

The SLAVIC SEVEN SAGES

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OF ROME

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Introduction

The Seven Sages of Rome (SSR) is the second most widely transmitted premodern narrative, after the Bible. It consists of a frame narrative with between 10-15 inset stories, the contents of which differ between editions. This project aimed to catalogue Czech, Polish, and Hungarian variants of the text, with Hungarian serving as a **comparative perspective** to explore transmission, reception, and influence. As part of larger open-access database work, findings show how language, culture, and historical context shape storytelling and highlight the Seven Sages as a **dynamic transnational narrative**.

Methodology

1. Bibliographic/archival research to establish key copies
2. Literature review to add editions and map critical work
3. Data entry into open-access database and digitisation
4. Catalogue searches to identify under-researched sources.

Limitations

Overreliance on online/UK-based sources excluded some works but also highlighted **importance of digitisation efforts**.

Transmission and Origins

Figure 1 shows the **shared history** of each tradition and their relationships; however, each language adapted and reused the stories in different ways. Together, the three illustrate how language, culture, and circumstances shape storytelling, whilst reflecting the world they are produced in.

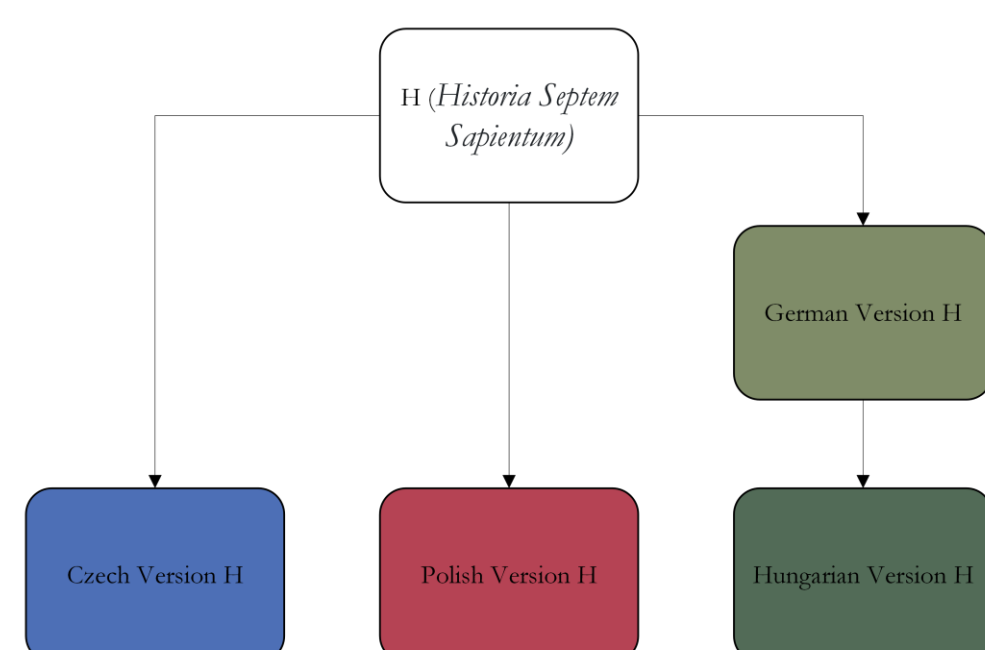


Figure 1: The origins of each tradition

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References, essay, and appendix of primary sources available via QR code



Czech Tradition: Localisation and Modification

Czech adaptations reflect a strong **localisation** trend, with translators adapting the text for domestic audiences. This is likely linked to a lack of church support for the prints, which meant they had to sell enough to be profitable. Furthermore, the inset stories show the most variation in this tradition, reflecting that they were likely **adapted for different tastes**. Certain inset tales were published independently, achieving popularity alongside the seven sages.

Polish Tradition: Stability and Mediation

Unlike the Czech works, Polish translations employ a **foreignization strategy** which relies on Polish knowledge of court customs to convey the story. The Polish SSR stands out for its remarkable **stability and international influence**. Serving as a **gateway text**, Polish editions travelled well beyond Central Europe, becoming the basis for Russian and Armenian versions of the tale. Uniquely for the time, the original work by Jan z Koszyczek, remained the only translation of the text for over 300 years, establishing itself as a **definitive edition** still read today.

Hungarian Tradition: Complexity and Gaps

Hungarian adaptations, though less studied, demonstrate a **distinct engagement** with the text. A wide variety of multiple translations circulated across several centuries, suggesting **cultural integration** but also strong interest.

Areas for further research

A number of gaps were identified in the literature review which this research could not fill. The largest of these is the corpus of **modern editions**, not yet examined by research.

Czech tradition: anomalies with the inset stories and the relationship between the SSR and the *Gesta Romanorum*, a collection of tales published earlier than the SSR, but which sometimes contain them..

Polish tradition: the location of a 1528 copy and comparative research into the **Russian and Armenian** versions, their origins, and the ways these have adapted.

Conclusions

Together, the Czech, Polish, and Hungarian traditions show the **reshaping of a single narrative** across different cultural contexts and historical circumstances, with the contrasts highlighting the interplay between local adaptation and international transmission. Ultimately, this study underscores the SSR as **more than a static tale**, instead placing it as a lens for understanding not only premodern storytelling but also the roots of transnational literary networks, which continue to connect us **beyond borders** today.