

Alexandra Kaar, *Wirtschaft, Krieg und Seelenheil: Papst Martin V., Kaiser Sigismund und das Handelsverbot gegen die Hussiten in Böhmen*. Beihefte zu J.F. Böhmer, *Regesta Imperii*, 46. Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2020, 387 pp.

In this thought-provoking study, Alexandra Kaar assembles an impressive dossier of diplomatic and other archival sources mentioning economic activity between Hussites and non-Hussites (referred to throughout as Catholics) to understand better the political and cultural dynamics of trade restrictions in the later Middle Ages. Not a work of economic history in a traditional sense, her story spans some sixteen years, beginning in 1420 with Pope Martin V's call to crusade against the Bohemian dissidents and ending around 1436, when the compacts were reached in the Moravian city of Jihlava. Kaar's main argument is that the embargo practices of the papacy and the empire against the Hussites took many different forms. These corresponded in turn to a vast array of strategic ends, not all of which necessarily had anything to do with moveable goods. To be sure, wares of all types feature heavily in the sources. But those wares, the author argues, are better understood as part of a larger cultural and political discourse that drew on the language of economics and trade. To what degree and in what form could one interact with those identified as Hussites, and who was responsible for articulating and regulating those strictures?

Undergirding the story of trade relations with the Hussites is a great deal of complicated legal history. Kaar shows how certain aspects of civil law in late antiquity were transformed in the canon law of the high Middle Ages, when popes and legal commentators began asking what the consequences of keeping the company of the heterodox should be. Here, Kaar draws on Stefan Stantchev's important work on the development of the papal embargo as a novel legal discourse extending beyond consumable goods to include, and even primarily be concerned with, pastoral care and salvation. This is followed by a substantial, nearly one-hundred-page overview of the history of research on the Hussite wars and the political economy of Bohemia in the fifteenth century, followed by a discussion of how the transmission of textual sources in the archives around Bohemia can, when used with great care, help us see regional conflicts and stories as part of a broader cultural phenomenon.

The core of this study, however, consists of three thematic blocks. In the first, Kaar focuses on trade restrictions and the regulation of commerce as a strategy of warfare in and around the Kingdom of Bohemia. Specific 'things' seem to have been targeted by non-Hussites as products of concern. Salt, wine, and other consumable goods can be found throughout the diplomatic correspondence from the registers of King Sigismund, for example, where the items are often mentioned in connection with the regulation of transportation routes – that is, with street traffic. But there were also items of relative luxury, like textiles that seem to have caught the attention of non-Hussites, as did ironware, horses, and other strategic military objects. The extent to which these regulations were actually regulated is unclear, but the lack of judicial records concerning these blockades suggests that, as in the logic of the papal embargo, the mechanism of punishment would most likely play out in the economy of the soul.

Kaar dedicates a second thematic strand to symbolic communication, a conceptual apparatus that has reached the status of canon among German-speaking scholars of the premodern. Various figures involved in the Hussite conflict not only invoked trade res-

trictions in charters and other documents for material gain or military advantage; they could also, as Kaar illustrates with numerous examples, contribute to a discursive idiom in which ‘Hussite’ could serve as a shorthand accusation of negligence. In Olomouc, for example, rumors circulated that the city government had decided not to defend the city given the all but certain Hussite takeover, which eventually forced officials to formally disavow the accusations in rituals of oath-swearing that were recorded on parchment, mending their public image at the cost of codifying in writing, at least implicitly, their support for a defensive military strategy.

In the final core section, we learn about the various ways that economic sanctions can be leveraged as a practice of authority – that is, of *Herrschaft*. By reading local mandates and those of Sigismund, Kaar differentiates a ‘bottom-up’ from a ‘top-down’ strategy and tries to tease out the different motivations that various historical actors had for preferring one over the other. In 1422, for example, the citizens of Zittau seem to have played into the imperial position on Hussite trade as a way of gaining an upper hand in regional disputes with regional elites, which at least in this case seems to have mostly concerned urban infrastructure again; the ‘top-down’ example from Breslau in 1431, on the other hand, depicts a direct intervention on the part of Sigismund. After learning about a legal relationship arranged by certain inhabitants of Breslau with a Hussite, Sigismund condemns the agreement and encourages the citizens of Breslau to take up arms against their traitorous neighbors.

The great strength of Kaar’s approach lies in its extraordinary assemblage of written sources that depict a clear pattern of economic warfare in the later Middle Ages. This material will be extremely useful not only for specialists, but also for economic and cultural historians of the later Middle Ages more generally. That same strength also speaks to some of the questions left open by the book, since, it seems, a trade embargo as such – a strategy in the singular – never really existed. While Kaar makes clear in her introduction that she is in fact looking at embargos and trade restrictions as a plurality of practices, we still read about a singular ‘Handelsverbot’ throughout the study and, in an offhand remark (85), the author alerts the reader to a small but telling detail: in all of these diplomatic and archival sources, there is not a single case of anyone petitioning for an exemption to these regulations; there was no one piece of legislation that a petitioner could seek an exemption from in the first place. The ‘anti-Hussite trade embargo’ was not, in other words, a monolithic entity, nor one that onlookers would necessarily have been able to identify, point to, or contest. This is in fact the primary take-away of Kaar’s thorough study, and one that is a crucial distinction to make. Unfortunately, the author’s relatively conservative terminology often inadvertently masks her innovative approach.

Still, *Wirtschaft, Krieg und Seelenheil* will almost certainly become the go-to work on the cultural-economic aspects of the Hussite conflicts, which promises to be a particularly fruitful field as the Regesta Imperii project to update the diplomatic records of Sigismund continues to unfold.

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