
MARCIN STARZYŃSKI*

[REVIEW]: EBERHARD ABLAUFF DE RHENO, *CRONICA DE NOVELLA PLANTATIONE PROVINCIE AUSTRIE, BOHEMIE ET POLONIE QUOD FRATRES MINORES DE OBSERVANTIA*, ED. BY A. KALOUS, J. SVOBODOVÁ, FRANCISCANS AND EUROPE: HISTORY, IDENTITY, MEMORY, 1, VIELLA, ROME 2024, PP. 190.

Monastic historiography – particularly in the Polish context – remains a relatively underexplored field of research. The reviewed edition confirms this observation, as it not only inaugurates a new publication series but also presents to readers the first tangible results of a project conducted at Palacký University in Olomouc, aimed at publishing narrative sources related to the history of the Czech Vicariate (later Province) of the Observant Franciscans. The edition is the fruit of collaboration between Antonín Kalous and Jana Svobodová.

In the extensive introduction, Kalous (who had already drawn on the chronicle in question in his earlier research outlines the origins of the Czech Vicariate¹), which – despite the fact that, from the Italian perspective, Bohemia lay beyond the Alps – became part of the Cismontane family of the Order (pp. 9–11). This development was closely connected to the mission carried out in Central Europe by John of Capistrano. The new friaries founded at the time in Austria, Bohemia, and Poland, together with those that joined the Observant movement (ten in total), initially formed a common vicariate, whose first chapter took place in Vienna in 1452. However, due to growing tensions – including ethnic and linguistic conflicts – separate

* Marcin Starzyński – Associate Professor at the Institute of History, Jagiellonian University, Cracow, Poland; e-mail: marcin.starzynski@uj.edu.pl; ORCID: 0000-0003-0946-2175.

¹ ‘Bohemia Chronicles of Eberhard Ablauff and Michael of Carinthia on the “Capitula generalissima” (1450–1526)’, *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 116 (2023), 97–142.

vicariates were established in 1467 for Austria and Poland, followed by the Czech Vicariate in 1469, which encompassed Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and Lusatia. The Czech Vicariate developed successfully: by the early sixteenth century, twenty-seven friaries had been founded in its territory. However, following the wave of the Reformation, only five remained – three in Bohemia (Plzeň, Jindřichův Hradec, Bechyně) and two in Moravia.

Very little is actually known about the author of the chronicle being published – beyond what he chose to reveal about himself (a stylistic feature of the era?). In the available literature, only Petr Hlaváček has so far provided a more detailed account of him (*Die böhmischen Franziskaner im ausgehenden Mittelalter. Studien zur Kirchen- und Kulturgeschichte Ostmitteleuropas*, Stuttgart 2011). He originated from an unspecified locality in the Rhineland, as indicated by his self-designation *de Rheno* (pp. 11–16).

He first appears in the surviving source material in 1482 (in the colophon of one of the texts copied in a manuscript he owned) as a theology student in Leipzig. Subsequent signatures which he placed at the end of the texts he transcribed, along with autobiographical notes inserted into the chronicle itself, allow for a fairly precise reconstruction of his itinerary (after all, the Franciscans were not bound by *stabilitas loci*, as A. Kalous rightly reminds us).

Seven volumes containing manuscripts and early printed books that belonged to Ablauff have survived to this day – two in the National Library (Národní knihovna) in Prague, three in the Strahov Library (Strahovská knihovna), and one each in Strängnäs, Sweden (Domkyrkobiblioteket), and in the Library of the Metropolitan Chapter of St Vitus (Metropolitní kapitula u sv. Vítá) in Prague.

He was probably present in Meissen (1484?), certainly in Torgau (1489), and later in Wrocław (1497–1501), where he served in the convent of St James as *lector secundarius*. He was then in Olomouc (1505), Głubczyce (1505–1506), Kadaň (1507–1508 and again in 1527), and possibly in Kamenz in Lusatia (1512–1519?). He most likely died in 1528, perhaps in Brno.

The codex containing the text of the published chronicle – according to a provenance note – originally belonged to the library of the Franciscan convent located outside the city walls in Brno (pp. 16–20). After the convent's destruction in 1530, it survived for over a century, but in

1643 it was burned by decision of the city authorities. The manuscript in question therefore must have left Brno before that date. From there (though whether directly is unclear), it found its way to the provincial archive of the Observant Franciscans in Prague, and later (after the Second World War) to the convent in Cheb, from where in 2008 it was returned to Prague and incorporated into the holdings of the National Library (Cheb Ms 157).

As A. Kalous has noted, the codex – intended for personal use – is composed of two (or rather, three) main parts. The first consists of the incunable *Privilegia et indulgentiae fratrum mendicantium* (printed in Leipzig in 1498), along with other minor texts, including a fragment of a sermon by the Italian humanist Antonio Cortesi Urceo, known as Cordus. The core of this bound volume (comprising as many as 337 folios) includes, among other works, the *Ordo visitationis*, copied by Ablauff in Głubczyce in 1505; the *Expositio literalis Regule evangelice fratrum Minorum* (a summary of *Liber conformitatum* by Bartholomew of Pisa); the *Apologia et defensorium fratrum Minorum de observantia* by Ludovico della Torre, vicar general of the Cismontane Observant family from 1498 to 1501; and the *Liber penthicus seu lugubris de statu et ruina ordinis monastici* by Johannes Trithemius, dating from 1493.

Finally, the entire final portion of this codex (the third part) is filled by Ablauff's chronicle, which is the subject of this edition (pp. 21–25).

The chronicle, written in Gothic Bastarda script, covers the period from the arrival of John of Capistrano in Vienna in 1451 to the so-called Bern Disputation of 1528. According to the editors, the work on the chronicle likely began in 1505, which is when the copying of Trithemius's aforementioned *Liber penthicus* was completed. Around the same time – 1505 or 1506 – the earliest section of the chronicle was written, and it was gradually expanded in subsequent years.

At this point, it is also worth raising the issue of similarities between Ablauff's account and the chronicle of Michael of Carinthia, provincial minister of the Czech province in 1526–1528 and again in 1531–1534, who began his own chronicle around 1510/1511 and continued it until 1521. This is particularly noticeable in the section covering the first half-century of the Observant branch's existence. Both authors must have drawn on some common source – either an annalistic-type record preserved in the library of the Olomouc convent or a now-lost chronicle by Bernardinus of Ingolstadt, written between 1451 and 1467.

The remainder of Ablauff's chronicle (from 1506 onward) significantly diverges from Michael's account and, in this later portion, is undoubtedly more valuable, detailed, and personal. It provides an excellent witness to the history of his religious order at the time. In this section, Ablauff also included various news items from the wider world, information likely gathered either from printed pamphlets or oral reports. When comparing his extra-ecclesiastical information to that found in other contemporary historiographical works – such as those by the Polish Observant chronicler Jan of Komorowo – Ablauff clearly emerges as a representative author of his time. Nonetheless, it must be remembered that it was Michael of Carinthia's chronicle that was recognized officially as the provincial chronicle.

The Latin text edition (pp. 29–141), accompanied by commentary and an index (pp. 175–89), was prepared with great care, based on Ablauff's autograph manuscript. The editors have also rightly decided to include the other historical texts found in the Cheb Ms 157 codex – either copied or written by Ablauff – in a series of numbered appendices (pp. 142–54).

To summarize: the rediscovered work of Eberhard Ablauff de Rheno is undoubtedly another important contribution to the understanding of Observant Franciscan historiography at the turn of the Middle Ages and the early modern period. It deserves to be used in future research, including scholars in Poland.