

The Birth Certificate of Slovene Culture: Exhibition Catalogue / Exhibition of Medieval Slovene Manuscripts in Honour of the Accession of the Republic of Slovenia to the European Union. Exhibition catalogue ed. Mihael Glavan. Exhibition Hall of the National and University Library in Ljubljana, 17 May–20 June 2004. Ljubljana: National and University Library, 2004. 95 pp., 30 colour illustrations. ISBN 961-6285-32-7 [contains a description and reproduction of the manuscript “Anniversario di legati latino-italiano-slavo della confraternita di S. Maria di Cergneu, Codice n. CXLIV”]

From 20 May to 30 June 2004, the Exhibition Hall of the National and University Library of Ljubljana presented a collection of medieval manuscripts billed as the “birth certificate” of Slovene culture. The manuscripts represent over 500 years of Slovene religious life and literary development. The organizers of the exhibition produced a catalogue for the exhibition which does the great service of presenting photographic plates of the manuscripts, English translations of these manuscripts, and four articles that explain the background and nature of the manuscripts. The colour plates are clearly and justifiably the highlight of the catalogue. Fittingly, the editors have offered excellent reproductions of the documents. Remarkably, much of the handwriting is clearly legible despite the age of the documents. At the same time, however, the reader can appreciate the many difficulties that medieval manuscripts pose for the researcher, such as the quality of the inks, the variations in handwriting, the manuscript material, and the effects of age on the legibility of the texts.

The four introductory articles, elegantly translated into English, seek to meet the needs of scholarly concerns and the interests of the educated lay person. The articles by Igor Grdina (“The Medieval World and the Monuments of its Spirit”) and Alfred Ogris (“The Klagenfurt/Celovec (Ratschach/Rateče) Manuscript”) were written specifically for the exhibition and provide clear, general introductions to their material for the visitors to the exhibit. The contributions of Jože Pogačnik (“Literary-Historical Determinants of the Stična Manuscript”) and Nikolai Mikhailov (“The Čedad/Čividale (Černjeja/Cergneu) Manuscript”) are reprints of essays already published in scholarly journals in the 1990s. Each author offers essential information about the dates and places of origin of the manuscripts, their present permanent locations, and specific details of linguistic and historical importance for each manuscript collection. In every case, scholars have found that the Slovene texts display broader “European” affiliations, from the different types of script the writers used to the inclusion of terms, concepts, and names borrowed from Latin, Italian, German, and other Slavic languages and dialects.

The compilers of the first three texts must have had a lay audience in mind because they did not engage in subtle theological argument, but sought, instead, to give their readers basic texts for worship. These included a number of prayer formulas (including the Lord’s Prayer and various prayers to Mary and the Holy

Spirit), several general confessions, the Apostles' Creed, an Easter hymn and a sermon on sin and repentance. The Freising and Celovec/Rateče manuscripts were written in communities under the influence of German bishops. The former probably stems from the tenth and early eleventh centuries; the latter was probably composed between 1360 and 1390, with insertions of names of parishioners from 1467 to 1471. The Stična manuscript was probably written in the early fifteenth century, apparently in a Cistercian monastery in Slovenia. The Čedad (Černjeja) manuscript differs significantly from the other documents. An administrative document, it offers a list of donations from local lay contributors to a local confraternity (the Marian "Brotherhood of our Lady") from the mid to late fifteenth century.

The Čedad (Černjeja) and the Celovec/Rateče manuscripts hold special interest for scholars of confraternities. The Čedad (Černjeja) document offers insights into the social and the cultural developments of the community in the last half of the fifteenth century. Its earliest entries were recorded in Latin and then in Italian (50 entries), but the last 52 entries are either Slovenian translations of Latin or Italian entries, or simply entries in Slovenian. The entries follow a standard pattern: they list the names of the visitors, their villages, the pledges and endowments they offered; the number of masses they requested for themselves or for relatives. The Celovec (Rateče) manuscript contains three texts for worship in local dialect copied in the fourteenth century (the Hail Mary, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed), and probably derived from earlier formulas from the eighth and twelfth centuries. On the back leaf of this document several scribes recorded the names and contributions of some of the lay members of the local "Confraternity of Our Lady" and also the "Apostolic Confraternity" (presumably the apostle Thomas) in Gothic cursive script. The document has been tied to the environs of Rateče, and the list of names date from the late fifteenth century. Ogris speculates that this list may have been used by the brotherhood as a memory aid in their memorial services. Included are names of Latin, Germanic, and Slovene origin, along with their bearers' contributions for silent prayers.

Slovenian religious, confraternal and community life has received very little attention from English scholars to this point in time. With the translation and publication of this catalogue, the editors have made a significant contribution to promote interest and research in this area.

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