Fragmentology

A Journal for the Study of Medieval Manuscript Fragments

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Reviews

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Review

Dalibor Havel, *Počátky latinské písemné kultury v českých zemích. Nejstarší latinské rukopisy a zlomky v Čechách a na Moravě* [The Beginnings of Latin Written Culture in the Bohemian Lands. The Oldest Latin Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments in Bohemia and Moravia] (Opera facultatis philosophaicae Universitatis Masarykianae, 479), Brno: Muni Press 2018, 534 pp. ISBN 9788021089181.

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The editorial to the first issue of *Fragmentology* (2018) emphasized that fragments are often the most important kind of manuscript evidence for the study of the beginning of (Latin) written culture in specific regions. It gave examples from Scandinavia and Hungary, but the observation is equally true for regions that now belong to the Czech Republic – Bohemia and Moravia. The beginnings of written culture in this region (which, it should be stressed, was not only Latin but also Slavic) are connected with the Christianization in the ninth century, although we possess few fully preserved manuscripts of Bohemian and Moravian origin from before the thirteenth century. In this regard, Havel's catalogue and analytical study of the earliest Latin fragments of Bohemian and Moravian provenance are essential in unearthing the beginnings of Latin written culture in the Czech lands. It is a welcomed enterprise that will surely benefit scholars and enrich the discipline of fragmentology.

Havel's monograph consists of two distinct works that can be used separately. The part perhaps most interesting to those not specifically concerned with the history of the written culture and intellectual life in the Czech lands is the catalogue of the earliest

Latin manuscript fragments from the libraries in the Czech Republic on pp. 100–372 (the greater part of chapter 3). This catalogue contains short descriptions of 216 Latin fragments dating from the end of the eighth to the end of the twelfth century (which Havel calls 'early medieval' following the chronology of Central Europe rather than that of Western Europe). Importantly, the fragments included in Havel's monograph represent only a third of Latin fragments predating the thirteenth century in the holdings of Bohemian and Moravian institutions (p. 19). Thus, rather than a complete overview, the users of Havel's catalogue see only a selection, although Havel stresses that the selection covers all types of fragment material in Czech collections (p. 473). It is a pity that the users of the book will not hear more about what was omitted from the selection and on what grounds. Was it perhaps because many fragments remain inaccessible? Likewise, readers do not necessarily get a good sense of the criteria for inclusion; were fragments picked on the basis of content, their character of fragmentation, age and provenance, or locus of current preservation?

The most exciting feature of Havel's catalogue is the presence of high-quality colour images of all 216 fragments. Havel is very well aware of the importance of this feature and correctly observes that images should be an essential element of a catalogue like his own (p. 54). Indeed, they allow his textual descriptions to remain relatively short as a single image can do more for paleographers than a lengthy description. Unfortunately, the image cannot do the same for codicologists. Here, the written description is, and will remain, key, whether in printed or online catalogues. Havel seems to be aware of the need for a good description of the material aspects of fragments, as is clear from the introduction to the catalogue on pp. 53–70. Despite noting, however, that he wants to provide information on the dimensions of the text areas in his descriptions (p. 59), the catalogue does not contain this information. It is commendable that Havel pays attention to the ruling pattern and also discusses the position of binding stations, whenever the state of the fragment allows it. However, without the information about the text area (both as it survives in the fragments and as it can be reconstructed based on the text) and about the number of lines (surviving and

reconstructed), the descriptions are incomplete. This is the most substantial weakness of the catalogue, for the fact that the texts are not always correctly identified or not identified precisely (Havel seems to base himself on pre-extant catalogues) is less of a problem, given the presence of high-quality images.

The second entity hidden in Havel's monograph that usefully complements the catalogue consists of two analytical studies that treat the palaeographical and codicological evidence pertaining to the oldest phase of the Latin written culture in the Czech lands. Havel first re-examines the oldest Latin documents that can be securely said to have been written in Czech lands, even if they cannot yet be attributed to a fully-developed scriptorium (pp. 71–99). In chapter 4 of his monograph, he treats the question of the oldest indigenous scriptoria (pp. 373–472). Manuscript material treated in these two studies includes both fragments and fully preserved codices, as well as glosses, corrections and other marginalia that demonstrate that particular manuscripts were present in early medieval Bohemian or Moravian institutions. As in the case of the catalogue of fragments, the two analytical sections are equipped with high-quality colour images. Moreover, Havel supplies these two sections with detailed codicological diagrams allowing one to visualize both the mise-en-page and the quire structure of the fully preserved manuscripts central to his reconstruction of the earliest indigenous tradition of Latin writing in the Czech lands. Since many of his arguments are based on the codicology of manuscripts, these diagrams are a helpful aid to the readers.

Following earlier scholarship, Havel connects the inception of Latin written culture in the Czech lands with the Frankish missionary efforts orchestrated from Bavaria and to a lesser extent from other German areas in the Carolingian period. As he shows in his catalogue, the oldest Latin fragments preserved in Bohemian and Moravian institutions correspond chronologically and geographically to this first phase of the spreading of Latin literacy into Slavic domains. Nevertheless, probably none of these oldest books were produced in Bohemia or Moravia, nor can it be assumed that they were present there in the early Middle Ages, although Havel indicates several fragments and codices that were present in Bohemia in

the eleventh century. He identifies Heiligenkreuz, Stiftsbibliothek, MS 217, a tenth-century Bavarian codex containing penitentials and canon law material, as the oldest manuscript whose Bohemian provenance can be proven. Crucial in this regard is a set of additions made by untrained hands whose contents suggest they were penned at the end of the tenth and during the first half of the eleventh century in the environs of the Prague bishopric. From this manuscript and from a fragment preserved in Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Lat. 1322, Havel deduces that trained scribes were present from early on in the environs of the Prague bishopric founded in the 970s, even though there was not yet a scriptorium.

The first scriptoria appeared in Benedictine monasteries, whose foundations can be placed into the same time frame as the beginnings of the Prague bishopric. Building on previous scholarship, Havel confirms that Břevnov Abbey, now a district of Prague, and Hradisko Abbey, near Olomouc, the seat of the Moravian bishops, were important early foundations possessing and producing Latin manuscripts. Havel identifies several manuscripts produced by teams of cooperating scribes displaying palaeographic particularities indicative of the existence of a scriptorium in both monasteries. Here the value of fragments is fully revealed, as his conclusions depend on fragments and marginalia, by means of which he tracks the same hands across several manuscripts. In total, Havel identifies twelve manuscripts that were either in possession of or produced by Břevnov Abbey between the mid-eleventh century and the first half of the twelfth century, connecting the establishment of Břevnov's scriptorium to the long and prosperous abbacy of Mainhard (1035–1089). In a similar vein, he attributes six manuscripts to the scriptorium of Hradisko Abbey during the abbacy of Bohumil (the 1130s and 1140s), whose time in office corresponds to the episcopacy of the influential Jindřich Zdík (c. 1083–1150) in neighbouring Olomouc. As a completely novel hypothesis, Havel suggests that Ostrov Abbey, near Davle in central Bohemia, was a third Benedictine monastery possessing a scriptorium in the early Middle Ages (in this case, in the first half of the eleventh century).

The Czech monograph is accompanied by an English summary (pp. 481–486), which will surely please those whose Czech is a bit

rusty. Thanks to the lavish assortment of colour images, the book is useful even to those who are not familiar with the language. Indeed, the images are the most admirable element of the monograph. Not only the author of the book should be praised here, but also the publisher who undertook an effort many publishers stubbornly refuse these days. It cannot be overlooked that the author and/or publisher was able to obtain images from over forty different institutions. The willingness of institutions to release their images should be commended, above all because we need more projects such as this book, whether in print or on the web.