

The Transformation of Confessional Cultures in a Central European City: Olomouc, 1400–1750. Antonín Kalous, ed.
Viella Historical Research 2. Rome: Viella, 2015. 206 pp. €35.

This book features the work of eight scholars whose endeavors shed light on how and why the important Moravian city of Olomouc emerges in the later Middle Ages as a city pulsating with religious conflict and sometime cooperation amid confessional division. Jaroslav Miller provides an introduction to Olomouc (a useful aid for the neophyte anglophone reader) and Graeme Murdock writes a valuable afterword bringing together a number of the important strands evident throughout the volume. In between we have significant elaborations on the major theme from Jan Stejskal, Antonín Kalous, Ondřej Jakubec, Tomáš Parma, Radmila Prchal Pavlíčková, and Martin Elbel. Inasmuch as most (if not all) of these scholars will be unknown in the anglophone world it is a pity the book contains no information about their work or institutional affiliation. Nevertheless, the book is a united effort aimed at elaborating how confessional allegiances and cultures evolved in a limited time and space and how those developments reflected the postmedieval world across a dynamic and sometimes contradictory landscape.

Olomouc has the distinction in the Czech lands for being a city that rejected the Bohemian heretic Jan Hus, and by extension the religious and social movement bearing his name, but accepted the German Reformer Martin Luther. Confessional divides deepened in the sixteenth century until a Lutheran dominance emerged only to be subjected to a forced re-Catholicizing in the wake of White Mountain. Trajectories of dissent are evident. Hussite heretics were burned at the stake in 1415 with the blessing of the Council of Constance. The following year, an obscure priest openly celebrated a Utraquist Eucharist (in the presence of the bishop) and was promptly subjected to a citizen's arrest only to be released at the intervention of the episcopal office. These were minor incidents within a major conflagration reflected in poignant manuscript marginalia by the priest Mach of Hnojice, who scribbled that there was nowhere to go ("Mach, where could you go?"), since the land is beset by "wolves and lions everywhere" (two-legged ones), and people are "half-dead half-alive."

Oddities abound. The Premonstratensian house just outside the city walls tacitly supported heresy from the Hussite period to the 1560s. The will of episcopal authority was sometimes subverted. The sentences stemming from the battle at White Mountain

were executed in Prague but commuted in Olomouc. Though a traditional seat of a bishopric with cathedral, chapter, and consistory, Catholic piety had to compete with the claims of Protestants, latter-day heretics, and dissenters. The Czech kingdom had gained a reputation for heresy and rebellion but the renewed cult of Cyril and Methodius offered an antidote to that perceived malady. Confraternities helped to rejuvenate Olomouc as a center of reformed Catholic religious practice. What appeared as an image of harmonious Catholic polity was soon shattered by conflict between the consistory and the city council. These transformations underscore the evolution and complexity of relations between urban communities and religious change, a point this volume does not fail to underscore. Still, Olomouc could claim to be one of only two cities within the Czech Crown to retain a consecrated bishop throughout the revolutionary days and religious upheavals associated with the Hussite movement.

What emerges from the cauldron of conflict in Olomouc is a new sacred landscape. Heresy has been eradicated, Catholic religious practice gains dominance, and architecture reinforces the new culture. Columns depicting Roman theology and practice are erected, churches are enlarged, and the cityscape takes on a new and profound look. Murdock invites us to consider the sense in which the city is perhaps trying too hard to be Catholic, to “demonstrate its Catholic credentials” and by implication attempting to “forget its heretical past” (172).

The book features thirty-six figures, a helpful bibliography, and references to archival materials that have informed and fortified the narrative in important ways. The volume stands without antecedent or peer in anglophone scholarship and opens up an important and relatively unexplored area for further research into ecclesiastical practices and religious beliefs in the later medieval and early modern periods. It is an indispensable contribution to the study and understanding of European confessional identity.

Thomas A. Fudge, *University of New England, Australia*