

The Hertvíks of Rušínov: East Bohemian Nobility in the Eye of the Hussite Storms

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The Hussite Revolution of 1419–1436 resulted in massive transfers of land holdings, with monastic estates losing the largest amounts of territory, along with the Archbishopric of Prague and wealthy chapters. The new owners of these ecclesiastic and royal pledges were not only members of the upper Hussite and Catholic nobility, but also members of the lower nobility that have been dubbed the so-called military aristocracy in the heretofore Czech historiographic literature. This so-called military aristocracy can be simply defined as a group of noble-born individuals from the upper and lower nobility that acquired significant property during the Hussite Wars (usually through the confiscation of former ecclesiastic property), which allowed them to influence the political and religious events in the kingdom. Their common characteristics were “poverty” and “insignificance” in the pre-Hussite period, but not necessarily low birth, because they included some members of the upper nobility – Jan Roháč of Dubé, Hašek of Valdštejn, Jiří of Dubé and Vízmburk, etc. In the written sources, these individuals usually appear only when they have achieved a certain level of property and power. The main protagonist of the noble family Hertvíks of Rušínov, Jan Hertvík of Rušínov (~1395–1455), is among these individuals. We will use the example of the elected Orebite military captain and an analysis of relationship networks to suggest a collective biography of the so-called military aristocracy in the area around Chrudim and Čáslav.

Contrary to southern or western Bohemia, there are very few surviving written sources from eastern Bohemia from this period. Only “whiffs” have survived in the archives of royal cities and towns (i.e. Chrudim and Hradec Králové, and the same is true for the central Bohemian towns of Čáslav, Kolín, and Kutná Hora), and no noble archive has survived intact to this day from the areas in question. It can be said that if the oldest layer of the Trčka archive had survived to this day in Lipnice nad Sázavou, we would be able to approach the study of eastern Bohemia’s Hussite history in a completely different way. The eastern Bohemian region is one of the most important during the Hussite period, but still one of the least covered in the relevant written sources. One of cradles of Utraquism thus suffered dearly from the troubles and upheaval the movement itself caused.

This book works with unpublished sources (especially unpublished manuscripts from municipal books and documents located in the state regional archive in Třeboň) as well as a large number of editions (narrative sources and documents). Attention was also given to a

nearly endless sea of secondary literature about the history of Utraquism. The text is separated into 2 sections (Jan Hertvík of Rušínov and his family and Hertvíks of Rušínov – the East Bohemian Nobility in the Hussite Storms) and 25 chapters including visual supplements and the catalogue of the seals of the Hertvíks of Rušínov. The “Žaloba kněze Bedřichova i páně Jiříkova s odpory” (Accusations Against the Priest Bedřich and Sir George of Poděbrady and his Supporters – SOA Třeboň, fond Historica Třeboň, inventory number 1216) is presented in an entirely new context and uniquely describes the realities of post-Hussite Bohemia. A detailed analysis of economic sources allowed for the formulation of new hypotheses and conclusions. The importance of the institution of military commanders for the Hussite leaders in certain Czech royal cities has now become clear. Waging war in the late Middle Ages was very difficult and civic defences and their rural hinterland helped keep the war machine in operation. It’s significant that the main protagonist of the House of Rušínov, Jan Hertvík of Rušínov, became captain in Kolín in 1427, and he could base his growing political power in this fortress. Despite this fact, field armies still had to undertake raids into distant lands to procure supplies, such as the siege of Lichtenburg castle (today the ruins of Lichnice castle near Chrudim) in 1428–1429. The sources show the siege was so costly that it exhausted not only the besiegers, but also the castle’s owner, Jan Městecký of Opočno. The payment of wages to the large garrison and other circumstances drained the magnate and there are only sporadic mentions of Jan Městecký after ceding the castle to the Orebites and Jan Hertvík of Rušínov when compared to the previous period.

This book does not focus on just Jan Hertvík of Rušínov. It would not be possible to correctly understand and evaluate importance of the family Hertvík’s of Rušínov without examining the social circles that we most often call the lower nobility in what today are the districts of Pardubice, Chrudim, Havlíčkův Brod, and Kutná Hora (that generally correspond to the historical Čáslav and Chrudim regions). The fates of noble servants and their companies are also examined. The work also notes the position of women in medieval society. A partial analysis of the Chrudim municipal environment shows the transformation of the relations between the lower nobility and royal towns and cities during the 15th century. To the contrary, the surviving manuscript of the oldest Přibyslav municipal book (1441) 1444–1600 demonstrates how the Hussite Revolution formed large new noble estates. A heretofore unknown record from the oldest municipal book in Český Brod (1420) 1448–1597 allows us to determine the make-up of Jan Pardus of Hrádek and Vratkov’s retinue, which is exceptionally important for a comparison with Hertvík’s entourage. The manuscript from the book in Český Brod also offers a unique picture of a time when the town was administered by the Orphans and

suggests how individual Hussite organisations approached municipal administration in their sphere of influence. The various data available about the size of noble retinues and their financing allows us to estimate how large the entourages of individual nobles were and how much they cost.

Work on this topic continues my long-term approach of observing the municipal environment by following the fates of specific individuals in the context of the given social class and the time they lived in, not because it is “in” or “popular,” but because I am deeply convinced of its value. The lives of the lower nobility were lived in the context of the standards of the time, conditioned by their social standing; the size of their property; individual abilities; and contacts with the sovereign, members of the upper and lower nobility, royal and other towns, and representatives of ecclesiastic institutions. Monitoring these networks of relationships, supported by interdisciplinary research of the surviving sources, allows for a much broader spectrum of testimonies and interpretations and dynamically captures and monitors the fates of selected individuals at times when the sources are lacking. However, this monograph should be more about the observed House of Rušínov than their time. But Jan Hertvík of Rušínov’s times created the fundamental context of his story, and it would be incomplete without them.

We lack a detailed study of the economic level in the stories of selected members of the so-called military aristocracy. Most authors limit themselves to listing property the specific noble acquired without subjecting the data to the proper criticism that is fundamental for its correct understanding and interpretation. Noting the economic aspects is key to understanding the ascent of these individuals. The case of Jan Hertvík of Rušínov demonstrates the expansion of a specific noble domain including determining its estimated size and the number of castles, forts, cities and towns, estate farms, villages, and other sources of production like mines, smiths, and mills. It was necessary to go further in the case of comparing Hertvík’s property, noting the war-time economy of Hussite Bohemia, including extensive expenditures for the ascending lower nobility. Providing food for people, fodder for animals, maintaining shelters and economic and defensive structures, and providing enough financial resources for the regular operation of the estate was the daily bread not only of members of the so-called military aristocracy, but almost all noble families. These needs inordinately grew during military campaigns or prolonged political negotiations.

The confiscation of monastic estates during the Hussite Wars did not just drain the royal coffers, but together with the sale of royal pledges also damaged the economic fundamentals of royal power. The portions of the revolutionary spoils on the one hand intensified the

discrepancies in property among a single class, while on the other hand disrupting the heretofore social stratification by destroying the boundaries between poor lords and the enriched so-called military aristocracy of low birth. The fact remains that thanks to Jan Hertvík of Rušínov and other lower nobles, including the descendants of Diviš Bořek of Miletínek, Vilém Kostka of Postupice, Jan Čabelický of Soutice, Mikuláš Trčka of Lípa, and many others, Hynek Ptáček of Pirkenštejn and later George of Poděbrady could launch a massive power struggle that led to the preservation Utraquism's legacy in the Czech lands and later to the election of the kingdom's administrator as the new King of Bohemia. However, Jan Hertvík of Rušínov never saw that, dying either during or shortly after 1455, robbing George of Poděbrady of a major supporter. Jan's descendants never achieved their father's importance and the family gradually became impoverished and lost power. The successors to Hertvík's efforts were the Trčkas of Lípa, whose star began to meteorically rise from the 15th century.