

## Bureaucratization of the Urban and the Ecclesiastical Administration from Below<sup>1</sup>

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In 1958, Josef Janáček devoted a small book to the remarkable figure of Jan Kotva (+ 1608), head of the guild of coachmen in the Old Town of Prague, and he described in a micro-historical manner the life of Prague coachmen in the reign of Rudolf II.<sup>2</sup> During my own work on the history of the Old Town church of St. Valentine, I have encountered the person of Jan Kotva among the treasury officers of that church.<sup>3</sup> The conjunction of the two activities in a single person can lead to interesting speculation.

The title of this article needs a further amplification in two respects. First, the concern is not with ecclesiastical administration as such; the administration of the treasury or *záduší* (i.e., the properties of the urban parish church), which is treated here, cannot be considered in the early modern period as a part of ecclesiastical administration; it is an entirely integral part of the official agenda of its patron, in this case the town community. Second, the term “bureaucratization” needs an explanation. The root term “bureaucracy” appears in France during the eighteenth century and – except for the period of the French Revolution – has a rather negative connotation. At the same time, it fittingly expressed the professional ethos of the newly emerging stratum of professional officialdom.<sup>4</sup> The concept of “bureaucratization” adopted by historiography in the latter part of the twentieth century, does not denote the formation of such a professional stratum, but an historical process of formalization and of inten-

1 This article is a part of the research project AV0Z80150510 (Historický ústav AV ČR).

2 Josef Janáček, *Obrázek ze života Rudolfské Prahy. Z manuálu Jana Kotvy cechmistra poctivého pořádku kočovského* [An Illustration from the Life of Rudolphine Prague. From the Manual of Jan Kotva, Master of the Honorable Order of Coachmen] (Prague, 1958).

3 Pavel B. Kůrka, ‘Kostel starožitný v smrdutých místech a blatech ležící’ – Kostel, farnost a záduší svatého Valentína na Starém Městě pražském v raném novověku [‘An Ancient Church, Located in Stinking Places and Swamps’ – Church, Parish and Treasury of St. Valentine in the Old Town of Prague in Early Modern Times], dipl. práce FF UK (Praha, 2002); idem, “Tu kdež nyní slove u sv. Valentína na rynečku. Dějiny a místopis kostela sv. Valentína na Starém Městě pražském,” [Where now is called at St. Valentine’s on the Little Square. History and Topography of St. Valentine’s Church in the Old Town of Prague] PSH 33 (2004), 109-180; idem, “‘Urozenost, ctnost, krása i umění. Za nic nestojí, když peněz nejní’ – Správa a majetek záduší kostela sv. Valentína na Starém Městě pražském v raném novověku” [‘Nobility, Virtue, Beauty and Art – Worthless, if Money Is Lacking.’ The Administration and Property of the Treasury of St. Valentine’s Church in the Old Town of Prague in Early Modern Times], *Pražský sborník historický* 34 (2006) 93–126.

4 Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, eds., *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 8 vv. (Stuttgart, 1972-1997), especially 7:76.

sified written record keeping in the various areas of public administration. As such, it can be attributed, or denied, to various historical periods.

The life of Jan Kotva does not illustrate all the possibilities contained in these definitions, but it demonstrates the characteristics of the lowest level of urban administration in the early modern period. As for his biography, it is not possible to find many data; the sources shed light only on the final phase of his life – the last sixteen years. Evidently, the first documentation of his life is the grant of residence in the Old Town of Prague in 1592.<sup>5</sup> According to this record, he came originally from Plzeň and, apparently, he had spent some time in the Lesser Town of Prague. The latter conclusion is based on the fact that, in support of his residence request in the Old Town, he had to submit a certificate of good conduct from the mayor of the Lesser Town. His birth date cannot be determined even approximately. A search for ancestors and relatives in the town archive of Plzeň turned up only two names, and without an indication of a relationship to our Jan Kotva. In 1531, Anna Kotvová, widow of Šimon Kotva, purchased a small house for 228 score of Meissen groschen.<sup>6</sup> A rather enigmatic transaction is recorded under the year 1539, according to which Jan Kotva, a resident of Plzeň (and, perhaps, grandfather of our Kotva), took over the debt of 45 score of Meissen groschen, owed to the altar of St. Elizabeth. This debt was attached to a house, and it is not clear, that he owned this house, yet he had to offer his other property as additional collateral.<sup>7</sup> He may have had an inheritance claim from a dying, or already deceased, owner of the house in question.<sup>8</sup> A search for traces of Kotva's residence in the Lesser Town has remained similarly unsuccessful. Hence, Jan Kotva did not enter history until 1592, when on 18 January he became a resident of the Old Town and in the autumn fulfilled all the preconditions for admission into the guild of coachmen.<sup>9</sup>

In the same year, when he was granted burgher's status, Kotva was included among the donors of the so-called Křižovnický graduál, which was possibly

5 AHMP, rkp. 535, kniha práv měšťanských 1550–1600, f. 251b.

6 Archiv města Plzeň (AM Plzeň), kniha lítkupní 1538–1569, inv. č. 213, sign. 1C16, f. 157a.

7 Charter AM Plzeň inv. č. 270, sign. I 328 z 2. května 1539. The archival aids of the Plzeň Town Archive record this document incorrectly (see, for instance, Miloslav Bělohávek, *Městský archiv v Plzni. Průvodce po archivu* [Plzeň 1954] 70). A record in the same sense is in AM Plzeň, kniha smluv 1530–1567, inv. č. 222, sign. 1C24, f. 65a “a někdy od Barbory Benediktové z domu od Martina Potměšila“ [and earlier from Barbora Benediktová from the house of Martin Potměšil].

8 Two more records are connected with this transaction: AM Plzeň, kniha lítkupní 1538–1569, inv. č. 213, sign. 1C16, f. 195b, leden 1538: (Barbora Benediktová sells a brewery to Dorota Náklová and buys a house from Martin Potměšil, to which a debt to the church treasury is attached.) AM Plzeň, kniha smluv 1530–1567, inv. č. 222, sign. 1C24, f. 62v–63a, 22. 1. 1539: (Barbora Benediktová, being ill, bequeaths a meadow to Lorenc Fiala, who is to furnish, in exchange, a lamp for the altar of St. John).

9 AHMP, rkp. 1761, f. 28r, rkp. 1762, f. 13b.

intended for St. Valentine's Church.<sup>10</sup> This gradual perhaps originates in the 1550s and Kotva's contribution to its decoration is the most recent; subsequent illuminations were never realized. As a newly-made citizen, this would have seen Jan Kotva's symbolic entry into the elite of the Old Town to which he was entitled as the administrator of a church choir.

Kotva frequently connects his name with the attribute Korfirst both in the milieu of the guild and outside of it. The form of the name and its orthography are not standardized: variants Korfist, Korfeřt and others occur. He is not unique among Prague coachmen to have used this sobriquet; before him it was adopted by Jiřík Korfeřt, a guild elder at the time of the origin of the guild, and by Šebestián Pec, whom a register of living and deceased guild members – apparently written by Kotva – titles Korfešt the Second. According to the same source, Kotva then figures as the third Korfeřt.<sup>11</sup> Entirely unrelated then is Jan Glecl, otherwise Korfeřt, a tapster in the house “U Ježka.”<sup>12</sup> In later years, Kotva sometimes signs himself simply as Jan Korfirst. The origin of this epithet probably has little in common with the imperial electors [in German: *Kurfürsten*; in Czech: *kurfürtové*]; its etymology is probably connected with the German word *Karren* (wagon, cart), dialectically pronounced as “*kore*,” or it could emerge – after several consonantal changes – from the word *Kallfuss* (horse's heel).<sup>13</sup> A possible interpretation is that Jan Kotva acquired membership in the guild of coachmen in the year 1592 through marriage and that he also gained from his father-in-law the sobriquet Kurfirst. This could also explain his rapid social rise.

As early as 1594, Jan Kotva became for the first time one of the guild elders; soon also he held the post of a guild master, and his name is absent only during the renewal of town offices of 1606. He is first mentioned in 1594 in the function of an official of the treasury at St. Valentine's,<sup>14</sup> and there is evidence that he performed this function also in the years 1599 and 1603-1608.<sup>15</sup> Briefly

10 MS Prague, NK Křiž XVIII A 6–7 [Graham Nos. 83,84]. Jan Kotva is documented in the first volume (Křiž XVIII A 7) f. 119r (E17r) as a donor of the decoration for the votive of the Trinity in Septuagesima and Lent. See: Martina Kratochvílová, *K provenienci křižovníckého a staroměstského graduálu* [On the provenance of the Křižovnícký and Old Town graduals] *Umění* 53 (2005) 323–334, who, on the basis of Kotva's entry (*Jan Kotva Plzeňský Korfyrst správce tohoto [svatovalentinského?] kůru i [a také?] u Matky Boží před Tejnem v Starém Městě* [Jan Kotva of Plzeň Korfyst administrator of this (St. Valentine's?) choir (and also?) at Our Lady before Týn in the Old Town]) considers, that the gradual was made for St. Valentine's Church, and not for the church of Our Lady before Týn, as was the earlier opinion. It remains questionable: how could a newly made citizen become administrator of two choirs? and did the St. Valentine's Choir enjoy legal status?

11 AHMP, rkp. 1762, f. 15–17.

12 Josef Teige, *Základy starého místopisu Pražského, 1437–1620* [Basis of the Ancient Topography of Prague, 1437-1620]. Vol. 2: *Staré Město pražské* [The Old Town of Prague] (Prague, 1915) 319–320.

13 Josef Beneš, *Německá příjmení u Čechů* [German surnames among the Czechs] ed. Marie Nováková 2 vv. (Ústí nad Labem, 1998) 1:138.

14 Artikulové, AHMP, I-451/21, čl. 18. See n. 22 below.

15 Kůrka, “‘Urozenost, ctnost, krása i umění’” 105.

he held the office of *padesátník* and, for a year, he served as the town scribe, which was his only paid function.<sup>16</sup> He owned a house on the northern side of Kaprova Street – hence in the proximity of St. Valentine’s Church.<sup>17</sup> He died in the year 1608. The last record, indicating his presence, dates from a week after Easter, although possibly several records in the manual of coachmen were made by his hand in the early summer. In any case, a list of the arbitrators from November 1608 already refers to his house, as belonging to “the late Mr. Kurfist.”<sup>18</sup>

It is of interest to follow and compare Kotva’s functioning at the head of the coachmen’s guild and at the treasury of St. Valentine’s. In both functions, he shared in the reorganization of those corporations – he established, for instance, their new official record books – and directly in the intensification of their administrative practices. Neither institution was outstanding. Just as the coachmen’s guild was, in comparison with other guilds of the town, rather second-rate, so St. Valentine’s Church belonged to the lower average. Nevertheless, the Old Town councillors could not afford to ignore entirely the happenings within the two institutions.

The coachmen’s guild originated in the Old Town in 1570 and its statutes dated to 1576.<sup>19</sup> Its origin was connected with the presence of Rudolf II’s court and with the specialisation within the carting crafts – the coachmen were oriented toward rapid long-distance transportation of persons and light freight.<sup>20</sup> The guilds had lost their autonomy after the year 1547 and that, of course, affected also the guilds, established subsequently. Now they were subordinated to the town council and to the royal judge (*královský rychtář*) through the “gentlemen ‘inspectors’” (*páni inspectores*). In the case of the coachmen’s guild, this function was exercised directly by the royal judge during the last decade before the Bohemian Uprising of 1618.<sup>21</sup> It is likely that, initially, the records of the guild were limited to the guild statutes and a book, in which admissions of new members were registered. Most of the other preserved guild books were established only in Kotva’s era, and then probably by him personally. There were two memorial books, into which the guild statutes were copied, and in which the oaths of guild members were recorded. One of them subsequently recorded

16 Janáček, *Obrázek ze života Rudolfinské Prahy* 37.

17 Kůrka, “Tu kdež nyní slove u sv. Valentina,” 160.

18 Jaroslav Čechura, Zdeněk Hojda, and Martina Novozámská, *Nájemníci na Starém městě pražském roku 1608*, [Tenants in the Old Town of Prague in 1608], *Documenta Pragensia monographia*, vol. 3 (Prague, 1997) 27 n. 72.

19 For the original of the Guild Statutes, see AHMP, perg. listina II–87.

20 Janáček, *Obrázek ze života Rudolfinské Prahy* 47.

21 Reinstatements of guild functionaries for the relevant period are recorded in the book: AHMP 69. “Gentlemen ‘inspectors’” appear for the first time in 1584 (f. 83); the royal judge assumes this function in 1608 (f. 204b and *passim*).

the above mentioned list of living and deceased members; the other gathered individual ordinances of the guild elders. In addition, Kotva most certainly established a voluminous manual.

A similar basic change in official practices occurred in the treasury of St. Valentine's Church during Kotva's period of service. To the extent that any documentation about the economy of the church exists from the earlier period, it consists only of complaints of irregularities in book-keeping. The supervision by the town council of the treasury was based on its ordinance from 1593, which reserved the appointment of treasury officials to the council, while previously they had been elected by the burghers resident in the relevant parish. In the case of St. Valentine's Church, it is possible to show a thorough reorganization of the treasury in 1599, which was directly connected with Kotva's official activity. That year dates a remarkable source, *Artikulové*,<sup>22</sup> the authorship of which can be most likely attributed to Kotva.<sup>23</sup> In addition, in the same year, a book of the treasury accounts was established, while the earlier book turned into a memorial one.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, the *Artikulové* probably were not Kotva's only book of regulations. The memorial book of the guild contains undated ordinances, which define certain matters that the guild statutes did not address. They consist of internal norms of the guild, promulgated by its elders. The matters of concern are, for instance, the duties of those guild members who were inactive, or who lacked town residence; also such matters, as fees for entries of records into the guild books, and remuneration of the scribes.<sup>25</sup>

Records, passed to us from Kotva, have an idiosyncratic style, deriving from the fact that the author lacked a specialized education and drew on his own imagination to devise the appropriate form of an official entry. His ideas about the proper course of corporations in his care are well illustrated, among others, by the opening statements [*arengae*]. The manual, established by him, is introduced by the following title: "This manual has its origin in A. D. One thousand five hundred ninety six on Monday after Michaelmas, in which various memorabilia are recorded (which affairs are transpiring) by the elder and also the

22 AHMP, I-451/21, published in: Teige, *Základy starého místopisu Pražského* 2, čp. 56, č. 36, p. 277–281; henceforth cited as *Artikulové* with the number of a given Article.

23 In addition to coincidences in style and content, the main argument for Kotva's authorship is an excerpt from the treasury books, which next to two Articles records also his name and the year 1599. AHMP I-451/12 a I-451/2.

24 The books have not survived; information about them is gathered in Kúrka, "‘Urozenost, ctnost, krása i umění!'"

25 AHMP 1761, f. 41–45, f. 168–174

26 *Manuál tento svůj začátek vzal léta páně Tisícího pětistého devadesátého šestého v pondělí po svatým Michalu Archandělu Božím, v němž se poznamenávají rozličné paměti, které se věci konají, když starší i také bratři mladší spolubývací v pořádku nahlédna níže do něho budeš moci porozuměti a jest spraven za starších Jana Kotvy...* AHMP 1756, n.f. [f. o].

younger brethren living in the order – looking further into it you will understand, and it was establish under the elder, Jan Kotvač”<sup>26</sup> The introduction to the Articles of the treasury at St. Valentine’s Church explicitly refers to analogies with guild statutes: “Because every single craft by certain articles is held together, as if by a chain, for the increase of the glory and praise of the Lord, God Almighty, for honesty and goodness: it has appeared to him proper for the admonition of one and all – who [honour] the existence and praise the Lord, God Almighty, in every goodness – especially toward the invoking and glorifying the Name of God, [for that admonition] to bind and decorate them by certain Articles and a laudable order in order that Honour and Praise of the Lord, Our God, might increase and that, for this purpose, honest neighbourliness and the Brotherhood of Literary [Choir] Society may be augmented in goodness.”<sup>27</sup> This sample also shows that the result of Kotva’s bureaucratic prose was not always a fully intelligible text.

Also entries about admission of new guild members, hitherto rather laconic, turned – evidently thanks to Kotva – into unusually voluminous ones, even if, in this case, they kept to a uniform structure. They form a distinct segment of records in the memorial book that Kotva had established.<sup>28</sup> The entry on the admission of Šimon Krysta Cymandl was an extraordinary one, inasmuch as he was a messenger of the city of Nuremberg and, at the given time, did not intend to engage in the trade of coachman.<sup>29</sup>

Kotva included in his recordings more than the official style of the relevant documents required, and he colourfully described contemporary life. For instance, already the first entry in the manual tells how the coachmen created an “international embarrassment” in 1595, when they had not furnished the necessary number of carriages for the arrival of a Muscovite embassy into Prague.<sup>30</sup> In the articles of the church treasury, he could not resist inserting – into a passage about bell-ringing – the following assessment of the existing situation: “...and now the years are fated to be expensive, dangerous – and constantly things are getting always worse.”<sup>31</sup>

Also the ordinances and regulations, composed by him, often recorded and

27 “*Poněvadž jednoho každého řemesla jisté artikule, kterýžto pro rozmnožení cti a chvály Pána Boha všemohoucího za poctivé a dobré jako nějakým řetězem v hromadie se zdržuje. I vidielo se mu za slušné, kteří bytí a chvály Pána Boha všemohoucího i ve všem dobrém a zvláště k vzývání a oslavování Jména Božího jednoho každého napomenouti, jistými Artikuly a řádem chvalitebným obmeziti a ozdobiť aby tedy Čest a Chvála Pána Boha našeho se rozmáhala, k tomu poctivé sousedství a Bratrstvo konventu Literátského své rozhojnění v dobrém bralo.*” Artikulové (see n. 21 above), Úvod [Introduction].

28 AHMP 1761, f. 73–78.

29 Ibid. f. 76b–77a.

30 AHMP 1756, f. 1.

31 “... a nyní léta souzená drahá, nebezpečná a čím dáleji, vždy hůře jest.” Artikulové (see n. 21 above)

described in detail some concrete case, which was to be avoided in the future or which, on the contrary, should serve as a model to be emulated. At the same time, it is necessary to note that it was not only his personal style. The same approach is often followed by the Guild Statutes of 1576.

The figure of Jan Kotva makes it possible to savour the course of early modern bureaucratization and the role of an individual, who was engaged at the lowest level of public administration. It is exactly the 1590s that represent a distinct turning point in the process of urban administration.<sup>32</sup> The dynamics of the Rudolphine metropolis – that in a short time had almost doubled the number of its inhabitants – posed new challenges also to the urban administration. Still, only its highest strata were fully professional, and drew on the graduates of the University of Prague. The level of guild administration continued to be staffed by private citizens. Thanks to the management of several dozen guilds with rotating officials, a good hundred of the Old Town residents became engaged in public life and authority. That was not a negligible social group, yet little is known about its motivation for public service. We may consider Jan Korfišt as its typical representative. He stands out by his unusual verbosity, although this may be partly due to the abnormal amount of his preserved writings.

At the same time, it is important to note that the changes toward greater bureaucratisation, exemplified by Kotva, were not irreversible. Not even Kotva found immediate successors. In the years after his death, entries in the books of the coachmen's guild were made just sporadically, and not even his system of recording was respected. Similarly, at St. Valentine's Church the regular rotation of officials and the keeping of accounts continued only to the year 1615. Afterwards, these procedures remained once more neglected.

Even the joint tenure of offices in the guild and in the church treasury was not unprecedented; periodical combination of the two types of offices derived from the fact that many coachmen tended to live in the parish of St. Valentine's.<sup>33</sup> As another example of a single person performing both functions, we can cite the case of Duchoslav Karafilát, recorded among guild officials in 1623, while he administered the church treasury in the period 1608-1615 and again the 1630s (possibly also in the 1620s).<sup>34</sup>

Josef Janáček attempted to portray Jan Kotva not only as a distinctive scribe, but also as an ambitious individual with conflicting loyalties, seeking more recognition from the town authorities than from his neighbours.<sup>35</sup> This interpretation to a certain extent reflected a Marxist approach of yesteryears. Nowa-

32 Václav Vojtišek, *O vývoji samosprávy pražských měst* (Prague, 1927) 61–62.

33 Kůrka, "Tu kdež nyní slove u sv. Valentina," 141.

34 AHMP 1756, f. 116; Kůrka, "“Urozenost, ctnost, krása i umění”" 106.

35 Janáček, *Obrázek ze života Rudolfinské Prahy* 36–37.

days, Kotva's whole-hearted engagement in public affairs can serve as an inspirational example. The charge of voraciousness can be refuted by pointing out the thanklessness of fulfilling such functions, when the reward for public service could rest only in the feeling of self-realization and, in the case of Kotva, also in the legacy that he had left behind. In any case, the fact that Jan Korfiršt devoted in his records so much space to considering the proper system of public administration, shows that he entertained his own idea of the common good and sought to implement it in his official agenda.

Translated from the Czech by Zdeněk V. David