



The only contemporary depiction of Jan Blahoslav, bishop of the *Unitas Fratrum*, is found on the title page of a printed hymnal of the Bohemian Brethren (at the singer's podium with glasses). Many hymns of the Unity continue to be used in present-day Protestantism. (HAB Wolfenbüttel, Sign. Tl 4 2)

Saved, Forgotten, Rediscovered

The violent recatholicisation of the Czech lands in the 1620s ended the existence of the *Unitas Fratrum* in Bohemia and Moravia. Many church members found refuge in Central Poland. Fourteen volumes of the *Acta Unitatis Fratrum* were taken to safety in Lissa (Leszno). There they were preserved, but eventually forgotten. Around 1840, Czech and German researchers became aware of the manuscripts. One volume was acquired by the Prague National Museum, the thirteen remaining volumes were purchased by the Renewed Moravian Church and have since been the property of the Herrnhut Unity Archives (since 1945 kept as a deposit in the National Archives in Prague).

With more than 10.000 written pages, mostly in Czech, the *Acta Unitatis Fratrum* contain an extraordinarily extensive and dense tradition of documents pertaining to the history of the Bohemian Brethren and more generally to Central European religious history in the 15th and 16th centuries. The *Acta Unitatis Fratrum* are an outstanding monument of early modern memorial culture. The scope and quality of the texts, as well as the distinct perspective of a persecuted minority group, render the *Acta Unitatis Fratrum* uniquely significant.

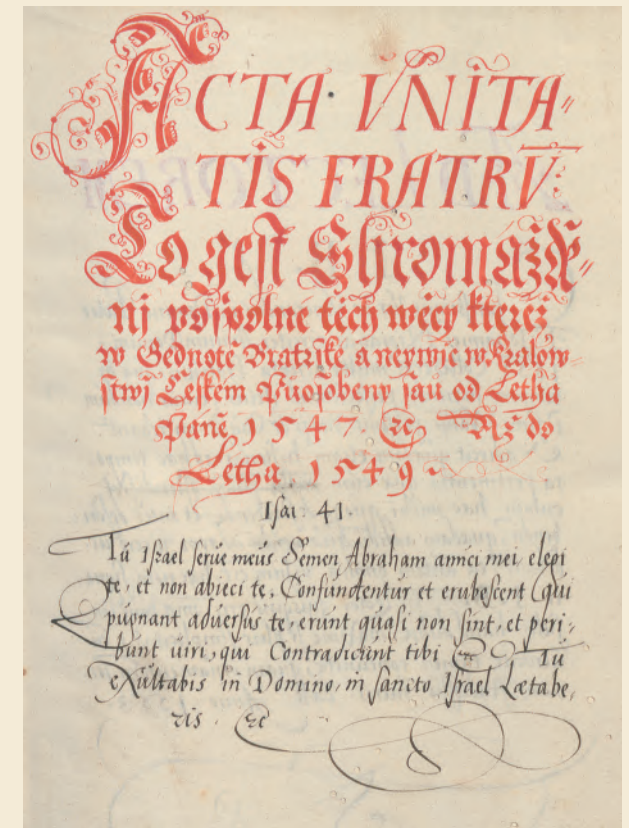
The Edition Project – An Innovative Approach

In the 19th century, attempts were made both on the Czech and on the German side to publish the *Acta Unitatis Fratrum*. In 1915 and 1923, Jaroslav Bidlo presented critical full-text editions of two of the fourteen volumes, but the project was not continued. In 2011, the leadership of the European-Continental Province of the Moravian Church appointed a German-Czech commission for publishing the *Acta Unitatis Fratrum*. In cooperation with the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, the commission developed an innovative approach for the edition project, aiming at making all text units accessible through detailed introductions, summaries, and indexes. The members of the commission are Prof. Dr. Joachim Bahlcke (University of Stuttgart), Prof. Dr. Jindřich Halama (Charles University Prague), Prof. Dr. Martin Holý (Academy of Sciences Prague), Dr. Jiří Just (Academy of Sciences Prague), Prof. Dr. Martin Rothkegel (Theologische Hochschule Elstal), and Prof. Dr. Ludger Udolph (Technische Universität Dresden).

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In the years after 1722, Nikolaus Ludwig Graf von Zinzendorf, together with Moravian refugees, established the Renewed Moravian Church (Evangelische Brüdergemeine) in Herrnhut, building on the tradition of the Bohemian Brethren.



Title page of the oldest volume of the *Acta Unitatis Fratrum* (Praha, Národní archiv, AUF, sv. VII)

Acta Unitatis Fratrum Letters and Tracts of the Bohemian Brethren

Edited on behalf of the Historical Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and the Provincial Board of the Moravian Church, European Continental Province.

Following the Model of Early Christianity

The Unity of Brethren emerged as a religious group between 1457 and 1467 in Bohemia, more than half a century before the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in Wittenberg and Zurich. Since the Hussite Wars, Bohemia had been divided between Roman Catholics and Hussite Utraquists. In view of the violent religious conflicts, a group of men and women from different social classes ventured to establish a new community based on the model of the New Testament and the early church. Despite persecution by Utraquist and Catholic authorities, a rapidly growing network of Brethren congregations emerged in Bohemia and Moravia, led by their own priests and bishops and a council of clergy and laity. In the course of the 16th century, the Brethren increasingly understood themselves as inheritors of a tradition going back to Jan Hus and at the same time as part of European Protestantism.



The image of the Victorious Lamb was used in 16th century Bohemian Brethren prints. In the 18th century, the symbol of the Lamb was adopted by the Renewed Moravian Church. (Knihovna Královské kanonie premonstrátů na Strahově Praha, Sign. FP II 11)



Vavřinec Orlík was one of the editors of the *Acta Unitatis Fratrum*. (NSUB Göttingen, Sign. 4 TH PAST 506 80 Rara)

Jan Blahoslav, Vavřinec Orlík, and the Origins of the *Acta Unitatis Fratrum*

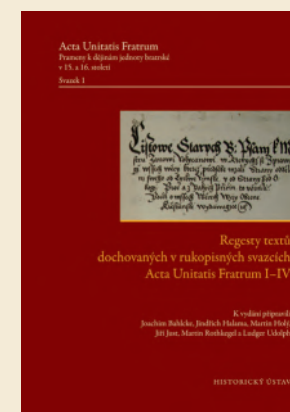
The Unity of Brethren developed an independent theological tradition and created an extensive body of literature. As early as 1500, printing was used to produce hymnals, devotional texts, and apologetical writings for their congregations.

Other documents, letters, and tracts, including numerous writings of the Unity's opponents, were only handed down in manuscript form and kept in the archives and libraries of the Unity. Around 1550, bishop Jan Blahoslav took steps to have the extensive handwritten tradition of the Unity systematically collected and copied in uniform quarto volumes. He was supported in his work by Vavřinec Orlík and other Brethren priests. In Eibenschitz (Ivančice), the series of *Acta Unitatis Fratrum* was continued by bishop Blahoslav's successors until 1589.



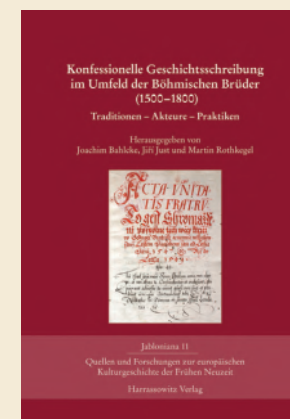
Acta Unitatis Fratrum. Dokumente zur Geschichte der Böhmischer Brüder im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert. Bd. 1: Regesten der in den Handschriftenbänden *Acta Unitatis Fratrum* I–IV überlieferten Texte. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018. 524 S., 24 farbige Abb. ISBN 978-3-447-10982-6. 128,00 Eur

The first volume of the new edition, published both in a German and a Czech version, describes the content of *Acta Unitatis Fratrum*, vols. 1 to 4.



Acta Unitatis Fratrum. Prameny k dějinám jednoty bratrské v 15. a 16. století. Sv. 1: Regesty textů dochovaných v rukopisných svazcích *Acta Unitatis Fratrum* I–IV. Praha: Historický ústav, 2022. 447 str., 24 barevných obr. ISBN 978-80-7286-390-7. 580 Kč

Of interest also:



Joachim Bahlcke, Jiří Just, Martin Rothkegel (Hg.): *Konfessionelle Geschichtsschreibung im Umfeld der Böhmischer Brüder (1500–1800). Traditionen – Akteure – Praktiken*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2022. ISBN 978-3-447-11709-8. 120,00 Eur

In preparation:

Acta Unitatis Fratrum, Bd. 2: Regesten der in den Handschriftenbänden *Acta Unitatis Fratrum* V–VI überlieferten Texte. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2023.