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Universities and vernacular preaching

The case of Vienna, Heidelberg and Basle

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UNIVERSITIES AND VERNACULAR PREACHING.
THE CASE OF VIENNA, HEIDELBERG AND BASLE

Ad preces ducis Austrie Magister Hainricus de hassya fecit hunc tractatum de confessione et bene tenendus est omnibus fidelibus. This Latin dedication as well as a Latin title are the prelude to a work in German. The author is Heinrich of Langenstein, the recipient Duke Albrecht III of Austria (1365-1395)¹. The link connecting both is the University of Vienna.

Heinrich's treatise on penance and the seven deadly sins, the famous 'Erkenntnis der Sünde' ('Cognition of sin') is transmitted in 79 manuscripts. Because of this broad transmission, it is conceivable that the text met with vivid interest from its audience. It is transmitted only once together with its Latin *dedicatio* and *titulus*. This manuscript (Gießen, UB, Hs. 705a) consists of four parts, all of which originate in the Viennese area between 1425 and 1430². The first part of the manuscript is a thirteenth-century collection of model sermons in German, the so-called 'Schwarzwald Sermons', followed by the above-mentioned treatise by Heinrich of Langenstein. In part III we find 'Sermones dominicales' and a 'Tractatulus de passione Domini'. The codex concludes with the Latin-German glossary 'Liber ordinis rerum'.

¹ Cf. Th. HOHMANN and G. KREUZER, *Heinrich von Langenstein*, in *Verfasserlexikon*. 2nd ed., ed. K. RUH, Vol. III, cols. 763-773.

² For a detailed description, see H.-J. SCHIEWER, *Die 'Schwarzwälder Predigten'. Entstehungs- und Überlieferungsgeschichte der Sonntags- und Heiligenpredigten*, Munich, 1996, pp. 152-166 (*Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*. Vol. 105).

The mixture of German and Latin texts as well as the lexicon suggest a literate owner of the manuscript. The German sermons have Latin glosses, which consist of explanations of the different points of the *dispositio*, references to other interpretations, exegetical comparisons and various schematizations of the structure of the text. Apart from that, there is a Latin list of the *exempla* used in the vernacular sermons. The following, less extensive texts are supplementary to the collection of German model sermons for Sundays and holy days. The function of the 'Liber ordinis rerum' was to serve as an aid for literary exchange between Latin and the vernacular. Unfortunately, the manuscript does not mention an owner or customer who would enable us to situate it conclusively in the academic milieu of Vienna. However, it is very probable to assume an origin and a reception in the context of the Viennese secular clergy, which had strong links to the university.

What makes this case of a mixed German and Latin transmission of texts interesting for our context? The University of Vienna and the University of Prague were the most prestigious schools in the German-speaking area during the late Middle Ages, serving as models for those that followed³. But unlike the University of Prague, which was founded in 1347 following an initiative by Karl IV, the Viennese university established in 1365 is an example not of a foundation by the sovereign of the empire, but by the local sovereign, who was interested in creating his own 'think-tank', so that he could recruit highly educated personnel for his administrative machinery⁴. « Wissen für den Hof » (« Knowledge for the court ») is the programmatic title of a recently published book by J.-D. Müller⁵ that is concerned with the supply of knowledge at the court, although it leaves theological and doctrinal knowledge aside. But exactly this kind of knowledge is the central

³ P. NARDI, *Die Hochschulträger*, in W. RUEGG, ed., *Geschichte der Universität in Europa*, Vol. 1, Munich, 1993, pp. 83-108, here pp. 102-108.

⁴ P. NARDI, *op. cit.*, p. 104f.; E. SCHUBERT, *Motive und Probleme deutscher Universitätsgründungen*, in P. BAUMGART and N. HAMMERSTEIN, eds., *Beiträge zu Problemen deutscher Universitätsgründungen der frühen Neuzeit*, Nendeln, 1978, p. 13f. (*Wolfenbütteler Forschungen*. Vol. 4).

⁵ Cf. J.-D. MÜLLER, ed., *Wissen für den Hof. Der spätmittelalterliche Verschriftungsprozeß am Beispiel Heidelberg im 15. Jahrhundert*, Munich, 1994, pp. 7-28 (*Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften*. Vol. 67).

concern and interest of the so-called 'Vienna School'⁶. The translation literature of the 'Vienna School' was the result of the reorganization of the Viennese university carried out in 1383 by Duke Albrecht III. The translation activity occurred especially in the last decade of the fourteenth and in the first four decades of the fifteenth century. Among the central figures of the 'Vienna School' is the above-mentioned Heinrich of Langenstein. Other important names are those of Nicolas of Dinkelsbühl, Thomas Peuntner, Ulrich of Pottenstein, and Thomas Ebendorfer. In contrast to other types of literature, surprisingly few sermons are the object of the translation activity of the school. But if we include the manuscript introduced above in our considerations, we will find that already existing collections of German model sermons like the 'Schwarzwald Sermons', which were apparently still transmitted and used for preaching in the wider vicinity of the university, could also be used for a transfer of theological and doctrinal knowledge. This observation sheds light on the spiritual supply lines of the court and the population in the vicinity of universities in general.

In Vienna itself these findings are supported by the few surviving catalogues of medieval libraries. The catalogues list two manuscripts with German sermon collections in the possession of the cathedral chapter (Kathedralkapitel) of All Saints in the church of St. Stephan's and a *vocabularius cum sermonibus de sanctis* in possession of the *Bürgerspital* ('citizens's hospital')⁷.

⁶ Cf. Th. HOHMANN, *Heinrichs von Langenstein 'Unterscheidung der Geister' lateinisch und deutsch. Texte und Untersuchungen zu Übersetzungsliteratur aus der Wiener Schule*, Munich, 1977, pp. 267-276 (*Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*, Vol. 63); Th. HOHMANN, "Die recht gelerten maister." *Bemerkungen zur Übersetzungsliteratur der Wiener Schule des Spätmittelalters*, in H. ZEMANN, ed., *Die österreichische Literatur*, Vol. 1, Graz, 1986, pp. 349-365; M.H. SHANK, "Unless you believe, you shall not understand". *Logic, University, and Society in Late Medieval Vienna*, Princeton, 1988.

⁷ Cf. F. LANDMANN, *Predigten und Predigtwerke in den Händen der Wiener Weltgeistlichkeit des XV. Jahrhunderts*, in *Abhandlungen aus dem Gebiete der mittleren und neueren Geschichte und ihrer Hilfswissenschaften. Eine Festgabe zum siebzigsten Geburtstag. Geh. Rat Prof. Dr. Heinrich Finke gewidmet ...*, Münster, 1925, pp. 288-307, here p. 289 and 301.

HEIDELBERG

Another manuscript of the 'Schwarzwald Sermons', Schaffhausen, Ministerialbibl. in der Stadtbibl., Min. 116, leads us away from the specific case of Vienna by establishing a link between the reception of this sermon collection and the University of Heidelberg. In this second manuscript we find the following colophon : *Expliciunt sermones boni et peroptimi et ex theologia sumpti. Et non sit tibi cura quis dicat Sed quid dicatur amanducare. Reportata sunt hec a venerabili ac eximio sacrorum canonum doctore domino venerando Johanne de Noet ordinarij studij heidelbergensis*⁸.

Johannes de Noet came from Brussels and was the first and most respected professor of law at the University of Heidelberg. First mentioned on March 16, 1387 as *decretorum doctor*, he was one of the founding members of the Heidelberg university. In the years following 1393 he occupied the position of rector or vice-rector. He was a canon at the cathedral of Speyer and *custos* at the chapter of the Church of the Holy Ghost in Heidelberg, where he held the first juridical prebend, the so-called *decretales*, from 1413 until his death in 1432. This man is said to have 'reported' (*reportata sunt*) the German sermons⁹. The use of this *terminus technicus* in this context is unusual, because there is nothing known about the role of sermon collections in the German language within the learned Latin area of the medieval universities¹⁰. The verb *reportare* must be understood as an indication of a transmission within the academic field and of the mediation of the collection by Johannes de Noet. In this way an anonymous sermon collection is authorized, and its suitability for pastoral care as well as its quality are proved.

⁸ Cf. H.-J. SCHIEWER, *op. cit.*, p. 257-263.

⁹ J. HAMESSE, *Reportatio and transmission de textes*, in M. ASZTALOS (ed.), *The Editing of Theological and Philosophical Texts from the Middle Ages*, Stockholm, 1986, pp. 4-34 ; R. RUSCONI, « Reportatio », in *Medioevo e rinascimento* 3 (1989), pp. 7-36.

¹⁰ Cf. P.B. ROBERTS, « Medieval University Preaching », in this volume p. 332, 324 mentioning vernacular preaching by full bachelors of theology in Oxford and Cambridge in the 15th century.

The connecting link between university and German sermons most probably lies beyond the academic area and has no traces in the statutes¹¹. We have to look for it in the field of ecclesiastical prebends, which were used as payment for university teachers, and in the vicinity of the noble founder of the university, the sovereign.

De Noet was canon and *custos*, the university a foundation by the Count Palatine. As in the manuscript from Vienna, we find in this manuscript distinct traces of its attachment to learned fields. Again Latin interpretations, which comment in the margins on the text of the sermons, lead the way, but there occur also relatinizations of individual words and phrases within the sermons themselves. Thus for example in the German counting of the *membra*, the German words *Diu êrste*, *Diu ander*, *Diu dritte*, *Diu vierde* etc. are regularly replaced by *Primo*, *Secundo*, *Tercio*, *Quarto* etc. In other transmissions of the 'Schwarzwald Sermons' the paraphrase of the pericope usually concludes with the sentence *Dc sint diu wort dez hailigen ewangelij* ('these are the words of the Holy Gospel'). In our manuscript they are translated into Latin: *Hec sunt verba ewangelij*. The same phenomenon can be observed with introductions of direct speech: *Do antwurte in vnser herre vnd sprach* ('then our Lord answered them and said') is translated simply as *Respondit Jesus*. These sometimes almost imperceptible relatinizations for formulas typical of sermons reveal a writer and user who is familiar with the corresponding Latin texts.

A glance at Vienna and Heidelberg, as well as the two manuscripts introduced here, give us examples that make us aware that medieval universities and their members were confronted with demands to which modern research has not yet paid sufficient attention. Of course, the 'Vienna School' has maintained a prominent place in literary history for a long time, but as yet no attempt has been made to investigate the general validity of the Viennese model case. This attempt is surely rendered more difficult by the lack of source material; such a dearth makes it impossible to establish clear and unquestionable links. Recently Müller has shown in several studies how important the university — in his case Heidelberg — was for the mediation of Latin knowledge in the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

court's lay circles. Müller's interests concentrate on secular literature¹²; his detailed studies prove what we could only assume for the religious area in the case of the Heidelberg sermon manuscript.

Considering our findings, the meaning of the term 'university sermon' must be extended. Apparently it can no longer be restricted to the sermon preached by intellectuals to intellectuals but has to include only the various, sometimes institutionalized possibilities of religious and doctrinal instruction, which use the university as a service institution. The phenomenon of highly reputed academic teachers who busy themselves with translation literature or lend their names to authorize religious texts in the vernacular begs a thorough study that would have to consider the situation at all universities in the German-speaking area. It also shows that a university teacher like Jean Gerson addressing lay people cannot be seen as a singular case but only as an uncommonly prominent and programmatic one¹³.

BASLE

The interest of academics for lay people, especially for those who were responsible for the financial support of the academic institution — I am thinking here of the court and of the urban patrician classes — can be observed not only in the immediate vicinity of the universities but also in the vicinity of the ecclesiastical councils, where we find a high concentration of intellectual potential.

In 1434 participants of the council of Basle preached sermons in the German language as guest speakers in the Dominican nunnery Ad Lapides, which had been reformed shortly before that time in the course of the Dominican observance movement. The exact circumstances of those 'guest-sermons' are not transmitted to us, so it remains unknown whether the audience of the so-called 'Basle Reform Sermons' was

¹² J.-D. MÜLLER, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-14.

¹³ H. KRAUME, *Die Gerson-Übersetzungen Geilers von Kaysersberg. Studien zur deutschsprachigen Gerson-Rezeption*, Munich, 1980, pp. 19-78 (*Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*. Vol. 71).

restricted to the members of the nunnery or rather open to a wider urban public — which is what I presume. What is certain is that the transmission of this group of sermons takes place within the context of the reformed nunneries of the fifteenth century¹⁴. Among the preachers were the Dominican Heinrich Kalteisen ; Johannes of Brandenturn, the later cardinal John of Torquemada, Dominican prior in Valladolid and Toledo ; Johannes Himmel of Weits, also called Johannes Coeli, known as one of the leading academics in Vienna between 1425 and 1450 ; Nikolaus of Jauer, who started his academic career in Prague, became Professor of Theology in 1395 and was a highly respected academic in Heidelberg between 1402 and 1435 ; and finally Thomas of Vienna¹⁵. My interest is concentrated on Thomas of Vienna, who is probably identical with a *magister* mentioned several times in the acts of the council of Basle between 1432 and 1434¹⁶. There he is called *magister Thomas de universitate Wiennensi*. This *magister* represented the University of Vienna in Basle and maintained contacts with Bishop Nicodemus della Scala, who was the legate of the Austrian duke. Thomas of Vienna also appeared as official preacher to the council. Since Lhotsky's studies, this *magister Thomas* has been identified as Thomas Ebendorfer, who was the official legate of the University of Vienna in Basle from 1432 to 1435¹⁷.

What has not yet been explored is the connection to that Thomas of Vienna who appears as the preacher of four German sermons in the collection of the 'Basle Reform Sermons'.

¹⁴ The sermons are transmitted in Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz zu Berlin, Ms. germ. fol. 741 (A, Dominican nunnery of Medlingen, 1496) ; *ibid.*, Ms. germ. qu. 166 (B, Dominican nunnery of St Nicolaus in undis in Strasbourg) ; *ibid.*, Ms. germ. qu. 206 (C, Dominican nunnery of St. Nicolaus in undis in Strasbourg). Cf. A. RÜTHIER and H.-J. SCHIEWER, *Die Predigthandschriften des Straßburger Dominikanerinnenklosters St. Nikolaus in undis*, in *Die deutsche Predigt im Mittelalter*, Tübingen, 1992, pp. 169-192.

¹⁵ Cf. the relevant articles in *Verfasserlexikon. 2nd edition*, ed. K. RUI, 1978f.

¹⁶ *Concilium Basiliense*, ed. J. HALLER, Vol. 2, Basel, 1897, p. 156, 223, 254 ; Vol. 3, Basel, 1900, p. 132, 232.

¹⁷ A. LHOTSKY, *Thomas Ebendorfer ein österreichischer Geschichtsschreiber, Theologe und Diplomat des 15. Jahrhunderts*, Graz, 1957 (*Schriften der Monumenta Germaniae historica*, Vol. 15).

In 1408 Thomas Ebendorfer was matriculated in Vienna ; he took his degree as a *magister artium* in 1412 and was awarded the academic honour of *doctor sacrae scripturae* in 1428¹⁸. Ordained as a priest in 1424, he was responsible for various parishes in the course of his life, the longest obligation being that for the parish Perchtoldsdorf near Vienna beginning in 1435. His sermon work includes several exclusively Latin collections with some 500 sermons, which have only partly been investigated. At present we know about just six German sermons of Ebendorfer, of which four have earlier versions in Latin. A Benedictine monk of Melk, Wolfgang Suppan of Steyr, is supposedly the translator of those sermons. If Thomas of Vienna is identical with Thomas Ebendorfer, the texts transmitted in the 'Basle Reform Sermons' are the first evidence for preaching activity in the German language by Thomas Ebendorfer himself. They probably survived because the Dominican nuns of Basle wanted to possess the sermons for repeated reading that they had heard only once. In addition the nuns may have wished to document in their own convent the activity of highly respected participants.

The unity and simultaneously the authorship of the four 'Basle Reform Sermons' attributed to Thomas of Vienna are proved by intertextual references¹⁹. The first two texts are concerned with confession, sermon 3 deals with spiritual, indolence and the fourth considers the *imitatio Christi*. Taking the penitential psalm as his starting point in the first sermon, Thomas gives instructions for confession, followed by explanations concerning the sacrament of confession, the quality of sins and the content of the confessional account itself. The admonition not to tire the priest by telling him unimportant details shows the pragmatic intention of these explanations. At the end of the first sermon we find a reference to the subject of the following sermon : the sins of thought. The second sermon is consistently centred around *suggestio*, *passio* and *propassio*. In addition, it deals with the function of the priest and the obligation to confess. The third sermon describes

¹⁸ P. UIBLEIN, *Thomas Ebendorfer*, in *Verfasserlexikon*. 2nd ed., ed. K. RUH, Vol. II, cols. 253-266.

¹⁹ Ms. A, 237^{ra}-244^{ra} (Nr. 1), 251^{ra}-257^{va} (Nr. 2), 285^{ra}-292^{va} (Nr. 3) ; B 256^r-266^r (Nr. 1), 266^v-277^r (Nr. 2), 297^v-307^r (Nr. 3), 319^v-330^r (Nr. 4) ; C 278^r-294^v (Nr. 1), 294^v-309^r (Nr. 2), 334^r-347^v (Nr. 3), 367^v-384^v (Nr. 4).

the aim of the holy mass and the consequences of spiritual indolence — especially during the canonical hours. This is the first mention of a subject that is relevant only within a monastic context. In the fourth text, Thomas discusses poverty as an obligation for members of an order but also points out the impact of this subject on lay people : their wealth must correspond to their faith. The sermon concludes with a warning against superstitious rituals at the end of the year, especially against astrology and the apparently very popular ritual of casting lots.

The doctrinal instructions for acting in a God-fearing way give the texts their individual character : the explanation of the significance of confession and prayer together with practical instructions and a clear rejection of every kind of fortune-telling. The specific piety of reformed nunneries of the Dominican observance movement plays only a marginal role. Thus the sermons remain polyfunctional and give the impression that already at their first delivery at the nunnery *Ad lapides*, they are not exclusively intended for women living in strict seclusion. The sermons' concentration on instructions for practical piety connects them with other German texts and genres known from the literary production of the 'Vienna School'. Let me close the circle of my argument by pointing out that there are strong correlations in subject and intention between Thomas' 'Basle Reform Sermons' and the treatise on penance by Heinrich of Langenstein which I mentioned at the beginning of my paper.

As pointed out above, members of the university did not only provide Latin texts, they also mediated and produced vernacular material. In addition, the example of Thomas of Vienna, i.e. Thomas Ebendorfer, in Basle shows that the intellectual élite did not shy away from taking part in a kind of circular lecture for the public. This specifically medieval type of open university may have provoked probably the best-known German preacher to refuse an academic office : Johann Geiler of Kayzersberg²⁰. Geiler was born on July 16, 1445, the son of an assistant town clerk in Schaffhausen. He studied in Freiburg to the level of master and obtained the Doctor of Theology in Basle in 1475. The following year, as the result of a 'citizens' initiative', he was granted a theological

²⁰ H. KRAUME, *Geiler, Johannes, von Kayzersberg*, in *Verfasserlexikon*. 2nd ed., ed. K. RUH, Vol. II, cols. 1141-1152.

professorship in Freiburg, which, however, he wanted to relinquish in favour of a preaching office in Würzburg. Nevertheless, the mayor of Strasbourg, Peter Schott, succeeded in bringing Geiler directly to Strasbourg in 1478.

Obviously and interestingly for our understanding of a learned theologian, the *simplices* and not the discussions at a university constituted the focus of Geiler's interest in his career.

University and vernacular preaching at the end of the fourteenth and at the beginning of the fifteenth century must be conceived as closely related terms. The intellectual potential of the universities in central Europe, which were founded in quick succession, was used not only for the administrative and political interests of their founders but also for the mediation of learned knowledge in the vernacular. One of the classic forms of teaching religious knowledge is the genre of the sermon.

The three examples from Vienna, Heidelberg and Basle have shown that universities and intellectual events such as ecclesiastical councils had a role, as yet underestimated, as in mediating Latin knowledge to lay people. In all cases we could trace the spiritual supply lines between the court and the upperclass population in the vicinity of universities. In the late fourteenth and in the fifteenth century universities became more and more service institutions which — through their academic teachers — authorized, mediated and distributed theological knowledge and sermons in the vernacular.

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