

BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF LETTERS
DEPARTMENT OF HUNGARIAN LITERATURE
HUNGAROLOGICAL STUDIES DOCTORAL SCHOOL

Mysticism in the Late Medieval Hungarian-language
Monastic Codices

Reception of Mysticism or Literary and Devotional Practice in the Devotional
Texts of the Late Medieval Hungarian-language

Monastic Codices

– PhD thesis –

Supervisor: Dr. Gábor Csilla

PhD student: Korondi Ágnes

Cluj-Napoca, 2014

Table of contents

I. INTRODUCTION	6
II. THE CODICES IN THE CANON OF HUNGARIAN LITERARY HISTORY	14
III. MYSTICISM, CODICES, MEDIEVAL WOMEN’S LITERACY	38
III.1. MYSTICISM AND THE HUNGARIAN-LANGUAGE CODICES: LITERATURE REVIEW	38
III.2. MYSTICISM AND LITERARY HISTORY: CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS ..	42
III.3. MYSTICISM AND WOMEN’S LITERACY IN MEDIEVAL WESTERN EUROPE AND HUNGARY...	45
IV. TEXTUAL FUNCTIONS AND THE GENRES OF DEVOTIONAL LITERATURE .	75
IV.1. THE CONCEPT AND PRACTICE OF MEDITATION IN THE CODICES.....	75
IV.1.1. <i>Meditation: genre or practice?</i>	75
IV.1.2. <i>Meditation and mysticism</i>	94
IV.2. MONASTIC RULES AND TEXTS OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTIONS IN THE CODICES.....	99
IV.2.1. <i>Rules attributed to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux</i>	105
IV.2.1.1. Bernard’s mysticism	105
a. The steps of love	106
b. The Song of songs and Bernard’s bridal mysticism	108
c. Christocentrism, passion mysticism, and the Pseudo-Bernard texts.....	110
IV.2.1.2. David of Augsburg’s <i>Formula novitiorum</i> as a Bernardian work in the <i>Horvát Codex</i>	112
IV.2.1.3. The <i>Liber de modo bene vivendi</i>	117
a. The reordered chapters of the <i>Érsekújvári Codex</i>	118
b. The <i>Winkler Codex</i> on love.....	123
c. The compilation of the <i>Guary Codex</i>	125
IV.2.1.4. Conclusions.....	125
IV.2.2. <i>Bonaventure’s mysticism mirrored by his rules</i>	126
IV.2.2.1. The <i>De perfectione vitae ad sorores</i> and its Hungarian translations.....	127

a. Bonaventure's mysticism for Poor Claires	127
b. Bonaventure's Hungarian readers.....	131
b.1. The translation of the <i>Weszprémi Codex</i>	132
b.2. The variants of the <i>Lobkowicz Codex</i> and the <i>Debreceni Codex</i>	135
IV.2.2.2. The <i>Regula novitiorum</i> and its translations	139
a. The <i>Regula novitiorum</i>	139
b. The Hungarian translations of the <i>Regula novitiorum</i>	140
b.1. The <i>Rule for Novices</i> in the <i>Vitkovics Codex</i>	140
b.2. The <i>Érsekújvári Codex</i> on Holy Communion	145
b.3. Extracts from Bonaventure's rules.....	146
IV.2.2.3. Conclusions.....	147
IV.3. MYSTICISM IN LEGENDS AND SERMONS	149
IV.3.1. <i>Saint Francis, the mystic?</i>	154
IV.3.2. <i>Saint Catherine of Siena, the dominican woman mystic</i>	159
IV.3.3. <i>Saint Margaret of Hungary, the local example</i>	165
IV.3.4. <i>Conclusions</i>	169
V. PASSION MYSTICISM.....	170
V.1. THE PASSION IN LATE MEDIEVAL SPIRITUALITY: LITERATURE REVIEW	170
V.2. PASSION NARRATIONS IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES	174
V.2.1. <i>The Latin material</i>	174
V.2.2. <i>The Hungarian texts</i>	177
V.3. PASSION PRAYERS	185
V.3.1. <i>Prayer texts and prayer collections</i>	185
V.3.2. <i>Sources, translation, textual variants</i>	187
V.3.3. <i>The memory of the passion: narrative techniques</i>	190
V.3.4. <i>The function of prayers: how to use the passion?</i>	192
V.3.4.1. Aids to meditation.....	192
V.3.4.2. Liturgical role.....	194
V.3.4.3. Protective prayers, the magic power of words, and the afterlife.....	196
V.3.5. <i>Conclusions</i>	201

V.4. VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS	202
V.5. <i>IMITATIO, COMPASSIO, CONFORMATIO</i> – DEVOTIONAL MODELS IN LATE MEDIEVAL HUNGARIAN-LANGUAGE PASSION TEXTS	209
VI. CONCLUSIONS.....	220
BIBLIOGRAPHY	223
APPENDICES.....	263
APPENDIX 1.	263
APPENDIX 2.	281
APPENDIX 3.	283
APPENDIX 4.	286
IMAGES	343

Keywords

mysticism, devotional literature, late Middle Ages, Hungarian-language codices, monastic literature, women's literature, Franciscans, Dominicans, passion, religious rules, meditation, prayer, mystical saints

Abstract

My thesis analyzes the reception of western mystical texts in the late medieval Hungarian-language monastic codices. These manuscripts were copied in the last decades of the 15th and the first decades of the 16th century mainly for the use of observant mendicant cloisters (especially for the Dominican nuns in the Island of Rabbits/Saint Margaret's Island and the Poor Claires in Óbuda). Many of the codices containing mainly edifying literature (sermons, legends, treatises, meditations, prayers, rules) translated from popular Latin works were prepared in the cloisters by nuns. The manuscripts that survived the destruction and scattering of medieval monastic libraries were transferred to national and academic libraries (National Széchényi Library, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, University Library of the Eötvös Loránd University, etc.). The modern editions of the codices have been published in the series *Régi Magyar Nyelvmélekek* [Old Hungarian Language Relics], *Nyelvméltár* [The Store of Language Relics], *Codices Hungarici* and *Régi Magyar Kódexek* [Old Hungarian Codices]. These texts have been the object of constant interest from the part of language historians since the moment they were discovered. This resulted in significant scholarly publications. But the philological and literary historical research intent on discovering the sources of the translations came to a halt after the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The *Régi Magyar Kódexek* series launched in the late 1980s triggered a new wave of research in this field. Nevertheless, despite the important papers published in recent decades, literary historians have plenty to do with regard to these texts, especially if they apply the approaches and research results of neighbouring disciplines. This thesis analyzing the reception of mysticism discusses a single, rather limited area from a varied and promising field.

From a methodological point of view my dissertation is based on the New Philology that emphasises the importance of the variant, since the textual versions are crucial in the Hungarian-language monastic literature. Those who prepared the codices (translators, scribes, compilers) usually did not choose to translate/copy long works in their entirety, only certain chapters, parts considered suitable for some reason. The transposition often implied smaller or larger modifications, accommodation. In some cases the genre of the text was also changed. On other occasions the scribes or translators compiled their writing from several works, or added some observations of their own. All these indicate that this body of texts belongs to the category of

functional literature, and thus it is organized around a different concept of literature and literary practice than belletristic works. Therefore, the selection of certain writings and genres, the considerations behind the selection, the intent of the text, the intended public, and the mode of translation reveal much about the culture of reading in the age and the literary and devotional practice of the compilers and intended readers. My thesis is built on such a functional approach. I point out the function of the main lines of selection, the translation and compilation techniques, and the spiritual needs of the presumed public. To discover these, I compared Latin and Hungarian, as well as different Hungarian textual variants in case there is more than one Hungarian translation to a work. (The extensive appendices of the thesis contain several such comparative tables.) The differences between the versions often mirror the translator's or scribe's method of adapting the text to his/her or the intended public's needs. My dissertation resituates the codex texts into the rich devotional context of the late Middle Ages in which they were used. I based this contextualization on the Anglo-Saxon and French research in historical anthropology and the history of spirituality.

When discussing the relationship between the Hungarian monastic literature and mysticism, I focused on the target system. Its differences from the sources I interpreted not as a lack, but as some unknown element to be understood, trying to reconstruct it as a self-sufficient whole. I outlined the devotional practice(s) behind these late 15th and early 16th century Hungarian-language pious texts, the spiritual possibilities they offered, recommended or imposed on their readers, users. While describing the way in which the communities or individuals constructed, shaped their self, their identity, and their spiritual path by means of literary and rhetoric tools, it is also revealed that the users' spiritual needs shaped the operation of the literary system that served them as well.

Following the introduction, chapter two analyzes the place occupied by the late medieval Hungarian-language codices in the Hungarian literary historical paradigm. I reviewed the most important histories of Hungarian literature (handbooks authored by Ferenc Toldy, Zsolt Beöthy, Cyrill Horváth, Frigyes Riedl, János Horváth, Antal Szerb, and the compendium published by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in the 1960s) focusing on the placement of the monastic literature in the line of literary development. By examining the relevant chapters, I pointed out that due to the historiographic construct of the decadent late Middle Ages, as well as to ideological motives the late medieval monastic literature came to be described as declining,

belated, overly sentimental, and with hardly any connection to the later developments in Hungarian literature. The linguistic and aesthetic evaluation and the application of the modern belletristic literature concept rendered the interpretation of the codex texts according to their original mode of being, as functional texts, difficult. The narrative of decline also determined the study of the relationship between mysticism and the codices. The few secondary literature works (presented in subchapter III.1.) dealing with the topic observe from time to time that the monastic literature transmits an overripe, exhausted, feeble spirituality that cannot and will not rise to the heights of high medieval mysticism. In the conclusion of the chapter some interpretative paradigms are presented that avoid the mentioned preconceptions and can be easily applied to the analyzed material. The perusal of the literary historical compendia also showed that, regardless of their approach, all the analyzed handbooks, with the possible exception of János Horváth, consider the codices worthy of scholarly interest firstly on account of their Hungarian language. They emphasize the texts' importance despite the fact that the majority of the copied works are not original Hungarian creations, but translations. The religious topic seems to be a rather uncomfortable secondary feature originating from the culture of the age. The relationship between the religious subject and vernacularism is rarely discussed. Some handbooks regard the vernacular texts a pre-reformed phenomenon and connect it to such religious and social changes. The present thesis considers this religious, devotional character determinant, and explains the increase in the number of vernacular texts by connecting it to the changes that took place in spirituality and the devotional practice. This enables us to avoid the evaluation of five hundred years old texts according to the present-day concepts of literature, and enables us to understand the literary practice of the original users.

Chapter three, starting from the review of earlier literature on the topic of mysticism in the Hungarian codices, considers the possibilities of analysis from a methodological point of view, and clarifies the terminology to be used further on. I considered useful to discuss the creation and use of mystical texts against the cultural background of women's literacy in medieval Hungary. Thus it became clear that during the 12–14th century when female mystics flourished in Western Europe the level of women's literacy in East Central Europe was not high enough to allow for the elaboration of mystical works describing complex religious experiences either in Latin or in vernacular. By the 15–16th century, when the spread of literacy made possible the birth of a vernacular literature written for and in part by women in Hungary, the

attitude towards mysticism had changed in the whole Europe. The western communities of women whose readings may serve as a parallel to the Hungarian codices (women communities of the *devotio moderna* who assumed a monastic way of life, observant cloisters) did not read and write complicated mystical revelations at this time, but highly functional, pious texts in hybrid forms revealing a degree of caution related to mystical experience. The early 16th century Hungarian-language text production was neither as abundant, nor as varied as the Western European, however, considered in the context of medieval Hungarian literacy, it was significant. The use of vernacular texts intended to serve as an aid to monastic reform and personal piety had become a daily necessity for a small group of women, shaping their communal and individual spiritual life.

Chapter four discusses the main text types that might elaborate on the character of mystical experience and the ways to achieve it. Its first subchapter investigates the presence and meanings of the concept meditation in the codices, demonstrating that *meditatio* in this corpus designates one of the elements of the traditional monastic spiritual exercise, *lectio, oratio, meditatio, contemplatio*. Texts only served as a starting point to the spiritual-mental process that took place in the soul/heart/mind of the reader. Such textual aids for meditation in the codices are characterized by caution regarding mysticism and a fear from excesses. The passion of Christ was the most popular among the meditational subjects.

One of the central text types of the monastic literature according both to its frequency and to its role in communal life was the religious rule. These normative texts show what kind of devotional behaviour was recommended by the codex compilers and the users. The late medieval attitude towards mysticism is well exemplified by the fact that from among the authentic and attributed works of the great 12th and 13th century mystical authors (Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure) only such rules and collections of religious instructions were translated into Hungarian. I analyzed the Pseudo-Bernard translation in *Codex Horvát* (in fact David of Augsburg's *Formula novitiorum*), the *Liber de modo bene vivendi* chapters in three codices (*Érsekújvári*, *Winkler*, and *Guary*), as well as the parts of Bonaventure's *De perfectione vitae ad sorores* in codices *Weszprémi*, *Lobkowitz* and *Debreceni*, the *Meditationes vitae Christi* fragment of *Codex Debreceni*, as well as the *Regula novitiorum* translations in *Codex Vitkovics* and *Codex Érsekújvári*. All these writings transmit a sober, practical spirituality based on

everyday life and focused on the traditional monastic virtues (poverty, humility, etc.). Mystical experiences and the meditational practice are subordinated to this.

A similar attitude is revealed by the analysis of the sermons and legends presenting the life of mystical saints and their experiences. The hagiographical type of the mystical saint as defined by André Vauchez is fairly rare in the legend collections of the codices dominated by the *vitae* of late antique martyrs. Saint Catherine of Siena, the figurehead of Dominican observance is a significant exception. Her long legend in the Dominican *Codex Érsekújvári* however, besides mystical experiences, also emphasizes the love and practice of monastic virtues. Humility and poverty are more important than the unmediated experience of God in the hagiographic texts about Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Margaret of Hungary as well. The latter's devotional habits (central role of the passion, importance of the Eucharist, frequent and fervent prayer, monastic virtues) resembles much the practice recommended by the other codex texts, especially the rules. All these hagiographic texts illustrate the devotional model outlined in the rules. Thus, they must have served as excellent aids to the observant reform.

Chapter five discusses the issue of passion mysticism, a central element of this monastic literature. After reviewing the secondary works on late medieval passion representations, I present the most important Latin and Hungarian passion narratives. Then I analyze the sources, narrative techniques, and possible functions of the numerous Hungarian-language passion prayers. A smaller part of these served as meditational aids, while most were meant to secure a place in heaven for the praying person. A subchapter presents the main types of passion-related visual representations of the age, while another attempts to outline the devotional model offered by these texts. Based on the concepts of *imitatio*, *compassio*, and *conformatio* the passion texts are an organic part of the more or less uniform devotional model detectable in the Hungarian-language codices, which focus on the human figure of Christ as an example to be imitated in order to achieve a union with God in the form of a virtuous Christ-like life on Earth and the bliss of the heavenly nuptials after death.