

Petra Mutlová, *The Case of the Other Hussites: Revisiting a Historiographical Construct of the Czech Reformation*. Habilitation Thesis. Masaryk University, Faculty of Arts, Brno, 2018.

Abstract

The main objective of the study is to reassess and analyse the concept of the so-called Dresden School, which allegedly comprised several German masters active at Prague University at the beginning of the 15th century. Numerous references in the scholarly literature rendered the existence of this School an accepted fact. During the early and formative years of the Hussite movement in Bohemia, this group of Germans from Dresden presumably ran a “School” located at the Black Rose House in Prague and played an important role in the scholarly disputes of that time. This group was apparently centred around Peter and Nicholas of Dresden, two well-educated theoreticians with extreme ideas concerning the contemporary state of affairs in the Church and the society. The activity of the Dresden School proved to be a stimulating element in religious developments in Prague up until the year 1417, and maintained a strong influence on the radical Hussite parties thereafter. Nevertheless, how the concept of this particular School should be understood remains unclear.

The study therefore examines the available written sources and scrutinizes the information they contain in order to find out whether the Dresden School existed as a well-defined group. As a first step, it analyses the contemporary period when the Dresden School was allegedly in existence. This comprises several stages: firstly, compiling references to the group or its members made by external contemporary sources (including well-known narrative sources or unresearched manuscript material); subsequently combining these sources with biographical data of the people and the information they provided about themselves; thirdly, reassessing the picture with the help of the literary output of individual members of the group; and lastly, looking for indirect evidence for the existence of the group. The next set of questions is centred around the later stages of the School’s existence and analyses its “afterlife”. The existence of the School is considered through the prism of its possible influence, namely whether there are signs of its ideological influence on anyone, whether its disciples or supporters markedly shared or promoted identical ideas, or whether there existed any kind of activities that could be generally linked with the consequences of the existence the Dresden School. Several 15th-century manuscript sources that attest to the promotion of the teachings of certain members of the School on a theoretical level are scrutinized for this purpose.

The thorough examination of the above-mentioned questions aims at facilitating a better understanding of the phenomenon of the Dresden School. The narrative sources from the 15th century contain largely contradictory evidence and do not provide grounds for considering the German masters as a determinate group or a school in terms of an institutional body of scholars. The biographical data of the people involved in the history of the Dresden School do not justify the supposition that they operated as a group, either. The literary output of the Dresdeners, however, revealed for the first time a hint at the existence of the Dresden School. The institutional character of the Dresden School was not confirmed either by indirect evidence related to the teaching activities or by doctrines that could have been shared by the individuals. On the other hand, primary sources showed that disciples and followers of the School had indeed existed. A transmission of one treatise by Nicholas of Dresden served as a case in point for the purpose. The later influence of some of the Dresdeners indicates a similar situation: collecting, cataloguing and promoting some of the masters’ treatises and ideas can be classified as evidence of the influence of the School. This evidence is nevertheless limited to individual members of the School, above all to Nicholas of Dresden, and not to the dissemination of opinions of the Dresden School. The conclusion of the study is therefore that the Dresden School did not exist in the lifetime of its alleged members and their immediate followers. Yet, as a historical construct the School existed and continues to exist up to this date.