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Opening Central Europe

Companion to Central and Eastern European

Humanism, vol. 2: *The Czech Lands*, part 1

(A–L), ed. by Lucie Storchová, Berlin and Boston:

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International research on Renaissance humanism is often limited to analysing the Western European and Mediterranean culture. Central European countries (like Hungary, Poland, or Bohemia) – whose writers, equally enmeshed in the network of international relationships, were also participants of this movement and citizens of the Republic of Letters – seem still rather unknown to the English-speaking world. Some monographs or articles written in German, English, or French, dealing with several authors from these lands, do appear; some entries concerning Central European culture and literature have been included in various companion books;¹ a handbook was published,² but there has been no general systematic reference work that could open this world to the western readers.

The present project was commenced within the framework of the multivolume *Companion to Central and Eastern European Humanism* which is being published by De Gruyter. The first volume, *Hungary*, edited by Farkas Gabor Kiss, is to be distributed in January 2022. The first part of the second volume, *The Czech Lands* (A–L), edited by Lucie Storchová, appeared at the end of 2020.

The latter work is intended to be a bio-bibliographical dictionary in which not only rudimentary information is provided, but

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¹ E.g. J. Axer with the assistance of K. Tomaszuk, “Central-Eastern Europe”, in *A Companion to the Classical Tradition*, ed. by C.W. Kallendorf, Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, pp. 132–156.

² *A Handbook to Classical Reception in Eastern and Central Europe*, ed. by Z. Martirosova Torlone, D. LaCourse Monteanu, D. Dutsch, Oxford: Wiley & Sons, 2017.

also a more comprehensive portrait of each writer and his oeuvre can be found. It is the outcome – as the book says – of a project undertaken by the Czech Science Foundation. It seems obvious that it was a long time in the making and required a harmonious team and effective collaboration of its members responsible for various entries. The whole group consisted of more than thirty researchers from four countries. The motto³ chosen by the authors testifies to the fact that they are also aware of the continuity of scholarly research, dedicating the volume ‘to past generations of scholars who dealt with humanism in the Czech lands, *in memoriam*.’ Nevertheless, entering into discussions on the conceptualization of humanism, they did not always share the point of view of their predecessors, since they preferred to give up both the ‘nationalist’ approach, favouring Czech-language literature, and that of classical philologists, focusing on humanist Latin poetry and considering the Czech-written texts – for example, the translations of the Bible or of ancient literary works – as less important. Ultimately, the authors chose a *via media*, trying to conceptualize humanism as a tendency to treat the classical tradition as a pattern of writing. The authors included in the book wrote either in Latin or Greek, edited ancient texts, translated some Latin, Greek, or Hebrew texts into the vernacular, or composed some humanist-oriented vernacular works. They were active between the last third of the 15th century and circa 1630. The *terminus a quo* of this timeframe is the beginning of a systematic humanist education in the Czech lands. The *terminus ad quem* is connected with the battle of White Mountain (1620), after which some scholars were forced to emigrate and the system of university education and didactics began to change. From the geographical point of view, the authors in question were either born in the Czech lands (that is: Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia), or worked there for a time, or else were connected with the local nobility or scholars. Consequently, we can also find Johannes Kepler among them, who spent twelve years in Prague.

The volume is carefully elaborated,⁴ provided with a list of abbreviations, a general (selected) bibliography and indexes of names and places. The book begins with a general preface, explaining the editors’ intentions and their criteria of selection and other guiding principles. In the next three introductory chapters, the development of humanism in the Czech lands is outlined and the most important authors of the main significant periods are mentioned. Petr Voit leads the discussion up to the first half of the 16th century, Lucie Storchová presents the humanist literature from the 1550’s until the late 1580’s, and Jan Malura with Marta Vaculínová discuss the late humanism from the 1590’s until the early 1620’s.

Some knowledge of the religious and political background seems essential to understanding the specific character of humanism in the Czech lands (especially

³ *Quasi nani sumus gigantum humeris insidentes* – ‘We are like dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants’ (the saying of Bernard of Chartres).

⁴ There are few errors caused by the printers devil, for example ‘Alcmaic’ verse (p. 26), ‘Cracow llage boys and a less numeviversity al centres for ished formation’ (p. 33), ‘In 1975 he [Bohuslaus of Lobkowicz and Hassenstein] enrolled at the university of Bologna’ (p. 689).

the role of the pre-Lutheran reformation and the peaceful coexistence of Catholics and Utraquists at the end of the 15th century, the University of Prague being dominated by the latter). We can speak of both Catholic, and Utraquist, humanist writers, but – significantly – the former often studied abroad, for example in Krakow, which makes this period interesting to Polish scholars dealing with the Czech-Polish literary relations, as does the Prague episode of Conrad Celtes to the German (and many other) researchers. The reader is guided through various connections between humanism, Renaissance, and Reformation, and the role of the diffusion of humanist education (directly from Italy, or through Germany), imitation of foreign humanists, and spreading of various textbooks, anthologies and commonplace books.

Lucie Storchová describes a transformation of the approach to the classical tradition in the second half of the 16th century, i.a. the growing importance of the Wittenberg model of education, connections with the Viennese court and university, urban humanism, and the role of printers such as Jiří Melantrich or Daniel Adam. She mentions some notable writers of the period in Moravia (such as Ioannes Du-bravius the bishop of Olomouc, and Šimon Ennius, influenced by the Lutheran reformation), and Bohemia (for instance, Matthaeus Cervus or Matthaeus Collinus). She underlines that speaking of humanist literature of the period one must be aware that Latin instruction went hand in hand with efforts to cultivate piety.

Jan Malura and Marta Vaculínová present the last period, marked by the relocation of the imperial court from Vienna to Prague, increased literary production, religious divisions, increasing confessionalisation of literature, political conflicts, or climate fluctuations and plagues that caused a rather pessimistic tone in many works of the time. The literary production grew significantly. The university humanism flourished, but also Czech-language works, mainly moralistic and religious, were often published. Towards the end of the period, after the Battle of White Mountain, the monopoly of the Catholic Church brought about a step backwards: the natural sciences were biasedly taught by the Jesuits, and many book collections were confiscated or became the spoils of war.

The individual author entries are set in alphabetical order; hence the first part of the volume (A–L), begins with Jakub Acanthis and ends with Albertus Lyttichius. All entries share the same pattern: the heading presents the writer's name in its variants, including pseudonyms; dates and places of birth and death (if they are known) and a very brief description (like 'a poet and author of teaching manuals,' 'a physician, Latin poet, and author of medical writings'); the main chapters of each entry are marked with Roman numerals: the first (I) is always *Biography*, the second (II) – *Work*, the last (III) *Bibliography*. In most cases, chapter II is subdivided, after a short introduction, into several subchapters marked with Arabic numerals (for instance, '1. Occasional Latin poetry,' '2. Translations into Czech,' '3. Biblical Exegesis,' '4. Homiletics'). In the case of more prolific authors, or more diverse literary production, these subchapters can split into several sections, marked with

alphabetical letters (a., b., c., etc.), which makes the presentation of every author's oeuvre very transparent.

In this valuable volume, Neo-Latin scholars can find a detailed description of many collections of poems of various functions (occasional, encomiastic, congratulatory verse, psalm paraphrases, and *querelas*) and genres (odes, poetic dialogues, elegies, and epigrams); prose treatises concerning the natural sciences or astronomy, historical writings, Bible exegesis and sermons, or *postillas*. All those works can be compared to analogous literary forms composed in other countries. It seems also thought-provoking to consider some 'recurring themes' – such as *An philosopho uxor sit ducenda* or *Terrae motus an sapienti sunt formidandi* – developed in the specific cultural context. We can find new material for comparative studies – there are, for example, some authors of psalm paraphrases mentioned in the volume whose names do not appear in Polish monographs of this kind of poetry. There are many descriptions of towns (in Latin), poems on biblical themes (concerning both Old, and New Testaments), and some representatives of the *poesis artificiosa* (mainly of anagrams) in the 17th century. There are also Czech translations of Erasmus's works (i.e. *Civilitas morum*, which also has its Polish translation from a similar period). It is possible to look for some international social networks: Augustinus Moravus Olomucensis (1467–1513) studied in Krakow, had close contacts with Conrad Celtes, Joachim Vadianus, and Valentinus Eck who praised him in a poetic volume published in Krakow (1513). Ioannes Codicius (1534–1561) taught in Chełmno, and published his works in Gdańsk. Caspar Cropacius (1539–1580) had Stanislaus Hosius and Jan Przerębski among his patrons. In many ways, therefore, the book is interesting and useful to Polish philologists or Neo-Latin scholars; the western readers can discover some new areas of literature in it; but the work is also valuable and significant from the Czech point of view, because the authors are retelling their literary history, bringing out of its treasury some new jewels as well as old masterpieces.

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