

Summary

THE INAUGURAL LECTURE OF AUGUST GOTTLIEB MEISSNER IN COMPARISON WITH THOSE OF K. H. SEIBT, F. A. C. WERTHES, J. J. HAAN, F. F. WALLRAF, AND E. SCHNEIDER

The article compares the inaugural lecture of August Gottlieb Meißner (1753-1807), Professor of Aesthetics and Classical Literature at Prague, and the first Protestant teacher at the Faculty of Arts in Prague since the Thirty Years' War, with the inaugural lectures of professors of aesthetics, or „die Schöne Wissenschaften“, at universities in the Habsburg Monarchy and at Roman Catholic universities in the Rheinland. (Chairs of Aesthetics were not established at the Protestant universities.) The prerequisites for a comparison are particularly good because the inaugural lecture of Meißner's predecessor at Prague, Karl Heinrich Seibt (1730-1806), has survived, as have those of his contemporaries, Professor Friedrich August Clement Werthes (1748-1817) at Pest, Johann Jakob Haan (whose dates of birth and death are unknown) at Trier, Ferdinand Franz Wallraf (1748-1824) at Cologne, and Eulogius Schneider (1756-1794) at Bonn. The aim of the comparison is to examine the conventions according to which professors of the Schöne Wissenschaften and aesthetics wrote their inaugural lectures, and to determine, how Meißner's lecture differed in these thematic conventions. The analyses demonstrate that the focuses of the inaugural lectures consist in clarifying the usefulness of these two taught fields for the university and society. The subsequent comparison with Meißner's lecture reveals that Meißner did not incorporate even one of the usual topics into his lecture; it appears not to bear a trace of any endeavour to legitimize aesthetics,

to explain what the subject was about, what it aimed to achieve, or how it might be useful. His silence about aesthetics (unlike Classical literature, still a new, far from usual discipline) leads one to search for the reasons behind this highly unusual approach. The article concludes with two hypotheses offered in explanation.