

‘...and order was upset’: Easter, the Eucharist, and the Jews of Prague, 1389*

Milan Žonca

The Attack

During the 1389 Easter celebration, a violent Christian mob entered the Jewish quarter in Prague. They plundered, destroyed Jewish places of worship and private homes and slaughtered most of the approximately 750 inhabitants. The attack, which occurred during a particularly sensitive liturgical season, was allegedly sparked by Jewish blasphemy – most Christian sources mention an earlier confrontation with a priest carrying a consecrated host through the Jewish quarter. It ended a period during which the Jewish community had flourished in the imperial capital thanks to favourable conditions created by the policies of Charles IV (1316–78) and his successor Wenceslas IV (1361–1419). While the riot did not completely obliterate the Jewish presence from Prague, it marked the beginning of a gradual decline that continued throughout the tumultuous fifteenth century.¹

*This is a post-print version of an article published in: Jonathan Adams and Cordelia Heß (eds.), *The Medieval Roots of Antisemitism: Continuities and Discontinuities from the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 287–305, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351120821>

¹For an overview of the history of Jews in Prague in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see František Šmahel, ‘Die Prager Judengemeinde im hussitischen Zeitalter,’ in *Jüdische Gemeinden und ihr christlicher Kontext in kulturell-räumlich vergleichender Betrachtung von der Spätantike bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Christoph Cluse, Alfred Haverkamp, and Israel Jacob Yuval (Hannover: Hahn, 2003), 341–63. On the approximate number of Jews living in Prague around 1389 and the number of possible casualties during the attack, see Alexandr Putík, ‘On the Topography and Demography of the Prague Jewish Town Prior to the Pogrom of 1389,’ *Judaica Bohemiae* 30–31 (1994–95): 42–45.

The attack occupied an important place in the communal memory of the inhabitants of Prague – Jews and Christians alike – as well as their contemporaries from elsewhere, as is indicated by the number of accounts of the anti-Jewish violence and the events leading up to it. Perhaps the best-known Latin narrative is the remarkable liturgical parody *Passio Iudeorum Pragensium* [The Passion of the Jews of Prague].² It survives in three versions and is a playful rearrangement and adaptation of Easter liturgical texts that portrays the suffering of the Jews as a distorted mirror image of the Passion of Christ.³ According to the *Passio*, the unrest in Prague began when local Jews threw stones at a priest carrying a consecrated host through the Jewish quarter during Holy Week. When Christian preachers denounced the assault in their sermons, the Jews sensed the impending danger and gathered in their communal official Jonah's courtyard. Municipal authorities attempted to prevent the violence by proclaiming that the Jews were under royal protection, but a Christian mob led by a peasant ringleader named Ješko, keen to avenge the injury to Christ, attacked after nightfall. They set houses on fire and killed the inhabitants, sparing only a handful of Jewish children, who were baptised and raised as Christians. 'O, truly blessed the night, which despoiled the Jews and enriched the Christians,' declaimed the anonymous author, alluding to the hymn *Exsultet*, sung during the Easter Vigil.⁴ Following the attack, town officials pressured the looters, with limited success, to return the spoils, arguing that Jewish possessions were tainted by usury. The disastrous plague epidemic of 1380 was still a fresh memory, so the corpses of the Jews scattered in the streets were eventually burned, 'lest the city be infected by air corrupt with the stench of usurious fat'.⁵ p. 288

It is likely that the *Passio* emerged from the University of Prague milieu, where

²For most recent discussion of this text, see Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 135–40; Eva Steinová, *Passio Iudeorum Pragensium: Kritická edícia Pašiji pražských Židov* (Brno: MA thesis, Masaryk University, 2010), accessed 27 May 2016, http://is.muni.cz/th/180028/ff_m/Steinova_diplo movaprac a.pdf; Eva Steinová, 'Jews and Christ Interchanged: Discursive Strategies in the *Passio Iudeorum Pragensium*,' *Graeco-Latina Brunensia* 17 (2012): 73–86; Barbara Newman, 'The Passion of the Jews of Prague: The Pogrom of 1389 and the Lessons of a Medieval Parody,' *Church History* 81 (2012): 1–26. For the English translation used below, see Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 264–71.

³A critical edition was prepared by Steinová, *Passio*, 18–29. On the surviving versions and manuscripts, see Steinová, *Passio*, 10–17.

⁴Steinová, *Passio*, 21; Newman, *Medieval Crossover*, 268.

⁵Steinová, *Passio*, 22–23; Newman, *Medieval Crossover*, 270.

the attack clearly stirred up interest. Johannes Lange of Wetzlar (d. after 1430), a theologian and physician who studied in Prague from 1383 to 1389, incorporated a report on the riot into his *Dialogus super Magnificat* [Dialogue on the Magnificat].⁶ Immediately after the attack, a certain Master Matthias composed a short poem justifying the attack as a punishment for the Jewish crime of blasphemy.⁷ The motif of crime and punishment is also emphasised in a pithy Old Czech summary of Matthias's verse, perhaps written by a diligent student and attached to the original: '[In the year] one thousand three hundred eighty-nine, the Jews were burned here, Jonah was killed in Prague. On the day of Christ's resurrection they were given hard penance'.⁸

The most famous Jewish description of the attack is preserved in the Hebrew elegy [*selihah*] _'Et kol ha-tela'ah_ [All the Afflictions], composed by Avigdor Kara (Qara'; d. 1439), a local Jewish scholar and schoolteacher who survived the attack.⁹ Kara's *selihah* emulates the style of elegies composed in earlier centuries to commemorate the martyrs of anti-Jewish persecutions, particularly the First Crusade. It describes the destruction inflicted upon the Jewish inhabitants of Prague on the last day of the joyful Passover festival, the eight days of which fell exactly on the Christian Holy Week that year, beginning on Palm Sunday.

Paralleling the *Passio*, with its pastiche-like use of biblical quotations and allusions, the elegy singles out the martyrdom of an unnamed rabbi, the destruction of the two synagogues, the desecration of the Jewish cemetery and the Torah scrolls. Like the Christian narratives, Kara also mentions both the parents who chose to kill their children and commit suicide, rather than fall at the

⁶Ernst-Stephan Bauer, *Frömmigkeit, Gelehrsamkeit und Zeitkritik an der Schwelle der grossen Konzilien: Johannes von Wetzlar und sein Dialogus super Magnificat (1427)* (Mainz: Selbstverlag der Gesellschaft für Mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte, 1981), 272–77.

⁷Newman, 'The Passion of the Jews of Prague,' 8, n. 37; Steinová, *Passio*, 11; Daniel Soukup, 'Latinské a české verše o pražském pogromu roku 1389: Ke dvěma pozapomenutým žákovským skladbám,' *Česká literatura* 5 (2012): 711–26.

⁸Soukup, 'Latinské a české verše,' 714.

⁹On Kara's life, occupation and intellectual profile, see Arye Maimon, Mordechai Breuer, and Yacov Guggenheim, ed., *Germania Judaica, Bd. 3, 1350–1519, Vol. 2* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 1126–27; Milan Žonca, 'Několik poznámek k intelektuálnímu profilu Avigdora Kary,' in *Dvarim meatim: Studie pro Jiřínu Šedinovou*, ed. Daniel Boušek, Magdalena Křížová, and Pavel Sládek (Praha: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2016), 35–56. In the following discussion, I quote from the earliest printed version of the elegy, as found in *Selihot le-fi seder q[ehilah] q[edošah] Prag* (Prague: Gershom Kohen, 1529), sec. 168. For an English translation, see Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 196–98. I have used my own translation.

hands of Christian attackers, and the Jewish orphans who were later baptised and adopted by Christian townsfolk.¹⁰ The poem concludes with an invocation of God's vengeance and a plea for the speedy advent of redemption. Kara's elegy was later included in Prague's early printed prayer books and incorporated into the liturgical rite of the Old-New Synagogue in Prague, thereby connecting the commemoration of this local event with the cyclical remembrance of catastrophes that had befallen the Jewish nation throughout history.

The two famous narratives report the events of 1389 from opposing vantage points, but nonetheless share common traits, and even constitute a form of mutual dialogue.¹¹ Both texts use sacred history remembered and re-enacted in religious ritual as a lens through which the violence is observed and ultimately endowed with meaning. While the anonymous *Passio* rearranges motifs and quotations from the Gospel narratives of Christ's Passion and resurrection, creating a highly complex representation of the attack, its motivations and its reverberations that is deeply embedded in Christian liturgical and devotional practices, Kara's elegy employs the imagery of the Passover celebration to present models of Jewish-Christian confrontation and place the local attack within broader context of national and universal salvation. p. 289

The complexity of the chosen narrative methods means that both texts are fraught with internal tensions. While the writer of the *Passio* ostensibly celebrates the slaughter of the Jews, his description of the looting and the utterances he attributes to the attackers also reveal uneasiness about their motivations. Framing the riot as a parody of Christ's Passion places the Jews in a paradoxical position, presenting them as both the villains of the story and its sacrificial victims.¹² As we shall see, Avigdor Kara's use of biblical quotations also problematises the seemingly clear-cut schematisation of characters, as well as appearing to covertly criticise the leadership of the Jewish community.

¹⁰Steinová, *Passio*, 22; Newman, *Medieval Crossover*, 269.

¹¹For an analysis of the interaction between Jewish and Christian narratives, see Eva Steinová, 'All That Suffering': Hebrew Narratives about the Prague Easter Massacre of 1389 and their Interaction with the Latin Material,' in *Knaanic Language: Structure and Historical Background*, ed. Ondřej Bláha, Robert Dittmann, and Lenka Uličná (Praha: Academia, 2013), 241–68.

¹²Newman, 'The Passion of the Jews of Prague,' 12–14.

Contested Time, Contested Space: Jewish-Christian Coexistence in Prague

However complex and ambiguous the literary representations, the inescapable reality of the attack begs the question: Why did the relatively unproblematic coexistence of Jews and Christians in Prague suddenly take a sinister turn on Easter 1389? Some contemporary writers seemed to think that the anti-Jewish violence was, paradoxically, the unavoidable outcome of the favourable conditions and stability enjoyed by the Jews, interpreting it as a way of restoring the social equilibrium that had been disrupted by Jewish expansion. In a laconic mid-fifteenth century commentary on the attack, Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (1405–64), later Pope Pius II, wrote:

The Jews living among Christians are a miserable human race. For wherever they are believed to prosper to the smallest extent, [it is perceived] as if they despised the majesty of our Lord, Jesus Christ, or the [Christian] religion, and lose not only their wealth, but also their lives.¹³

Contemporary clerical writers often blamed Emperor Wenceslas IV and his courtiers' favourable policies for the 'scandalous' flourishing of the Jewish community in Prague. According to the Augustinian abbot Ludolf of Žagaň (d. 1422), the Emperor granted the Jews permission to protect their quarter by a system of gates; he also assigned them some houses that had originally belonged to Christians, 'especially the house of the Christian Masters'.¹⁴ As a result, the Jews began to 'behave recalcitrantly toward the [Christian] faith, blaspheme against the Saint of Israel and were eager to abuse our Saviour in various ways'.¹⁵

The Archbishop of Prague, Jan of Jenštejn (1348–1400), who, beginning in 1384, was in conflict with Wenceslas over ecclesiastical privileges, also repeatedly claimed that the Jews enjoyed better conditions than Christians, especially

p. 290

¹³Aeneas Silvius, *Chronicon Bohemiae*, ed. Josef Emler (Praha: Grégr & Dattel, n.d.), 125–26.

¹⁴On the gates protecting the Jewish quarter on Sabbath and Jewish holidays and their location, see Putík, 'On the Topography,' 40–41. In 1366, the house originally belonging to Lazar, a wealthy Jewish financier, was dedicated to the newly established Charles College. In 1386, the masters moved to a new location in the present-day Karolinum. It is possible that the house was later returned to the Jews. See Putík, 'On the Topography,' 33–35.

¹⁵Ludolf von Sagan, *Tractatus de longo schismate*, ed. J. Loserth (Wien: Carl Gerold's Sohn, 1880), 419–20.

clerics.¹⁶ In a Christmas sermon, he warned that Jewish prosperity was a sign of the coming of the Antichrist and complained that ‘one Jew has more power among the princes than a nobleman or a prelate’.¹⁷ According to Jenštejn, the toleration of usury was the clearest indication of Jewish prosperity and of Jews’ excessive social influence. The Archbishop was a fervent critic of usury, and synodal statutes from the 1380s reflect his repeated attempts to eradicate it.¹⁸ That the Emperor not only chose to turn a blind eye to this sinful practice, but even benefited from it, was a source of scandal for the Christian faithful. Johannes Lange of Wetzlar formulated the issue poignantly: ‘When the Hebrews are baptised, they abandon usury, yet Christian kings anointed with chrism receive interest, and make the Jews freer than Christians.’¹⁹

For these writers, economic and social advantage based on sinful usury was at its most dangerous and problematic when manifested publicly. Lange criticised the Emperor’s vice-chancellor Sigismund Huler for his deferential behaviour toward wealthy Jews:

You have watched with proud heart how Jonah and Pinhas and their fellows marched through the streets of the town and mocked Christians in an unsightly manner. But you, miserable counsellor, when meeting the Jews, manifestly took your hat off and addressed these wicked Jews as ‘masters’ and ‘fathers’.²⁰

On closer examination, it is possible to find traces of this discourse in Avigdor Kara’s *seliḥah* as well. The third stanza of the elegy situates the attack in time and space:

Divine judgement hit crown-wearing Prague / in the year 5149 after creation [1389 CE]. / The just tottered in front of the evil and ‘the natural order was upset’.²¹ / Alas, the strong rod is broken, the lordly staff!²²

¹⁶Ruben Ernest Weltsch, *Archbishop John of Jenstein, 1348–1400: Papalism, Humanism and Reform in Pre-Hussite Prague* (The Hague; Paris: Mouton, 1968), 40–78.

¹⁷Weltsch, *Archbishop John of Jenstein*, 62, n. 89.

¹⁸Weltsch, *Archbishop John of Jenstein*, 164–65; Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 137.

¹⁹Bauer, *Frömmigkeit, Gelehrsamkeit und Zeitkritik*, 274.

²⁰Bauer, *Frömmigkeit, Gelehrsamkeit und Zeitkritik*, 276.

²¹This phrase is taken from midrash *Bereshit Rabbah* 55:8: ‘R. Simeon bar Yohai said: Love upsets the natural order, and hate upsets the natural order.’ Cited in H. Freedman, trans., *Genesis Rabbah*, Vol. 1 (London: Soncino Press, 1939), 488.

²²*Seliḥot*, sec. 168.

The city of Prague is described as ‘crown-wearing’ [*ha-ma’atirah*], highlighting its status as the Bohemian capital. The epithet is taken from the biblical Book of Isaiah, where it is applied to Tyre, a city ‘whose merchants were nobles, whose traders the world honoured’.²³ Kara seems to be signalling that honour and nobility produced by wealth provides no protection from God’s punishment. Indeed, Isaiah prophesied that God would punish Tyre ‘to shame all the honoured of the world’.²⁴ Similarly, another image of destruction used by Kara, the broken ‘strong rod’, is taken from the prophecy of Jeremiah, where it refers to another pagan city, Moab.²⁵ Like Tyre, Moab was punished for its haughtiness and reliance on financial wealth.²⁶ Kara’s biblical allusions suggest that the Jewish community of Prague might have been punished for its excessive reliance on wealth and honour. Kara’s exclusive focus in his elegy on the fate of rabbis and scholars contrasts with the central role played by Jewish communal leaders in the Christian narratives. Did he perhaps hold them responsible for ‘upsetting the natural order’ and bringing Jewish-Christian relations into imbalance with misguided demonstrations of love and hate? p. 291

Influential churchmen may have found it expedient to exploit anxieties about the economic role played by Jews in Christian society in late-medieval Prague in their political struggle with secular authority. However, the crucial role played by popular piety and local religion in laying the groundwork for the attack, and ultimately in providing it with meaning, cannot be overlooked.²⁷ A closer examination of the surviving narratives, and the connection between the riot and the accusation of host desecration, in particular, suggests that the attack of 1389 and its literary representations were shaped by ideas and concerns tied to specific developments in Prague’s religious and devotional landscape during the late 1380s.

At the time, the Bohemian Church was astir with debate about the laity’s access to the Eucharist. While not directly addressing the Jews, these arguments

²³ Isaiah 23:8. I have used the *JPS Tanakh* translation.

²⁴ Isaiah 28:9.

²⁵ Jeremiah 48:17.

²⁶ Jeremiah 48:7. In this chapter, Moab is also associated with ‘arrogance’, ‘pride’, ‘haughtiness’, and ‘self-exaltation’.

²⁷ I am inspired in particular by Natalie Zemon Davis’s analysis of St Bartholomew riots, which has shown that religious concerns can play a deeper and more significant role in motivating and structuring violent acts than simply providing a rhetorical facade. See ‘The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France,’ *Past and Present* 59 (1973): 51–91.

touched upon the definition and imposition of social and gender hierarchies, of control of public expressions of piety and of the uneasiness about hypocrisy and heresy. Churchmen and schoolmen discussed the danger posed by the unregulated contact of the faithful with the body of Christ, on the one hand, and the potential of the Eucharist to inspire spiritual and social reform, on the other. The Easter liturgical celebrations shaped by the Gospel narratives of Christ's Passion and resurrection offered an opportunity for meditation, not only on salvific suffering of God incarnate, but also on the role of spiritual humility, the power of communion, and the economy of salvation and grace. Shortly before the attack, the Emperor intervened in the debate, leading to a tense situation in which the Jews took on a key symbolic role as the archetype for 'un-Christian' elements seeking to hinder spiritual reform and prevent or limit the faithful's access to the Eucharist. Echoes of contemporary theological and pastoral debates could be heard in the paschal liturgical rhetoric, accentuating concerns about the balance of spiritual power in a society that many felt was ripe for radical reform and purification.

According to *Passio Iudeorum Pragensium*, Jews triggered the riot by attacking a priest passing through the Jewish quarter with a consecrated host:

On the evening of the Sabbath day, toward the dawn of the first day after the Sabbath, a priest entered the Jewish quarter with the body of Jesus. The Jews went forth to meet him, and, bearing stones in their hands, they shouted and said, 'Let him be stoned, for he has made himself the Son of God.' Then the children of the Hebrews, taking stones from the streets, went to meet the priest, shouting and saying: 'Cursed is he whom you bear in your hands.'²⁸

A different version has the priest being harangued by Jews while bringing a communion host to a sick person: 'He, whom you carry, is not the Son of God, but an idol.'²⁹ p. 292

By the end of the fourteenth century, host desecration accusations, often accompanied by anti-Jewish violence, have become widespread in Europe, including in Bohemia and the neighbouring regions.³⁰ However, unlike most

²⁸Translated by Newman, *Medieval Crossover*, 264; cf. Steinová, *Passio*, 18.

²⁹Steinová, *Passio*, 28.

³⁰The wave of anti-Jewish violence following a host desecration accusation in Pulkau in

desecration narratives, the *Passio* does not depict the Jews as attempting to torture and destroy the host in a vindictive re-enactment of Christ's crucifixion. Rather, they assert the boundaries of their quarter, defend it from Christian intrusion and openly challenge Christian belief in Christ's real presence in the Eucharist.

The incident occurred during the Holy Week, a period marked by interreligious tension and concern about the Jewish presence in the Christian society. This liturgical season was an occasion for public demarcation of communal boundaries, often through controlled acts of ritual violence such as stone-throwing, noisemaking or mutual verbal abuse. Storming of the Jewish quarter played an important role in the ritual assertion of Christian superiority and the re-actualisation of divine vengeance, demonstrating the appropriate social order and hierarchy.³¹ The polemical pronouncement of Christian religious identity was accompanied by a heightened sensitivity to Jewish blasphemy; in many places, including Prague, the Jews were required by ecclesiastical and secular regulations to remain indoors on Good Friday, in order not to interfere with Christian celebrations.³²

Unlike the Iberian Peninsula, there are no surviving records to suggest periodic recurrences of ritualised paschal violence in Prague, but the description of the incident in the *Passio* reflects a concern about the containment of Jews characteristic of Holy Week riots. The narrative describes a public assertion of boundaries, which were perhaps all too frequently challenged. By the last quarter of the fourteenth century, the Jewish community of Prague was protected by a system of six gates. The proximity of Jewish and Christian communities might nonetheless have been perceived as too immediate, with the boundaries between them seen as insufficient. The Jewish quarter was not a separate district; it was located within the city's intricate network of no less than forty-five parishes. The areas inhabited by the Jews fell within the St Valentine, St

Lower Austria in 1338 afflicted numerous communities in Moravia and Bohemia. Furthermore, there was a separate accusation that same year in the Bohemian town of Kouřim. See Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 65–69; Daniel Soukup, 'Forgotten Old Czech Source for the Events in Pulkau in 1338,' *Judaica Olomucensia* 1 (2013): 141–54; Birgit Wiedl, 'Die angebliche Hostien-schändung in Pulkau 1338 und ihre Rezeption in der christlichen und jüdischen Geschichtsschreibung,' *Medaon* 4.6 (2010): 1–14.

³¹David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 200–30.

³²Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 29; Jaroslav V. Polc and Zdeňka Hledíková, *Pražské synody a koncily předhusitské doby* (Praha: Karolinum, 2002), 152–53.

Nicholas, and Holy Cross the Greater parishes. According to the visitation report of Archdeacon Pavel of Janovice, who visited these parishes in 1379–82, priests from both St Valentine’s and Holy Cross churches complained that the Jews refused to compensate them for tithes they would otherwise have received from Christian inhabitants.³³ In this sense, Jews and their homes occupied a socially and economically significant place within Christian sacred space.

An enclave of Christian houses, including the Benedictine convent of the Holy Spirit, established in 1348, separated the eastern and western sections of the Jewish settlement, which was clustered around the community’s two principal synagogues: the Old and the New (today Old-New). Municipal tax records show that the core of the Jewish quarter was surrounded by several blocks of houses inhabited by a heterogeneous population, primarily made up of ordinary craftsmen and tradesmen, the most frequent recipients of small Jewish loans.³⁴ It was a rough neighbourhood, notorious for gambling and prostitution.³⁵ A St Nicholas parishioner complained to Paul of Janovice that the area was full of houses inhabited by students, who often accommodated prostitutes, ‘which is a source of scandal for many’. He further remarked, ‘often people die without having received the sacraments, because the priests refuse to visit them’ – presumably out of fear for their own safety.³⁶ However, there were also members of the elite living in the mixed areas neighbouring the Jewish settlement,³⁷ and in exceptional cases, Jews were allowed to acquire homes in Christian sections of the city.³⁸

p. 293

The spatial and social proximity of Jews and Christians of all classes concerned

³³Ivan Hlaváček and Zdeňka Hledíková, eds., *Protocollum visitationis archidiaconatus Pragensis annis 1379–1382 per Paulum de Janowicz, archidiaconum Pragensem, factae* (Praha: Academia, 1973), 82, 96.

³⁴Bedřich Mendl, ‘Z hospodářských dějin středověké Prahy,’ in *Sborník příspěvků k dějinám hlavního města Prahy*, ed. Václav Vojtíšek (Praha: Obec hl. m. Prahy, 1932), 80.

³⁵On Hampays, a brothel located in the Jewish quarter, see Putík, ‘On the Topography,’ 24–26.

³⁶Hlaváček and Hledíková, *Protocollum visitationis*, 79.

³⁷Houses that were legally Christian and had been acquired by the Jews with royal consent could be repossessed by the Emperor or handed down to him as an escheat. The ruler then put these houses to his own use, often donating or selling them to his courtiers. See Putík, ‘On the Topography,’ 33–37.

³⁸Martin Musílek, ‘Juden und Christen in der Prager Altstadt während des Mittelalters: Koexistenz oder Konfrontation?’ in *Juden in mittelalterlichen Stadt: Der städtische Raum im Mittelalter – Ort des Zusammenlebens und des Konflikts*, ed. Eva Doležalová (Praha: Filosofia, 2015), 62–63; Putík, ‘On the Topography,’ 11–12.

Prague theologians. At some point before 1400, Matthew of Cracow (c. 1345–1410), a master of theology at the University of Prague, wrote a response to a query sent by one of his close friends, possibly Archbishop Jan of Jenštejn, who was disturbed by the contact between Christian butchers and Jews. Matthew listed numerous established reasons why a good Christian should not do business with Jews and should avoid their company altogether, including both their negative influence on Christian morality and their enmity for the Christian faith.³⁹ While Matthew did not mention the Jews in his treatise *De contractibus*, a comprehensive scholastic treatment of business ethics, the unambiguous anti-Jewish position he expressed in the letter seems to address the situation on the ground, which included uncomfortably intimate contact between Jews and Christians.

The problematic nature of Jewish–Christian spatial coexistence, which both enabled and shaped the attack of 1389, was brought to the fore by the conflict over sacred time, with Jewish and Christian narratives of martyrdom and redemption challenging each other during the highly contested period of Passover and Easter. This was also a time when the body of Christ – both his suffering body on the cross and the Eucharistic body on the altar – stood at the centre of pious meditation and liturgical practices related to its spatial manipulation and relocation. On Palm Sunday, Christ’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem was commemorated with a liturgical procession, sometimes involving a host.⁴⁰ On Good Friday, a cross or a crucifix, or, less frequently, a consecrated host might be symbolically buried in a sepulchre, a special chapel or a structure outside of the sanctuary, and then taken up and carried back in again on Easter morning before matins.⁴¹ In some areas in Central Europe, Prague being one of them, special crucifixes with movable arms were used to provide a realistic visual image of Christ’s deposition and burial.⁴² These meditations and practices

³⁹Matthias Nuding, *Matthäus von Krakau: Theologe, Politiker, Kirchenreformer in Krakau, Prag und Heidelberg zur Zeit des Großen Abendländischen Schismas* (Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 111–13.

⁴⁰Peter Browe, ‘Die Entstehung der Sakramentprozessionen,’ in *Die Eucharistie im Mittelalter: Liturgiehistorische Forschungen in kulturwissenschaftlicher Absicht*, ed. Hubertus Lutterbach and Thomas Flammer, 6th edn (Münster: LIT, 2011), 467–68; Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 245–46.

⁴¹Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 112–48; Browe, ‘Die Entstehung der Sakramentprozessionen,’ 461–67; Justin E. A. Kroesen, *The Sepulchrum Domini Through the Ages: Its Form and Function* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 153–69.

⁴²Amy Powell, *Depositions: Scenes from the Late Medieval Church and the Modern Museum*

directed the attention of the faithful to the vulnerability of Christ's body and the consequences of its exposure to inimical agents, fueling anxiety about the spatial proximity of religious communities, their hierarchy and the dangers facing Christian society, both from within and from without.

This anxiety is reflected in the depiction of the Jewish attack on the host in the *Passio*. Here, the entry of the host carried by the priest into the Jewish quarter is compared to Christ's entry into Jerusalem. According to the Gospels, Jesus was welcomed by the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem with the cry, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'⁴³ As previously mentioned, Christ's triumphant entry was re-enacted in processions accompanied by the singing of the processional antiphon *Pueri Hebraeorum*. In the *Passio*, this antiphon is parodically inverted and used to describe the attack of Jewish children on the host. The problematic nature of urban coexistence is emphasised as the paved streets of Prague supply the Jewish children with stones, their 'weapons' against Christianity.

p. 294

It has been noted that liturgical processions, especially those including the host, were used to structure social space and provide 'an ordered reading of existence in which dominance and subordination were acknowledged'.⁴⁴ By introducing textual elements associated with the Palm Sunday procession, the author of the *Passio* fashioned the attack on the host as the attack on social hierarchy and its guardians, the clerics.⁴⁵ This symbolism also underscored local clerical criticism of Jewish pride and social superiority by contrasting their behaviour with that of Christ. The narrative depiction and liturgical re-enactment of Christ's entry into Jerusalem in the Gospels, associated with the prophecy of Zechariah and juxtaposed with the reading of the Passion, was interpreted as an opportunity for meditation on the virtue of humility.⁴⁶ This tendency is

(New York: Zone Books, 2012), 81–90. The two surviving examples from Prague are the sculpture of Christ with movable arms from the Hradčany Carmelite monastery (mid-fourteenth century) and the cross with Christ from the Benedictine convent of St George (mid-fifteenth century). Michaela Ottová, 'Kristus s pohyblivými pažemi z Litovle – jeho forma a funkce,' in *Kristus z Litovle: Restaurování 2007–2010*, ed. Helena Zápalková and Antonín Basler (Olomouc: Muzeum umění Olomouc, 2011), 32–39.

⁴³Matthew 21:9, Mark 11:9–10, Luke 19:38, John 12:13.

⁴⁴Mary C. Erler, 'Palm Sunday Prophets and Processions and Eucharistic Controversy,' *Renaissance Quarterly* 48.1 (1995): 78.

⁴⁵Charles Zika, 'Hosts, Processions and Pilgrimages: Controlling the Sacred in Fifteenth-Century Germany,' *Past and Present* 118.1 (1988): 60–64.

⁴⁶See, for instance, the second sermon on Palm Sunday by Bernard of Clairvaux, in *PL* 183,

reflected on a popular level in an early sixteenth-century antiphonary containing older, late-medieval Czech interpolations into liturgical texts. The Palm Sunday antiphons are accompanied by an exhortation to the faithful to emulate Christ's meekness:

He about whom the prophet David [sic] said: 'Heaven is his throne, and the earth is his footstool,' [cf. Isaiah 66:1] is sitting humbly on a young donkey, teaching humility to those who fear you, saying: 'Learn from me to be humble, if you wish to enter the Jerusalem of heavenly joy.'⁴⁷

In the context of Prague's discourse of reform, this meditation on humility, framed by liturgical processions, elicited criticism of social and religious abuse, including clerical corruption. In his collection of Czech sermons written in 1413, Jan Hus used the Gospel reading for Palm Sunday to contrast the 'popes, archbishops, cardinals, bishops, canons and parish priests', who often ride pompously on horses in adorned vestments, accompanied by a suite of sycophants, with a modest donkey that carries the Eucharist in the procession and is left behind unnoticed, eating grass.⁴⁸ The image of the Palm Sunday procession, a liturgical representation of Christ's glorious-yet-humble entry into Jerusalem, could thus be used to simultaneously symbolise and subvert established hierarchies, if they failed to conform to the ideal of authentic Christianity. As we have seen, arrogance and pride were the vices attributed to the Jews of Prague by contemporary clerical writers. By presenting the Jewish attack on the host as a distorted image of a Palm Sunday procession, with its construction of social hierarchy and denunciation of pride, the author of the *Passio* interpreted the resulting anti-Jewish violence as a part of a social and spiritual struggle against both individual and social vice. p. 295

Jews and Christian Spiritual Renewal: The Struggle over Frequent Communion

By the late fourteenth century, the focus on social and religious hierarchies was part of a broader discussion about reforming Christian society and reli-

col. 257d; translated into English in *Sermons for Lent and the Easter Season*, ed. John Leinenweber and Mark Alan Scott, trans. Irene Edmonds (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 105; Zechariah 9:9.

⁴⁷Prague, National Library, MS XVII E 1, fol. 99r.

⁴⁸Jan Hus, *Česká nedělní postila*, ed. Jiří Daňhelka (Praha: Academia, 1992), 178.

gious devotion. The attack on the Jews and its narrative representations can be interpreted as part of a lively debate about the laity frequently taking communion, which was one of the hallmarks of the local religion in Prague from the mid-fourteenth century onward. These debates about the role of sacraments in Christian life and their potential to induce both the spiritual and institutional reform of the Church culminated in the late 1380s and early 1390s. By that point, the Emperor, the Archbishop, university masters and preachers of spiritual reform were all involved in efforts to delineate rules governing the laity's access to the Eucharist, and public manifestations of piety in general. It is possible that the host desecration accusation that sparked the attack on the Jews of Prague was part of this effort. In what follows, I will look at these debates and indicate where they converged with anti-Jewish concerns.

The role of Eucharist in Christian religious life was a subject of debate throughout the Middle Ages.⁴⁹ The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 established the obligation of all Christians to receive communion at least once a year. More frequent access to communion was not discouraged, however, much emphasis was laid on necessary spiritual preparation for receiving the Eucharist, in order to limit trivialisation or unworthy reception.⁵⁰ Sensory contact with the Eucharist became the paramount spiritual aspiration, and new forms of devotion evolved to help the faithful prepare for and benefit from the salvific gaze upon the consecrated host.

Frequent communion – the most intimate form of contact with Christ's real presence, in the species of bread – remained the domain of the clergy and of religious virtuosi, but the latter category became more inclusive. The Eucharist played an important role in the spirituality of the beguines, a group made up primarily of upper middle-class women and belonging to the wave of (semi-)heterodox religious movements that appeared over the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁵¹ The beguines' aspiration to live lives of ascetic piety and mystical experience, while remaining in the world, challenged institutional monasticism. Their mystical visions aroused suspicion and their unstructured and unregulated lifestyle was perceived as a hotbed of heresy. In-

⁴⁹For an overview, see Rubin, *Corpus Christi*.

⁵⁰Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 57–59.

⁵¹On the beguines, see most recently Tanya Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris: Gender, Patronage, and Spiritual Authority* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

formation about their activities in Bohemia is scant, but surviving documents p. 296 show that they were among the heretical groups targeted by Bohemian Inquisitors during the first half of the fourteenth century.⁵²

Calls for the spiritual reform of the Church and debates about lay participation in sacramental life were an essential aspect of the ‘unique [...] combination of religious energies’ characteristic of the vibrant local religion that emerged in Prague during the reign of Charles IV.⁵³ Echoing some aspects of the Dutch *devotio moderna* movement, the promotion of frequent communion for the laity and other forms of Eucharistic devotion became emblematic of the many issues that reform was meant to address.⁵⁴ The Bohemian proponents of this new spiritual emphasis saw the Eucharist as ‘spiritual medicine’ and its frequent reception as the only way to limit or suppress sin in both personal and public life.⁵⁵ Jan Milič of Kroměříž (d. 1374), a cathedral canon turned ascetic and apocalyptic reform preacher, who established a lay religious community of reformed prostitutes in a former brothel named Venice in the New Town of Prague, presented frequent communion as an eschatological sign, a necessary precondition for the unification of faithful with Christ and the cornerstone of a new reformed Christian community, in which the boundaries between clergy and laity would be relativised.⁵⁶ Despite the support of Charles IV,

⁵²Alexander Patschovsky, *Quellen zur böhmischen Inquisition im 14. Jahrhundert*, Monumenta Germaniae historica, Vol. 11 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1979); Alexander Patschovsky, ‘Ketzer und Ketzerverfolgung in Böhmen im Jahrhundert vor Hus,’ *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 32 (1981): 261–72.

⁵³David C. Mengel, ‘Emperor Charles IV (1346–1378) as the Architect of Local Religion in Prague,’ *Austrian History Yearbook* 41 (2010): 29.

⁵⁴Jaroslav V. Polc, ‘Vita coniugale e comunione quotidiana dei laici: Questione disputata a Praga alla fine del sec. XIV,’ *Lateranum*, n.s., 42 (1976): 203–38, reprinted in idem, *Česká církev v dějinách* (Praha: Akropolis, 1999), 169–205; David R. Holeton, ‘The Bohemian Eucharistic Movement in Its European Context,’ *The Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice* 1 (1994): 23–48; Stanisław Bylina, ‘La dévotion nouvelle et le problème de la communion fréquente en Europe Centrale XVe–XVe siècles,’ *The Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice* 4 (2002): 31–42; Hana Pátková, ‘Die vorhussitischen Fronleichnamsbruderschaften in Böhmen,’ in *Die ‘neue Frömmigkeit’ in Europa im Spätmittelalter*, ed. Marek Derwich and Martial Staub (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 77–83; Olivier Marin, *L’archevêque, le maître et le dévot: genèses du mouvement réformateur pragois, années 1360–1419* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2005), 457–534.

⁵⁵This view was articulated for the first time in *Malogranatum*, an anonymous treatise written at the Cistercian abbey of Zbraslav near Prague in the mid-fourteenth century. Marin, *L’archevêque*, 467–69.

⁵⁶Peter C. A. Morée, ‘The Eucharist in the Sermons on Corpus Christi of Milicius de Crem-

Milíč's eschatological ecclesiology and criticism of clerical corruption aroused the opposition of local clergy and mendicant orders, and he was forced to defend himself against an accusation of heresy at the papal court in Avignon.

Milíč's emphasis on frequent communion was taken up by his disciple Tomáš Štítný of Štítné (d. before 1409), who popularised it in his vernacular religious writings.⁵⁷ Over the course of the 1380s, this once isolated devotional belief became a pastoral challenge, and, as a result, the debates concerning frequent communion spread to the parlours of Prague theological schools. Vojtěch Raňkův of Ježov (d. 1388), a Paris-educated *scholasticus* of the St Vitus Cathedral chapter, offered a cautious defence of frequent lay communion in his treatise *De frequenti communione ad plebanum Martinum*.⁵⁸ While acknowledging the importance of the Eucharist in Christian life, Vojtěch's final verdict was that to avoid profanation of the sacrament the faithful should always take the counsel of their regular confessor and consider local church regulations when determining the frequency of its reception.⁵⁹ The emphasis on personal discernment was more pronounced in a widely disseminated treatise, *Dialogus rationis et conscientiae de crebra communione* [The Dialogue Between Reason and Conscience Concerning Frequent Communion], by Matthew of Cracow.⁶⁰ Matthew presented rational arguments against most common scruples and obstacles to frequent communion and to enabling individuals to determine their own spiritual needs.

Matthew put his pastoral approach based on individual discernment into practice at least once, in his capacity as the spiritual guide of a certain Elizabeth, the wife of a prominent Prague burgher. According to Jan of Jenštejn, frequent p. 297

sir,' *The Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice* 5.1 (2002): 65–76; Marin, *L'archevêque*, 470–73; Vilém Herold, 'The Spiritual Background of the Czech Reformation: Precursors of Jan Hus,' in *A Companion to Jan Hus*, ed. František Šmahel and Ota Pavlíček (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 75–81.

⁵⁷Pavčina Rychterová, 'Konzepte der religiösen Erziehung der Laien im spätmittelalterlichen Böhmen: Einige Überlegungen zur Debatte über die sog. böhmische Devotio moderna,' in *Kirchliche Reformimpulse des 14./15. Jahrhunderts in Ostmitteleuropa*, ed. Winfried Eberhard and Franz Machilek (Köln: Böhlau, 2006), 219–37; David R. Holton, 'The Sacramental Theology of Tomáš Štítný of Štítné,' *The Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice* 4 (2002): 57–79; Polc, 'Vita coniugale,' 182–85; Marin, *L'archevêque*, 474–76.

⁵⁸On Vojtěch, see Vilém Herold, 'The University of Paris and the Foundations of the Bohemian Reformation,' *The Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice* 3 (1998): 15–24.

⁵⁹Marin, *L'archevêque*, 478–80.

⁶⁰Nuding, *Matthäus von Krakau*, 33–42; Marin, *L'archevêque*, 483–86.

communion was an important aspect of this female mystic's devotion:

She drew this sweetness of exultation and joy from the reception of the Lord's body and the most holy Eucharist, which she received as often as it was suited to her devotion, according to the counsel and with the permission of the venerable Master Matthew of Cracow, master in theology, her confessor and regular spiritual counsellor.⁶¹

By the late 1380s, such forms of devotion were causing the secular and ecclesiastical authorities misgivings. In spring 1388, Emperor Wenceslas IV issued a decree expelling all 'beghards and hypocrites' from Prague. In his reaction to the decree, Archbishop Jan of Jenštejn, while expressing approval for the Emperor's concern for the spiritual welfare of his realm, criticised the fact that the order was misused to persecute devout Christians and reminded the Emperor that each accusation should be presented to Jenštejn himself or his representatives.⁶²

Elizabeth seems to have been one of the victims targeted by the decree. Jenštejn claimed she, along with her husband, had 'suffered great persecution, having been deprived of their property, house and possessions, by a royal decree'.⁶³ Elsewhere, the Archbishop also alluded to the persecution of devout Christians who greeted each other using the name of Jesus – they were 'driven away from Prague as beghards and heretics'.⁶⁴

In these texts, Jenštejn presents Wenceslas as an enemy of the lay spiritual renewal, keen to use the struggle against heresy to his own economic advantage. The Archbishop, who had clashed with the Emperor in the past, and who was in conflict with several of his courtiers at the time, had every reason to be suspicious of Wenceslas's desire to persecute heresy and to assert his authority in matters of Church discipline.⁶⁵ While Jenštejn seems to have been largely sympathetic to the frequent communion movement, a defensive measure was needed to slow down the Emperor's momentum. Thus, echoing the Emperor's concern about the spread of heresy, the diocesan synod of October 1388 decided to limit lay communion to once a month and to prohibit preachers from

⁶¹ Polc, 'Vita coniugale,' 204, n. 125.

⁶² Weltsch, *Archbishop John of Jenstein*, 233–34.

⁶³ Jaroslav V. Polc, *Svatý Jan Nepomucký* (Praha: Zvon, 1993), 382, n. 26.

⁶⁴ Weltsch, *Archbishop John of Jenstein*, 220.

⁶⁵ Weltsch, *Archbishop John of Jenstein*, 59–60.

promoting frequent communion among the faithful.⁶⁶

It is possible that the decree was intended to be temporary. Nonetheless, it clearly further aggravated tensions within the clergy.⁶⁷ The university masters were consulted, and some of them, including Jenštejn's close friend, the Dominican Heinrich of Bitterfeld (d. c. 1405), wrote academic treatises advocating frequent communion.⁶⁸ Moreover, some proponents of Eucharistic devotion ignored the ban, or even ventured to challenge it. In his treatise *Regulae veteris et novi testamenti* [Rules of the Old and the New Testament],⁶⁹ Matěj of Janov (d. 1393), a follower of Milíč and a protégé of Vojtěch Raňkův, who was educated at the University of Paris and was later a canon at the St Vitus Cathedral in Prague, wrote that they 'were not frightened or disturbed by the king's prohibition, threateningly proclaimed in the streets and squares, nor repelled by the disarranged superstitions of some prelates'. In his comprehensive treatise, he presented his vision of Church renewal based on carefully distinguishing authentic from inauthentic Christianity on the basis of biblical 'rules' and frequent communion. p. 298

It seems that Matěj openly challenged the synodal decision in his sermons delivered at the St Nicholas Church in the Old Town. At the synod in October 1389, he was forced to publicly recant a number of errors attributed to him, including the assertion that the faithful should be allowed to receive communion at will.⁷⁰ Two of his fellow preachers at St Nicholas Church, Jakub of Kaplice and Ondřej, were disciplined for even more radical proclamations –

⁶⁶While the synodal decrees do not survive, the details of this decision are repeatedly mentioned by Matěj of Janov, cited by Polc and Hledíková, *Pražské synody*, 243–45. According to Matěj of Janov, the clergy attending the synod felt 'that from such frequent communion of Christ's body and blood come forth many heresies, in particular certain most wicked heretics known as beghards [...] and beguines.' Weltsch, *Archbishop John of Jenstein*, 244.

⁶⁷Polc and Hledíková, *Pražské synody*, 244.

⁶⁸Jindřich z Bitterfeldu, *Eucharistické texty*, ed. Pavel Černuška (Brno: L. Marek, 2006); Marin, *L'archevêque*, 500–03.

⁶⁹On Matěj, see Vlastimil Kybal, *M. Matěj z Janova: Jeho život, spisy a učení* (Praha: Královská česká společnost nauk, 1905); Herold, 'The Spiritual Background of the Czech Reformation,' 81–89; Marin, *L'archevêque*, 490–500. For editions of *Regulae*, see Vlastimil Kybal, ed., *Matthiae de Janov dicti Magister Parisiensis Regulae veteris et novi testamenti*, 5 Vols (Innsbruck; Praha: Wagner; Česká akademie věd a umění, 1908–26), henceforth cited as *RVNT*; Jana Nechutová and Helena Krmíčková, ed., *Matthiae de Janov dicti Magistri Parisiensis Regularum veteris et novi Testamenti Liber V De corpore Christi*, Vol. 6 (München: Oldenbourg, 1993). For the quotation, see Kybal, ed., *RVNT*, 1:100.

⁷⁰Polc and Hledíková, *Pražské synody*, 246.

Jakub allegedly claimed that the faithful were allowed to snatch the host from a priest if he refused to hand it over.⁷¹

Prague clerics were aware that they had to walk a fine line between opening the door to accusations of heresy and stamping out the flourishing Eucharistic devotion. In October 1390, forty days of indulgence were granted to anyone who knelt during the elevation of the host or accompanied a priest visiting the sick with communion,⁷² steps that were clearly meant to promote forms of Eucharistic piety that were not seen as suspicious.⁷³ In June 1391, the limitation placed on lay communion was revoked and 'true penitents' were allowed to receive communion whenever they wished.⁷⁴

The attack on the Jews in April 1389 took place only a few months after the temporary suppression of frequent communion was announced. Moreover, it occurred during religious festivities that culminated in the nearly universal reception of the Eucharist, at a time when the beneficial effects of communion on ordinary Christians had become the focus of preaching and pious reflection. In this climate, access to the Eucharist and the reverence or irreverence shown for it were volatile issues laden with both interreligious and intra-religious significance. It is notable that the advocates of frequent communion preached at St Nicholas Church, just outside of the Jewish quarter. Whether the accusation was based on an actual incident that occurred during the handling of the host in a contested shared space on Easter is of secondary importance. What is significant is that the accusation and the way the attack on host is presented in the *Passio* resonate with the concerns of the proponents of frequent communion and spiritual renewal.

The symbolism of Easter liturgy and the references to the debates about frequent communion share a common theme with anti-Jewish concerns

⁷¹Polc and Hledíková, *Pražské synody*, 247.

⁷²Polc and Hledíková, *Pražské synody*, 251–52.

⁷³According to a summary of 'beghard articles' of faith, written down by a late fourteenth-century Bohemian Inquisitor, beghards refused to show reverence during elevation in order not to 'descend from the purity and elevation of their contemplation.' Similarly, Matthias of Janov claimed that all heretics and beghards held the Eucharist in contempt. Alexander Patschovsky, 'Spuren böhmischer Ketzerverfolgung in Schlesien am Ende des 14. Jahrhunderts,' in *Historia docet: Sborník prací k počtě šedesátých narozenin prof. PhDr. Ivana Hlaváčka*, ed. Miloslav Polívka and Michal Svatoš (Praha: HÚ ČSAV, 1992), 368; Kybal, ed., *RVNT*, 5:202–05.

⁷⁴Polc and Hledíková, *Pražské synody*, 254.

expressed in the *Passio*, namely, the condemnation of spiritual pride and the defence of established religious hierarchies. The potential inversion of the social status of the clergy and the laity was one of the primary concerns of the opponents of frequent communion. According to an anonymous Augustinian monk, who composed a short polemic with Matěj of Janov, lay adherents of frequent communion claimed that they were more sanctified than priests, having been anointed by the Holy Spirit.⁷⁵ According to Matěj himself, the opponents of frequent communion were concerned that frequent access to Eucharist would blur the boundary separating the clergy from the laity: ‘These beghards and beguines already strive to be like priests. Which devil consecrated them for this?’⁷⁶ p. 299

Both camps claimed that their opponents were motivated by pride and haughtiness. The anonymous Augustinian decried the ‘proud stupidity and stupid pride’ of laywomen who received communion thrice a day.⁷⁷ Analogically, Matěj of Janov identified spiritual pride and hatred as the principal reason for clerical opposition to frequent communion.⁷⁸ According to Matěj, pride and other vices associated with it – avarice, dishonesty, concupiscence – were rooted in hypocrisy, which was the first sign of the coming of the Antichrist.⁷⁹ Using eschatological vocabulary to underline the urgency of his concerns, Matěj of Janov made a link between the opposition to frequent communion and social tensions expressed through the tropes of sinful arrogance and pride. As we have seen, these tropes were also used by the author of the *Passio* to frame the conflict between the Jews and the Christians of Prague that eventually led to the massacre of 1389.

The link between clerical opponents of frequent communion and the Jews in the *Passio* is also suggested by references to unjustified accusations of heresy. The motif of Jews throwing stones at the host (‘Let him be stoned, for he has made himself the Son of God’) alludes to an episode in the Gospel of John, read on the Fifth Sunday of Lent.⁸⁰ Two decades later, Jan Hus used this episode to draw an analogy between Jewish aggression and the corruption of the Prague clergy. The Jews wanted to stone Jesus as a blaspheming heretic, ‘against their

⁷⁵Jan Sedlák, *M. Jan Hus* (Praha: Dědictví sv. Prokopa, 1915), 41*–42*.

⁷⁶Kybal, ed., *RVNT*, 5:9.

⁷⁷Sedlák, *M. Jan Hus*, 41*–42*.

⁷⁸Kybal, ed., *RVNT*, 5:8–10.

⁷⁹Kybal, *M. Matěj z Janova*, 129–42.

⁸⁰John 10:31–33.

own law, without a charge, without witnesses, without a verdict, not outside of the city, but in the holy city [Jerusalem]'. Similarly, Hus claimed that the clergy at the St Vitus Cathedral once attacked Christians of good will, who had asked the priests not to lie in their sermons.⁸¹ The depiction of the Jews stoning the Eucharist on Easter could have brought all these allusions into play, creating an analogy between the Jews of Jerusalem accusing Christ of heresy, the Jews of Prague attacking the host and the corrupt clergy indiscriminately making accusations of heresy, and even resorting to violence to stifle the calls for the moral and spiritual reform of the Church. Like priests and monks who are full of spiritual pride, the proud Jews, with the support of secular authorities, attempt to limit the access of the faithful to the Eucharist by preventing the priest from passing through their neighbourhood.

The attack on the Jewish community of Prague, led by a simple peasant rather than a secular or ecclesiastical authority, constitutes the realisation of the ideal proclaimed by the proponents of frequent communion, including Matěj of Janov. The attack, motivated by an infusion of the Holy Spirit during Easter communion, annihilated the Jews as symbols of the sins and vices troubling a corrupt Church.⁸² The attackers are portrayed as the precursors of a renewed Church rediscovering its lost unity: '[T]he Spirit of the Lord gathered them together, not just in an hour, but in an instant, from diverse and far distant places, in unity of wills and holy faith.'⁸³

To sum up, when the Jewish community of Prague was attacked in 1389, more was at play than simply wrath against a marginalised God-killing people. In the *Passio Iudeorum Pragensium*, the inverted and distorted language of the Easter liturgy is used to depict the Jews as the tokens of the vices that need to be eradicated in the search for a renewed Christian community. The image of the Jews attacking a host is employed to stake out a position in the internal Christian dispute over the role of Eucharist in revitalising the spiritual life of the Church. The concerns with intra-religious and interreligious hierarchies are conflated in the anonymous author's emphatic message; those in positions of power who present obstacles to the regenerating power of the Eucharist must fall. Given

p. 300

⁸¹Hus, *Česká nedělní postila*, 175.

⁸²In the *Passio*, the Holy Spirit used the tongues of the town criers to proclaim that the Jews should be attacked. The attackers are also described as having been 'moved by divine inspiration to destroy [the Jews].' Newman, *Medieval Crossover*, 266–67; Steinová, *Passio*, 19–20.

⁸³Newman, *Medieval Crossover*, 269; Steinová, *Passio*, 21.

their association with the Emperor, usury and spiritual pride, the Jews become the epitome of the obstacles faced by Church reformers and devout Christians emulating Christ on their journey to 'heavenly Jerusalem'. While certainly not unique in its tendency to assimilate the anxiety about Jewish-Christian coexistence into more wide-ranging social and religious debates, the *Passio* demonstrates the complex ways in which this could be achieved, none of which makes the riots of 1389 less gruesome or their textual representations less distressing. It does, however, help to locate the unique place of the attack on the Jews of Prague in the history of medieval anti-Jewish violence and its literary representations.