

A Cross Section of Manuscript Culture: A Companion to Compile a Compiler

Passionate Copying in Late Medieval Bohemia. The Case of Crux de Telcz (1434–1504). By Lucie Doležalová with contributions by Michal Dragoun and Kimberly Rivers. Karolinum Press, Prague, 2021. 200 pp.

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This is not just a portrait of a so-called creative copyist (or creative reader); the case study of Lucie Doležalová presents many aspects of late-medieval manuscript culture, giving an example, which is, however, quite unique. This is why studying the copyist oeuvre of Crux de Telcz as a phenomenon may bring to light numerous problematics of his cultural environment. In fact, there are several questions which cannot be answered, but the approach helps to recontextualise and reflect on the limits and difficulties of this field and the methods of the research. First, Lucie Doležalová presents a wide variety of causes of the uncertainty of sources. This kind of reflection accompanies all of the analyses in the volume, most of the content of which has already been published in Czech.¹ The analytical descriptions can also be read separately; however, taken together they show the reconstruction of an obscure profile: Crux de Telcz, a scribe of astonishing diligence.

The insights into literary culture in late-medieval Bohemia are illustrated by facsimiles of the codices copied by Crux, which facilitate an understanding of the aim of the accurate analyses and, mostly, illuminate the problematics literally by publishing easily readable smaller parts—and if not, reveal the enormous amount of precise work behind this study.

After a more general introductory chapter, which is indispensable for contextualising the most crucial questions related to Crux, or, more precisely, the conceptualisation of authority and the obstacles to publishing medieval manuscripts.

1 *Kříž z Telče (1434–1504): pisář, sběratel a autor* [Crux of Telč (1434–1504) scribe, collector and author]. Edited by Lucie Doležalová and Michal Dragoun. Prague: Scriptorium, 2020.

We must consider especially those questions that cannot be solved. Beside these reflections, an important feature of the book is the transparency of its structure. The volume is divided into precisely organised shorter sections, thus it is easy to find particular themes. The conclusions—or sometimes the realisation of the inability to draw conclusions immediately—are always based on the original sources, some of which are published by Doležalová with translations of her own.

The study of Crux is an abundantly informative and logically built construction of representative excerpts at the same time. Its representativity, however, may be questioned, because what the reader discovers is a sequence of case studies within a larger case study. The connections and patterns are made visible but we should not forget about the vast amount of texts associated with Crux's life-long scribal activity, which, of course, cannot be represented completely ...*quanto constat scriptura labore*²—highlights Crux in his own poem.

But was he an author or a scribe? How should we interpret this distinction in the era of late-medieval paper codices? The first chapter discusses the problematics of the study of medieval texts; the status of copies and the co-authors, and the serious limitations caused by the blurred borderline between authorial and scribal version, and the fragmentation of material transmissions. Do have all the interventions and little modifications offer some meaning to us?

The main aim of the author was to focus on the scribal activity of Crux de Telcz to grasp his intentions in the mirror of his different roles (preservator, translator, author, glossator, editor, and collector of manuscripts) as a contributor to the manuscript culture of late-medieval Bohemia. In spite of being extraordinary, the phenomenon itself can also show the possibilities and limits, claims Doležalová. Sometimes, however, conclusions must remain merely suggestions for several reasons, but these interpretations and suggestions can help us understand the character of medieval textual production.

Caveats are well represented in this chapter; among other topics, the variety of the scribal interventions, the possibility of having a (partly) personal library, and the incompleteness of the corpus: there may also be hidden codices of Crux which are still waiting to be discovered—and there is the chance of erroneous attributions or exclusions of codices or parts of miscellany.

Other remarks concern the relation of Crux to the copied matter, including his personal interest in it (sometimes he was paid, which means that the text was ordered and chosen by somebody else; sometimes collaboration with other scribes can be detected). His beliefs and opinions (concerning the Hussite movement or astrological texts, for example) and the level of understanding of what he wrote (e.g.

2 “...how much work is involved in copying/writing”, translated by Lucie Doležalová, 9.

computistic tables) is also interesting. There are so many different texts that it is possible that he simply copied everything he found. Maybe the marginal manicules can be considered signs of interest.

Lucie Doležalová analyses several cases of ambivalence in Crux's scribal activity: his curiosity and diligence as opposed to his negligence, and a tendency to leave mistakes without correction; the relevance and irrelevance of his glosses; and the capricious fluctuations in relation to being well-organised, reader-friendly, or, most of all, chaotic, full of incomprehensibilities and obscurities. His uniqueness is due to his strong connection to his age: "before that, it would have been too expensive" to have so many codices; "later, it would have been unnecessarily tiresome".³

The case study begins with a biography that is as detailed as possible and is based on more than 150 colophons and notes left by Crux himself, which let us reconstruct his life, except for his social network—unfortunately, nothing personal is included in these kinds of glosses.

After the explanation of the errors concerning the identification of his unusual first name (the reason why he was sometimes mentioned incorrectly as Ulricus/Oldřich?), Doležalová offers a short historical overview. The ecclesiastic context of Crux de Telcz was determined by the religious controversies of late-medieval Bohemia: during the Hussite wars, Crux copied many texts from both sides but remained firmly Catholic.

The biography of Crux is based mainly on the chronological interpretation of his numerous colophons, which are also published in Appendix IV, providing primary autobiographical information. We lack sources about his youth, and nor was his whereabouts certain at all times in later years. He copied religious polemics, sermons, works of the Church Fathers, and texts related to devotion and religious education. He was probably active in local schools too. He entered the Augustinian House in Třeboň, referring to himself as *predicator* and *altarista*. There he copied a wide variety of texts: school texts, medical treatises, sentences from authorities, songs, legal texts, historiography and marginalia to Petrus Lombardus. As an Augustinian canon in Třeboň, he was supposed to be familiar with the Třeboň library, but his scribal activity decreased. This library is the largest preserved monastic library from the medieval Czech lands, with 300 surviving codices.

In the next chapter (*Author*) Lucie Doležalová examines the provable authorial activity of Crux, but ultimately avoids defining whether the interventions are of the author or a scribe. In this case, it is also important to explain for what reasons this is so hard to define. If we had to choose: "Crux was certainly more of a scribe than

3 Conclusion, 182–83.

an author”⁴. The false attributions of Jaroslav Kadlec are clarified; some poems are less likely to have been authored by Crux than sermons and songs, although this is difficult to prove (or disprove). Crux certainly left some necrological notes and two letters—one to Johannes Nosidlo, and one to Tobias of Tábor. His letters contain debates about communion *sub utraque specie* and refute some “articulus erroneus and hereticus”. The editions of these religious polemics are to be found in the appendix. The main questions concern the communion, the causes and circumstances of Hus’s death, and a miraculous solar eclipse (which happened earlier). However, Crux rather seems to claim his own truth instead of being ready for real debate. Doležalová assures the reader that these letters deserve further discussion.

Chapter four—*Translator*—focuses on a passion excerpt and other mystic texts translated (and maybe also compiled) by Crux. He sometimes copied the Latin and Czech versions too. There are other Czech texts which are probably his translations. The preservative aspect of Crux’s copying activity is important, because some texts are the only surviving exemplars.

The next topic of the study is the reconstructability of Crux’s profile as a compiler. After considering the criteria for defining the corpus (the appearance of his hand in a manuscript), Doležalová presents some new identifications and proven mistakes involving earlier attributions, although he clarifies that such a corpus cannot be finalised because of the assumption of hidden documents. We can read a detailed description of the content of the corpus. An interesting aspect of the interplay of manuscripts and printed texts (and, of course, of Crux de Telcz) is also included. Further questions that are discussed are the professionalism of Crux as a scribe, the degree or genre of interventions in his codices, and the difficulties of the chronology. Unlike the approach and analysis, the corpus itself as a result is quite confused. The majority of Crux’s codices are heterogenous. The variety of copied texts have been reorganised multiple times not only through the compilation of different variations but also by adding shorter texts on single leaves. This chaotic collection and composition of Crux’s manuscripts raises the question of their efficiency in public (or personal) use.

Chapter 6 presents Crux in the role of the glossator of his own and others’ copies. Lucie Doležalová enumerates and describes the typical interventions of Crux’s hand (e.g. correction, orientation, giving further information, or just filling empty spaces with glosses not connected to the text at all). The fact that the glosses can simply be copied together with the source material makes strict categorisation impossible. However, the author distinguishes between two major types of glosses: additional and prescriptive notes. In Crux’s case, the prescriptions to readers mean a certain

4 III. Author, 45.

“wrapping” of polemics—for example, a title—which clearly represents his Catholic standpoint. Despite trying to control their reception, he copied texts from both sides.

The examples presented in the next chapter (*Scribe*) must be seen as rather extreme cases because Crux usually copied more carefully, and used to compare more variants before adding his corrections. The first part illustrates a careless copy of a quite popular catechism which contains representatively “all the typical signs of medieval textual ambivalence”⁵—from the perspective of medieval conceptions of “original” or “authorial”, it is important to clarify that the variants should not be considered mere mistakes. Nevertheless, the omission of significant parts indicates the lack of careful re-reading which has led to contradiction, because the marginals suggest that the manuscript was used (but never corrected).

The second example illustrates an interesting field of Crux’s collection: an explanation of the individual meaning of Hebrew letters related to Hieronymus’s *Epistula XXX ad Paulam*. Crux made several mistakes in copying two different variants of this text without comparing or unifying them. The second copy’s material context is a miscellany of riddles and other word play. As we observe later, riddles were important to him.

The following two sections (8. *Teacher*; 9. *Preacher*) describe and analyse the “creative copying” of Crux, presenting some examples of his compiling methods. His early miscellanies contain different school-related texts—e.g. florilegia, dictionaries, and riddles. Some pieces of Czech lyrical poetry are only preserved here, in Crux’s copies. Lucie Doležalová presents four groups of texts related to schools and found in school miscellanies. The first genre is represented by several versions of three drafts of a school headmaster’s moralising speeches, which are probably compiled, and maybe also authored by Crux himself. The second text is the sole surviving exemplar of a pedagogical poem by an unknown author—probably Crux. The poem depicts human life through the allegorical image of the Pythagorean letter Y: one must choose the narrow path. The third text group is a large collection of proverbs, including Latin and Czech ones.

The group discussed most concerns riddles. The latter were commonly used in medieval education. The types are well represented as mathematical, biblical (*ioca monachorum*), and philosophical riddles. Didactic grammatical riddles are also called *logogriphs*—riddles based on the transformation of words by adding or removing letters or syllables. The solution to others lies in the numerical value or the number of the letters. The author describes some of the parallel phenomena of medieval Europe (for example, the *Enigmaticus* of Claretus), analysing the resemblances and overlaps. She points out that the same collection of riddles has not yet been found

5 VII. Scribe, 80.

anywhere. Apart from identifying the sources, the solutions themselves, tending to be strange, turn out to be mysteries for philologists, too. What is more, Crux himself also misunderstood some pieces of his riddle collection, as the explications prove.

However, the sense of the seventeenth riddle remains obscure:⁶ *Bos portat spinam de qua facit auca rapinam. Quiquam auca rapit bovi, hoc dat vitulo et ovi.* In the description of the solution (which seems to be the process of writing, metonymically), the role of *bos* is doubtful. The suggestion of including just one more animal into the riddle did not seem very convincing to me, especially at the first place of a genre which is usually short and dense. I would like to suggest another possible translation of the word *spina*. Instead of “thorn”, it could be “spine”—the spine of a book which could have been bound in leather of *bos*. Or it could be interpreted as some other instrument used in the book-binding process made of cattle bones or horns (maybe an inkhorn, or some kind of folder or ruler).

Crux de Telcz must have been an active preacher too (Chapter 9). His sermon copies offer a good insight into late-medieval preaching methods and especially into the ways of reorganising the *materia praedicabilia* for different purposes. There are sketches and more elaborate pieces amongst Crux’s sermon copies which include individual sermons and collections too. The compiling process can be illustrated and proven at once by the presence of smaller papers bound in the codex later and by examining the different variations associated with a certain topic. A case study presents Crux’s self-written auxiliary documents about New Year’s gifts. Nevertheless, New Year’s sermons are rather adaptations than Crux’s own creations—even if they seem special and peculiar at first glance. They probably originate from Johln of Vodňany’s sermon collection. The main idea of the speeches is to remind all of Christ, who is a gift from God to all of us. The connection to the liturgic occasion is the prefigurative interpretation of the circumcision.

Doležalová introduces a Latin–Czech exemplum from Crux; a quite strange metamorphic one of uncertain origin, to prepare the explanation of the gifts. This is followed by the analysis of the sketch “They all love gifts”, a sermon on the circumcision with instructions to the preacher related to each gift, *dic de natura eius*. The list of appropriate gifts according to the person’s age, marital condition, and profession is ultimately a moralistic allegory. The full form of the sermon is probably borrowed from Johannes Herolt (Discipulus), but there is also another more elaborate version by Crux, including three gifts to each addressed. Another sketch belonging to this compilative composition is a simple list accompanied by relevant biblical quotes. Late-medieval New Year’s gifts sermons used to have a specific bird-related symbolism. This may have been familiar to Crux’s audience, since it was well-known during that age.

6 VIII. Teacher, 116–17.

Fortunately, these manuscripts are also published in the book's appendix, as well as the next interesting copied text from Crux de Telcz: *Undecim condiciones bonae memoriae*—advice for improving one's memory, likely authored by Crux himself, which accompanies an excerpt from the treatise *Ars memorandi*.

To complete the case of Crux de Telcz, after the concluding chapter we can make a comparison with work of a nearly contemporary copyist, Johannes Sintram, with the help of an article from Kimberly Rivers.⁷ This study could be—and in fact, it is—an additional chapter to Doležalová's book. The points of comparison are the amount of copied manuscripts and personal comments, the possibility of having a personal library, and the degree of “creativity” as a copyist—involving selecting from verses in vernacular poetry. An important point in Rivers' article is the emphasis that the criteria of being a “good” scribe is not self-evident to a modern observer. Sintram, a Franciscan scribe from Würzburg, mainly copied texts related to teaching and preaching—just like Crux. As a scribe and a book collector, he seems to have had a certain proprietary attitude—for example, via cross-references to books in his possession. Finally, we should not forget to mention his definite interest in organising tables, indexes, and marginal notations (*vide tabulam*), leading to them appearing frequently in Sintram's manuscripts.

Lucie Doležalová's book ends with an extensive and rich appendix of text editions which not only permits an insight into Crux's manuscripts but provides illustrations of the phenomena discussed above. The work which is supposed to be Crux's own (the letters and the verses on the Pythagorean letter Y) are followed by his copies and compilations: the prescriptions for a good memory, an excerpt from the proverb collection, and the variations on the New Year's sermon. Thereafter, Doležalová describes the corpus of Crux's manuscripts organised by his life periods and the type of textual intervention. The last parts of the appendix are a special kind of source edition: Sintram's colophon collection by Kimberly Rivers, and Crux's colophons in chronological order by Lucie Doležalová and Michal Dragoun.

Crux de Telcz, this particularly active scribe, can be depicted and seen as a focal point of manuscript culture in his era and in his geographical location. This shows how a case study can provide general reflections and specific interesting details by choosing representative parts of Crux's collection which would be otherwise vast and confusing. Interesting, informative, and fragmentary—as it ought to be.

7 Rivers, *The Franciscan Johannes Sintram (d. 1450) as a Scribe—A Comparison*, 165–80.

