Origins of the Vernacular Mode: Medieval Theology, Politics and Religious Identities

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»Origins of the Vernacular Mode« (OVERMODE) was an ERC Project granted to Pavlína Rychterová in the year 2010. It was carried out from April 2011 until March 2017 at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute for Medieval Research (Host institution) and at the Institute for Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (second beneficiary).[1] The project aimed at a comparative study and a European contextualization of late medieval vernacular religious literature in Eastern Central Europe. Its main goal was to re-formulate several key research approaches pursued in Central and especially Eastern Central European historiographies, philologies and literary studies. It advanced methodological reflection in order to explore the full range of research questions for which vernacular texts can be used as evidence. It made a large body of sources accessible to the international scholarly community and it re-wrote some of the key historical narratives of Eastern European historiography.

The focus of the project on the political dimension of vernacular religious literatures in Eastern Central Europe proved to be very fruitful, especially for research on the dynamic of the Hussite reformation in the first half of the 15th century, and for research about the character of this revolt as a supra-regional phenomenon. Several approaches were formulated anew – on the vernacular biblical translations, on the multilingual character of the society in medieval Bohemia, on the role of the language as a symbolical representation of power, on the dynamic of the Hussite revolution, on the character of the participation of the laics in it as well as in the other reform movements, on the vernacular character of the reform propaganda, and on the strategies of social and religious identification in Eastern Central Europe. Thanks to the project, the research tasks pursued at both institutions were embedded in a dense international scholarly network of research projects on late medieval religious education and on medieval translation. The project has succeeded in turning the overall focus of medieval research in the respective area to the vernacular as well as multilingual texts and their social and political dimensions. It was shown, among other things, that the vernacular texts from the sources for the history of Hussite revolution are much more important than previous research assumed. The history of ideas has to be re-written with a new focus on

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these texts, which are to be regarded not only as witnesses of the lay education but as crucial works shaping the basic revolutionary ideology. The social role of vernacular religious educative literature in general may be re-defined using the example of the dynamic of the Hussite revolt. To enhance the visibility of the Eastern Central European material written in the vernacular was one of the goals of the project and thanks to the international scholarly network in which the project team members are active, this goal was fulfilled in a most satisfying way.

The research team was formed with regard to the scholarly disciplines necessary for the successful handling of the material. All the project members brought their specific expertise. Beside the PI, specialized in history and Slavonic studies, a PhD student specializing in Bohemian studies and literary studies was employed at the host institution as well as a PhD student specializing in Latin philology and Bohemian studies and a PhD student specializing in German studies and Polish studies. At the second beneficiary two post-docs and two PhD students specialized in history, codicology, and in Latin philology were employed. Both post-doc positions were part-time employment. This solution was chosen because of the different roles of individual members of the team – whereas the PhD students had to concentrate on their PhD theses, both the post-docs helped to coordinate the project part hosted by the second beneficiary together with the PI and ensure internal as well as external cooperation.

OVERMODE represented a major advance in our understanding of the translating cultures of late medieval Central and Eastern Central Europe. The project was organized by means of subprojects positioned on three different methodological levels: 1) subprojects for which the goal was to launch the methodological debate on the individual source types as well as to make the sources from Eastern Central European areas available for Euro-American research; 2) subprojects focusing on material crucial for better understanding the role of the vernaculars in genres, social environments, and socio-political developments of interest; 3) subprojects concentrating on the methodology of comparative analysis of European late medieval religious literatures.

All the subprojects addressed texts neglected by research up to now and/or lacking basic textual analysis. They were chosen with the purpose of enhancing the methodological and theoretical debate as well as questioning the prevailing historical and literary historical master narratives and filling a gap in historical and philological research. In all cases, a thorough study of the transmitted material, its classification, description (in several cases also edition), and contextualization in a European literary and social framework was necessary. The methodologies used in the examination of the material were therefore very traditional at first – well-established historical and philological methods of examining medieval texts, from the auxiliary sciences (especially paleography and codicology), from source critique, and from historiographical comparative analysis. These methodologies were the most fruitful in the project and in combination with the innovative approach chosen and the previously unexplored material they have gained a new importance. The methods used in translation studies and identity studies were crucial for interpretation of the material. The collaboration with the VISCOM and SCIRE projects in particular presented a methodological challenge:[2]

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2   SFB F42-G18 Visions of Community. Comparative Approaches to Ethnicity, Region and Empire in Christianity, Islam and Buddhism (400-1600 CE) (VISCOM), website: viscom.ac.at; ERC AdG No. 269591 Social Cohesion, Identity and Religion in Europe 400-1200 (SCIRE), website: www.univie.ac.at/scire.

The research into the textual representations of social identifications developed on the early medieval source material was discussed with a focus on late medieval textual material comprising Latin and Central European vernaculars in all variants (monolingual as well as multilingual texts, translations, adaptations, etc.). The project contributed to the fast developing research field of medieval bi- and multilingualism. In the subproject »Latin Translations of the Czech Sunday Postilla of Jan Hus« the methodologies of code-switching in modern languages were applied. The editorial subprojects (»Biblical Apocrypha in Vernacular Reception of the Bible in Late Medieval Central Europe« and »The Vade mecum in tribulatione of John of Rupescissa in Seven Vernaculars«), with apocryphal texts for which a high variability is significant and with relevant texts in numerous vernaculars respectively, presented complex challenges to the editorial approach and brought methodological innovations in several respects.

Project Parts

The first subproject »Pursuing a New Order: Central European Vernaculars between Theology and Politics (14th–15th c.)« focused on the social dimension of late medieval translations in Central and Eastern Central Europe. It concentrated on the translations from the area of theology, ecclesiology, and religious educative (pastoral) literature in the German, Czech, Polish, and Hungarian vernaculars, and on Hebrew texts extant in the given area. The socio-political setting and impact of these translations was discussed with the aim of going beyond any biased and/or implicit presuppositions based on the previous literary historical narratives, to break through the spell of the master narrative – be it a historical or a literary historical one, and to create new space for Europe-wide comparison. The purpose of the subproject was to contribute to the debate on translation in medieval Europe and, based on the primary material, to overcome the West-East biases in the field. The results of the project are two collective monographs published in the Series »The Medieval Translator« at Brepols publishers.

The volume *Pursuing a New Order I. Religious Education in Late Medieval Central and Eastern Central Europe* discusses textual material from the given area which was previously unknown and/or neglected. The goal of the volume is to provide the reader with a first philological analysis, as well as a literary historical and historical contextualization. To meet such a goal required a detailed focus on the linguistic features of individual texts, on their stylistic qualities in comparison with their models and individual copies, and on their literary as well as historical context. The central question was whether, why, and how distinctive new communicative, literary and political cultures developed after the vernacular languages had acquired increasingly higher levels of literacy and education. The intensification of ambitions to transcend the social boundaries of the language, from what might be called everyday communication to a medium of ›high‹ culture and discourses that had previously been exclusively defined by the use of Latin, was strongly connected with ambitions to socially ascend on the part of non-elite or lower elite groups. The process of vernacularization of religious communication in the late Middle Ages was by no means linear or simple. Ambitious social groups could only specify their demands and negotiate old and new definitions of their social position when they were able to control the media and communicative tools of these negotiations on a high intellectual level. But this also means that the control of the vernacular as a new medium not only became increasingly important for groups or individuals to establish new social positions; it also became essential for maintaining the old. We also see members of established elites, like their upwardly mobile neighbours, actively participating in the process of vernacularization, or even competing in their efforts to define it, to give the first stimuli

for the translation of texts, a set of texts, or themes in order to define vernacular modes and codes of communication. The individual case studies mainly address theological and pastoral texts which a) translate and interpret the higher levels of philosophical and theological knowledge into vernaculars and therefore open these levels of education to the non-elite, b) introduce new topics into the religious and/or political debate on the threshold between Latin and the vernaculars, c) re-formulate existing ideas concerning the social order in general in the vernaculars, and d) interpret controversial philosophical and theological topics in vernacular languages, and therefore have an impact on the new understandings of the role of power in society. In this volume, each of the polities and literary languages are represented by one study concerning hitherto neglected textual material: translations were made from Latin into German, Polish, Czech, and Hungarian; as well as Hebrew, although so far only indirect evidence points to that conclusion.

The volume *Pursuing a New Order II. Late Medieval Vernacularization and the Bohemian Reformation* concentrates on the Hussite reform movement which formed in the first two decades of the fifteenth century in Bohemia; it used one of the vernacular languages of the realm, Czech, as a vehicle for the dissemination of its reformist ideas, and for the creation of a strong and stable basis for the reform. The leaders of the reform used existing strategies of identification to strengthen the group of adherents to an idiosyncratic interpretation of Scripture. They pursued a universalist goal but relied on local supporters. They were determined to build a community of true believers, of the ›faithful‹ in the terminology of John Wyclif, whose ecclesiological ideas they adopted. They saw in vernacular preaching a crucial way of securing the success of the reform. The vernacular therefore became a very important strategy of identification, able to bind the usually disconnected religious, ethnic, and political (regional) identities together and generate a very potent aggregate of identifications. The understanding of the vernacular language as the only ›genuine‹ language of the true (Hussite) faith was present in the movement from its beginnings, but it was never supported by an elaborated doctrine and as such it never gained overwhelming authority, very likely because communication with ›the enemy‹ had to be maintained, and the primary goal of the movement, the reform of the universal Church, had to be maintained even when it was clear that reform would remain confined to Bohemia.

Although the internationalization of Czech Hussite studies from the 1960s onwards provided innovative theoretical as well methodological inputs, religious texts produced in Czech in this context remained largely marginalized, confined to Czech literary studies and philology, both lacking international scholarly networks and struggling, as they still do, to counter prevailing nationalistic and vulgar Marxist models. Consequently, scholarly treatment of the given material has never made any headway. Many of the Czech religious and theological texts do not have any personal ›history‹, quoted mainly to illustrate preconceived judgements about their role in the development of the Czech language, identity, and literary production. By contrast, this volume aims to provide materials for a future history of the Hussite vernacular theology and to contribute to the transformation of the scholarly narrative(s) about the Hussite movement by including works of vernacular religious education among the most important source material.

Subprojects designed in the OVERMODE project as PhD theses concentrated on Bohemia during the reign of Charles IV as the multilingual heart of the late medieval Roman Empire. The PhD thesis of J. Sichálek, *The Old Czech Apocryphal Story of Joseph (Son of Jacob)*, moved to a new level the methodology of research on biblical translation in Eastern Central Europe. It formulated a new and very important strand of the literary studies: late

medieval translations of Bible and biblical apocrypha in Eastern Central Europe represent an unknown material and as such enrich significantly the flourishing international studies on Bible translation. The PhD thesis was finished in 2017 and will be published in the Series »Prameny k náboženským dějinám českým [Sources on the history of religiosity in Bohemia], Filosofia-Press« in 2019. The comparative study by V. Žůrek, *The Comparative Use of Historical Motives in the Monarchic Legitimation between the Kingdoms of France and Bohemia at the End of the Middle Ages*, concentrated on the narratives about how the collective identity in power centres was shaped by its own past. The role of Latin as a meta-language in the multilingual kingdom of Bohemia was analysed as well as the role of language as a social identification on several levels of interaction. The PhD thesis was finished in 2015, defended at the University Paris I – Sorbonne. The PhD thesis of Soňa Černá, *The Letters of St Jerome by the Prague Chancellor and Notary John of Neumarkt. A Brief Transmission History and Catalogue*, concentrated on one of the most serious research gaps in the history of late medieval literature in Bohemia. The first comprehensive research on the manuscript transmission of the German written œuvre of the prominent Bohemian author, the chancellor of the emperor Charles IV, John of Neumarkt was presented in the study, which will therefore serve as a point of departure for all subsequent research on the topic. The PhD thesis of J. Odstrčilík, *Analysis of Two Latin Translations of Hus's Czech Sunday Postil in the MSS Brno, Moravian Library, Mk 56 and Mk 91 and their Partial Edition*, represents a first formulation of a complete new research strand in Eastern Central European historiography and philology. J. Odstrčilík was able to develop an interdisciplinary research approach concerning the multilingual homiletic texts extant in great quantity and variety in the Central and Eastern Central European area and untouched by research until now. The study represents a major contribution to translation studies and studies on late medieval multilinguality, especially because it introduced the Slavic languages into the comparative research and therefore helps to differentiate the comparative approaches on the given material.

Several subprojects in OVERMODE aimed at comparative research in the European dimension. The linguistic and philological aspects played a dominant role in the collaborative subproject »The Vade mecum in tribulatione of John of Rupescissa in Seven Vernaculars« which concentrated on one of the most popular late medieval prophetic works, *Vade mecum in tribulatione,* written by the French Franciscan John of Rupescissa in the 1350s in Latin. The project focussed on the edition and comparative analysis of medieval vernacular translations and adaptations of the extant text. Sixteen individual translations into seven medieval vernaculars were identified, edited and cross-analysed, whereby various interdependencies were described by an international team of philologists who were working on the editions of individual texts. The joint editorial work, the first enterprise of this type in medieval studies will be published in 2018 by Vita & Pensiero, the publishing house of the University of Milan.

John of Rupescissa's *Vade mecum in tribulatione*, composed in 1356 in Avignon, was the most widely copied eschatological-prophetic text of the Middle Ages written by an author known by name. There are forty-three known copies of complete or abbreviated Latin versions. Documented evidence exists of several others. The work was translated into French, English, German, Czech, Italian, Catalan, Castilian, and probably Hebrew (not extant). Four different translations and/or versions of one translation are known in French, three in German, three in Czech, three in Castilian, two in Italian, and single ones respectively in English and Catalan. The number of languages into which the *Vade mecum in tribulatione* was translated is very high compared with even the most popular medieval religious educative bestsellers, such as the *Horologium sapientiae* of Heinrich Seuse or the *Meditationes vitae*

Christi. The first, very detailed translation was made into French just two years after Rupescissa finished his prophetic warning. The appeal of the text to potential readers of all strata of the society seems obvious at first sight: a harsh critique of the church hierarchy, religious orders as well as the secular lordship, and concrete information on the arrival of the Antichrist and of future plagues and catastrophes embedded in a set of religious admonitions were applicable in different times, different places and in different societies. The respective translations and their copies were reworked accordingly to fit into the concrete socio-political settings. On the other hand, it would be misleading to reduce the motivations of the translators and scribes to the longing to interpret some concrete situations. Several translations and copies analysed in the subproject were very probably written down as a mere curiosity and/or as literary texts suitable for personal religious education but not as a means of interpreting the present political (ecclesiological) situation. The reception of Rupescissa's prophetic compendium in medieval Europe shows very clearly how differently texts were read and interpreted, even works with a seemingly very urgent message. The edition of all the extant translations of *Vade mecum in tribulatione* provides an excellent basis for new approaches concerning late medieval religiosity.

The subproject ›Historiographies in Central and Eastern Central Europe (13th–16th ct.)‹ was launched in collaboration with the special research programme VISCOM (Visions of Community) as a part of the international collaborative project *Historiographies of Identity. Social Functions of Historical Writing from Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages*. It concentrated on the chronicles and historical narratives produced and reproduced by distinct social groups in the given area and on the analysis of the respective identity constructions discussed in individual sources. The respective collaborative monograph will be published by Brepols publishers as the sixth volume of the series ›Historiography and Identity‹. It deals with histories written in a time which brought about a profound differentiation of medieval societies in the given regions – among others, a differentiation of the nobility, the rise of urban societies, the formation of new social strata and distinct groups (for example universities), and an increasing mobility and permeability of social elites. These and many other changes presented a serious challenge both to individuals and to social groups. Consequently, the demand for reassuring identifications grew more pressing the more social strata achieved their share of economic and political power. Narrative offers of identification produced and reproduced by historiography did not necessarily grow more complex than in the previous periods, but were surely more differentiated – often tailored specifically for distinct social groups, in competition with other groups and their narratives, and often using the language of a particular target group: the vernaculars instead of the universal language of elite education, Latin.

Of particular interest is the interplay between the languages in the book in the area under scrutiny, that is, apart from Latin, mainly German and Czech, but also Polish and Hungarian. In this interplay orality and literacy interacted with mutual effects on each other. Late medieval source material suggests complex relations not only between Latin and vernaculars, but also between oral and written language. Both were used in heterogeneous ways in Latin and in the vernaculars, in learned and popular discourses. The volume explores whether and in what way new social demands and new languages influenced historiographical narratives, their form and contents, their impact and their reception. It addresses the questions of which strategies of identification individual works developed to balance many alternative modes of identification; which older narratives were appropriated and adapted in new societal contexts, thus developing into new models for the construction of communities and remaining

politically successful; which of them in turn lost their direct impact and thus became »petrified« elements of specific, e.g. learned, discourses, and which new narratives were developed.

During the six years of research great attention was paid to inter- and cross-disciplinary cooperation. The project was carried out at two participating institutions, the Institute for Medieval Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (host institution) and at the Centre for Medieval Studies, Institute for Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. OVERMODE cooperated closely with the Project »Cultural Codes and their Transformation in the time of Hussite Reformation« (Project GAČR P405/12/G148). From among several cooperative activities, the series of sessions presented at the IMC Leeds 2015 on the methodologies of Lollard and Hussite studies has to be pointed out. Very fruitful cooperation was established with the Institute for German studies at the University of Vienna. Prof Stephan Müller acted as a supervisor for the PhD thesis of S. Černá (SP *John of Neumarkt*); the collaborative Volume *Origin Stories. The Rise of Vernacular Literacy in a Comparative Perspective* (submitted for publication in 2017) is a result of this cooperation too. Specialists in individual European as well as non-European philologies, Asian studies, Byzantine studies, sinology etc. contributed to this volume. The second cooperation partner of the project was the special research programme of the Austrian Research Fund (FWF) VISCOM – »Visions of Community: Comparative Approaches to Ethnicity, Region and Empire in Christianity, Islam and Buddhism (400–1600 CE)« – located at the University of Vienna and at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Apart from participation by the VISCOM team in OVERMODE events and vice versa, the members of the VISCOM project took part in the activities of the COST-Action IS 1301 (see below) co-organized by the PI. The PI's efforts to launch cross-disciplinary collaboration peaked in the successful application for the COST Programme in the year 2013 (project duration: 9/2013-9/2017). The project »New Communities of Interpretation Contexts, Strategies and Processes of Religious Transformation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe« was developed by three ERC-grantees cooperating on their related ERC-projects (besides OVERMODE, 209394 HOLY AND LAY and 263274 OPVS).[3] At the COST Action IS 1301, more than 250 researchers from 22 European and non-European countries took part; the scholarly exchange was organized in three working groups and carried out in the form of regular meetings, summer schools devoted to chosen topics to the benefit of the Master- and PhD-students, and by means of short scientific missions awarded on a competitive basis and supporting young researchers. »The Medieval Translator« Network represents the last type of large-scale cooperation in OVERMODE. The network was established in the middle of the 1980s by Roger Ellis (University of Cardiff). The series of »Cardiff Conferences on the Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages« can be regarded as pioneering work in the area of European cooperation on medieval translation (the results of the activity of the network are published in the Brepols series »The Medieval Translator«). With OVERMODE joining the network, its focus moved from English and French literature to Central and Eastern Central Europe – the 11th »The Medieval

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3   ERC StG No. 209394 Holy and Lay: Holy Writ & Lay Readers. A Social History of Vernacular Bible Translations in the Late Middle Ages, website: www.rug.nl/research/icog/research/researchgroups/holyandlay; ERC StG No. 263274 Oeuvres Pieuses Vernaculaires à Succès (OPVS), website: www.opvs.fr.

Translator« Conference was organized in March 2017 by the OVERMODE and COST action IS 1301 projects in Vienna and focused on the readers of medieval translations. The resulting proceedings will be published in the Brepols series »The Medieval Translator« in 2019.

Through its interdisciplinary and innovative approach, OVERMODE has laid a valuable foundation for further collaboration in a research field which the project has helped to define for the future.

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