FUKALA, Radek – HRUBÝ, Vladimír: *Poděbradové: rod českomoravských pánů, kladských hrabat a slezských knížat*. Praha 2008, p. 75–110; NOVOTNÝ, Robert: *Konverze české a moravské šlechty v husitském století* (now on *Konverze*). In: CERMANOVÁ, Pavlína – SOUKUP, Pavel (eds.): *Husitské re-formace: proměna kulturního kódu v 15. století*. Praha 2019, pp. 312–313.

² NOVOTNÝ, R.: *Konverze*, p. 325.

³ VÁLKA, Josef: *Politika a nadkonfesijní křesťanství Viléma a Jana z Pernštejna*. In: VOREL, Petr (ed.): *Pernštejnové v českých dějinách: sborník příspěvků z konference konané 8.–9. 9. 1993 v Pardubicích*. Pardubice 1995, p. 9.

⁴ NOVOTNÝ, R.: *Konverze*, p. 306.

⁵ SZPIECH, Ryan: *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic* (now on *Conversion and Narrative*). Philadelphia 2012, p. 121.

amples of such converts from 15th century are Hilarius of Litoměřice and Václav Křižanovský. Another important but much less known convert from the beginning of the 16th century is Jiří Sovka of Chrudim.⁶

In this article, I am not going to speculate much about the conversion itself. The conversion of a well-known and politically active priest such as Sovka was a very sensitive matter on both confessional and political levels, so the accounts of his conversion are relatively plentiful but polemically biased. Therefore, the conversion narratives presented here can tell us a lot more about community standards of belief than about the individual experience of conversion.⁷ Instead of focusing on the usual questions such as the character of conversion, its sincerity and motivation, I am going to focus on the perception of Sovka and the construction of the image of his conversion in various kinds of texts addressing the conversion or reacting to it.

2 Jiří Sovka of Chrudim on the way to conversion

Jiří Sovka was born in Chrudim, a dowry city that was not very big or important, but it was almost entirely Czech and confessionally Utraquist, because the German patriciate had been exiled at the beginning of the Hussite revolution.⁸ The one thing worth considering about the city is its good school which has produced many talented students, many of them reached the education (and many even the most important offices) at Prague University.⁹ Although we know very little about Sovka's before his entrance to the university, one thing is almost certain – he was Utraquist since his baptism.

The career of Jiří Sovka of Chrudim started with his studies at Prague University – he earned a bachelor degree in 1497 and master degree in 1499.¹⁰ Later he held various university offices and his university career culminated

⁶ For example, Novotný does not mention Sovka at all when listing the best-known converts. NOVOTNÝ, R.: *Konverze*, p. 306. A short biogram of Jiří Sovka can be found in MACEK, J.: *Víra a zbožnost jagellonského věku*. Praha 2001, p. 97. More about Jiří Sovka and his background FLORIÁN, Čeněk: *Děkané artistické fakulty: Václav z Chrudimě, Šimon z Chrudimě, Viktorin Kornel ze Všehrd a Jiří Sovka*. Časopis Národního muzea, 111, 1937, s. 287.

⁷ SZPIECH, R.: *Conversion and Narrative*, p. 7.

⁸ FROLÍK, Jan: *Chrudim ve 14. a 15. století: archeologie a historie k podobě a vývoji města*. In FROLÍK, Jan (ed.): *Jan Hus, husitství a východní Čechy. Příspěvky z konference*. Chrudim 16.–18. 9. 2015. Chrudim 2015, pp. 29–42.

⁹ PEŠEK, Jiří: *Některé otázky dějin pražské univerzity jagellonského období 1471–1526* (now on *Některé otázky*). Acta Universitatis Carolinae – Historia Universitatis Carolinae Pragensis, 18, 1978, n. 1, p. 142.

¹⁰ *Monumenta historica universitatis Carolo–Ferdinandae Pragensis*. Tom I, Pars 2. *Liber decanorum 1/2 facultatis philosophicae Universitatis Pragensis ab anno Christi 1367 usque ad annum*

in 1502 when Sovka was the dean of the artistic faculty.¹¹ In the *Liber decanorum* we can also find first traces of Sovka's interest in political activity, amongst other things, he wrote an extensive text criticising so-called Rendl's laws (*Vladislav Land Ordinance / Vladislavské zemské zřízení*), aimed against the political position of the royal towns.¹² Sovka's ambitions were not limited to the University and his interest in politics soon transformed into political activity. It is therefore not surprising that Sovka became closely associated with Italian bishop Fillip de Nova Villa who was invited to Bohemia to consecrate Utraquists. We can find Sovka in the bishop's entourage soon after his arrival. According to the bishop's diarium, Sovka often assisted the bishop during ceremonies from August 1504 at least until September 1505. Sovka became one of the bishop's closest associates, he is even called archdeacon in the diarium.¹³ Soon, a conflict between the bishop and the Lower (Utraquist) consistory led by Pavel of Žatec emerged. The bishop's theologically conservative thinking caused friction with some of the more radical members of the Lower consistory; there were also administrative issues and criticism of the bishop's secular life.¹⁴ Sovka remained loyal to the bishop during this conflict and became part of the bishop's own consistory in Kutná Hora.¹⁵ This suggests that Sovka's theological orientation was probably conservative in dogmatic matters and inclining to reunion with Rome.

Another important part of his life Sovka spent as the abbot of the Slovany (later called Emmaus) monastery. The monastery was founded by Charles IV. and since the beginning it adhered to Slavonic liturgy.¹⁶ The history of the monastery in the 15th century is not very well documented.¹⁷ The Slovany monastery adhered to Utraquism – monks had embraced Utraquist liturgy and

1585 e codice membranaceo illius aetatis nunc primum luce donatus (now on *Liber decanorum* I/2). Prague 1832, p. 178 and pp. 186–187.

¹¹ *Liber decanorum* I/2, pp. 191–201.

¹² TOMEK, Václav Vladivoj: *Dějepis města Prahy*. Vol. X (now on *Dějepis*). Praha 1894, p. 159; *Liber decanorum* I/2, pp. 192–193.

¹³ "...magistro Georgii Chrudimensi archidiacono nostro." ŘEHÁK, Jan: *Kutnohorské diarium biskupa Filipa Villanuova*. Věstník Královské České společnosti nauk, 1879, n. 5, pp. 52–73.

¹⁴ More about the conflict MACEK, J.: *Víra a zbožnost*, p. 130–138; HREJSA, Ferdinand: *Dějiny křesťanství v Československu* IV. Praha 1948, pp. 168–170.

¹⁵ TOMEK, V. V.: *Dějepis*, pp. 224–227.

¹⁶ ČERMÁK, Václav: *Ke kořenům církevněslovanského písemnictví kláštera Na Slovanech*. In: KUBÍNOVÁ, Kateřina (ed.): *Karel IV. a Emauzy: liturgie, text, obraz*. Praha 2017, p. 15–27.

¹⁷ KŮRKA, Pavel: *Slovanský klášter mezi husitstvím a katolicismem. Dějiny klášterní komunity v letech 1419–1592* (now on *Slovanský klášter*). In: BENEŠOVSKÁ, Klára – KUBÍNOVÁ, Kateřina (eds.): *Emauzy. Benediktinský klášter Na Slovanech v srdci Prahy*. Praha 2007, pp. 107–117.

started to serve communion under both species early in the Hussite wars.¹⁸ The Utraquists didn't have a unified ideology of monasticism and their opinions varied from indifference to direct attacks against monasteries.¹⁹ The situation in Prague was even more complicated because there were several attempts to exile all monks from the city (on the basis of the privileges granted by Sigismund of Luxemburg). Despite that, the Slovany monastery continued without any interruption.²⁰ Another unusual thing is the close connection of the Slovany monastery to Prague's city council and Prague university; many professors and deans from the university became abbots and vice versa.²¹ It seems that the Slovany monastery was a prestigious institution.²² However the economic situation of the monastery was declining during the 15th century – by the end of the century the monastery was poor and able to sustain only a couple of monks.²³

Sovka became abbot at Slovany on 30th July 1507. The way he got the office is interesting – The Old Czech Annales describe his election as “fast and unexpected” and king Vladislaus Jagiello intervened on his behalf.²⁴ It seems that conservatively oriented Sovka was a defender of the king's interests in Prague – as the abbot of the monastery he strictly rejected the idea of the unification of Prague cities because “it is the matter of the king.”²⁵ It was also

¹⁸ POHUNEK, Michal: *Dějiny kláštera Na Slovanech za husitství v letech 1419–1442*. Praha 2014 (unpublished master thesis).

¹⁹ A nice example of Utraquist ambiguity toward monasticism is Martin Lupáč criticizing his co-religionist for preserving monasteries in Prague. MOLNÁR, Amedeo: *Martin Lupáč: Modus disputandi pro fide*. Folia Historica Bohemica, 4, 1982, p. 165. An example of traditional utraquist criticism of the Franciscan order is so called Matřýkat proti Bosákovi in: TRUHLÁŘ, Josef (ed.): *Manualník M. Václava Korandy: T. ř. rukopis Bibliothéky Klementinské*. Praha 1888, pp. 45–96. On the relationship between Utraquist and the Franciscan order see HLAVÁČEK, Petr: *Bohemian Franciscans between Orthodoxy and Nonconformity at the Turn of the Middle Ages*. The Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice, 5, 2002, pp. 167–189.

²⁰ Unfortunately there isn't a scholarly monograph that would present Utraquist views on monasticism, for an overview of the fate of monasteries in Bohemian lands see MACEK, J.: *Víra a zbožnost*, p. 200–234.

²¹ PEŠEK, J.: *Některé otázky*, pp. 165–166.

²² The monastery received more testaments in 1440's than all other monasteries in Prague combined. KŮRKA, P.: *Slovanský klášter*, p. 112.

²³ KŮRKA, P.: *Slovanský klášter*, pp. 115–116.

²⁴ “T.l. v středu (30. června) po sv. Petru a Pavlu v nešpory z rozkázání krále JM. rychle a nenadále uvedli pan purkmistr a páni novoměští toliko M. Sovku za opata do Slovan.” *Starší letopisové čeští* (now on SLČ). In: CHARVÁT, Jaroslav (ed.): *Dílo Františka Palackého II*. Praha 1941, p. 238.

²⁵ “A před tím v neděli (19. září) před sv. Matoušem slavný kazatel M. Jíra Sovka, v Slovanech na kázání svém mezi jinými prosbami učinil zmínku naposledy o té jednotě, nazvav ji čertovou jednotou, a právě: Milí lidé! Sami vidíte, že jakmile jste počali o jednotu státi a mluvíti, jaký jest

the first sign of a strained relationship between Sovka and citizens of Prague which culminated in Sovka's conversion at the beginning of 1510. One week after the conversion, Sovka left Prague, never to return. Sovka took the name Basilius and spent the rest of his life in Olomouc in the Augustinian All Saints monastery.²⁶ Not only that Sovka was accepted to the monastery but he was very soon also elevated to the office of provost.²⁷ It is quite probable that king Vladislav supported Sovka again since he was the only one who might have any interest in Sovka's election.²⁸ However, Sovka didn't enjoy the new office for long because he died in 1511, a year after his entry to the monastery.²⁹

3 Image of Sovka's conversion in historical memory

The Old Czech Annales provide many details about Sovka's life and conversion. Nevertheless, it is important to remember The Old Czech Annales are not an impartial narrative they have been written from the viewpoint of staunch Utraquism. It is possible to say that chronicles reconstructed, rather than described, Sovka's conversion. The accounts of Sovka's actions are built on the knowledge that he would eventually convert. Therefore, Sovka's actions are presented as preparation for his conversion; it is doubtful whether they really

toho počátek, že nevole a bouřky; pak kdyby se dokonala, co by potom bylo; i co vy jednáte; však vám to státi nebude moci, neb to jest věc královská; by pak i král svolil, spomeňte na císaře Karla, kterýž toto město zvelebil, kdybyste to učinili, pykali byste toho po létech i vaši budoucí." SLČ, p. 239.

²⁶ Vědecká knihovna Olomouc (now on VKOL), sign. M II 46, *Annales seu protocollorum, pars secunda*, p. 4, dates his election after the death of Jan Štávka of Hodenice, but wrongly to 1507, because Jan Štávka died in 1510 which is also the year of Sovka's conversion and arrival to Olomouc.

²⁷ His election to the office of provost was against the statuta and privileges of the monastery. The statuta have whole chapters devoted to accepting monks from other orders. They should spend a couple of years in the cloister and prove their character – which Sovka clearly did not. Moreover, he was very quickly elected as the provost of the monastery. NEUMANN, Augustin: *Neznámá statuta moravská z 15. století*. Hlídka, 34, 1917, n. 1–5, pp. 157–158. More about the elections of provost of Augustinians canons HRADIL, Filip: "*Congregatio lateranensis in Moravia*" a problematika voleb řeholních lateránských proboštů v 16.–18. století. In: PAVLÍČKOVÁ, Radmila – ELBEL, Martin (eds.): *Miscellanea ze semináře starších dějin*. Olomouc 2005, pp. 59–71.

²⁸ TOMEK, V. V.: *Dějepis*, p. 306. On 10th March 1510 king Vladislaus granted protection to the monastery of All Saints in Olomouc and confirmed their resettlement from Lanškroun; the king also confirmed its lands and property and allowed a free election of the provost and granted the monastery same liberties as other Moravian monasteries. Moravský zemský archiv, fond Augustiniáni Olomouc, sign E 3. A 8. It is possible that the confirmation was a part of the deal with the king and should confirm that accepting Sovka as provost should not be taken as precedent and that older privileges are still valid.

²⁹ VKOL, sign. M II 46. *Annales seu protocollorum, pars secunda*, p. 5.

happened exactly in the described way. Nevertheless, the Old Czech Annales present an interesting narrative of Sovka's conversion.

I have already briefly mentioned two affairs connected to Sovka covered in the Old Czech Annales – his election as abbot of the Slovany monastery and his preaching against the unification of Prague Old and New City. His next preaching described in The Old Czech Annales was an uncontroversial denunciation of Picards.³⁰ Even though it went against tacit tolerance of the Brethren, it was entirely in accordance with the politics of king Vladislaus (who approved persecution of Brethren in the St. Jacob mandate). Sovka's emphasis on the veneration of the eucharist as Picard's greatest heresy was in line with the traditional Utraquist critique of the Brethren. Even the Old Annalist doesn't seem to be bothered by this sermon, nor is he trying to explain it in the light of Sovka's later conversion. The same applies to Sovka's preaching from 23rd January 1508. In this sermon, Sovka criticised tolerant ideas of Albrecht Rendl and controversial Christological opinions of Sigismund of Kamenice.³¹

More interesting for our purpose is Sovka's preaching from the 26th August 1509: "The master Jiří Sovka, the abbot of Slovany monastery, said during his preaching that communion under both species is good, and communion under one is also good. The people on the way from his sermon were cursing, angry and reluctant to his words. Nothing good will come out of it!"³²

There is no doubt that Annalist is describing the event with Sovka's later conversion in mind, as we can see from the prophetic sentence in the end of the report. The Annalist is convinced (to be more precise, is trying to convince his reader) that Sovka was already halfway in his apostasy. Nevertheless, if the "worst" thing that Sovka said was that communion *sub una* is also good, Sovka might have been still quite far from fully converting. The long period between the preaching "under one is also good" (26th August 1509) and the announcement of conversion (17th February 1510) puts the veracity of this account into doubt. If Sovka was already halfway into his conversion, we have to ask why

³⁰ "T. I. v sobotu den Božího narození (25. prosince) M. Jíra Sovka kázal a mezi jinými řečmi pověděl o Pikhartích, že jsou největší kacíři pod nebem; proto prý, že kacíři jiní měli jeden blud anebo dva a někteří pochybovali toliko o sv. Trojici, a tito pak o celé svátosti atd." SLČ, p. 240. All translations to English are my own unless otherwise noted.

³¹ "V neděli po sv. Vincenci M. Jiřík na kázání svém zejména provolal Albrechta Rendle, odsuzuje ho, protože pravil, že z každého národu, buďto z Židův, buďto z pohanův aneb Řekův mohou spasení býti; a Sigmunda Barši z Kamenice odsuzoval do pekla, protože mluvil, že Bůh nikdy nesstoupil s nebe na zemi." SLČ, p. 241.

³² "M. Jíra Sovka, opat slovanský, tu neděli (26. srpna) po sv. Bartoloměji kázal mezi jinými slovy, že přijímati pod obojí jest dobré, a pod jednou jest také dobré. Lidé jdouce z toho kázání láli, hněvají se, neb jest to v lidu rozpačení a z toho nebude nic dobrého." SLČ, p. 268.

he waited so long to announce it and why he was allowed to remain the abbot of the Slovany monastery. Another question is how controversial the statement was for the citizens of Prague. The Utraquists were overall quite willing to accept the teaching of the Roman church that Christ is present under both species. It is even possible to condemn Sovka's conversion and have no problem with the Roman rite.³³ The laymen were generally much less interested in religious polemics and theological disputes than clergy and intellectuals; they were usually more tolerant or indifferent to these issues.³⁴ On the other hand, Prague was in some ways more radical and proud of its Utraquist identity and had privileges that excluded Prague from religious *modus vivendi* applied elsewhere.³⁵ Nevertheless, such a strong reaction seems to be an overstatement. What Annalist presents as a reaction to a theological issue also might be a reaction to a different topic mentioned in the preaching – Sovka often commented the political situation, and his opinions often were controversial.

Whether true or not, the description of the Annalist is quite clear – on the one side, he presents Sovka's shady character, and on the other, there are honest and faithful citizens of Prague who disagree with him. The narrative presented in the Old Czech Annales could serve to cleanse Prague from the shameful conversion. By portraying the citizens of Prague as opposed to Sovka's preaching and stressing the king's influence on his election, Annalist is trying to reduce the shame of supporting Sovka before his conversion. That was important because Sovka was a prominent figure of the Prague University and Slovany monastery – institutions closely connected to Prague cities.

The last relation about Sovka in the Old Czech Annales deals directly with the announcement of the conversion. The act itself was deliberately staged as a public political proclamation – Sovka announced his conversion during his preaching on one of the important holidays – the Fast Sunday: "On the same Sunday [17th February 1510 – J.Č.], master Sovka preached in the Slovany monastery that he did not want to be with the side of both kinds, but that he

³³ For example, Václav Písecký in his Bolognian dispute pronounced this idea in his reaction to Sovka's conversion "paulatim deinde huic malo occurretur interdicto alterius speciei, ita tamen ut arbitrium illud sit celeris utrolibet pacto illud adsumere, quibus et devotio maior esset et reverentia in hoc sacramentum multo pronio." RYBA, Bohumil (ed.): *List Václava Píseckého Michalovi ze Stráže* (now on *List Václava Píseckého*). *Listy filologické*, 60, 1933, n. 2/3, p. 285.

³⁴ ŠIMŮNEK, Robert: *Toleration from necessity or from indifference? The role of faith in South Bohemia in the late Middle Ages*. In: DOLEŽALOVÁ, Eva – PÁNEK, Jaroslav (eds.): *Confession and Nation in the Era of Reformations: Central Europe in Comparative Perspective*. Prague 2011, pp. 91–111; MACEK, J.: *Víra a zbožnost*, pp. 385–415.

³⁵ NODL, Martin: *Staroměstská radnice jako místo volby českých králů*. In: CERMANOVÁ, Pavlína – SOUKUP, Pavel (ed.): *Husitské re-formace: proměna kulturního kódu v 15. století*. Praha 2019, p. 293.

wanted to obey the Pope because only there is salvation and nowhere else. He elected Martin of Vlašim from St. Stephan in his stead and personally introduced him; the burgomaster of New city of Prague, Martin Šturm, other lords and several prelates from the Castle were present. Thus, Sovka made a tumble and rejected what he had commended previously. And thus the owl [an allusion to the name Sovka – J. Č.] flew out of the cloister and the eagle-owl flew into the cloister. On Monday after the second Fast Sunday, master Sovka left Prague by the Vyšehrad gate.³⁶

The act of the conversion had to be prepared in advance. Otherwise, it would be impossible to explain why the Catholic prelates from the Castle were present. Also, the presence of other important figures such as city councillors was part of the dramatic act of conversion.³⁷ The transfer of the Sovka's office to Martin of Vlašim, a man very close to Sovka both personally and politically, in the presence of the burgomaster and councillors of the New Prague town suggests that the city council approved the transfer of the office, or at least knew of the act in advance. The timing of the conversion is also interesting because it occurred soon after the departure of king Vladislaus, and it is possible that the king was engaged in the conversion. Sovka left the city after a week of packing and settling his possessions, and the reason for his departure seems to be to get his new office in Olomouc rather than fly away from Utraquist rage.

This is not the only historical account of the event. I will present two more reports from the chronicles that might serve as proof of the importance of the Sovka's conversion for historical memory. The example of presenting Sovka as an archetypical convert (proving that Sovka had already held an important place in the historical memory of Utraquists) is the treatment of the event in the chronicle by Bartoš the Scribe. Bartoš used Sovka as a precursor of the great convert of his times – Havel Cahera, who played a pivotal role during the religious upheaval of the 1520s. Bartoš looks back and reminds his readers of other famous converts: "Before XV years it was master Jíra Sovka of Chrudim,

³⁶ "It. v tu neděli postní M. Sovka na kázání svém mluvil v Sloanech, že již nechce státi při straně podobojí, ale pod poslušenstvím papežovým, že tu jest spasení a jinde nic. I zvolil na své místo M. Martina od sv. Štěpána a on ho tam uvodil a při tom byl purkmistr novoměstský v ty časy, Martin Šturm, i jiní páni a někteří preláti s hradu. A tak tehdy M. Sovka převrhl kozelec, a co prvé velebil, to potupil; sova vyletěla z kláštera a vejř vklouzl do kláštera; a potom v pondělí po druhé neděli postní týž M. Sovka vyjel z Prahy vyšehradskou branou." SLČ, p. 273. According to Tomek, Sovka wasn't leaving the city by the usual way to Olomouc hinting that Annalist might wanted to point out that Sovka was trying to hide his departure. TOMEK, V. V.: *Dějepis*, p. 306.

³⁷ In some ways it reminds later revocation sermons, however he seems to be quite mild in his statements. RYANTOVÁ, Marie: *Raně novověká revokační kázání konvertitů k protestantismu*. Český časopis historický, 113, 2015, n. 3, pp. 669–713.

former abbot of Slovany monastery in the New city of Prague; he was a great teacher and preacher and he had withheld the truth of the communion of Christ body and blood; later he started longing for the secular glory and went to Olomouc in Moravia amongst the Romans where he betrayed and denied all he had said before and taught against it. God pitied this wrongdoing and sent a quick and inglorious death to him. And, around this Havel, the wind is already blowing, as you will read later. What is in the future, only God knows, but various punishments are waiting for this kind of apostates.”³⁸

The polemical intention of the author is clear; Bartoš uses Sovka's story as a convenient polemical tool. For Bartoš the Scribe, Sovka is part of the line of great converts from the Utraquist faith: “Please, look to your ancestors: Hilarius, Křižanovský, Sovka and many others who wished the same things as you do. And what they have got from it and how have they ended, everybody knows very well. And you are going to end the same way, remember this well because you have risen against God and his truth as well as his faithful and chosen men.”³⁹

In Bartoš's chronicle, we can find two prominent motives of the description of converts. First is the motivation for conversion – it is not because of arguments or change of heart, but for temporal glory, money or some other secular benefits.⁴⁰ Second is the quick, sudden and dishonest death of the convert that followed soon after the conversion and which is presented as

³⁸ “Tak jest také učinil před XVti lety mistr Jíra Sovka z Chrudimě, opat někdy kláštera Slovan-ského na Novém městě Pražském, že jsa znamenitým učitelem a knězem zastával pravdu pod obojí způsobou v přijímání těla a krve Kristovy; potom zachtělo mu se mu také cti světské a šel do Olomouce na Moravu mezi římany, tam zmimochočil a zapřel všeho prvního i učil proti tomu. Bůh pak litoval krivdy své a dopustil naň rychle bídnou a potupnou smrt. Okolo také tohoto Havla vítr se již točí, jakož se toho dále dočteš. Co potom jest budoucího, to sám bůh zná, neb rozličné od boha pokuty na takové poběhlce přicházejí.” ŠIMÁK, Václav (ed.): *Fontes Rerum Bohemicarum VI. Kronika Pražská Bartoše písaře; Paměti o bouři pražské roku 1524; Listy a kronika Mistra Jiřího Píseckého* (now on FRB VI). Praha 1907, p. 25–26.

³⁹ “Prosím předložte sobě předky: Hilaria, Křižanovského, Sovku a jiné mnohé, kterýmž se téhož chtělo jako i vám. K čemu sou přišli a jaký sú konec vzali, to jest všem známé a vědomé. A vám jest na též přijíti, pamatujte sobě to velmi dobře, neb ste povstali proti pánu bohu a pravdě jeho, i proti věrným a voleným jeho.” FRB VI, p. 148.

⁴⁰ LUEBKE, David M. (ed.): *Conversion and the Politics of Religion in Early Modern Germany*. New York 2012, p. 6; QUESTIER, Michael: *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580–1625*. Cambridge MA, 1996, pp. 42–43; STELLING, Lieke: ‘Thy Very Essence Is Mutability’: Religious Conversion in Early Modern English Drama, 1558–1642. In: STELLING, Lieke – HENDRIX, Harald – RICHARDSON, Todd (eds.): *The Turn of the Soul: Representations of Religious Conversion in Early Modern Art and Literature*. Leiden 2012, pp. 59–83.

God's punishment for the act. Thus, the convert's death was conventionally described as an inversion of the good death.⁴¹

The third account that I would like to mention is from the chronicle of Václav Hájek of Libočany. Hájek offers us an entirely different perspective because he himself converted from Utraquism to Catholicism. Secondly, he was writing quite a long time after the Sovka's conversion (his chronicle was published in 1541 by Jan Severin Jr.). It shows that the story of Sovka's conversion could retain its significance even for the next generation. Hájek's account is unsurprisingly full of praise of Sovka's character, but it also reflects his own experience with the bitter life of a convert: "On Monday after the second Fast Sunday, an honest man and preacher master Jiřík Sovka, who was learned above others, have departed from Prague to Olomouc and there, from the will of the king, he took the office of provost of the monastery of All Saints in Olomouc suburb and became a rare preacher. After his departure from Prague, many, who had listened to him and had praised him before, started to curse him because he joined the Christian ranks."⁴²

However, the most interesting facts come to light when we compare all three accounts. Both Sovka's enemies and his defenders tend to agree on two interesting features of the story. Firstly, Sovka was an eloquent preacher who could raise a strong emotional response from the audience of his sermons.⁴³ Secondly, both his enemies and allies acknowledged that Sovka was a very learned man. It might seem self-evident since he was a leading figure at the Prague University, but it is important to remember that attacking the learning of opponents was one of the basic strategies in polemical discourse, so it is usually silently passed by or actively belittled.⁴⁴

⁴¹ PRCHAL PAVLÍČKOVÁ, Radmila: *Smrt konvertity. Zprávy o dobré a špatné smrti v konfesním kontextu*. Historie–Otázky–Problémy, 11, 2019, n. 1, pp. 63–80, esp. 71 ff.

⁴² "V pondělí po druhé neděli postní poctivý muž a slavný kazatel mistr Jiřík Sovka, jenž byl člověk nad jiné učený, vyjel z Prahy a jel do Olomouce a tam z vůle královské uvázal se v probostství kláštera Všech svatých na předměstí olomouckém a tam byl učiněn vzáctným kazatelem. Po jeho odjezdu z Prahy mnozí ti, kteříž jeho rádi poslouchali a jej velmi chválili, protože přistoupil k řádu křesťanskému, velmi jej haněli." KOLÁR, Jaroslav (ed.): *Václav Hájek z Libočan. Kronika česká. Výbor historického čtení*. Praha 1981, p. 666. A complete transliterated edition of the chronicle LINKA, Jan (ed.): *Kronika česká*. Praha 2013, here p. 1068.

⁴³ Also in the chronicle of All Saints monastery he is called "eximius et zelosus concionator." VKOL, sign. M II 46. *Annales seu protocollorum, pars secunda*, pp. 4–5.

⁴⁴ I can show how unusual this portrayal is in one example from Bohemia of the 15th century. When Jan of Rabštejn is describing Hilarius of Litoměřice, as an ignorant diakon from Prague. Since both of them were Catholics the denunciation of Hilarius comes not from confessional enmity but from the simple fact that he was defending a different opinion. RYBA, Bohumil (ed.): *Jana z Rabštejna Dialogus*. Praha 1946, p. 76.

4 The image of Sovka's conversion in the popular culture

A typical response to a conversion intended for the common people would be either part of the oral tradition or some kind of temporary print, so we have very limited options for surveying the image of the convert in the popular culture. Luckily the anonymous Song about Sovka (*Píseň o Sovkovi*) was written down and preserved to the present times. Due to the character of the text, it is not surprising that we do not know its author, but it is evident that it was composed by a learned Utraquist (probably a member of the Prague University). The versed song was intended for the common people and meant to transfer orally, but fortunately for us it was written down later on.⁴⁵ The main intention of the song is polemical and satirical; it tries to undermine any credibility that Sovka might have had before his conversion. Therefore, the text is a very good example of various literary tropes used in religious polemics and depicting converts in popular culture.

The Song about Sovka begins with the presentation of his wicked family background. According to the Song, Sovka was a dishonest bastard from a disreputable family and his brother was criminal hanged for his crimes.⁴⁶ As we have already seen, the desire for temporal glory, offices and property is one of the most common strategies of describing the motivation of converts; it is not surprising that Sovka's portrayal in the song is constructed similarly:

“For a lamb's skin piece,
he rejected Christ's chalice.”⁴⁷

“He loves the prebend more
then the truth of Christ's lore.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ The author of the text says that *Song about Sovka* should be sung to the melody of the very well known song *Jezu Kryste, vykupiteli*. KOLÁŘ, Jaroslav (ed.): *Zrcadlo rozděleného království: Z politických satir předbělohorského století v Čechách*. Praha 1963, p. 36.

⁴⁶ “Pošel z Chrudimského / kraje, města ctného, / sám sa pankhart bezectný / lidem ohyzdný, / bratra mu oběsili, / ke cti posloužili.” FRB VI, pp. 370–371.

⁴⁷ “Pro kus beránčího kožicha / zapěl jest Krystova kalicha.” FRB VI, p. 371. Similar marginalia is written down in manuscript with anonymous sermons against Picards besides attack on another convert, master Havel, who can be also found in the Song about Sovka: “Mistr Sovka, ten pro kus koži zapěl kalich a mistr Havel, ten vběhl v pikharty, aby byl zveleben a ctěn, jakož sú se jim divně pochlubili Pikharti.” cf. GOLL, Jaroslav: *Rokycanova Postilla*. Časopis Musea království Českého, 53, 1879, n. 2, p. 211. Later Goll corrected his mistake that this part of the manuscript was written by Rokycana because of the mention of Sovka. GOLL, Jaroslav: *Domnělá kázání Rokycanova proti Bratřím*. Český časopis historický, 2, 1896, n. 4, p. 246.

⁴⁸ “...víc miluje prebendu / než Kristovu pravdu.” FRB VI, p. 371.

These are archetypal motives, but the Song about Sovka goes deeper and offers a psychological explanation of Sovka's personality. According to the song, it was his family background that caused Sovka's desire for an improvement of his social status.⁴⁹ That is quite unusual for satirical texts. Usually, the desire for money is considered a self-evident trait of the convert and is simply assumed without need for any explanation.

The author of the song also often uses various wordplays with the name Sovka. It might seem like childish quibbling, but in polemical treatises every possibility to offend, discredit or ridicule the opponent is good enough for presenting the superiority of the position of the author.⁵⁰ Moreover, the motif of birds had been part of the polemical tradition in Bohemia since the times of Jan Hus.⁵¹ The various wordplays with bird names were also accommodated in the well-known debate between Hilarious of Litoměřice and Václav Koranda jr.⁵² The Song about Sovka accommodated it too, not only because the name Sovka was an easy target, but also to subsume Sovka's case to the line of the great Utraquist apostates. A nice metaphor is made by connecting the inclination of owls to nighttime with renouncing the light of the Utraquist truth.⁵³ Finally, the motive of the owl is used in one other way – the author turns upside down the motive of the owl as a symbol of wisdom.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ "Sva pak, jsúc tak ponižená, / chtěla býti vždy vyzdvižena." FRB VI, p. 371.

⁵⁰ HOMOLÁČ, Jiří: *Polemika jako žánr (Na materiálu Šaldovském)*. Česká literatura, 46, 1998, n. 3, pp. 245–248.

⁵¹ Use of the image of the goose in polemic NECHUTOVÁ, Jana: *Dialogus volatilis Štěpána z Dolan*. Listy filologické / Folia philologica, 107, 1984, n. 1, pp. 11–18. More about identification with the symbol ŠMAHEL, František: *The War of Symbols: The Goose and the Chalice Against the Cross*. Trans. Zdeněk V. David. The Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice, 4, 2002, p. 150–153. Some modern scholars see the use of animal personifications as a reference to contemporary political figures also in *Nová Rada* by Smil Flaška of Pardubice, other scholars are more sceptical. For general overview of the discussion see ŠORM, Martin: *Nová rada k starým sporům: báseň Smila Flašky v zajetí historie*. Česká literatura, 68, 2020, n. 3, pp. 271–301.

⁵² MAREK, Jindřich: *Polemické spisy Václava Korandy mladšího*. Mediaevalia Historica Bohemica, 19, 2016, n. 1, pp. 117–122.

⁵³ "Sova světlosti nemiluje, / ale v temnostech se raduje." FRB VI, p. 371; "Sova ve dne nesmí zpívat, / než počíná po tmě výskati." FRB VI, p. 372.

⁵⁴ "Sovo, hled' na své nepravosti, / neutrhej lepších moudrosti, / učenějším vtipnějším, / ctnost-nějším, věrnějším. / Tvě známy sou nešlechtnosti, / více nežli moudrost a ctnosti." FRB VI, p. 371.

The inversion of values is not restricted to the symbol of the owl. Sovka is also depicted as the inverted image of a good priest.⁵⁵ Furthermore, we cannot omit the important motive of the seven deadly sins.⁵⁶ The explicitly mentioned are pride,⁵⁷ avarice,⁵⁸ drunkenness⁵⁹ and indecency.⁶⁰ Sovka is also compared to various shameful characters – Judas is the most obvious role model for traitors and apostates.⁶¹ He is also compared to pagans and heretics (specifically Manicheist).⁶² And Song about Sovka also hints that his departure from Prague was dishonest and secret:

“Therefore from Prague he flight
in the middle of the night,
in Germany found his nest,
in Olomouc he took a rest.”⁶³

These verses also address the nationalistic sentiment of the listeners, also quite common strategy in the polemical engagements in Bohemia. Another typical motive of God's punishment for apostasy is also present. In Sovka's case, the author does not speak about his death, so it seems possible that at the time of the composition of the song, Sovka was still alive.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the author hints that Sovka's fate will not be different from the fate of other converts, so Sovka should look forward to a quick and dishonest way of dying.

⁵⁵ “...boha svého nezná / krev Páně potupuje, / vlast svú zrazuje, / hoden proto prelátství / římského biskupství” FRB VI, p. 371. The notion about the bishop's office seems very improbable. More plausibly, it is another polemical tool that is trying to amplify Sovka's ambition.

⁵⁶ ČERVENKA, Radim: *Proti kněžskému neřádu, krve křesťanské vylévání, lakomství, svatokupectví, obžerství, smilství, pýše a neposluhování svátostmi. Sedmero hříchů a utrkvisté v 16. století*. Folia Historica Bohemica, 30, 2015, n. 2, p. 257–277.

⁵⁷ “Uměním se nadýmáje, / všechny jiné potupující, / moudřejší vždy haněla, / než jest sama byla. I proti samému / pánu bohu svému / ústa otevřela.” FRB VI, p. 371. “Hrozná sú to slova, / když ho pán Bůh potrestal, / aby nepejchal.” FRB VI, p. 371.

⁵⁸ “...víc miluje prebendu, / než Krystovu pravdu.” FRB VI, p. 371.

⁵⁹ “...počiná po tmě výskati / jako vopilý sedlák.” FRB VI, p. 372.

⁶⁰ “...rufiánství, sodomství, / jiné nepravosti.” FRB VI, p. 371.

⁶¹ “Ty pak, Sovo zrádná, / lichá a jidášná.” FRB VI, p. 372.

⁶² “...kterůž držali kacířové, / oni Manicheové / a jiní pohané.” FRB VI, p. 372. The term is obviously used as a common denomination for all christological heresies, not for the dualistic heresy in particular.

⁶³ “Protož z Prahy zletěla, / v noci vyběhla, / v Němcích si se shnizdila, / v Olomúci sedla.” FRB VI, p. 373.

⁶⁴ “Když ho pán bůh potrestal, / aby nepejchal, nemocí ho porazil.” FRB VI, p. 371.

Even in the Song about Sovka, it is possible to find a couple of motives that are not typical parts of the portrayal of converts. Firstly, the song's author is unwilling to fully denounce Sovka's learning. Instead, the author is trying to relativize it through formulations implying that he is not as wise as he thinks or that he is not even so learned as his predecessors.⁶⁵ Sovka is not ignorant, but he is using his knowledge wrongly and his learning is presented as a source of pride that led him to the conversion. Secondly, there is a presentation of a positive program besides expected polemical and satirical motives. The Song about Sovka reminds its readers (or rather listeners) of the main points of Utraquism. It presents references to popular authorities supporting communion sub utraque⁶⁶ or reminds them of ideological foundations of Utraquism such as the law of God⁶⁷ and the Basel Compactata.⁶⁸ It is proof that Utraquists have been using songs to propagate and communicate their ideas to the common people. The method that had proved useful during the Hussite revolution was still employed at the beginning of the 16th century.⁶⁹

5 Socratic dialogue as an antidote for apostasy

A letter with the so-called Bolognian dispute by Václav Písecký provides us with a unique opportunity to survey the impact of the conversion on the personal relationships of the convert. At first glance, the Bolognian dispute does not look like a reaction to the Sovka conversion at all. The dialogue defends communion sub utraque and takes place in Bologna, a city without any connection to Sovka. However, the dialogue is only a part of the letter to Michal of Stráž and the clearly stated purpose of the letter is to drive away Michal doubts aroused by Sovka's actions.⁷⁰ Písecký's correspondence shows that Michal of Stráž was deeply troubled by Sovka's apostasy – The letter with

⁶⁵ "Jenž byli múdřejší, nad tě učenější, / Hilarius dvorný, / Křižanovský zrádný." FRB VI, p. 372.

⁶⁶ Explicitly mentioned are popes Gelaisus, Gregory the Great and Leo. FRB VI, p. 372.

⁶⁷ "...proti páně zřízení, / ustanovení, / pod jednou přijímati i posvěcovati." FRB VI, p. 372.

⁶⁸ "Že tupíš své předky / Pravdy boží svědky, / kteréž zbor bazilejský / i císař římský / schválili sú za věrné / křesťany a slavné." FRB VI, p. 371.

⁶⁹ PERETT, Marcela K.: *Vernacular Songs as "Oral Pamphlets": the Hussites and their Propaganda Campaign*. Viator, 42, 2011, n. 2, p. 371–391.

⁷⁰ / "...de Georgio et de quibusdam aliis, quae nec tu ignoras et ego silentio transire malo quam explicare." RYBA, B. (ed.): *List Václava Píseckého*, p. 120. A marginal note in the translation of the Bolognian dispute by Hrubý implies that some other activities might also played role – it seems possible that Sovka remained in contact and was trying to convert his colleague Michal of Stráž: "Tu již Mistr téměř zjevně namietá mistru Michalovi, aby dobře se rozmyslil na to, co jest před se vzal, buďto sám od sebe, buďto z Sovkova nabádání, buďto jakžkoli nebo z jakéžkoli příčiny." Národní knihovna Praha (now on NK), sign. XVII D 38, f. 104r. Available at:

the Bolognian dispute, written on 25th September 1510, was not the first to address the problem. Václav Písecký had written an older letter with the same purpose, but the first attempt was unsuccessful as he himself admits.⁷¹ So he invested time, effort and valuable paper to rid Michal of Stráž of all his doubts once and for all: "In order to, so to speak, put a crown to the previous letter, even though that is far away from the things I am doing now."⁷²

The reasons why this correspondence is available to us are fortuitous – it was not so much the content of Písecký's letters that interested the next generations, but their formal outlook, especially his high humanist style of writing that was quite rare in Bohemia of that time. An important role in the preservation of the Písecký's writings was played by his mentor and friend Řehoř Hrubý of Jelení who translated the dialogue into Czech and inserted it into his manuscript anthology.⁷³ Hrubý also offers a few interesting remarks about the context of the Bolognian dispute and Sovka's conversion. According to Hrubý, there was a rumour that Michal of Stráž was thinking about following Sovka's example and entering a monastery.⁷⁴ Hrubý also refers to a discussion he recently had with "one excellent and learned apostate."⁷⁵ If this discussion really had happened, the mentioned apostate was almost certainly Sovka – both the description and time frame fit. Moreover, the discussion is mentioned in one of Hrubý's paratextual comments to the Bolognian dispute.⁷⁶

http://www.manuscriptorium.com/apps/index.php?direct=record&pid=AIPDIG-NKCR__XVII_D_38__10ZJT10-cs [cit. 30. 9. 2021].

⁷¹ The letter is present in Václav Písecký epistolary, see TRUHLÁŘ, Josef: *Dva listáře humanistické. 1. Dra. Racka Doubravského. 2. M. Václava Píseckého s doplňkem Listáře Jana Šlechtý ze Všehrd* (now on *Dva listáře*). Praha 1897, nr. XVI.

⁷² "Volo enim aliam scribendi provinciam indire, ut epistolae priori nuper ad te transmissae quandam eu corondem addisiam." RYBA, B.: *List Václava Píseckého*, p. 119.

⁷³ NEŠKUDLA, Bořek: *Řehoř hrubý z jelení a takzvaný národní humanismus*. Česká literatura, 62, 2014, n. 5, p. 728–751.

⁷⁴ "Mistru Michalovi k kterémuž to psal a o kterémž ta již pověst byla vyšla, že chce za Sovků do kláštera." NK Praha, sign. XVII D 38, f. 110v.

⁷⁵ "Jednomu znamenitému a učenému Apostotovi ne velmi dávno když smy se o to počeli potýkati mlčení učinil, že smy sobě ještě nikdy v takové núzy jsuce skrze ně položení biskupuov sami bez římské strany ani volili ani potvrzovali ani od jiné stolice než od římské jich brali nebo přijimali." NK Praha, sign. XVII D 38, f. 121v.

⁷⁶ ČERVENKA, Jan: *Literární dialogy, tolerance, reformace* (now on *Literární dialogy*). Olomouc 2020 (unpublished doctoral thesis), p. 176–182. Sovka is mentioned directly when Hrubý laments that the most learned men are becoming heretics. NK Praha, sign. XVII D 38. f. 482v–483r. This is another instance where Sovka is acknowledged as a learned man and simultaneously denounced as an apostate.

In his writing, Václav Písecký presents a carefully constructed account of a dispute he had over *Apologia Fratrum* with one learned Dominican theologian during his studies in Bologna. The dialogue is clearly inspired by the form and method of Socratic dialogue,⁷⁷ which is interesting because Socratic dialogues were rarely used.⁷⁸ A possible explanation why Písecký used this unusual literary form could be an attempt to show that humanism might be used to defend Utraquism efficiently. At least Písecký considered the dialogue the best way to drive away Michal's doubts caused by Sovka's conversion. And the same goes for Hrubý, who considers the Bolognian dispute the best apology of Utraquism he has ever read.⁷⁹

I have surveyed the arguments and formal aspects of the Bolognian dispute elsewhere;⁸⁰ here, it will suffice to mention the details that might have some connection to Sovka. It is important to note that the account of the dispute held in Bologna was, at least partially, artificially constructed. Even Hrubý emphasized that readers "should not think that the Monk was using exactly the same words as they were written down by our Master, he used his own words everywhere and his own ideas. Because that is the way how learned and wise men compose dialogues."⁸¹ Nevertheless, more important is that Písecký is trying hard to present the disputation as a real event – for example, he devoted much space to describe the journey of *Apologia Fratrum* to Italy, including the names of all messengers from Bohemia and Písecký's strenuous effort to find a way how to dispute about sub utraque without danger of being accused of heresy. Despite this detailed account, the name of the most important character is missing. Even Řehoř Hrubý, the translator of the letter, did not know the identity of the opponent and had to call him simply the Monk. It seems plausible that he did so as a reference to Sovka, who was also a monk and learned man. Another reference to Sovka might be Písecký's definition of the heretic. He is quoting Augustine's definition of heretic as someone who invents new things for his temporal benefit.⁸² That this is a reference to Sovka is highlighted by Řehoř Hrubý of Jelení, who added a simple marginal note

⁷⁷ KOLÁR, Jaroslav: *Dva světy humanistického dialogu*. Slavia, 65, 1996, n. 3, pp. 348–350.

⁷⁸ HNKINS, James: *Plato in the Italian Renaissance I*. Leiden 1990, pp. 3–9.

⁷⁹ NK Praha, sign. XVII D 38, f. 105r.

⁸⁰ ČERVENKA, J.: *Literární Dialogy*, pp. 159–171.

⁸¹ "Nemysl žádný také sobě, aby ta slova byla toho mnicha, kteráž sú v mnichových řečech latinská položena – všudyť mistr svými slovy jeho vypravuje smysly. Neb tak dělají muží vtípní a učení, když dialogy pišíe. Ke kterýmžto dialogům jistě i vtip velmi ostrý i umění veliké a výmluvnost hojná musí býti." NK Praha, sign. XVII D 38, f. 105r.

⁸² RYBA, B.: *List Václava Píseckého*, p. 282.

to this passage: "Sovka thus and from these reasons have done."⁸³ As we have already seen, the desire for temporal goods is one of the strongest motives used in the description of conversion.

The last question is why Michal was so disturbed and why Písecký devoted so much effort in refuting Sovka's case. The answer can be found in their shared intellectual background, the Prague University. Michal of Stráž was working very closely with Sovka. After his election to the office of dean in 1500, Michal of Stráž wrote the praising speech on Sovka in *Liber decanorum*.⁸⁴ We can find many instances of both Sovka and Michal of Stráž holding various offices during their time at the University. For example, Michal served as a collector when Sovka was the dean,⁸⁵ Michal of Stráž was a collector and Sovka dispensator under Matthias of Pelhřimov in 1504.⁸⁶ Their relationship was much closer than just two alumni from the same university, and it seems plausible that they became friends during their time as colleagues. Moreover, their relationship did not end right after Sovka's conversion because both Písecký's letter and Hrubý's comments prove that Sovka was still in contact with Michal. Písecký was also close to Sovka; Sovka was dean when Václav Písecký got his bachelor's degree.⁸⁷ However, he does not seem to be affected by Sovka whatsoever – he clearly rejected Sovka's apostasy immediately after he had found out about the conversion.⁸⁸

6 An uncommon reaction to common conversion?

As a final thought, I would like to offer some possible answers to the question why Sovka aroused such response while many other converts were silently passed by. Several factors make Sovka's position unique. Firstly, it is his role as the abbot of Slovany monastery, a place with historical significance to Utraquism and closely connected to both Prague cities and the University. The

⁸³ "Sovka proto a tak činil." NK Praha, sign. XVII D 38, f. 101r.

⁸⁴ "Magister nempe Georgius Crhudenensis et ingenio et eloquentia vir propemodum incredibiliterque valens, ingenti cum splendore ac vehementi omnium summaque admiratione plenam sibi auctoritatem facultate." *Liber decanorum* I/2, p. 190.

⁸⁵ *Liber decanorum* I/2, p. 191.

⁸⁶ *Liber decanorum* I/2, p. 206.

⁸⁷ *Liber decanorum* I/2, p. 201. TRUHLÁŘ, Josef: Václav Písecký. *Obraz z dějin národní osvěty počátku 16. století*. Časopis Musea království Českého, 50, 1876, n. 1, p. 84.

⁸⁸ "Georgii professio mihi non probatur. Subvereor enim, ne illum tandem eius (ut dicere solet) conversionis poenitentia subeat. Et profecto, si Italiam melius lustrasset, si Romam, ubi cathedra Petri posita est, sese contulisset, diligenterque omnia perpendisset, quo in cardine versantur, si abici in mundo et non exaltari voluisset, nunquam forsitan illud suscepisset. Equidem illud fateor, quod sentio; id sentio, quod ex multis cognosco." TRUHLÁŘ, J.: *Dva listáře*, p. 52.

second factor might be various political engagements of Sovka – his support of the Italian bishop and critique of the unification of Prague cities made him an exponent of the king's influence in Prague. Sovka can be viewed as an internal enemy on both theological (his conservative views and support of the Italian bishop) and political (his sermons against Rendl and unification of Prague cities) levels. Sovka's case might also be influenced by the intensification of the negotiations with the Papacy about the Basel Compactata; if prominent figures such as Sovka could convert to Rome, it might cause doubts about the usefulness of the Basel Compactata and the whole religious *modus vivendi* in Bohemian lands.⁸⁹ Thirdly, the reaction might be amplified by his skill as a preacher; we know that his sermons were controversial and often aroused emotional responses. Therefore it is not surprising that the reaction to his apostasy was also very loud.

The last factor, and according to my opinion the most important one, is his close affiliation with Prague University. The university was the main source of utraquist ideology and the only place of education for Utraquists (if we omit a few exceptions that could study abroad and conceal their religious identity as Václav Písecký). The fact that the heart of Utraquism was corrupted by apostasy was a great blow for utraquist intelligence. It caused various personal responses – it could cause doubts (Michal of Stráž) or trigger efforts of individual scholars close to Sovka to clear their name (Písecký and Hrubý). Also, the institution of Prague university itself needed to clear its reputation.⁹⁰ And since the university scholars were trained in various polemical engagements, they were more than able to provide various kinds of denunciations of Sovka's actions. Obviously, many factors were at play, each with different importance for different people.

Sovka's case also offers a unique insight into the impact that conversion of a prominent church figure could have on both societal and personal level. Nevertheless, the image of his conversion was quite conventional. Sovka's motives were downplayed as a mere desire for money and glory; his character was subjected to various kinds of polemical attacks, most of them part of the topical image of the convert. Even though the image of the conversion was quite common, what makes this particular case special is its endurance and variety of reactions to it. Sovka's conversion aroused vivid and long-term responses;

⁸⁹ For context of the negotiations see HALAMA, Ota: *Utravistická konfese z roku 1513*. *Studia historica Brunensia*, 62, 2015, n. 1, pp. 373–387.

⁹⁰ I can present one interesting instance of exactly this type of cleansing of the historical memory – it is a note inserted in the *Liber decanorum* I/2, p. 191 to the period of the Sovka's office as the dean, a later hand has written down a note to his name saying “impious Sovka, post apostate”.

we are able to survey only small traces preserved in various sources. One thing is clear, the case of Jiří Sovka of Chrudim served as a pivotal example of conversion in Bohemia at the beginning of the 16th century.

RESUMÉ

*LITERARY REACTION TO CONVERSION.
THE CASE OF JIŘÍ SOVKA OF CHRUDIM*

The religious conversions were nothing extraordinary in the Bohemia of the Jagellonian era, but conversions of priests could cause a serious religious disturbance. An important but little-known case from the beginning of the 16th century is that of Jiří Sovka of Chrudim. His case was a sensitive matter for Utraquists, so the descriptions of his conversion are plentiful but biased. In the article, I am trying to survey the construction of the image of Sovka's conversion and its use in various kinds of texts. The conversion narratives presented here can tell us more about community standards of belief than about the individual conversion experience. Sovka was perceived as a part of the line of the great converts from Utraquism and was used as a warning example for Utraquists. The chronicles used Sovka as an example of the convert, the *Song about Sovka* tried to destroy Sovka's credibility amongst the common people and Písecký tried to repudiate personal doubts about faith caused by Sovka with Socratic dialogue. The image of Sovka's conversion was quite conventional. His motives were downplayed as a mere desire for money and glory and his character was subjected to polemical attacks, most of them part of the topical image of conversion. However, Sovka's image differed in two important aspects – to a certain level, all texts acknowledge Sovka's learning and/or his skills as a preacher, probably due to his close connection to Prague university.

Keywords: Jiří Sovka of Chrudim, religious conversion, image of apostate, Utraquism, Bohemian Reformation, Václav Písecký, Řehoř Hrubý of Jelení, Socratic dialogue, religious satire, religious polemics

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