

Report on the doctoral dissertation

“Italian Rhetoric and Courtly Love in the Formulary of Queen Kunhuta. A Critical Edition of the Letter Collection of Magister Bohuslav with an English Introduction (Codex Vindobonensis Palatinus 526)”

by Francesca Battista

I read Francesca’s dissertation with great interest. I think in light of recent developments both in the fields of paleography and the study of medieval epistolography it was a good choice of a phd topic to revisit and re-edit the formulary. I believe future readers of the formulary will benefit from using this critical edition and will certainly find useful guidance in the introduction. However I suggest some improvements should be made to the introductory study for it to be a worthy match of the second part, the critical edition.

The critical edition:

Upon comparison with Palacky’s text, I certainly find the edition of Francesca a great improvement. She follows recent trends that advocate letting the text speak for itself and letting the manuscript transpire through the edition admirably and consequently. As far as I can judge, her corrections make sense. Her aim to report the contents wholly (and in the original order) finally makes some interesting material available.

The accompanying study:

One has the impression that this dissertation was written by two persons: a meticulous professional philologist and a sloppy student who is in a great hurry. But not even such a doctoral candidate can find excuses for not running the spellcheck through the text. However, because linguistic errors run deeper than spelling mistakes, I strongly recommend the language to be checked by an English native speaker or a professional editor.

The structure of the dissertation could also be improved. The introductory abstract shows all the great potentials this letter collection has: making possible a monographic study of the queen, and the epistles as sources for dictaminal, socio-

cultural, emotional history or gender studies. But then it is hard to follow how these threads are carried out in the dissertation, the chapters being a little bit circular and repetitive in their arrangements.

The main methodological claim I find a very good starting point. It states that the material should be studied in its nature of being a letter collection, rather than individual letters that we should select random information from, and that the contents should not be read with a rigid separation of fictional and real in mind.

Francesca shows herself very knowledgeable concerning the recent discussions in scholarship about these matters, and shows how these discussions really shed a different light on the collection. I would encourage her however to apply these methods in a bolder fashion, and dare formulate stronger statements.

I also find commendable the combination of philological, literary and historical approaches, as the edition of the text, the analysis of the love letters and the description of the queenly court illustrate it. Again, my problem is structural, the connections and transitions between these chapters and methods could have been made more clear and smooth. If Francesca would connect some more dots in the narrative, then an intriguing source would receive the engaging treatment that it deserves.

Obviously phd dissertations have to have a limit and stop somewhere: I would, however liked to hear more about certain issues that received just a few paragraphs, or show up just in footnotes: for example the gendered voice, about the memorial function of the collection, about Henricus of Isernia and his school (he could have perhaps deserve an entire chapter). The analysis would have also benefited from some comparative chapters, for example with similar Czech or other European materials (St. Clare's letters are mentioned, but not discussed).

I would also have liked to read more about the material placed in the appendix: for example the relevance of the love letters in the appendix is treated only in one footnote, while perhaps it would be worthwhile to expand on the possible connections somewhere in the main text.

To sum up:

I do recommend the dissertation for defence, but I advice Francesca to bring the level the English part up to the standard of the Latin.

Reka Forrai  
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