

John-Jerome of Prague (1368-1440): a Norbertine Missionary in Lithuania¹

Introduction

Few careers demonstrate the intricacies and interrelatedness of the reformist impulses at work in western Christendom during the first half of the fifteenth century as well as that of John-Jerome of Prague. John-Jerome was born in Prague ca. 1368. He studied at the University of Prague at the same time John Hus was there, and was exposed to the currents of reform that had been building in Bohemia for some time. He became a Premonstratensian canon at Strahov near Prague, and eventually went to Poland. While he was in Poland John-Jerome was a chaplain at the court of King Wladislaus-Jagiello, where he preached and was the royal confessor for a time. John-Jerome served as a missionary in Lithuania, and years later gave an account of his journey and work there to Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, the future Pope Pius II, at the Council of Basel in 1432². After years at the Polish court he became in 1410 the first abbot of a new Premonstratensian foundation at Nowy Sącz in the diocese of Cracow. In 1412 John-Jerome left Poland and the Premonstratensian Order and traveled to Tuscany to take up the eremitical life at Camaldoli. As a Camaldolese he was an active participant in the work of monastic reform, and served as a *visitor* and eventually held the post of *maior eremi* at Camaldoli³. In 1423 he preached at the Council of

¹ This article is based upon work done for my 1992 doctoral dissertation, *John-Jerome of Prague (ca.1368-1440): A Study in Late Medieval Monastic Intellectual Culture*, directed by Professor James J. John of Cornell University. I would like to thank Professor John for the use of his notes on John-Jerome, while acknowledging that any possible errors of fact or interpretation remain my own.

² Aeneas Sylvius PICCOLOMINI (Pius II Pontifex Maximus), *Descriptio Asiae Europaeque* (Paris, 1534). Pp. 360-365 contain his account of Lithuania and John-Jerome's mission there. Henceforth referred to as *Descriptio*.

³ See William P. HYLAND, "John-Jerome of Prague and Monastic Reform in the Fifteenth Century." *The American Benedictine Review* 47 (1996) pp. 58-98; and William P. HYLAND, "Forma Perfectionis heremitarum: a Fifteenth Century Primer for Hermits." *Studia Monastica* 37 (1995) pp. 395-404. This article includes an introduction to and critical edition of the previously unpublished fifteenth century Latin text.

Pavia-Siena⁴, and from 1428 to 1430 traveled to Palestine, Cyprus and Rhodes, where he personally engaged in disputations with Greek Orthodox theologians⁵. He returned to Poland in 1433 as part of a legation of the Council of Basel. Due to a quarrel with Ambrogio Traversari, prior general of the Camaldolese, John-Jerome was not allowed to return to Camaldoli itself, and died in the Camaldolese house at Murano outside of Venice on July 17, 1440⁶.

John-Jerome was a theological conservative, rejecting any deviation from Latin orthodoxy, whether Hussite or Greek Orthodox. Nonetheless, he was willing to defy papal authority in the cause of reform, and risked censure for his activities on behalf of the Council of Basel and within his own Camaldolese order. Like his eminent contemporary Jean Gerson, John-Jerome saw reform in primarily a hierarchical sense: the reform of the laity and Church at large was predicated upon a reform of the lives and practices of the bishops and clergy⁷. Clerical reform involved a return to observance of canon law. John-Jerome, as with Gerson, was not enamored of radical or laicizing tendencies, nor the sweeping away of contemporary institutions in order to re-create an imagined situation of the "primitive church". Instead, renewal of the Church must be accompanied and indeed grounded upon the personal reform of individual prelates, who in turn would inspire the laity by their own example. Penance and conversion were the foundations for the renewal of Christendom.

Urgency for reform was intensified in John-Jerome's eyes by his conviction that the Catholic world was besieged by both internal and external enemies. The need for personal and institutional reform was inextricably linked in his mind with the imperative to defend Catholic truth on

⁴ See William P. HYLAND, "Reform Preaching and Despair at the Council of Pavia-Siena (1423-24)." *The Catholic Historical Review* 84 (1998) pp. 409-430.

⁵ See William P. HYLAND, "John-Jerome of Prague (1368-1440) and the *Errores Graecorum*: anatomy of a polemic against Greek Christians." *Journal of Religious History* 21 (1997) pp. 249-267. For more on this journey and on John-Jerome's views about Islam, see William P. HYLAND, "John-Jerome of Prague and the Religion of the Saracens" in *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam* (Edited by John V. TOLAN; New York: Garland Press, 1996) pp. 199-208. The article consists of an edition, English translation, and an introduction to a previously undiscovered opusculum of John-Jerome of Prague entitled *Miraculum noviter factum intra Saracenos*.

⁶ For a fully-documented overview of the chronology of John-Jerome's career, see William P. Hyland, "John-Jerome of Prague: Portrait of a Fifteenth Century Camaldolese". *The American Benedictine Review* 46 (1995) pp. 303-334.

⁷ See Louis B. PASCOE, S.J., *Jean Gerson: Principles of Church Reform* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973) pp. 13-15; 206-214.

all levels by whatever means deemed necessary. Such a manifold task would involve him in a number of diverse activities which took him far beyond the stillness of his hermit's cell at Camaldoli, and produced a considerable body of written work ranging across the genres of contemporary religious literature⁸.

The career of John-Jerome of Prague is not as well known as it should be. There are several historiographical problems which have made the study of his rather long and complex career difficult, and led to this unfortunate neglect. One such factor is that John-Jerome has been overshadowed by his exact contemporary and fellow Czech, Jerome of Prague. This associate of John Hus, who like Hus was burned at the stake for his heterodox views at the Council of Constance in 1415, is relatively well-known⁹. His dramatic death at Constance, recorded for posterity by the German papal official Dietrich Niem and the Florentine humanist Poggio Bracciolini, among others, ensured him an important place in the hearts of his Czech countrymen and in the wider sphere of Protestant hagiography.

Both Jeromes were born in or near Prague around 1370, and actually studied together in the college of King Wenceslaus at the University of Prague¹⁰. From this common starting point their respective careers went in very different directions, although there was to be another point of intersection. In March 1413 Jerome of Prague was in Cracow, where he preached and engaged in public disputation. Jerome was well received by the court of King Wladislaus-Jagiello, and proceeded to Lithuania at the invitation of Duke Witold. John-Jerome was present in Cracow at this time, and had of course worked as a missionary in Lithuania years earlier¹¹.

⁸ For a list of John-Jerome's writings, including printed and unedited works, see William P. HYLAND, "John-Jerome of Prague: Portrait of a Fifteenth Century Camaldolese", *loc.cit.*, pp. 331-334.

⁹ See R.R. BETTS, *Essays in Czech History* (London: Athlone Press, 1969) pp. 195-235.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 197. In an anti-Hussite tract entitled *Tractatus contra haereticos Bohemos*, John-Jerome made the following statement about his university years: "Nos quoque bohemi iuvenes in Praga studentes cum Johanne Huss et Jeronymo, item cum jacobello et marco et aliis constudentibus morabamur in collegio Regis Wenceslai et quolibet anno circa festum pasche communicavimus omnes sub sola specie panis, sicut communicabant patres nostri bohemi." Cracow, Cod. Bibl. Jag. 385, fol. 270r; cited in Jaroslav Bidlo "Čeští emigranti v Polsku v době husitské (Some emigrants in Poland during the Hussite era)." *Casopis Musea Kralovstvi Ceskeho* 69 (1895), p. 246.

¹¹ BETTS, *op. cit.*, p. 219ff provides an account of Jerome's travels to Poland and Lithuania.

Besides these points of actual convergence, both men were involved in the Hussite controversies (although on different sides), and both of their careers reached crucial points as far as the international community was concerned at ecumenical councils. Although these facts should not necessarily have led to a confusion of the two men's identities, in some cases it apparently did. Thus, Agostino Fortunio, a sixteenth century historian of the Camaldolese Order, probably in order to defend the honor of his order and to prevent confusion and scandal among the Camaldolese themselves, found it necessary to point out that John-Jerome (whom he refers to as *Hieronimus*) was not the same person as the Hussite Jerome of Prague. After providing the text of a letter of the Council fathers of Basle which empowered John-Jerome to go to Poland as part of the Council's legation to that nation, Fortunio proceeds to point out that *Hieronimus* the Camaldolese hermit is not the same person as *Hieronimus* the heretical Hussite¹².

The distinction between the two Jeromes clearly set forth by Agostino Fortunio in the sixteenth century was for the most part heeded by later scholars¹³. It is interesting to note one last development related to the coincidence of the two contemporaries sharing the same name. For several Roman Catholic historians, the fact that John-Jerome, a fierce opponent of the Hussites, shared the same name with one of the most notorious of the Hussites, led to a rhetorical juxtaposition of the two men in

¹² "Hoc loco illos toto caelo errasse palam est, qui hunc Caml. Hieronymum de Pragma illum aequivocum fuisse arbitrati sunt, qui sectatus est heresim iannis Uss & Ioannis Vuicleff. Porro ille Hieronymus hereticus in Concilio Constantiense suum evomit venaenum, & non fuit religiosus, sed laycus ut patet ex abiuratione, quam ille in Concilio fecit anno 1415, 23 Septemb., in haec verba: Ego Hieronymus de pragma artium liberalium magister cognoscens veram catholicam Ecclesiam, & apostolicam fidem anathematizo omnem heresim etc. Item ex sententia mortis postea contra illum lata, quod rediisset ut canis ad vomitum, sessione 21. die 31. Maii 1516 [sic 1416] cuius haec sunt verba. Sententia contra Hieronymum de Pragma Laycum magistrum in artibus, qui traditus est potestati seculari & combustus. Hieronymus vero Camal. anno 1440 in Venetii ex hoc miserabili hospitio in caeleste palatium migravit inter Sanctos multorum iudicio relatus." Agostino FORTUNIO, *Libri Historiarum Camaldulesnium* (Italy, 1575) p. 243.

¹³ The only exception to this I could find is the eighteenth century German historian Christian Gottlieb JÖCHER. In his *Compendiöses Gelehrten-Lexicon*, Third edition (Leipzig, 1733) Theil I, col. 1502, Jöcher describes the career of the Hussite Jerome of Prague well enough, but at the end of the entry adds: "Er hat einen Sermon de S. Romualdo hinterlassen." This is clearly a confusion with John-Jerome, who of course wrote and edited a well-known sermon concerning the life of St. Romuald, the founder of the Camaldolese. In 1750 in his *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon* (Leipzig) Zweiter Theil, D-L, col. 1593, Jöcher again makes the same mistake. Jöcher also makes several mistakes in his entry for *Hieronimus Pragensis* (John-Jerome).

John-Jerome's favor. Thus, we find the seventeenth century Czech Jesuit historian Bohuslav Balbin beginning his article on *S. Hieronymus Pragensis, Ord. Camaldulensium*, with the following words:

Oh, Bohemia, when the kingdom, thoroughly corrupted by the heresies of Hus and Jerome of Prague, labored under enormous disgrace throughout all of Europe, behold how around that same time God raised up for you from Camaldulensian solitude another Jerome likewise from Prague, who with apostolic labors in a manner of speaking balanced the injuries (which previously he had attacked) to the church, and restored to Bohemia and to Prague its most important dignity¹⁴.

Balbin extolls John-Jerome for his missionary labors in Lithuania, and for his piety and erudition. Balbin's enthusiasm for John-Jerome is natural enough, given the climate of Counter-Reformation Bohemia in which Balbin lived and wrote. Bohemian Protestantism had been very strong up until the victory of the imperial forces at the Battle of White Mountain in 1620, and the Hussites remained as heroes for many. The need to point out that not all eminent Czechs of the fifteenth century supported the Hussites must have been of paramount importance to a Roman Catholic scholar such as Balbin. It should also be clear that for many Czech historians for whom the Hussite Revolution represents the ultimate expression of Czech nationalism, John-Jerome would not be a hero. Yet for all Czech historians he is interesting as a prominent Czech emigre who made a mark on the international scene at a time when Bohemian affairs were an important preoccupation of international politics in a way that they would not be again until the outbreak of the Thirty Years War some two centuries later¹⁵. It should be noted that

¹⁴ "Cum Bohemia Regnum Hussi, & Hieronymi de Praga haeresibus corruptissimum ingenti per universam Europam laboraret infamia, ecce tibi eodem prope tempore ex Camaldulensi solitudine alium HIERONYMUM itidem Pragensem excitavit DEUS, qui damna quae prior intulerat ecclesiae, apostolicis laboribus quodammodo compensaret, suumque Bohemiae, ac Praegae potissimum decus restituerat." Bohuslav BALBIN, S.J., *Miscellanea Historica Regni Bohemiae*, Decadis I., Liber IV., Hagiographicus seu Bohemia Sancta (Prague: Georgius Czernoch, 1682) p. 178.

¹⁵ Thus the most thorough treatment of John-Jerome yet produced in Czech can be found in an article by Dr. Jaroslav BIDLO, "Čeští emigranti v Polsku v době husitské (Some emigrants in Poland during the Hussite era)." *Casopis Musea Kralovstvi Českeho* 69 (1895) pp. 242-265; 424-452. As can be seen from the article's title, Bidlo correctly places John-Jerome in the context of the many Czech scholars who for various reasons found the Hussite-dominated Bohemia of their day objectionable and who consequently lived abroad. For a briefer nineteenth-century Czech point of view on John-Jerome's career, see the entry "Jeronym Prazsky, mnich" in *Ottův Slovník naučný* 13 (1898) pp. 257-268.

Roman Catholic authors outside of Czechoslovakia have also seen John-Jerome as an important voice of Czech orthodoxy during the Hussite era¹⁶.

Another historiographical problem is the fact that John-Jerome changed his name at a crucial point in his career. From his birth until the time he left Poland for Italy in 1413, John-Jerome was known as *Johannes Albertus de Praga* or simply *Johannes de Praga*. At the time he was in Poland he was also known by the name *Johannes Silvanus*, although the origin of the nickname *Silvanus* remains unknown¹⁷. From the time he became a Camaldolese in 1413 until his death in 1440, the former John of Prague was known as *Hieronimus de Praga*, *Hieronimus Pragensis*, or *Hieronymus Albertus de Praga*. Finally, in certain Polish sources John-Jerome is known as *Munschek*¹⁸. The fact that John-Jerome was known by different names at different points in his career is further complicated by the fact that in 1413 he changed religious orders, moving from the Premonstratensians to the Camaldolese.

¹⁶ In French, DOM JEAN FRANCOIS († 1790), a Benedictine of the Congregation of Saint-Vanne, in the *Bibliothèque générale de écrivains de l'Ordre de Saint Benoît*, Tome Premier (Bouillon, 1777; reprint edition Louvain, 1961) p. 539, wrote: "Jérôme, de Bohême, le bienheureux. Dans le temps que Jérôme de Prague débitoit ses erreurs en Bohême, Dieu lui suscita un adversaire du même nom et nè dans la meme ville que lui." And in Italian, one finds the following statement by the anonymous author of *Cenni Biografici dei Venerabili Eremiti che son vissuti nel S. Eremo di Camaldoli* (Florence: Federigo Bencini, 1862) p. 74: "Correva nel suo principio il secolo decimo quinto, e gli errori di Wicleff si disseminavano a dismisura fra i popoli della Boemia e della Moravia per le insinuazioni ereticali di Giovanni Us. Era doloroso ai buoni ortodossi di quelle nazioni il vedere sovvertite le sante istituzioni Cattoliche da una piena di scandali quasi irreparabile. Un uomo di spirito non ordinario, caldo di zelo per la fede, e versatissimo nelle scienze umane e religiose, per nome Girolamo dell città di Praga, amareggiato dai mali della patria sua penso di trasfondere in altre ragioni la parola di vita."

¹⁷ BIDLO, *loc.cit.*, p. 246, suggests that the name *Silvanus* was applied to John-Jerome at the Polish court as a result of his missionary efforts in the Lithuanian forests. Another possible explanation is that John-Jerome was already sporadically practicing the eremitical life which he would later embrace in the solitude of Camaldoli. It should be mentioned that LEON GOOVAERTS in his *Écrivains, Artistes et Savants de L'Ordre de Prémontré* mistakenly attributes John-Jerome's two works, *Linea Salutis* and *Exemplar Salutis*, to a certain Bishop John the Iron of Litomyšl and Olomouc on p. 423. This John had also been a canon at Strahov, and Goovaerts seems to have confused the two men.

¹⁸ In LUDWIK ZAREWICZ, *Zakon Kamedulów jego Fundacye i Dziejowe Wspomnienia w Polsce i Litwie* (Cracow, 1871) p. 17, John-Jerome is referred to as *Hieronim Munschek z Pragi zwany apostołem Litwy* († 17 lipca 1440). The source for this appellation is almost certainly to be found in a sermon of John-Jerome's in the library of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow: Ms. 1487 fol. 305: "Sermo per mgrum Ieronymum de Praga, alias Munschek, in ecclesia Basiliensi cathedrali coram Concilio in octava Pasche a.d. 1433."

These factors have led to some confusing developments in the historiography of John-Jerome's career. The previously-mentioned account of Aeneas Sylvius served as the basic source of information for those interested in the career of John-Jerome. Aeneas however was apparently unaware that the man he knew and interviewed as *Hieronymus Pragensis* had once been known as John Albert of Prague, or that this John of Prague had once been a Premonstratensian Canon and chaplain at the Polish court. This omission led those historians who followed Aeneas to be unaware of the earlier career of the Camaldolese they knew as *Hieronymus Pragensis*¹⁹.

In a similar fashion, the Camaldolese historians Agostino Fortunio, Magnoaldo Ziegelbauer, and Mittarelli and Costadoni never mention how John-Jerome was once known as John Albert of Prague, or that he had ever been a Premonstratensian Canon at all. Their main source for his earlier career was the rather selective information provided by Aeneas Sylvius, as well as evidence found in manuscripts containing John-Jerome's own writings in the monastic library at Camaldoli²⁰. Through no fault of their own, the Camaldolese writers were unaware of John-Jerome's original name.

¹⁹ Thus in the *Acta Sanctorum* II Februarii, 1658, p. 101, discussion of the career of John-Jerome and his sermon on the life of St. Romuald follows Aeneas Sylvius and never mentions that John-Jerome had once been a Premonstratensian known as John of Prague. The same can be said for Bohuslav Balbin in his works. Most importantly, J.A. FABRICIUS in his widely read *Bibliotheca Latina Mediae et Infimae Aetatis* (Patavia, 1754) Tomus III, pp. 247-48, continued this trend and failed to make the connection between *Hieronymus Pragensis Bohemus* and John Albert of Prague.

²⁰ Agostino Fortunio in 1595 only knows John-Jerome as *Hieronimus Pragensis*. Agostino follows Aeneas for his description of John-Jerome's mission to Lithuania, and says nothing else about John-Jerome's early career. Magnoaldo ZIEGELBAUER in his *Centifolium Camaldulensium* (Venice, 1750) p. 26, is heavily dependent on Aeneas, Mabillon, and Agostino Fortunio for his information, and thus says nothing new about Hieronymus. In the *Annales Camaldulenses*, the very important history of the Camaldolese Order, Volume VI, (Venice, 1762) pp. 223-26, the authors Joannes-Benedictus MITTARELLI and Anselmus COSTADINI discuss the early career of the man they know as Hieronymus of Prague. They quote the account of Aeneas Sylvius concerning John-Jerome's work in Lithuania, and mention based on statements found in manuscripts of John-Jerome's writings in the library of Camaldoli that John-Jerome preached and worked at the Polish court. Despite the fact that these thorough chroniclers of their order had extensive resources at their command, they seem completely unaware of John-Jerome's earlier name and his life as a Premonstratensian abbot. Since there would be no reason to leave this information out of the narrative of John-Jerome's career, it must be assumed that John-Jerome's original name and thus his tenure as a Premonstratensian Canon were unknown to them.

While Camaldolese and other western European historians remained unaware of events in the early career of John-Jerome besides those provided by Aeneas Sylvius, another stream of historiography for John-Jerome's career developed in Polish and Premonstratensian circles. The source for this stream is to be found in the work of John Długosz, the fifteenth-century Polish historian²¹. Długosz discusses the career of John-Jerome in his work *Liber Beneficiorum Dioecesis Cracoviensis*, written in the mid-fifteenth century²². Długosz discusses the origins of 58 monasteries of fifteen different orders, including the Premonstratensian house of Nowy Sącz founded in 1410. John-Jerome, then known as *Johannes de Praga*, was the first abbot of this royal foundation. Długosz provides information about the early career of John-Jerome (some of it mistaken)²³, and also mentions John-Jerome's switch to the Camaldolese and his activities at the Council of Basle. Długosz never mentions explicitly that *Johannes de Praga* changed his name to Hieronymus, but he does provide the text of a bull of the Council of Basle summoning John-Jerome to the council. This document refers only to "Hieronimo de Praga", so it must have seemed obvious to Długosz that John-Jerome had changed his name at some point, or else he would not have included this document in a discussion of the career of the Premonstratensian *Johannes de Praga*. As we have seen, what was self-evident in Poland, where John-Jerome was well-known, was not so obvious anywhere else.

The eighteenth-century historian of the Premonstratensian Order, Father Charles Hugo, follows Długosz very closely in his treatment of John-Jerome. Hugo never mentions that *Johannes de Praga* later became known as *Hieronymus*, although he does acknowledge John-Jerome's

²¹ John Długosz was a canon of the cathedral church of Cracow, and lived from 1415-1480. See Urszula BORKOWSKA, "The Polish Church in the Writings of Jan Długosz", in *The Christian Community of Medieval Poland*, edited by Jerzy KŁOCZOWSKI (Wrocław, 1981).

²² Joannes DLUGOSZ, *Liber Beneficiorum Dioecesis Cracoviensis*, in *Opera Omnia IX* (ed. Alexander Przezdziecki, Cracow, 1864) pp. 78-85.

²³ Although Długosz correctly states that John-Jerome had been made the first abbot of Nowy Sącz in 1410 at the instigation of King Wladislaus, he asserts that John-Jerome had come to Poland fleeing the Hussites. This is very unlikely, as John-Jerome was certainly present in Poland long before the ascendancy of Hussite ideas at the University of Prague. Although it is possible that John-Jerome had at some point returned to Prague from Poland, and then fled to the Polish court, there is no evidence for this. From the perspective of the 1470's, it may have seemed obvious to Długosz that such an opponent of the Hussites as John-Jerome had not been welcome back in Prague, but to argue that John-Jerome was driven out of Prague is another matter entirely.

switch to the Camaldolese and his activities against the Hussites at the Council of Basel²⁴. Most recently, the Premonstratensian historian Norbert Backmund mentions John-Jerome as the first abbot at Nowy Sącz, without referring at all to his later career and change of name²⁵.

It is not surprising that Premonstratensian and Camaldolese authors would concentrate on the accomplishments of John-Jerome which occurred while he was a member of their respective orders. Thus Hugo does not dwell on John-Jerome's diverse activities in Italy, and the Camaldolese writers are simply unaware of most of the details of John-Jerome's early career in northern Europe. John Dlugosz, whose treatment of John-Jerome could have served to bring these two streams together, was never cited by any author other than Hugo as a source of information for John-Jerome's career until Jaroslav Bidlo in 1895. It was Bidlo who finally put together the information from Polish, Premonstratensian, and Camaldolese sources to paint a coherent picture of John-Jerome's career. Bidlo wrote in Czech however, and although the results of his work have been incorporated into Polish historiography²⁶, it was not until 1960 that a correct outline of John-Jerome's career appeared in a non-Slavic language²⁷. My doctoral dissertation and articles are the first attempt to present a systematic analysis of the life and work of John-Jerome of Prague.

Three distinct phases of activity mark John-Jerome's tenure as a Premonstratensian canon in the Polish kingdom. The first is a missionary

²⁴ HUGO discusses the career of John-Jerome in his *Sacri et Canonici Ordinis Praemonstratensis Annales* (Nancy, 1734) pars 1, t. 2, col. 753-758.

²⁵ Norbert BACKMUND O.Praem., *Monasticon Praemonstratense* (New York and Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1983) Tomus 1, Second edition, pp. 417-418. Backmund does acknowledge John-Jerome's Camaldolese connection when he writes concerning John-Jerome: "Abbas iste mortuus est in odore sanctitatis apud Camaldulenses in Bielany prope Cracoviam." But this death in Poland is quite impossible, since the Camaldolese did not establish a house in Bielany until the seventeenth century. Backmund here apparently misread Hugo.

²⁶ See Jerzy ZATHEY, "Hieronym Jan Silvanus z Pragi" in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* 9 (1960-61) pp. 507-509.

²⁷ Antonio PIOLANTI provides a summary of John-Jerome's career in "Girolamo da Praga", *Enciclopedia Cattolica* 6 (1951) p. 668. Piolanti lists only *Annales Camaldulenses* as a source however, and thus not surprisingly fails to mention John-Jerome's original name or his tenure as a Premonstratensian Canon. B. STRASIEWSKI in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (Second edition, edited by Josef HÖFER and Karl RAHNER, Freiburg, 1960) Bd. 5, col. 332, provides a brief chronology of John-Jerome's career, including both orders and both names; see also Winfried EBERHARD in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (Third edition, Freiburg 1996), Bd. 5, col. 96.

sojourn in Lithuania, which is the subject of this article. In a subsequent article I intend to treat his ministry as a chaplain and confessor at the Polish court, as well as his tenure as the first abbot of the royal foundation at Nowy Sacz. These varied activities in different ways provided John-Jerome with early opportunities to put his ideals into action, and on at least two of these occasions to see them end in frustration. John-Jerome also gained much experience and knowledge about the complicated relationship between religion and politics in eastern Europe and the various groups, whether pagan, Hussite or Greek Orthodox, who seemed to be a threat to the stability of Catholic states in the region.

Lithuania and the Catholic frontier

When John-Jerome arrived in Lithuania to do mission work near the end of the fourteenth century, he was entering a region marked by an extremely complex dynamic of political and religious conflict and change. His mission only makes sense when one understands the forces at work in the Baltic region that finally culminated in the Christianization process of Lithuania. The Duchy of Lithuania was the last pagan state to be incorporated into western Christendom during the medieval period. With the baptism of its last pagan duke, Jagiello, in 1386, and Jagiello's immediate marriage to the Polish queen Jadwiga, the conversion of the Lithuanian people to Latin Christianity began in earnest. Prior to this event, however, the Lithuanian people and their rulers held out against their Christian neighbors to the north, south, east and west for over three centuries. The extraordinary resistance of the Lithuanians to Christianization was inextricably linked up with the politics of the Baltic region, and the intrigues involved in the expansionist policies of Livonia, the Teutonic Knights, the Kingdom of Poland, the Duchy of Moscow, and Lithuania itself.

By 1283, the Teutonic Knights had completely conquered the Letts and Old Prussians, along with some smaller Baltic tribes²⁸. This brought the boundaries of the lands under the control of the Knights up to the borders of the lands controlled by the dukes of Lithuania. The Lithuanians, a larger group than the other Baltic tribes, had been gradually

²⁸ For these campaigns, see William L. URBAN, *The Prussian Crusade*, Second Edition (Chicago: Lithuanian Research and Studies Center Inc., 2000).

expanding into a formidable regional power, gaining control of large tracks of land in Ruthenia and the Ukraine. This Lithuanian state was strong enough to maintain itself against the Teutonic Order, and in conjunction with Samogitia posed a constant threat to the Teutonic Knights' domains in Livonia and eastern Pomerania. Such a *status quo* was unacceptable to the crusading ideals of the Teutonic Knights, and for over two hundred years a state of endemic warfare existed between the Knights and the pagan Lithuanians up until 1423²⁹. The Lithuanians unlike their Baltic cousins were able to successfully resist the German advance, but the region around Lakes Chud, Ilmen and Lagoda became a hostile religious frontier, reduced by endemic raids to form a "belt of devastation". Although the paganism of the Lithuanians provided the Teutonic Knights with an ostensible justification for war, the obvious fate in store for the Lithuanians if conquered by the Knights was military and economic exploitation and colonization. The Knights had done little or nothing to convert the conquered Prussians and Letts, and it is clear that their motivations were by no means primarily religious³⁰. Needless to say, the activities of the Teutonic Knights with regard to the other Baltic peoples did not inspire the Lithuanians to readily adopt Latin Christianity. When overtures were made by the Lithuanian rulers to the Catholic West, this was done through the channels of the Kingdom of Poland or the international mendicant orders, rather than through the Teutonic Order or even the German Empire.

The Teutonic Knights were not the only threat to Lithuanian autonomy. Although the Polish kingdom often served as a useful ally against the Germans throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the relationship with Poland was an uneasy one for several reasons. The Christian kings of Poland could not for long view with equanimity the growing power of Lithuania, particularly the latter's expansion into

²⁹ Eric CHRISTIANSEN, *The Northern Crusades: The Baltic and the Catholic Frontier, 1100-1525*, Second Edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1997) p. 133.

³⁰ The motives of the Knights become even clearer when one examines the situation following the union of Poland and Lithuania in 1386. Lithuania, now ruled by a Christian king, continued to be the target of the Knights' aggression and propaganda. As Christiansen remarks, in order to continue to justify themselves and their actions against the Poles and Lithuanians as a holy war, "the Order followed a policy that has been called 'illusionist': pretending that the Lithuanians were Saracens, for the sake of keeping up the influx of crusaders and gaining territory from Christian powers." CHRISTIANSEN, *op. cit.*, p. 169. See also Kurt FORSTREUTER, *Die Ideologie des Ordensstaats: das Bild des Deutschen Ordens in der deutschen Geschichtsschreibung und Publizistik* (Berlin: Colloquium, 1979), pp. 58 ff.

Ruthenian duchies which the Poles also claimed³¹. Of equal importance perhaps was Lithuania's persistent adherence to paganism. The Polish kings were in an awkward spot in the eyes of the international political scene when they allied themselves on occasion with the pagan Lithuanians against the Catholic Teutonic Knights³², and Polish churchmen sought to initiate missions of their own into Lithuania.

Finally, the Lithuanian dukes had to face a growing rival on their eastern borders. The Duchy of Moscow emerged from underneath Tartar dominance during the fourteenth century to push its claims as the rightful ruler of all of Russia, and in particular of all Ruthenian and Russian Orthodox Christians. These claims would bring Muscovy into conflict with Lithuania, for many Orthodox Christians lived in areas under Lithuanian control. During the period under consideration the Lithuanians and their subject territories were able to successfully contain Muscovite expansion, but the latter's claims remained clear³³.

Thus, as the last quarter of the fourteenth century commenced, the Lithuanians remained in a peculiar position in the political scene of central and eastern Europe. In a very real sense, as a pagan people surrounded by hostile Catholic and Orthodox powers, their position was a precarious one. The paganism of the Lithuanians did in a sense facilitate their expansionist policies, since it allowed the Lithuanians to govern Latin Christians, Greek Christians, Jews and Tartars impartially³⁴. The Lithuanians were very tolerant of religious diversity in their far-flung realm, and allowed much local autonomy. Many Russian towns and nobles, for instance, preferred to remain under Lithuanian control rather than submit to the much tighter reins of their co-religionists, the Dukes of Muscovy. The pressures put on the Lithuanians by the Christian powers were, however, significant, and Lithuania's continued existence outside both the Catholic and Orthodox orbits was ultimately not tenable, particularly given the crusading mentality still so prevalent in this part of Europe.

³¹ For a good summary of Lithuanian expansion in the fourteenth century, see Oscar HALECKI, *Borderlands of Western Civilization* (New York: The Ronald Press company, 1952) pp. 110-114; Saulius SUZIEDELIS, *The Sword and the Cross: A History of the Church in Lithuania* (Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1988), pp. 19-41.

³² One such alliance was in the 1320's, but it did not last long owing at least in part to the refusal of the Lithuanians to accept Christianity. See CHRISTIANSEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 110 ff.

³³ See Tadeusz SLIWA, "Kościół prawosławny w państwie litewskim w XIII-XIV wieku" in *Chrzest Litwy: Geneza Przebieg Konsekwencje*, edited by Marek T. ZAHAJKIEWICZ (Lublin: Catholic University of Lublin, 1990), pp. 15-32.

³⁴ CHRISTIANSEN, *op. cit.*, p. 139, makes this point rather strongly.

The process of bringing Lithuania into the Christian orbit began long before the political union of Poland and Lithuania in 1386. As early as 1250, the Lithuanian prince Mindaugas (Mindog) had been baptized, and the Teutonic Knights of Livonia secured papal consent to his coronation in the summer of 1253. At that same time Christian, a Teutonic Knight, was consecrated as Bishop of Lithuania. This alliance between the Knights and the Lithuanians was short-lived, however, for in 1261, the pagan Samogitians, who were close allies of the Lithuanians, after defeating the Teutonic Knights compelled Mindaugas to sever his relationship with the Teutonic Order. This dealt a severe blow to efforts at Christianization, which at any rate had never gone beyond Mindaugas and his court circle³⁵.

There was a Polish bishop abortively appointed for Lithuania in 1255. Undoubtedly this was a counter-move to the activities of the Teutonic Order, but it has led to speculation that there had been Polish missionary work in Lithuania. Instructions of Pope Urban IV relating to the appointment of suitable missionaries for Lithuania were sent to Poland in 1263, but with little effect³⁶.

Riga and its archbishop sought to Christianize Lithuania towards the end of the thirteenth century, in order to facilitate Lithuania's cooperation as an ally against the Teutonic Order. Thus, in 1298 the Lithuanian ruler Vytenis (Witenes) seemed about to embrace the Christian faith, and after some delay in 1312 he asked the papal legate in Riga to send two Franciscan friars to establish a church in Lithuania. This was done, but the church was subsequently burned down by the Teutonic Knights in a raid³⁷.

Under Vytenis' successor, Gediminas (Gedymin), a significant flirtation with Latin Christianity occurred³⁸. Gediminas established three churches under the direction of Franciscan and Dominican friars, and also had friars among his council of advisers. He made frequent appeals for help to Rome and elsewhere against the encroachments of the Teutonic Knights, and in 1324 a papal legation arrived in Lithuania to discuss with

³⁵ See Stanislaw ZAJACZKOWSKI, "The Christianization of Lithuania by Poland", in *Poland and Christian Civilization*, edited by Jerzy BRAUN (Veritas Foundation, 1985), pp. 181-186; HALECKI, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-114; SUZIEDALIS, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-26.

³⁶ ZAJACZKOWSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

³⁷ ZAJACZKOWSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

³⁸ ZAJACZKOWSKI, *op. cit.*, pp. 185-86; HALECKI, *op. cit.*, p. 111; SUZIEDALIS, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-31.

the Duke the Christianization of the country. Nothing came of this legation, but sporadic attempts were made in the future, most notably a papal bull of 1373 exhorting the Lithuanian dukes to be baptized and thus make peace with the Teutonic Knights.

Besides the presence of many Latin Christians within the Lithuanian realm, there was also a substantial number of Orthodox Christians. The intermarriage of Lithuanian, Polish and Ruthenian nobility and royalty was also increasingly common, and helped create an atmosphere favorable to Christianization³⁹. The hostility and behavior of the Teutonic Knights undoubtedly made many Lithuanians unenthusiastic about Latin Christianity, but at the same time pushed the Lithuanians into a closer relationship with Poland. This relationship reached a culmination in 1386, when the pagan Duke Jagiello accepted Catholic baptism and subsequently married the Polish Queen Jadwiga (Hedwig). Jagiello took the name King Wladislaus I, and ruled over the unified realms of Poland and Lithuania⁴⁰. One of the stipulations of the treaty of union was that steps be immediately taken to bring about the Christianization of the Lithuanian people⁴¹.

It is certainly very likely that Jagiello accepted Catholic baptism in order to gain the Polish crown. This being said, however, it is also true that Jagiello/Wladislaus did take very seriously his obligation to bring Christianity to his Lithuanian subjects. He founded churches, established a bishopric in Vilnius, and personally participated in missionary efforts. His wife Queen Jadwiga took a keen interest in the Lithuanian missions as well. Before discussing this process of Christianization and John-Jerome's contribution to the missionary effort, however, it is important to note the extraordinary vitality of the Lithuanian paganism which John-Jerome would encounter in the last years of the fourteenth century.

The religious beliefs and customs of the pre-Christian Baltic peoples are considered to be an important source for the study of the oldest

³⁹ It was usual for the Lithuanian partner in such a diplomatic marriage to take on the faith of his Christian partner. Thus, when a Lithuanian prince was placed in charge of a Ruthenian area, he would inevitably convert to Orthodoxy, or Catholicism in a Catholic area. This for obvious reasons facilitated Lithuanian control over an area, but at the same time further isolated the pagan element within the Lithuanian ruling family itself.

⁴⁰ For the immediate background to these events, see William URBAN, "The Conversion of Lithuania 1387", *Lituanus* 33 (1987) pp. 12-22.

⁴¹ The Treaty of Cracow of August 14, 1385, stipulated that the Lithuanians were to be converted to Christianity as a condition for political union. See HALECKI, *op. cit.*, p. 118, et passim.

phases of Indo-European religion. One reason for this is that the Germans after conquering the Baltic tribes made only sporadic efforts at Christianization, and many pagan elements survived among the often only nominally Christian Balts. This survival is particularly relevant for Lithuania, whose pagan inhabitants were not even baptized until 1386-87. The vitality of Lithuanian paganism right up until the official introduction of Christianity in 1386-87 has been noted by many historians. While for reasons previously mentioned there were definite political motivations behind the Lithuanian leaders' rejection of Christianity, no medieval chronicler ever questioned the authentic attachment of the Lithuanians to the beliefs of their ancestors. This attachment continued on the part of the people long after pagan rituals had ceased to serve a political purpose. Indeed, the obvious pagan survivals in Lithuania and Samogitia served the interests of the Teutonic Knights, who used them as a justification for continued war against Lithuania⁴².

In February of 1387 Catholicism was introduced formally into Lithuania with the foundation of the already mentioned bishopric at Vilnius. The royal couple took an active interest in the missionary efforts. Jagiello ordered the conversion of all his Lithuanian subjects, and took concrete steps to effect the religious change. Besides the establishment of a bishop in Vilnius, Jagiello founded numerous parish churches and provided them with ample material support⁴³.

In the spring of 1387, the new king went beyond material support and personally took charge of the first missions. Jagiello traveled in person throughout Lithuania delivering missionary appeals to the people, and

⁴² As Marija Gimbutas states about the religious situation in Lithuania after the "conversion" of 1387: "Even then, while the Christian faith infiltrated the palaces of the nobility and cities, the villagers retained the old religion for many centuries." Marija GIMBUTAS, *The Balts* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), p. 179. As Erik Christiansen observes, "The slow progress of the missionaries within Lithuania after 1386 suggests a deep-rooted and much-valued alternative religion which rose and declined for positive rather than negative reasons." (CHRISTIANSEN, *op. cit.*, p. 139)

⁴³ Many of the important documents relating to the establishment of Christianity in Lithuania can be found in *Codex Diplomaticus Ecclesiae Cathedralis necnon Dioeceses Vilnensis* (*Cod. Dipl. Vilnensis*), Volumen I (1387-1507), edited by Jan FIJALEK and Władysław SEMKOWICZ (Cracow: Nakładem Polskiej Akademii Umiejętności, 1948). Document 4 on p. 10 establishes the foundation of seven parish churches by the king in the villages of Volkomaria (Wilkomierz), Miszohola (Mejszagola), Nyemczani (Niemenczyn), Myedniky (Miedniki), Crewa (Krewa), Obolcze (Obolce) and Hayna (Hajna). Documents 9 and 14 list more establishments, and document 5 enumerates gifts which Queen Jadwiga personally donated to the various new churches.

acted as a translator for the Polish priests who accompanied him⁴⁴. On this first missionary campaign in and around Vilnius, Jagiello went further than mere persuasion. People were driven by force to the banks of rivers and baptized *en masse*. Images considered to be idolatrous were destroyed, and sacrificial fires were extinguished. Sacred groves were cut down, and various animals such as snakes and lizards which were considered to be sacred were killed⁴⁵. Pope Urban VI (1378-89) commended Wladislaus/Jagiello for the destruction of pagan idols, and urged him to continue with his missionary endeavors⁴⁶.

The union with Poland, however, was soon threatened by a quarrel within the Lithuanian ruling family. Jagiello's cousin, Vytautas (Witold, Alexander), was a brilliant political strategist who felt slighted by the political favor shown to one of the king's brothers. After realizing that Jagiello was not going to grant him the privileges he desired, Vytautas fled in 1390 to Prussia and cooperated with the Teutonic Knights in their intrigues against Lithuania. In 1392 Vytautas was reconciled with the king and queen, and he was awarded the administration of Lithuania as Jagiello's vassal⁴⁷.

Under Vytautas the process of Christianization continued, although efforts at evangelization in the countryside seem to have proceeded slowly and cautiously⁴⁸. In 1397 Franciscans entered Lithuania with papal and royal approval, and subsequently took up pastoral duties in Vilnius itself⁴⁹. In 1398, Jagiello and Vytautas made a joint gift of

⁴⁴ Karol GORSKI, "Probleme der Christianisierung in Preussen, Livland und Litauen", in *Die Rolle der Ritterorden in der Christianisierung und Kolonisierung des Ostseegebietes*, edited by Zenon Hubert NOWAK (Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu, 1983) pp. 30-31.

⁴⁵ For an English translation of John Długosz's account of the king's activities on this mission, see *The Annals of Jan Długosz*, translated by Maurice MICHAEL (Chichester: IM Publications, 1997), pp. 348-49. See also pp. 414-415 for a detailed discussion of the king's missionary activities in Samogitia in 1413.

⁴⁶ See documents 10 and 14 in *Cod. Dipl. Vilnensis*. for Pope Urban's remarks.

⁴⁷ HALECKI, *A History of Poland*, (New York: 1943) pp. 70-72. For the long and checkered relationship between Jagiello and Vytautas and an extensive bibliography, see William URBAN, *Tannenberg and After: Lithuania, Poland, and the Teutonic Order in Search of Immortality* (Chicago: Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, 1999) pp. 1-50; 251-322; and Vanda SRUOGIENE-SRUOGA, "Jogaila (1350-1434)", *Lituanus* 33 (1987) pp. 23-34.

⁴⁸ See URBAN, *loc.cit.*, pp. 19 ff.; SUZIEDELIS, *op. cit.*, pp. 37 ff; ZAJACZKOWSKI, *op. cit.*

⁴⁹ See document 27 in *Cod. Dipl. Vilnensis.*, pp. 44 ff. As the following documents in this collection attest, the Bishop of Vilnius proceeded to found a Franciscan house in the town of Lyda. Not surprisingly, on December 1, 1398, a Franciscan, Jacob Plichta, was elected as the second bishop of Vilnius (doc. 34).

money to facilitate the plans of the Bishop of Vilnius to propagate the faith and to strengthen it among the neophytes⁵⁰. Queen Jadwiga made plans for the establishment of a Lithuanian college at the University of Prague in 1397, although these plans would be superseded by the re-establishment of the University of Cracow in 1397-1400⁵¹.

Relations between Vytautas and his royal cousin became strained in 1398 when Witold contracted a separate peace with the Teutonic Knights. Vytautas was at the time heavily involved in campaigns on the Black Sea against the Tartar vassals of Tamerlane, where at Worskla in 1399 he suffered a major defeat. In 1401 he and Jagiello were reconciled at the Congress of Vilnius, where Jagiello delegated his Grand-Ducal power to Vytautas, and a statute of autonomy was granted to Lithuania⁵². For the rest of the time John-Jerome was in the area (until 1413), there was substantial cooperation between Vytautas and the Polish king, culminating in the devastating victory of the Polish-Lithuanian forces over the Teutonic Order at Tannenberg/Grünwald in 1410.

The missionary work of John-Jerome

The exact dates of John-Jerome's missionary journey through Lithuania are impossible to determine. Although Czech priests were present in Lithuania in the years following 1387⁵³, it is clear that John-Jerome's

⁵⁰ *Cod. Dipl. Vilnensis.*, Document 30. In a document of the same year, Duke Vytautas promised: "In omnibus terris nostris pro posse nostro fidem Catholicam dilatare." *Liv-, Esth-, und Curländisches Urkundenbuch*, edited by F.G. VON BUNGE (Reval and Riga: 1853-1910) vol. 4, doc. 1784. For the early development of the Lithuanian diocesan and parochial system, see Bolesław KUMOR, "Organizacja diecezji litewskich do końca XV wieku" and Stanisław K. OLCZAK, "Fundacje kościołów parafialnych w diecezji wileńskiej do końca XVII stulecia" in *Chrzest Litwy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-90 and pp. 91-108, respectively.

⁵¹ See Zajackowski, *op. cit.*, p. 137. Also, Zofia KOZŁOWSKA-BUDKOWA notes that the need to train clergy for Lithuania was certainly an impetus for the re-foundation of the university in 1397, and its actual restoration in 1400. See her article "The Foundation of The University of Cracow", in *Poland and Christian Civilization*, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-178. For the long-term results of this policy, see Kazimierz WOJCIK, "Kontakty intelektualne z Litwą. Litwini na Uniwersytecie Krakowskim" in *Chrzest Litwy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 231-240.

⁵² HALECKI describes these events in some detail in *A History of Poland*, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-80.

⁵³ Karl VÖLKER notes in *Kirchengeschichte Polens* (Berlin and Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1930) p. 87: "Tschechische und auch deutsche Priester waren darunter" in Lithuania in 1387. See also SUZIEDELIS, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

mission took place sometime after Vytautas came to power in Lithuania in 1392. As Aeneas Sylvius states about John-Jerome:

Having received commendatory letters from King Wladislaus to Duke Vytautas to preach the gospel of Christ, he penetrated into Lithuania and with the support of Vytautas converted many people to the salvific faith of Christ the Lord⁵⁴.

John-Jerome worked in Lithuania under Vytautas' protection, and was obliged to leave the region upon the withdrawal of his favor. According to Aeneas, Vytautas ordered John-Jerome to leave Lithuania following the severe complaints of the people against the missionary's zealous activities:

Men followed their women and asserted that they could not bear the new religion, and said that they would rather relinquish their land and ancestral hearths than give up the religion handed down to them from their ancestors. Moved by this protest and frightened of tumult among the people, Vytautas desired that the common people be without Christ rather than himself. Having revoked the letters which had been sent to provincial governors ordering them to assist Jerome, he ordered that man to withdraw from the province⁵⁵.

Unfortunately these letters are not extant, and the date of John-Jerome's journey remains a matter for speculation. As mentioned, John-Jerome probably arrived at the Polish court in 1394, and served the Polish king until his departure for Italy in 1413. From 1405 to 1410 John-Jerome was preaching and writing in Cracow, and from 1410 to 1413 he was abbot of the newly-established Premonstratensian house at Nowy Sącz south of Cracow⁵⁶.

There are two documents in the cathedral archive in Vilnius which may contain references to John-Jerome. The first, dated May 9, 1397,

⁵⁴ "Ubi acceptis literis ab Vladislao rege commendaticiis praedicaturus evangelium Christi ad Vitoldum principem in Lituaniā penetravit multosque populos Vitoldi favore fretus ad salutiferam Dei Christi fidem convertit." *Descriptio*, p. 365.

⁵⁵ "Sequuntur et viri mulieres nec se ferre posse novum cultum asserunt, relinquere potius terram et patrios lares quam religionem a maioribus acceptam dicunt. Motus ea re Vitoldus veritusque populorum tumultum Christo potius quam sibi deesse plebem voluit. Revocatisque literis, quas praesidibus provinciarum declarat jubens parere Hieronymo, hominem ex provincia decedere iussit." *Descriptio*, p. 365.

⁵⁶ Wilhelm Mannhardt is incorrect in placing John-Jerome's missionary journey in the years 1413-1416. He arrives at this conclusion by assuming John-Jerome came to Poland and Lithuania following the anti-Catholic uprising in Prague upon the execution of John Hus at Constance. Mannhardt knows nothing of John-Jerome's career at the Polish court, and is building his assumptions upon mistakes made by Aeneas Sylvius concerning the chronology of John-Jerome's career. See Wilhelm MANNHARDT, *Letto-preussische Götterlehre* (Riga: Lettisch-Literarische Gesellschaft, Band 21, 1936), p. 133.

concerns the foundation of a chapel by the bishop of Vilnius in honor of St. Andrew and St. Francis, as well as the Polish saints Stanislaus and Wladislaus. In the discussion of the new chapel's location, the home of a Canon John the Bohemian is mentioned⁵⁷. Likewise among the names of witnesses at the end of this same document is found a certain *Joannes Boemus*⁵⁸. In the *Testamentum Andreae Primi Episcopi Vilnensis*, dated October 27, 1397, a *Joannes Bohemus* is listed among the witnesses⁵⁹.

If these two documents do refer to John-Jerome, it would place his mission to Lithuania in the years 1397-98. It would not be surprising that a cleric on personal terms with King Wladislaus/Jagiello would be asked to witness important ecclesiastical documents if he were in Vilnius. Also, the odd occurrence of Vytautas revoking John-Jerome's permit to preach in Lithuania might be related to Vytautas' above-mentioned separate peace with the Teutonic Order, and the resulting tension between the two royal cousins. This would explain why there is no further mention of John-Jerome in any subsequent Lithuanian sources. If these documents do not refer to John-Jerome, than it is possible he was in Lithuania at either an earlier or later date. The renewed understanding between Jagiello and Vytautas in 1401 certainly could have served as an opportunity for John-Jerome to go to Lithuania, but any concrete evidence is lacking⁶⁰.

The length of John-Jerome's missionary journey is equally difficult to determine. Jaroslav Bidlo speculated that it was a three year journey based upon the following statement of John-Jerome's from 1432:

... that I was easily able to ascertain, because I learned by experience, when I dwelt for three years in the land of the Saracens, preaching the faith of Christ⁶¹.

⁵⁷ "In castro vero pro domo habitacionis altariste de area sive curia nostra directe ab acie cimiterii hodierni, ut stubella nunc est posita usque ad domum honorabilis viri Johannis Boemi canonici Wilnensis." *Cod. Dipl. Vilnensis*, Document 29, p. 50.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Document 33, p. 59.

⁶⁰ The authors of the *Annales Camaldulenses* begin their treatment of John-Jerome under the year 1402, and note how John-Jerome was back in Poland by 1405. This would imply that John-Jerome was indeed in Lithuania in the years following 1401, but no evidence is brought forth to support this idea. See *Annales Camaldulenses* VI, pp. 223-224. BIDLO, *loc.cit.*, p. 253, places the missionary journey between 1398-1410.

⁶¹ In late 1432, John-Jerome would write: "Quod ego facilliter probare possem, quia experientia didici, quando fidem Christi praedicans tribus annis in terra Saracenorum habitavi." *Tractatus contra haereticos Bohemos*, in *Annales Camaldulenses*, *op. cit.*, Tom. IX, p. 796. In the version of this tract found in Cracow, this same statement reads *tribus annis continuis*. Cracow, Codex Jagiellonian 385, fol. 276v, as cited by BIDLO, *loc.cit.*, p. 257.

Bidlo goes on to argue that the term *Saracenus* at this time could often be used to denote *Paganus* in northeastern Europe, especially in polemical contexts⁶². However, in the case of John-Jerome it is clear that he makes a distinction between pagans and Moslems. In the passage quoted above from his tract against the Hussites, John-Jerome goes on to use the terms *pagani* and *saraceni*, and it is clear they are not identical in his mind. In a passage from a sermon preached in 1409 at the Polish court, John-Jerome makes it clear, based upon his own experience, what he means by *pagani*:

... and not the great blindness of the pagans, who worship planets and fire and quadrupeds or serpents in place of God, and by these things are oppressed⁶³.

John-Jerome actually did spend time in the Holy Land and was quite familiar with actual Moslems. The passage referring to his three years among the Saracens clearly refers to his Middle Eastern trip of 1428-30, and has nothing to do with his mission to Lithuania. Thus, the exact duration of his time in Lithuania remains unknown.

Unfortunately John-Jerome has left no written description of his sojourn in Lithuania. As mentioned earlier, the account of John-Jerome's mission is preserved for posterity by Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, who interviewed John-Jerome at Basel in 1433. The second-hand nature of this source does not, however, negate its importance. It was through this account of Aeneas Sylvius that John-Jerome was primarily known to early modern historians, and it is an invaluable ethnographic source for pre-Christian Baltic religion. John-Jerome apparently went into areas where there were few if any churches. Aeneas never mentions that John-Jerome baptized anyone, so it is possible he visited settlements whose inhabitants had recently been baptized. Be that as it may, the account makes clear that the new faith had made little impact on the inhabitants. Presumably John-Jerome worked through an interpreter, and given the provocative nature of his attacks on pagan sacred sites, was certainly provided with some protective escort.

⁶² See CHRISTIANSEN, *op. cit.*, p. 169, for examples. But it also must be said that this use of *Saraceni* to describe the Lithuanians was a policy of the Teutonic Knights, and not of those such as John-Jerome who were in the service of the Polish king.

⁶³ "...non magne tenebre paganorum qui coluntur planetas vel ignem pro deo vel quadrupedia aut serpentes et ab hiis opprimuntur." From a Sermon for the feast of St. Stephen, in the *Exemplar Salutis*, Budapest (Loránd Eötvös Central University Library). Ms. 50, fol. 356v.

The first group of people John-Jerome encountered worshiped serpents (*serpentes colebant*). John-Jerome serves as an important witness for the presence of serpent worship in Lithuanian religion. Each head of a family had his own serpent in the corner of the house lying in the hay, to which he gave food and offered sacrifices⁶⁴. John-Jerome commanded all of these snakes to be killed, and then to be brought out to the center of the village to be publicly cremated⁶⁵. This was a highly provocative gesture, as snakes were among the animals held sacred by the ancient Balts⁶⁶. From this and subsequent actions it becomes obvious that John-Jerome was not merely preaching to these recent "converts", but was actually engaged in a campaign of extirpation of pagan practices.

At this point in the narrative John-Jerome next discovers a group who worshiped a sacred and perpetual fire (*gentem reperit, quae sacrum colebat ignem eumque perpetuum appellabat*)⁶⁷. Priests ministered to the fire in order to keep it maintained constantly, and friends of those afflicted with various diseases would approach these priests for advice and assistance. In the night the priest and his followers would approach and warm themselves by the fire, and the next morning would announce whether or not the sick person would recover. If the face of the sick person appeared, it pointed to future health. If the back appeared, it was a portent of deterioration and death. John-Jerome showed this ritual to be a delusion, and destroyed the temple, extinguished the fire, and proceeded to introduce Christian ways⁶⁸.

Unfortunately it is not recorded exactly how John-Jerome showed the efficacy of fire-worship to be a delusion, but the destruction of the fire-temple by force was perhaps the most effective aspect of his demonstration. Fire in general occupied an important place in Baltic religion, and was considered holy and worshiped. This story of the fire-cult as related by John-Jerome to Aeneas Sylvius represents one of the most detailed descriptions of fire veneration by the Lithuanians, an account all the

⁶⁴ "Paterfamilias suum quisque in angulo domus serpentem habuit, cui cibum dedit ac sacrificium fecit in foeno iacenti." *Descriptio*, p. 365. Harald BIEZAIS mentions "the so-called holy corner, i.e. the dark corner of a peasant's house in which a deity or person lives." See his "Baltic Religion", *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 2, 1974, p. 666. References are given to various works of Biezais and others that address various aspects of Baltic religion.

⁶⁵ *Descriptio*, p. 365.

⁶⁶ GIMBUTAS, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

⁶⁷ *Descriptio*, p. 365.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

more valuable because the cult in its pre-Christian form was on the verge of eradication⁶⁹. In an ironic situation that has been repeated countless times since the first extirpation campaigns of the late fourth-century, the best descriptions of pagan religion are often preserved by missionaries personally engaged in the process of eradication.

John-Jerome next proceeded further into the countryside (*introrsus*), where he encountered a group (*gentem*) who worship the sun. The sun, known as Saule, occupied a central place in the pantheon of Baltic sky gods. Saule was believed to sanctify the fertility of the fields, and many hymns to her survive⁷⁰. Along with the sun, moreover, these people worshiped an iron hammer (*malleum ferreum rarae magnitudinis*) in what appears to have been a unique cult (*singulari cultu*). John-Jerome asked the pagan priests about the object of their worship, and they responded with the following tale. At one time the sun was not visible for many months, as a very powerful king had captured her and concealed her in the prison of a fortified tower. The *signa zodiaci* (presumably other sky gods) brought aid to Saule, and with a giant hammer destroyed the tower and liberated the sun from captivity. Thus the Lithuanians considered the hammer "an instrument worthy to be venerated, by which mortals received the light"⁷¹. After hearing this tale, John-Jerome ridiculed the tale and demonstrated to them that the sun and moon and stars were created by God to serve human beings⁷². This hammer-cult is otherwise unknown in Lithuanian religion, and John-Jerome's relation of the myth to Aeneas Sylvius is perhaps the missionary's most important contribution to the ethnography of pre-Christian Lithuania⁷³.

The climax of John-Jerome's journey soon followed, as he proceeded to another region where he encountered people who venerated woods

⁶⁹ GIMBUTAS, *op. cit.*, p. 203, cites this passage from Aeneas Sylvius as the best example of Lithuanian fire veneration.

⁷⁰ For the role of Saule in Baltic paganism, see BIEZAIS, *op. cit.*, pp. 665 ff; MANNHARDT *op. cit.* and GIMBUTAS, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

⁷¹ "...dignum itaque veneratu instrumentum esse, quo mortales lucem receperissent." *Descriptio*, p. 365.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ John-Jerome's story most likely concerns worship of Kalvaitis, the heavenly smith of the Baltic pantheon. As GIMBUTAS, *op. cit.*, p. 202 remarks, "In Baltic mythology, *Kalvaitis* or *Kalvelis* is a figure similar to *Hephaistos* in the Greek, *Volundr*, *Welant* in the Scandinavian, and *Ilmarinen* in the Finnish mythologies. His hammer was gigantic; Jerome of Prague, a missionary in Lithuania, noted in 1431 that Lithuanians honoured not only the sun, but also the iron hammer of rare size, by whose aid the sun was said to have been freed from imprisonment."

consecrated to their gods, and considered one ancient tree to be particularly sacred. John-Jerome preached to these people for many days about the Christian faith⁷⁴, and then commanded that the sacred grove be cut down. The Lithuanians present refused to do so, and at that point John-Jerome seized a two-edged axe and chopped down one of the trees. Many then began to imitate the missionary's action, and with saws, axes, and pick-axes cut down the grove⁷⁵.

The crowd's imitation of the missionary is very interesting, and merits some comment. Although the people present were surely intimidated by John-Jerome and his royal protection, their destruction of the wood was perhaps powered by more complex motivations. Some were sincerely driven by a spirit of conversion. Others perhaps wished to take economic advantage of the new situation opened up by the availability of the resources of these no longer sacred lands⁷⁶. At the height of the prestige of the pagan establishment, there was undoubtedly a small minority who resented these limitations on the exploitation of the area's natural resources. The number of the discontented probably grew as many wished to follow their leaders in embracing the new faith, particularly as the efficacy of the Christian God was "demonstrated" so effectively by missionaries such as John-Jerome. The inability of the local gods to defend themselves against the destructive assaults of missionaries seemed to prove the Christian case. By the time it was considered safe to assault and exploit the formerly *tabu* areas, there was a significant group of people apparently willing to do so.

This is not to say that there was not any ambivalence or resistance to John-Jerome's actions. Aeneas relates that in the middle of the grove there was a very ancient oak tree, considered by the people to be sacred and the seat of their gods⁷⁷. No one presumed to cut this tree down, but when someone finally made the attempt, the person was injured. The

⁷⁴ "...praedicavit huic genti pluribus diebus fidei nostrae aperiens sacramenta." *Descriptio*, p. 365.

⁷⁵ "Prior itaque Hieronymus assumpta bipenni excellentem quandam arborem detruncavit. Tum secuta multitudo alacri certamine; alii serris alii dolabris alii securibus sylvam deiiciebant." *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ See GIMBUTAS, *op. cit.*, p. 193, on the extent to which natural resources were protected for religious reasons. For the use of material incentives to facilitate conversions, see *The Annals of Jan Dlugosz*, *op. cit.*, pp. 414-415.

⁷⁷ Respect for certain groves, trees and other fauna was a common feature of pre-Christian Indo-European religion, and missionaries in Celtic, Germanic and Slavic areas had often encountered this phenomenon. For the Balts, see GIMBUTAS, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

dismayed crowd fled to John-Jerome and remonstrated with him. Thereupon John-Jerome, after asserting how the supposed power of the tree was nothing else than a diabolical illusion, led a group of people to chop down and burn the tree⁷⁸.

John-Jerome supervised the destruction of many other sacred groves and eventually encountered serious resistance. A group of women went to Vytautas and complained that John-Jerome had destroyed the house of their gods, where they were accustomed to seek divine assistance. They no longer knew where to find their gods. John-Jerome, they felt, wanted to destroy all of their holy places, and by introducing new sacred things was attempting to extirpate their customs. These women were joined by their men, who claimed they would rather relinquish their land and ancestral homes (*terram et patrios lares*) than the religious customs received from their ancestors. Faced with these complaints and wishing to avoid a severe popular disturbance, Vytautas revoked the commendatory letters which had served as the missionary's protection. John-Jerome was commanded to leave the province, and his mission was terminated⁷⁹.

This account of resistance to Christian missionary work, and the reaction of Vytautas to the protests, are very interesting. As far as the sources are concerned, John-Jerome's story is the only purported example of large-scale resistance to the Christianization process. Karl Gorski states that there were no pagan reactions at all in Lithuania, and does not mention John-Jerome's mission⁸⁰. Stanislaw Zajackowski mentions that John-Jerome came to Jagiello's court around 1394 and was "subsequently directed to do missionary work in Lithuania. His excessive zeal in destroying the objects of pagan cults caused indignation among the people and, in consequence, Witold found himself compelled to recall him from his assignment." He goes on to state: "Missionary activity found no opposition on the part of the population. The case of Jan-Hieronimus of Prague was an exception."⁸¹

⁷⁸ *Descriptio*, p. 365. The destruction of sacred trees is a familiar occurrence throughout the Christianization of central and northern Europe in the medieval period. For its application in the Baltic region, see Kurt FORSTREUTER, *Deutschland und Litauen* (Königsberg: Osteuropa, 1938) p. 9; Jacob OZOLS, "Zur Frage der heiligen Wälder in östlichen Ostseegebiet." *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung* 26 (1977) pp. 671-81. For an overview of the methodology of missionaries in Lithuania and its continuity with the medieval period, see Marek T. ZAHAJKIEWICZ, "Chrząst Litwy" in *Chrząst Litwy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-56.

⁷⁹ See note 55 above.

⁸⁰ "In Litauen gab es keine heidnische Reaktion." GORSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁸¹ ZAJACKOWSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

Why was there no great resistance to Christianization, and no other reactions than those inspired by the work of John-Jerome? The first thought is that there may indeed have been pagan reactions, and that no record of them has survived. Polish and Lithuanian historians have tended to stress the ease of the conversion, and have often been primarily concerned with contrasting the successful missionary endeavors of the Polish church with the rather severe methods of the Teutonic Order⁸². It must be said, however, that even the propagandistic literature put out by the Teutonic Knights in the fifteenth century against Lithuania never mentions any pagan reactions to Christianization⁸³.

While acknowledging that there may have been unrecorded reactions against Christianization, the apparent uniqueness of the events surrounding John-Jerome's mission can be explained in another way. Although Lithuania ostensibly became a Christian duchy in 1387, virtually all authorities agree that the process of Christianization was implemented gradually and unevenly at best. In a sense the Teutonic Order was probably correct in its assertion that Vytautas was not vigorously pursuing the conversion of his people. Political realities made occasional extirpation campaigns expedient, and the mission of John-Jerome was probably consented to by Vytautas in order to placate his Polish allies, who were particularly sensitive to the charges made by the Teutonic Order. But as Aeneas Sylvius noted with some sarcasm, perhaps reflecting John-Jerome's own feelings, domestic tranquility was more important to Vytautas than a thorough propagation of Christianity.

Finally, as regards the strict accuracy of the account in the form it has come down to posterity, some caution is necessary. Aeneas Sylvius was an excellent scholar, and is known to have taken notes in situations such

⁸² Kazimierz Tymienicki and Tadeusz Silnicki, for example, go to great pains to contrast the attitudes of the Teutonic Knights toward Christianization with those of the Polish kingdom. They mention the German wars of conversion against the already nominally-Christian Wends and Pomeranians, and see the later struggles of the Teutonic Order against "Christian" Lithuania as a continuation of German imperialism, having little to do with sincere missionary aspirations. See TYMIENICKI's "The Contrasting Attitudes of Germany and Poland towards Europe's Last Surviving Pagans" and SILNICKI's "Poland's role in the Conversion of Pomerania" in *Poland and Christian Civilization*, *op. cit.*

⁸³ "Even Teutonic sources do not mention any such opposition, though its existence would have favored the Order's propaganda against the Polish-Lithuanian union." ZAJACZKOWSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

as his interview with John-Jerome for later use⁸⁴. It is possible that he shaped the written account in a way that maximized dramatic impact, and in doing so compartmentalized John-Jerome's encounters in a manner that might not reflect the order of their actual occurrence. It is also possible that John-Jerome himself maximized dramatic impact when he told his own story, particularly since he had had about thirty years to think it over. With due allowance being made for literary embellishment, it must be noted that ethnographers of the region have never had any reason to doubt the accuracy of John-Jerome's account as related by Aeneas Sylvius, and independent ethnography of the region is in line with the information provided. It is fortunate that John-Jerome was able to relate this information to Aeneas Sylvius, perhaps the most serious and learned ethnographer of his day. The foundation of churches, as recorded in the documents from the cathedral archives of Vilnius, represents only the very first stage of Christianization in Lithuania. The mixture of toleration, syncretism, and extirpation that undoubtedly characterized most medieval mission efforts is witnessed to rather powerfully by this text.

John-Jerome's missionary venture does shed some light on a formative episode of his career. Although the reader is dependent on Aeneas Sylvius for information, aspects of John-Jerome's personality, such as a vigorous idealism and confrontational style, come through. John-Jerome's tendency to ridicule the opposition, a trait that will manifest itself very strongly in his later polemical and reform activities, is also present in his mission work. The reaction of Vytautas to his evangelistic effort must have been instructive to the idealistic Premonstratensian canon. John-Jerome was clearly an intrepid and sincere missionary, but the success or failure of his task was to a large extent determined by the politics of Catholicism's northeastern frontier.

⁸⁴ Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, who eventually became Pope Pius II in 1458, kept voluminous notes and personal diaries throughout his long career as a humanistic man of letters, poet, diplomat, historian and priest. For a basic treatment of his life, see R.J. MITCHELL, *The Laurels & the Tiara: Pope Pius II, 1458-1464* (London: Harvill Press, 1962). See also *Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope: The Commentaries of Pius II*, edited by Leona GABLE and translated by Florence GRAGG (New York: Capricorn Books, 1962). For a nuanced treatment of the place of Aeneas in fifteenth-century Italian humanism, see Berthe WIDMER, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini in der sittlichen und politischen Entscheidung*, in particular Chapter One, "Die humanistische Wesenart Eneas" (Basel und Stuttgart: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1963).

Summary

This article concerns the missionary work of the Premonstratensian canon John-Jerome of Prague (1368-1440) in Lithuania in the early fifteenth century. John-Jerome, originally a canon of Strahov, served as the personal chaplain of King Wladislaus Jagiello of Poland, and participated in that monarch's evangelistic efforts in the Duchy of Lithuania. John-Jerome years later gave an account of his missionary work to Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, the future Pope Pius II, who included it in his *Historia Europae*. This article discusses John-Jerome's mission in relation to the wider political and religious issues facing the Baltic regions at that time. John-Jerome would later go on to become the first abbot of the new Premonstratensian foundation at Nowy Sącz, and eventually leave the order to pursue the eremitical life at Camaldoli. In addition to a treatment of his missionary work, the article discusses various historiographical issues in the study of John-Jerome's long and varied career.

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