

## Summary

### Transmission of Knowledge. The Fortune of Four Bestsellers in Late Medieval Czech Lands

In the present publication, transmission of knowledge in any historical period, including the Middle Ages, is understood as an active, dynamic process. To capture its nature and extent, living texts are explored in their interaction with their authors, scribes, readers, users, as well as in general context of the society in which they originated. It is this transmission of knowledge by means of recording the texts in manuscript books which stands at the centre of our research. When formulating and answering questions regarding medieval codices and recorded treatises, the perspective of the research was shifted from the texts themselves to the reader/user who is deemed at least as important as the contents of the researched texts. For the study of medieval written culture of the Czech lands, those works were explored which were not considered a compulsory reading required to be known by every medieval scholar but those which enjoyed extraordinary popularity, were widely distributed and accepted. The research followed two basic methods of approaching the texts: the first method proceeded from the texts to the people behind them (writers, owners, users); the second method began with the people (scholars, collectors and bibliophiles) and proceeded to researching the texts. Both these approaches complement one another which allowed tracing the social dimensions of the manuscripts as well as the importance which a specific work enjoyed in the culture of the given region.

To answer the questions from the area of medieval written culture and scholarship, four treatises were selected and subsequently explored in as wide a range of their impact as possible. Attention was focused on works which in the medieval period met the conditions to be placed in the category of bestsellers: pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum secretorum*; catechetical dialogue *Elucidarium* by Honorius Augustodunensis; chess treatise *Liber de moribus hominum et officiis nobilium sive super ludum scaccorum* by the Dominican Jacobus de Cesolis and *Chronicon pontificum et imperatorum* by Martin of Opava. What in our opinion connects these treatises is their explicitly or implicitly expressed effort to transmit variously defined knowledge not only to the highly specialized audience but also to wider, yet naturally still educated classes. In this process, one of the reasons is perceived why the texts which are called in

this publication *books of knowledge* were spreading so successfully across the medieval society. For example, (pseudo-)Aristotle in his *Secretum secretorum* explicitly writes that he passes on to his disciple a set of knowledge on the world which was make Alexander able to rule the nations. *Secretum* in the form of the letter between two important historical personalities mediates a highly intellectual discourse and insight into complicated disciplines, including politics, metaphysics or astrology. Yet it does so in a selective, condensed and often even uncomplicated manner which makes the treatise suitable to be read in various social and educational levels, and thus to a certain degree provides interdiscursive transmission of knowledge. *Elucidarium*, written as a staged dialogue between the teacher and his pupil had the transmission of its theologically oriented knowledge already encoded in its form. Again, it did so in a well arranged, clearly structured and abstracted way. Cessolis's *Liber de moribus* was not only a social allegory (and, at the same time, instruction on how the society works) based on the game of chess but also a source of Classical tales and exempla which provided wide access to a reduced and easily graspable Classical knowledge. *Chronicle* by Martin of Opava is both a popular summary of historiographical data, and an interpretative tool for legitimisation of the division of power in history.

Educational culture is a culture of the recorded text; moreover, the number of extant manuscripts of specific works testifies to their importance. It was books and other written documents which, besides oral tradition, provided the only source of knowledge. Their value was hence invaluable in the effort to either receive or transmit knowledge further. A corpus of the preserved Latin transcriptions was defined in the effort to capture the transmission of knowledge realized by means of the selected texts in the geographical area of the Czech lands. On this ground, all texts started to exhibit the curve of frequency of their occurrence. Given the different historical development in various parts of Europe, two out of four texts, as expected in the region of the Czech Lands, had their copies multiplied later than in Western Europe: for example, *Elucidarium* has no extant copy in the area of the Czech lands from the time shortly after it had been written, i.e. from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Also, *Secretum secretorum* becomes more widely known here, apart from a few exceptions, only in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. With this general tendency which can be observed in Europe chronologically correspond both Cessolis's *Liber de moribus* and *The Chronicle* by Martin of Opava, their correspondence being clearly explained by the later date of their origin. Further development in all cases unequivocally confirms the flourishing of written production in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Connection also needs to be sought in the

founding of the university which stimulated intellectual life and exchange of texts – especially in the example of pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *Secretum secretorum*, this line is indisputable due to the fact that it found its place in the university education. Yet the establishment of such a dominant centre of knowledge had an undeniable influence on the spread of treatises which do not provide a very clear evidence on how a specific treatise was used in the university milieu. In the context of the present publication, this is especially true of Martin's *Chronicle*. In the pre-Hussite era, the number of manuscripts increased not only in the metropolitan chapter and cloister libraries but also in parishes. For example, the reception of *Elucidarium* shows that the Czech development departs from the European trend where the owners unequivocally recruited from the monastic institutions. However, in the Czech lands of the 14<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the work is attested to be present also in parishes. Among the parish priests, including those in the countryside, gradually spread also three of the other examined treatises. Already in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the texts became part of the live written culture in that they entered other texts which caused that the transmission of knowledge contained in them entered the next phase. These works (especially *Secretum secretorum* whose importance was solidified by Aristotle's name) became so naturalized that it gradually became an inseparable part of the specific educational and literary field, be it the sphere of political or natural philosophy. The trend of intercultural reception continued also in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, although different social atmosphere brought with itself new genres as well as new communicational codes. Vernacularisation, which will be discussed later, undoubtedly played a role in the secondary reception of the texts.

The Hussite movement altered the heretofore rising line in the number of copies although it did not interrupt it entirely. Even in the era of the Hussite wars, new copies are still found, even though their number is undoubtedly significantly smaller. Some new records are known to have originated in the 1420s university milieu; others are mentioned in relation to the Southern Bohemian cloisters which were under the protection of the Rosenberg family. Also, the production beyond the Bohemian borders should not be neglected, that in Silesia, Vienna and the Empire where the Catholic emigrants were arriving, often taking their books with them. Yet the Hussite period was crucial also from the perspective of the later development after the Compacts of Basel were announced. Even though higher losses in the number of manuscripts need to be undoubtedly taken into account, in the Hussite period, the absolute number of the copies of the individual works did not reach the

pre-Hussite values. Reasons for this can be perhaps sought in the altered literary preferences which, on the one hand, inclined to the religious polemic genre, on the other hand, to the newly arriving humanism. Yet another important factor was certainly also the bad economic situation of the Church institutions, cloisters, chapters and parishes which ought to continue in their role of influential intellectual centres. Moreover, the role of the text in the society was also changed by the Hussite movement, that is, the change affected even such treatises which on the first sight lacked polemic potential. Thus, quotations from *Secretum secretorum* become a safeguard which promotes the Catholic rule in a confessionally divided kingdom and Aristotle in his advice to Alexander is made to utter words on Christian unity (i.e., the Catholic faith). So neutral a text in terms of values as was Martin of Opava's *Chronicle* entered the polemic arena as a historical argument confirming the Utraquist beliefs. *The Chronicle* served as proof of the practices of the original Church (especially the so-called St Peter's mass) and the decline which the Church reformists saw as the result of the Donation of Constantine. Yet polemic potential of Martin's work was also discovered by Catholic authors who, nevertheless, used it in a very similar manner. While the Utraquists interpreted papal edicts as mere human heresies which deflect the Church and liturgical practice away from the ideal of the original Church, the Catholic authors understood the chronicle as a narrative legitimizing the development of this practice. Disputations from the Hussite era liked to make use of historical arguments. After all, Martin of Opava was not their only and most quoted source. This position was held by the papal-imperial chronicle *Flores temporum* which was preserved, among others, even in its special Czech redaction. *Elucidarium*, composed as a dialogical Catholic catechism, did not contribute to the Hussite polemics in any significant way despite the fact that the copy of this text is found in the codices alongside treatises critical to the Hussites as well as in those written in their favour.

Yet to return to the manuscript corpus itself. During its assembling, attention was not placed only on the copies themselves. The manuscript users were gradually taking part of the written culture which resulted in them leaving their marks in codices in the form of annotations, insertions, or commentaries. By doing so, they provided not only a proof of the passive but especially the active reception and therefore also successful transmission of knowledge. Textual interventions naturally changed in relation to the character of the treatise as well as the milieu in which it was used. Interventions in the copies of *Liber de moribus* and *Elucidarium* were characterized especially by the effort to make the copied matter more clearly arranged and thus

make the text easier to navigate. The readers of *Secretum*, especially those connected to the university milieu, did not hesitate to add extended glosses which often bore witness to their deep understanding of a specific topic and a proactive approach to the discussed matter. The founding of the university goes hand in hand with the commentaries to *Secretum* which circulated throughout Central Europe. Prague had obviously been one of the centres where academic communication channels intersected. The extant commentaries thus prove a lively intellectual exchange especially between the Prague and Cracow university soon after their founding.

Medieval Czech lands were no exception in that elite circles viewed books as representative objects which generally represented an important part of the cultural and social capital. Since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the written production here significantly rises, it is also possible to witness the rise of extensive private libraries which were no longer a phenomenon exclusively linked to the royal court. These were the libraries of high Church prelates who were among the most educated men in the country. Yet after the death of their owners, these book collections inevitably became part of the library of the respective Church institution or university. Bibliophilic book collecting continued even in the 15<sup>th</sup> century when the important Church personalities (Jan Herttemberger of Loket, Jan of Krumlov, Václav Koranda the Younger) were joined also by lay aristocracy. It is no doubt that, for example, the Rosenberg family already at that time, in the Middle Ages, owned the basis of their future monumental library which included even the best-sellers of the time including those examined in this publication. In the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, we come across, apart from the collectors, such extraordinary individuals as was, for example, Crux of Telč. However, from his intense and at the same time creative approach it is not possible to arrive at more general conclusions as he in his efforts remained rather unique.

Though focus was placed in the first place on the above-mentioned four treatises, their research led to the finding that similar features were exhibited by many other works which were also taken into consideration in this publication, especially as their copies were often found in the same milieu and even in the same codices as “our” bestsellers. By these works we mean especially the pseudo-Bernard’s treatise *Epistola de cura rei familiaris*, pseudo-Burley’s *Liber de vita et moribus philosophorum antiquorum*, *Breviloquium de virtutibus antiquorum principum et philosophorum* by John of Wales, *De quatuor virtutibus principalis* by Martin of Braga or the exempla collection called *Gesta Romanorum*. These treatises, together with *Liber de moribus* and to a lesser degree also with *Secretum secretorum* formed a group of “useful texts” which

are, among others, characterized by easy access to the matter of Classical tales and philosophy. In accord with the definition of *books of knowledge* at the beginning of this publication, the abovementioned works can be without hesitation included in it as well. These texts also share a prominent tendency to interpret the society in a moralizing way. They also gave advice to their readers and users on the workings of the society, on Classical history and they mediated paraphrased tales of European history and mythology. To scholars, students and perhaps even more to preachers, these texts offered a much-needed reservoir of wise stories and advices which they could quote in their subsequent works without the need to browse through thick volumes which often required specialized academic expertise. It is therefore obvious that common occurrence in a whole range of codices was not the only thing which bound these texts together; what is also apparent is their inner textual interconnectedness.

Medieval bestsellers shared space in the same codices; to give another example, it is possible to mention *Epistola presbiteri Johannis*, the legendary letter of the Prester John which, in many aspects, influenced medieval imagination. In the European context, all our bestsellers are often found copied together with this letter. In the context of the Czech lands, especially the common occurrence with Martin of Opava's *Chronicle* can be found, which corresponds with the fact that it was copied, either directly or by commission, by those who were interested in geography, looked up to the Orient, the exotic and the unknown worlds.

All four selected treatises were equipped in the Middle Ages with their Czech renderings. Their vernacular versions originated gradually and most of them beg the question whether medieval attempts at vernacularization were successful or if it is better described as multiplying of unsuccessful projects. Considering this process also raises the question of its relationship with laicization, among other things also because in the Latin production, documented lay readers of the examined bestsellers are practically missing, which is true even of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Based on our literary probe, it is therefore not possible to consider the laicization of the written production in a very broad sense. However, the fragmentary preservation of aristocratic, town and burgher libraries should be taken into consideration. One of the exceptions was the translator and lawyer Petr Přespole, citizen of Kutná Hora, who is linked in 1460s with the copy of Martin of Opava's *Chronicle*. Is it therefore justifiable to perceive the vernacularization and laicization in the Middle Ages as connected vessels? Vernacularization undoubtedly meant a huge impulse and challenge for the spread of works written in Latin. When taking

the Czech lands into consideration, it is not possible to mention the Czech language versions without mentioning the German versions, too, which in the vernacular field need to be viewed as partners to the Czech texts. What also needs to be taken into account is the fact that the German translations were without exceptions copies of the variants which had not originated in our lands and were therefore a part of the much broader and complicated language space.

We studied and described the conversion to the vernacular mode for each of the given bestsellers separately. The pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum secretorum* was translated into Czech several times: the oldest translation from the 14<sup>th</sup> century has not survived. Other is known only from a later record from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. At this time, two more translations were created, at the request (and with the financial support) of the higher nobility (lords of Hradec and Rosenberg). Only the latter translation from the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century survived in two copies. References to *Secretum* appear already in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in the Czech vernacular works (*Správovna*, *Solfernus*); at least in the case of *Správovna* it is possible to assume that its author Pavel Žídek used a Latin text as his source and choose the vernacular form with regard to lay readers of the royal court.

In the case of the Latin *Elucidarium*, not a single layperson has been found among its readers. When this dialogue became the Middle High German *Lucidarius*, or the Old Czech *Lucidář*, it partially changed its form, contents and in the end even its target readers. In this process, vernacularization lead to a shift beyond the borders of catechesis. Some passages were added which aimed at a lived-through devotional practice and new chapters were added covering the themes of liturgy, cosmology, and geography. The Czech translation of *Elucidarium* is extant in a single manuscript which dates to the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century; already at the end of this century, first prints appear which shifts the focus (at last) to the lay readership. The only layperson, of whom it is safe to assume that he in the medieval Czech lands read Jacobus's *Liber de moribus* is Tomáš Štítný ze Štítného, author of its Czech rendering. This text, despite having elicited considerable attention of historians and experts on Czech medieval language and literature is yet again extant only in the single manuscript from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Although it is necessary to assume that the Czech text had circulated in several copies, it was not an obvious success. Štítný's adaptation, though, was no exception in this respect. Before 1500, pseudo-Burley's *Liber de vita et moribus* had been translated into Czech three times; the first variant is extant in one copy, the second one in four copies and the third one is again available only in a sin-

gle copy. The fact that this text, like *Secretum secretorum*, had been translated repeatedly, is no proof of successful spread of its vernacular versions. However, in the case of *Chronicle* by Martin of Opava, the situation is quite different – here, besides its Latin production, even its Czech adaptation, the so called *Martimiani*, which originated thanks to the efforts of the (probably) lay translator Beneš of Hořovice, proved successful. Of all the examined texts, it was probably the most successful in the vernacular milieu. However, even in this case, it is not possible to ascribe to it some prominent impact on the lay readers. Based on our four researched texts, their Czech renderings thus seem rather stories of repeated failure. The general question, how far the lay readership involved in the written culture of the period in a more significant and active way, remains on the hypothetical level.

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