

Jakub Kozák: Reception of Classical Antiquity in Short School Writings from the Late Middle Ages – Edition and Introduction

BA thesis

Ohlasy klasické antiky v kratších školních textech pozdního středověku – edice a úvodní studie

Evaluation

The aim of this BA thesis is to contextualize four short Latin texts copied by Crux of Tel, a late medieval Czech copyist in one of his personal miscellanies. Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the work of Crux, and argues that these short texts can be considered as a kind of 'opuscula', i.e. works which reveal at least the personal interests of their 'author', even if they were not composed by him. Chapter 2 discusses the role of the classical myths in the Middle Ages: here, a much lengthier bibliography of the secondary literature would be possible, and perhaps even desirable. The A. seems to have grasped too much under one chapter: at least three different topics are condensed into one single argument: the difference between fabula and historia (Peter van Moos' classical treatment of the subject remains without mention), the reception of Classical literature (where beside Reynold-Wilson's *Scribes and Scholars*, the use of more recent sources would be welcome) and medieval mythography. For the theoretical insights on the medieval Latin writings about myths, some space should be given to the role of allegorization already here, as it becomes a central subject in the chapter on the text taken from Pierre Bersuire. Jean Seznec's classic *Survival of the pagan gods* should be mentioned as well, and Jane Chance's *Medieval mythography* (however debatable her arguments are) should be cited at least. However, it is important to stress that the period in which Crux was writing was already that of a hybrid, late medieval and Renaissance, manuscript and print culture, and it is difficult to evaluate these sources without keeping in mind the presence of Petrarch's and Boccaccio's texts (see the studies of Agostino Sottili on Petrarch's reception in Bohemia, a similar study about the reception of the *Genealogie deorum* of Boccaccio seems to be lacking). Obviously, we have to forget the concept of the „Northern early Renaissance”, developed by Konrad Burdach, but there exist surprisingly many traces of classical reception in late medieval Bohemia in comparison with other regions, which can account for the presence of such notes in school education.

The thesis correctly identifies the main sources of three short notes: the first two are taken from Guido da Colonna's *Historia destructionis Troie*, the third one from Pierre Bersuire's *Ovidius moralizatus*. Concerning the cited passages about Itys, it is worth noting that the A. cites Bersuire's text from the 1509 Paris edition of Josse Bade,

which was recently demonstrated to be a contaminated edition, prepared by a monk in Clairvaux, according to Pablo Piqueras Yagüe (his dissertation can be downloaded here: <http://uhu.es/publicaciones/?q=autores&code=854>). Thus, it remains a question, what kind of manuscripts of Bersuire Crux had access to, and where, at which step of the textual tradition the differences between the texts appeared. The minor changes ('boiled and eaten' to 'half-boiled and half-roasted') and the shameful desires of Tereus who was moved by the taste of his own son (p. 24) might have appeared already in the sources that Crux himself used, thus in the "original" text of Bersuire. It would be useful to look for available manuscripts of the *Ovidius moralizatus* (and also of the *Historia destructionis*) in Bohemia.

For the focus on grammar in medieval mythography, numerous parallels can be found in Christopher Baswell's *Vergil in medieval England* (Cambridge University Press, 2006, *passim*). The short text about Alexander is intriguing, especially in light of the rich literature about Alexander in late medieval Bohemia, but too generic to be able to draw any conclusions.

In sum, the BA thesis of Jakub Kozák is a very thoroughly researched study on three minor texts which far exceeds the necessary requirements of a BA thesis, and show his excellent research skills. I support giving it the highest possible grade, A+, or any similar grade used in the Czech Republic.

Budapest, May 29, 2023.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kiss Gábor".

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