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The Slavic Seven Sages of Rome

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Introduction

The Seven Sages of Rome is one of the most widely transmitted premodern narrative collections, coming second only to the Bible.¹ With at least 31 languages and 1000 manuscripts and prints,² it has travelled across linguistic and cultural boundaries and became a staple of storytelling in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and beyond. Within Central and Eastern Europe, the tale was adapted in multiple vernaculars, assuming distinct forms which reflect their functions. This essay focuses on three of these traditions: Czech, Polish, and Hungarian, attempting to catalogue their transmission, reception, and influence. Whilst the Czech and Polish versions represent major Slavic adaptations, the linguistically distinct Hungarian tradition provides a valuable comparative perspective with its historical and geographical connections to the region.

This research forms part of a larger collaborative project to catalogue all known versions of *The Seven Sages*, both manuscript and print, across as many languages as possible. This has involved data entry of Appendix A into an open-access database to bring together a wide range of material.³ The project also seeks to make previously inaccessible material more widely available, and as such digitisation has been a key goal, with Appendix A containing almost 30 digitised editions ranging from 1501 to as recent as 2012. Within this broader framework, this essay offers a focused case study on the Central and Eastern European context. It first briefly discusses the history of the tradition, summarising the most common version of the text, before delving into each of the Czech, Polish, and Hungarian versions in turn. Finally, it will highlight similarities and differences between transmission and reception, before reflecting on potential topics of further research.

The Seven Sages of Rome is thought to originate from Indian and Persian sources, where it travelled through Arabic intermediaries into Latin and European languages. Its origins in India are from approximately the 5th century, with its transmission to Arabia in the 8th century.⁴ The story consists of a frame narrative, with multiple inset/embedded stories, which usually have a moral focus. The frame involves a prince who is sent away to live with seven wise sages after the death of his mother. Whilst he is being educated abroad, his father remarries a ‘wicked stepmother’, who calls for the son to be brought home to the court. Here, versions differ but usually either the prince or one of the sages has a dream/prophecy that the prince will die if he speaks a word

¹ Jaroslav Kolár, *Kronika sedmi mudrců* (Odeon, 1985), p. 12.

² Rita Schlusemann, ‘The Dissemination and Multimodality of *Historia septem sapientum Romae*’ in *Top Ten Fictional Narratives in Early Modern Europe: Translation, Dissemination and Mediality*, ed. by Rita Schlusemann, Helwi Blom, Anna Katharina Richter and Krystyna Wierzbicka-Trwoga (De Gruyter, 2023), pp. 87-126 (p. 4).

³ *Seven Sages of Rome Database*, 2024, <https://db.seven-sages-of-rome.org/Main_Page> [accessed 31 August 2025]

⁴ Killis Campbell, *The Seven Sages of Rome* (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1907), p. xi.

in his first seven days at the court. As such, he returns mute and is unable to defend himself when, after a failed seduction, his stepmother accuses him of sexual assault. To aggravate the situation further, the stepmother tells her husband a parable, usually about an ungrateful son, and his father sentences the prince to death. This is where the first of the sages intervenes and tells his own story, resulting in the boy's execution being postponed for one day.

The pattern continues, with the empress sharing tales of ungrateful sons and deceitful advisors, and each of the sages coming forward with stories about the wickedness of women. After both stories have been told for the day, there is a brief episode in the frame narrative where the father makes a judgement and both the sages and the stepmother react. On the eighth day, the boy is able to speak; normally, he tells the final story about a father who murders his innocent son; however, this doesn't change his father's mind. Regardless, when he reveals that his stepmother was unfaithful with a man disguised as one of her maids, the father apologises to his son and sentences the stepmother to death. Years after the incident, the son is revealed to be the best king/emperor that the people have ever had.

One of the most interesting things about this structure is that substitution and adaptation of both details in the frame narrative and the individual inset stories is very possible, reflecting contemporary cultural expectations and the culture of the adaptation. This allows for each tradition to reshape the text in subtle or sweeping ways, producing versions which not only reproduce the narrative core but also serve as mirrors of the societies in which they circulated.

Methodology

The project's main aim was to collate a comprehensive catalogue of *The Seven Sages of Rome* across Slavic languages, with a particular focus on Czech and Polish editions; the methodology was designed in line with this to not only document editions, but also to create a resource which could support comparative analysis and highlight broader patterns of transmission, particularly across Central and Eastern Europe. To do this, I adopted a bibliographic and archival approach. The process began with the collection of a preliminary bibliography for each language, using Schlusemann's 2023 study as a starting point for identifying existing editions and critical studies.⁵ Building on this foundation, I performed a literature review of secondary scholarship to map previous research and develop a catalogue of editions, noting distinctive features of each adaptation. Sources were selected via a snowballing method, which was then supplemented with

⁵ Schlusemann.

database searches of key repositories, for example, JSTOR. These details were entered into a database, designed to serve not only as a record of primary and secondary sources, but also as a structured digital resource supporting comparative study. Finally, I searched major catalogues, including those of national and key university libraries, to identify editions which may have been newly discovered or under-researched. Where editions were not available digitally, I contacted holding libraries to request digitisation, extending the reach of the database. This process ensured that the database could serve as a resource not only for identifying extant editions but also to support future scholarship through improved accessibility.

The methodology was limited somewhat by its reliance on secondary sources available online or within the United Kingdom, which inevitably excluded some works published in restricted-access contexts or which were only present physically abroad. This constraint underscored the importance of digitisation within the project, whilst also pointing to the need for potential future projects to incorporate on-site archival research. Nevertheless, the combination of literature review, bibliographic collation, and direct engagement with libraries provided a solid methodological basis and a replicable framework for future expansion of the database.

Transmission and Origins

The tale of *The Seven Sages of Rome* has travelled widely across the world, taking root in multiple vernacular traditions. Within the Slavic world, the texts survive most prominently in Czech and Polish versions. Both traditions demonstrate a distinct mode of reception: the Czech text as an experiment in localisation for a domestic audience and the Polish as a stable and highly influential version with international acclaim. The Hungarian tradition, by contrast, shows a less-documented, more complex case study, however one with deep national engagement. Although Hungarian is not a Slavic language, its geographic proximity and historical ties with Czechia make it a useful comparative point, highlighting where linguistic and cultural differences shaped adaptations, rather than merely location. When compared, the three traditions show the ways in which language, culture, and circumstance impact storytelling, with three distinct reception modes identified: localised adaptation, cultural mediation, and complex transmission.

The Czech Tradition: Localisation and Modification

The Czech tradition is one of the best documented Slavic versions of *The Seven Sages*, unique in its adaptation, and as such forms a valuable piece of research material. In historical terms, it bridges the world between medieval and renaissance work, as an intermediate step between

entertaining prose of the Middle Ages and the Humanism of the Renaissance era. Unlike other traditions, there is no conclusive information about the translation, however Kolár suspects that the original is ‘coincidentally’ from a Latin manuscript.⁶ The translation of the *Gesta Romanorum* is more certain, with Vietz claiming it is of a Latin origin,⁷ the same as that of Keller’s 1841 German version, despite small differences between the two texts.⁸ The Latin original on which the two would be based has not yet been identified, and as such, we cannot conclusively judge the origins.

Early versions of the text emphasise their factual basis through the use of ‘kronika’ in the title.⁹ It is worth noting that this is unique in versions from central eastern Europe, which mostly opt to identify the texts under the Emperor Pontian, as can be seen in the Polish and Hungarian works. Schlusemann also notes that this is one of two editions to express an explicit intention for the text,¹⁰ highlighting it as a parable against the wickedness of women. Narratively, Kolár draws attention to a logical fallacy resulting from a poorer translation.¹¹ Pontian, the Emperor of Rome, calls on seven Roman sages to take his son far away to be educated, in Rome. Whilst this may not be intentional, it serves to foreground the ‘foreignness’ of the tale in an understandable way for a Czech public, with the repetition of the location emphasising its distance from Bohemia. Furthermore, there is some confusion about the inset stories. Some of this could be attributed to varying translations of the text, with Kolár positing that all the embedded stories are at some point replaced.¹²

The most comprehensive overview of the story order is provided by Nebeský, based on the 1501-1508 print by Mikuláš Bakalář.¹³ This corresponds with the traditional order of Version H (*Historia Septem Sapientum*), with some small changes; seven stories for the Empress, with each followed by one from a sage and concluding with the son speaking.¹⁴ The list is reproduced below in Table 1, with notes on where differences appear.

⁶ Kolár, p. 14. All translations unless otherwise stated are my own.

⁷ J. Veitz, ‘Povaha povídek v Gesta Romanorum’, *Listy filologické / Folia philologica*, 37.3 (1910), pp. 255-272 (p. 258).

⁸ Jan Novák, *Staročeská Gesta Romanorum* (Česká Akademie Císaře Františka Josefa pro Vědy, Slovesnost a Umění, 1895), p. xxi.

⁹ Schlusemann, p. 102.

¹⁰ Schlusemann, p. 103.

¹¹ Kolár, p. 14.

¹² Kolár, p. 10.

¹³ Václav Nebeský, ‘Literatura Lidu.’, *Časopis českého museum*, 21.4 (1847), pp. 338-368 (pp. 356-68).

¹⁴ Kolár, p. 15.

Table 1: Story order of Czech 1501-1508 print, according to Nebeský.¹⁵

Order	Story	Narrator	Notes
1	Arbor	Empress	
2	Canis	Bancillas	Instead of a dog, a falcon watches the child.
3	Aper	Empress	The boar falls asleep from eating too many apples.
4	Puteus	Lentulus	
5	Gaza	Empress	
6	Avis	Kratone	The bird is a magpie and is killed, while the husband realises its innocence at the end. The sage is noted as Kratone in the Czech version, which would be Kato in German.
7	Sapientes	Empress	The king is not Herod, but the boy is Merlin.
8	Tentamina	Malkwidař	The sage would be Waldbach in German.
9	Virgilius	Empress	
10	Medicus	Jozef	The King of Hungary sends for Hippocrates and the father of the sick man is the Prince of Burgundy.
11	Senescalcus and Roma	Empress	The king is too ugly to take a lover.
12	Amatores	Kleofas	
13	Inclusa	Empress	
14	Vidua	Joachim	The guard beheads the widow.

There are some anomalies with the scholarship surrounding the story orders. Firstly, Jakubec suggests that the emperor tells his own story as the finale.¹⁶ Further, vaticinium, the fifteenth tale, where the son himself speaks, is conspicuously absent from Nebeský's order, which Máchal acknowledges and proposes as a site for potential future research.¹⁷ Finally, Murko identifies several anomalous stories in the Czech adaptations which other scholarship has not discussed, believing these to be from a Latin source.¹⁸ He is unable to date these (with suggestions ranging

¹⁵ Nebeský, pp. 356-68.

¹⁶ Jan Jakubec, *Dějiny literatury české* (Jan Laichter, 1929), p. 291.

¹⁷ Hanuš Máchal, 'O některých knížkách lidového čtení', *Národopisný sborník československý*, 3.1 (1898), pp. 1-26 (p. 11).

¹⁸ Matthias Murko, 'Die Geschichte von den sieben Weisen bei den Slaven', *Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-historischen Classe der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 122 (1890), pp. 1-138 (p. 30).; Hans R. Runte, *The Seven Sages of Rome and the Book of Sindbad: An Analytical Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1984), p. 146. suggests in his notes on Murko's

from the 16th century to the late 1800s) but provides literal translations into German, which are summarised in Appendix B. Names also appear to be changed in Murko's reproductions, with 'Poncjan' being replaced by Rhodrygo, suggesting an Italian influence on the texts. These inconsistencies highlight the fluidity of early print works and the challenges of working with partial sources.

Whilst the Czech version remained mostly national, it was a popular Czech story in its time, especially considering its position as one of the earliest examples of prints in the country. Alongside the main story, vaticinium, the prince's story, circulated widely and achieved popularity as its own narrative.¹⁹ Interestingly, it retained its narrator and is told by carevič, the historical term for son of a king. Much later, the story was reissued as a book, demonstrating how particular narrative units of the text were able to detach themselves and appeal to readers as standalone morals or entertaining stories. It also is noteworthy as an example of popular taste dictating earlier publishing works, with Voit identifying Bakalář as a printer who was independent from the church and thus reliant on profits from prints.²⁰ Thus, whilst Czech adaptations never travelled far past their borders, they represent a fascinating example of dynamic local adaptation in early print culture.

The Polish Tradition: Stability and Cultural Mediation

The Polish Seven Sages tradition has a strikingly different trajectory; remarkable for its extensive influence and popularity, it achieved widespread readership and enduring cultural significance. The first translation was published in a time of change for Polish literature, where it began to turn towards its own vernacular for publishing.²¹ Previously, all printing had been in Latin and often was of bad quality.²² Most translations of literature were from Latin, however German and Czech origins have been uncovered in some instances,²³ despite a disavowal of Czech influence by cultural institutions.²⁴ Copies of these translations were often lost, resulting in multiple translations of the same work. The Polish Seven Sages is notable for not conforming to this trend, with a single translator responsible for all prints until the late 19th century. Finally, Polish

article that there is an additional story, titled *uxores expulsaе*, however this is not present in the text nor in other works on the story order.

¹⁹ Máchal, pp. 9-10.

²⁰ Petr Voit, 'Mikuláš Bakalář jinak', *Kniba: zborník o problémech a dejinách knižnej kultúry*, 29.1 (2012), pp. 68-106 (p. 94).

²¹ Julian Krzyżanowski, 'The Old Polish Version of the History of the Seven Sages,' in *Studies on the Seven Sages of Rome*, ed. by Hans Runte, Henri Niedzielski, and William Hendrickson, (Educational Research Associates, 1978), pp. 79-87.

²² Aleksander Brückner, 'Dawne powieści ludowe: Studja i szkice', *Prace Filologiczne*, 6.1 (1907), pp. 165-186 (p. 167).

²³ Krzyżanowski, *Old Polish*, p. 80.

²⁴ Aleksander Brückner, 'Zwei polnische Uiccate der Bayrische Staatsbibliothek', *Archiv für Slavische Philologie*, 41.1 (1927), pp. 161-208 (p. 165).

literature often plays an important role in mediating Eastern and Western Europe,²⁵ bridging linguistic, cultural, and intellectual divides.

The translator behind the initial work was a renowned writer named Jan z Koszyczek, or Jan of Koszyce. He translated the work from Latin in around 1528, before or during his studies at the Jagiellonian University,²⁶ and is responsible for translating some of the most important prose narrative works of the 16th century,²⁷ including the *Gesta Romanorum* and the narrative of *Solomon and Marvolf*.²⁸ It is uncertain where exactly he translated from; Murko suggests that the same original that Jan z Koszyczek worked from is used by the translator of a 1512 Strasbourg print, explaining similarities between the texts. Brückner and Krzyżanowski agree that this was likely a manuscript.²⁹

The long title of the work reflects an emphasis on the ‘foreignness’ of the story, whilst the shortened ‘Poncján’ is the beginning of a trend of mentioning the emperor’s name in the title.³⁰ Both the Polish and Danish version solely mention the emperor’s name, whilst the Hungarian and Swedish adaptations use both the name and the seven sages, in some cases including the son’s name, Diocletianus.³¹ The style of the text is prioritised over its contents, with symmetry a key aspect of this.³² Within the Polish narrative itself, there are very few changes made to story order or attempts at assimilating the tale to a Polish context. Murko posits that this reflects a Polish audience that are very familiar with Western courtly customs and thus do not require a translation in this sense.³³ Krzyżanowski provides the most common story order, shown below in Table 2.³⁴

²⁵ Brückner, *Ludowe*, p. 166.

²⁶ Teresa Michałowska, *Literatura polskiego średniowiecza Leksykon* (Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN SA, 2011), pp. 146-7.

²⁷ Michałowska, pp. 146-7.

²⁸ Brückner, *Unicate*, p. 164.

²⁹ Brückner, *Ludowe*, p. 171.; Julian Krzyżanowski, *Poncján (Historja o siedmiu mędrkach) przekładania Jana z Koszyczek 1540* (Biblioteka pisarzy polskich, 1927), p. iv.

³⁰ Schlusemann, p. 103.

³¹ Schlusemann, p. 103.

³² Schlusemann, p. 106.

³³ Murko, *Geschichte*, p. 86.

³⁴ Krzyżanowski, *Old Polish*, p. 82.

Table 2: Story order of Polish prints as provided by Krzyżanowski.³⁵

Order	Story	Narrator
1	Arbor	Empress
2	Canis	First Master
3	Aper	Empress
4	Puteus	Second Master
5	Gaza	Empress
6	Avis	Third Master
7	Sapientes	Empress
8	Tentamina	Fourth Master
9	Virgilius	Empress
10	Medicus	Fifth Master
11	Senescalcus and Roma	Empress
12	Amatores	Sixth Master
13	Inclusa	Empress
14	Vidua	Seventh Master
15	Vaticinium and Amici	Son

Considering onward transmission and popularity, Polish is one of the most successful of any national version. As can be seen in the list of prints in Appendix A, the text remained particularly popular in Poland throughout the 16th century and beyond.³⁶ Although Schlusemann notes a time gap between the editions of 1566 and 1699 (130 years), she adds that this is consistent with trends in the north and with the Czech version,³⁷ and the text was still reprinted more than any other in the period,³⁸ earning it the title of the ‘most popular chapbook in Poland’.³⁹ The Polish version had a wide reach within the country, however, it was also heavily translated, not only forming the basis for the Armenian and Russian traditions, but also undergoing translation back into Latin, a reflection of its popularity and influence.⁴⁰ The Armenian translation has been dated to 1614, completed by Jacob Thokhat, a member of the large Armenian community in Zamość.

³⁵ Krzyżanowski, *Old Polish*, p. 82.

³⁶ Michałowska, pp. 146-7.

³⁷ Schlusemann, p. 94.

³⁸ Schlusemann, p. 93.

³⁹ Krzyżanowski, *Old Polish*, p. 83.

⁴⁰ Roman Loth, *Dawni pisarze polscy: od początków piśmiennictwa do Młodej Polski: przewodnik biograficzny i bibliograficzny* (Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 2000), p. 18.

Murko offers a summary of the work in an article, however there is yet to be a full comparative study carried out.⁴¹

The widest distribution of a translated Polish edition is credited to the Russian version, with over 40 manuscripts produced and the frame story adapted and reproduced in chronicles of folk epics.⁴² The Polish edition which served as the source text has not yet been conclusively identified. Murko suggests based on key differences that it was a manuscript by a different translator, which has since been lost.⁴³ This is a difficult conclusion to draw without access to any manuscripts; Brückner instead suggests that the Russian translator is to blame for any changes made, including the renaming of Pontian to Eleazar,⁴⁴ and Staniszewski claims the source is a 1663 edition.⁴⁵ It is generally concluded that the transmission of the text from Poland to Russia was via a long journey through Novgorod, before finally ending up in Moscow.⁴⁶ This could be somewhat to blame for differences between the texts; Brückner notes a lack of understanding of the Polish source by the translator,⁴⁷ likely due to distance. Finally, individual stories from the collection, such as that of Jovian have been printed as their own editions and reissued throughout the early modern period.⁴⁸ Together, these translations and reprints highlight Poland's unusual role in transmission, as both a national bestseller and a mediator of the tale transnationally.

Hungarian: Complexity and Lacunae

The Hungarian version of *The Seven Sages* is comparatively under-researched; however, the surviving evidence reveals a complicated history. Latin manuscripts of the text preserved in Hungary suggest that audiences were exposed to the tale even before its translation into the vernacular.⁴⁹ These manuscripts were also likely written in Hungary,⁵⁰ indicating not only familiarity with the text but active participation in the creation and dissemination. The notable instance of two separate translations, released with 5 years of each other,⁵¹ reflects this

⁴¹ Matthias Murko, 'Beiträge zur Textgeschichte der Historia septem sapientum', *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literaturgeschichte*, 5.1 (1892), pp. 1-34 (pp. 27-33).

⁴² Murko, *Geschichte*, p. 88.; Krzyżanowski, *Old Polish*, p. 83.

⁴³ Murko, *Geschichte*, p. 93.

⁴⁴ Brückner, *Ludowe*, p. 172.

⁴⁵ Andrzej Tadeusz Staniszewski, *Historyje krakowskie: Funkcjonowanie narracyjnych tekstów popularnych we wczesnonowożytnej aglomeracji krakowskiej* (Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2020), p. 46.

⁴⁶ Murko, *Geschichte*, p. 87.

⁴⁷ Brückner, *Ludowe*, p. 173.

⁴⁸ Krzyżanowski, *Old Polish*, p. 84.

⁴⁹ Csilla Gábor, 'The Frame of the Story, the Story of the Frame: Hungarian Variants of The Seven Sages of Rome', *Philobiblon*, 15.1 (2010), pp. 176-193 (p. 181).

⁵⁰ Csilla Gábor, 'The Seven Sages as Reading for Edification: Medieval Narratives of The Seven Sages of Rome', *Philobiblon*, 21.2 (2016), pp. 15-34 (p. 20).

⁵¹ Gábor, *Frame*, p. 178.

engagement. Whilst it has been established that Heltai's work is translated from the German,⁵² we have no conclusion for the Balázs text aside from that it was published in Vienna. In terms of style, the prints reflect similar considerations to their Polish counterparts: symmetry is prioritised, even over the contents at points.⁵³ The text enjoyed particularly pronounced popularity in Hungary, as evidenced by the number of editions and their circulation.⁵⁴

Comparative analysis

Together, the Czech, Polish, and Hungarian traditions of *The Seven Sages* represent three distinct models of textual reception and transmission. The Czech version demonstrates the ways in which early printed texts were adapted to local audiences, showcasing how experiments with narratives link with early print culture. The fluidity of early vernacular transmission is illustrated by the changing story orders and the fact that specific tales were severed from their context and circulated independently. On the other hand, Polish versions show the significance of widespread influence with a degree of stability. The story order has remained very similar to its parent version, H (*Historia Septem Sapientum*), and Jan z Koszyczek's translation has showed dominance in the printing sphere. The translations into Armenian, Russian, and Latin illustrate well the capability of the work to mediate across linguistic and cultural boundaries, as a piece of entertainment but also a true transnational text. Finally, the Hungarian tradition, whilst less studied, presents an example of deep engagement with the text, across several different languages, different translations, and many centuries. In this way, the Slavic versions of *The Seven Sages* demonstrate the ways in which vernacular traditions shape, adapt, and transmit a shared narrative, reflecting both national identities and transnational storytelling networks.

Directions for future research

During the research process, a number of areas were found which could benefit from more detailed research than my resources would allow. In terms of the Czech tradition, questions around the inset stories remain, whilst research into *The Seven Sages* and the *Gesta Romanorum* has tended to focus on one or another, instead of the relationship between the two. It would be beneficial to have a complete list of which editions contain Seven Sages stories, whilst close study of these could reveal clues as to the identity of the anonymous Czech translator. Looking to the Polish adaptations, despite the wealth of scholarship, the original 1528 translation remains

⁵² Gábor, *Frame*, p. 177.

⁵³ Schlusemann, p. 106.

⁵⁴ Schlusemann, p. 116.

elusive, although its recovery could offer a unique insight into the text's earliest form and early Polish vernacular translation. Beyond this, the strength of the Polish adaptation, its international transmission, remains less researched compared to other aspects of the text. A detailed comparative study of the Polish, Russian, and Armenian transmission networks, for example, could reveal adaptation and cultural mediation which has previously been unexplored. Finally, the majority of work on all the traditions has been focused on manuscripts or early printed texts, reflecting either the priorities of previous researchers or that they were writing in the early modern period; however, within Appendix A, there are a number of modern popular editions which would be worthy of their own scholarship. An investigation of these could reveal much about the ways in which *The Seven Sages* continues to resonate with contemporary readers and offer further insight into the enduring life of the text. Moreover, such work could prove an important lens through which to examine transnational storytelling, especially in the context of a very national Central/Eastern Europe. Addressing these questions would enrich critical literature and help to fulfil the goals of this project: promoting open-access, comparative research across borders and traditions.

Conclusion

The study of Czech, Polish, and Hungarian versions of *The Seven Sages of Rome* illustrates the richness and diversity of its transmission across Central and Eastern Europe. Whilst the Czech adaptations demonstrate a localisation strategy in action, adapting the narrative to suit domestic readers, reflecting the need for work to sell amongst a general audience, the Polish tradition exemplifies stability and influence, serving not only as a national bestseller but also as the source for many international transmissions, connecting Central Europe with the furthest regions of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The Hungarian version, while less studied, highlights the intricacies of vernacular adaptation, with multiple translations and centuries of circulation reflecting deep cultural engagement.

Together, these case studies reveal how language, culture, and historical circumstances shape narrative reception and adaptation. They showcase *The Seven Sages* as a living framework, rather than a static text, revealing how it transforms to reflect contemporary cultural values, tastes, and social contexts. Furthermore, the research demonstrates the value of a comparative, open-access approach, which enables the consolidation of dispersed sources and illuminates patterns of transmission, whilst most importantly supporting future scholarship. Finally, although much remains to be explored, this study underscores the significance of *The Seven Sages* as a lens for

understanding premodern storytelling, whilst drawing attention to the roots of transnational networks that continue to shape how we think about cultural exchange today.

Appendix A: Bibliography of Czech, Polish, and Hungarian editions with commentary

Czech Editions

Knihovna Národního muzea, Prague, III E 43. Digitised at:

<<https://new.manuscriptorium.com/apis/resolver-api/cs/catalog/default/detail/manuscriptorium%7CKNM - NMP III E 43 0PVPDHE-en>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

This is the version of the *Gesta* used by Novák in his work.⁵⁵

Knihovna Národního muzea, Prague, III E 48. Digitised at:

<<https://www.manuscriptorium.com/apps/index.php?direct=record&pid=KNM - NMP III E 48 3B0SDP6-cs>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

Národní knihovna České republiky, Prague, XVII.F.28. Digitised at:

<<https://www.manuscriptorium.com/apps/index.php?direct=record&pid=AIPDIG-NKCR XVII F 28 2D0KGPA-cs>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

Jireček's work is based off this manuscript, with 111 stories in total.⁵⁶ He notes it as very similar to Keller's edition, with *The Seven Sages* on pages 215-257 and containing the frame tale with 10 inset stories; he does not note which of the stories these are.⁵⁷

Kronika sedm mudrcův Rozprav ky velmi ut'essenee v sobie zavijeraji jii v nichžto lest a chytrost ženská: zjevňe se vypravuje Počnase tak to (Plzeň: Mikuláš Bakalář, c. 1501–1508). Digitised at:

<<https://stt.opac.nm.cz/records/5b2333e5-d509-4e29-9ee1-f302e505fdfb>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

The first print of *The Seven Sages* alone is by Mikuláš Bakalář, a well-researched printer in his own right, and is in octavo with 120 leaves total. Bakalář is the oldest well-recorded Czech/Slovak printer,⁵⁸ with speculation based on linguistic analysis suggesting that he may have had Slovak origins.⁵⁹ His original surname was Štetina and he studied in Krakow, where he likely learned the printing trade based on evidence of workshops with

⁵⁵ Novák.

⁵⁶ Josef Jireček, 'České sbírky rozprávek pod názvem "Gesta Romanorum" známých', *Časopis Musea království Českého*, 36.4 (1862), pp. 360-380 (p. 362).

⁵⁷ Jireček, *Gesta*, p. 364.

⁵⁸ Voit, Petr, *Český Knihstisk mezi pozdní gotikou a renesancí: II tiskaři pro víru i tiskaři pro obrození národa 1498-1547* (Academia, 2017), p. 16.

⁵⁹ Voit, *Český Knihstisk*, pp. 16-17

other students.⁶⁰ The custom at the time was to take the degree level as a new surname, which he did shortly after graduation. As one of the most active printers of his time, we only have one year where none of his work is preserved,⁶¹ and around half of his production was Czech-language medieval literature.⁶² His style was unique in many ways, allowing the attribution of this print to him: he worked closely with colleagues in Nuremberg, the first of his time to do this,⁶³ and was not linked to the church, instead relying on texts that sold well.⁶⁴ He also preferred to print in Czech whilst many of his contemporaries worked in Latin, a good business move as it allowed him to avoid competition with dominant German printing.⁶⁵

Whilst no translator is named, Kolár posits that it was done specifically for Bakalář and argues that it is of an excellent quality, with very few edits made between versions.⁶⁶ The speech of the emperor is markedly different from others in the text, perhaps reflecting some knowledge of courtly manners, and the detailed discussion of veins in *Tentamina* would suggest some medical training or at least a good education.⁶⁷ The dating is close to the *Gesta* and has recently been adjusted based off Bakalář's equipment; however, it remains unclear if he was the printer of the whole text or perhaps just a section.⁶⁸ Several adjustments to the text have been made to reflect cultural conditions at the time; an example of this is the specific mention of a knight owning a multi-story house.⁶⁹

Komedia sedmi mudrců ([s. l.: Kašpar Aorg], 1558).

Other than that the print is in octavo, very little is known about this text. Voit speculates that, contrary to popular thought, it may not be a play and may have been misidentified due to its dialogue form.⁷⁰ The existence of the print is noted in bibliographies from the time,⁷¹ however it is unclear if it is distinct from the pre-1567 edition, as sometimes they

⁶⁰ Voit, *Český Knihitiště*, pp. 18-19.

⁶¹ Voit, *Bakalář*, p. 75.

⁶² Voit, *Bakalář*, p. 83.

⁶³ Voit, *Český Knihitiště*, p. 20.

⁶⁴ Voit, *Bakalář*, p. 94.

⁶⁵ Voit, *Bakalář*, p. 82.

⁶⁶ Kolár, p. 16.

⁶⁷ Murko, *Geschichte*, p. 24.

⁶⁸ Voit, *Bakalář*, pp. 90-1.

⁶⁹ Murko, *Geschichte*, p. 23.

⁷⁰ Voit, *Český Knihitiště*, p. 445.

⁷¹ Josef Jungmann, *Historie literatury české aneb soustavný přehled spisů českých s krátkou historií národu, osvícení a jazyka* (Prague: V. H. Krenn, 1825), p. 222.

are listed separately and others as the same work.⁷² Unfortunately, there are no copies of either to examine and draw a conclusion.

Kronika sedmi mudrců ([s. l.: s. n., pre-1567]).

As noted above, it is unclear if this print is distinct from the 1558 edition. It is listed as octavo.

Kronyka o sedmi Mudrcých / kteráž w sobě Rozprávky welmi kratochwilné zawijrá / w nichžto se Lest a Chytrost ženská zgewně wyprawuge (Prague: Jiří Jakubův Dačický, 1590).

This print is discussed by Šimák in his article and is incomplete, missing the first 22 leaves and the ending of the story.⁷³ It does have a woodcut, but no description is provided.

[*Kronika sedmi mudrců*] (Litomyšl: Matouš Václav Březina, [1637-1651]). Digitised at: https://www.manuscriptorium.com/apps/index.php?direct=record&pid=AIPDIG-NMP_V_G_111_291YT46-cs [accessed 29 August 2025].

Březina's work is absent from most bibliographies in the past and remains less known today. It is also incomplete, missing the beginning of the text and 2 leaves in the middle.⁷⁴

Kronyka Kratochwilná O Znameníých Sedmi Mudrcých (Kutná Hora: Františka Šleretová, [1772]).

Digitised at:

<https://books.google.cz/books?id=VtJjAAAAcAAJ&pg=PP5#v=onepage&q&f=false> [accessed 29 August 2025].

Kratochwilná Kronyka o sedmy Mudrcých (Jihlava: Fabián Augustin Beinhauer, [1789–1831]). Digitised at:

<https://books.google.cz/books?id=wGVmAAAAcAAJ&hl=cs&pg=PA1#v=onepage&q&f=false> [accessed 29 August 2025].

Kratochwilná kronika o sedmi mudrcých (Jindřichův Hradec: [s. n., 1790-1800]).

Jungmann notes that this print is influenced by Michael Andreopolus' translation from Syriac into Greek.⁷⁵

⁷² Voit, *Český Kniháček*, p. 445.

⁷³ Josef Vítězslav Šimák, 'Dva příspěvky knihopisné', *Časopis Musea království Českého*, 90.1 (1916), p. 45.

⁷⁴ Šimák, pp. 43-50.

⁷⁵ Jungmann, p. 143.

Pamětná historie o Sedmi Mudrejch, trans. by Václav Rodomil Kramerius (Jindřichův Hradec and Tábor: Aloisius Josef Landfras and Son, 1860).

Kramerius' translation is unique, in that it is the only standalone text in this Czech bibliography to not originate from the initial translation. Murko notes that Kramerius translated from a German 1865 edition of *The Seven Sages*, printed by Landfras und Sohn in Neuhaus and written by Jos Hanfstängl;⁷⁶ this text was translated into many other languages, including an 1888 Polish edition published by Edward Feitzinger. This itself is adapted from Marbach's *Wigandsche Volksbücher*. The translation is very literal other than altering the names of the sages; it is simplified somewhat to appeal to an audience with less literacy. It is unknown whether this is the first edition.

Mrawná kronyka o Sedmi Mudrcích, aneb: Witězství ctnosti (Skalica: [s. n.], 1865).

This is the main text which Murko bases his analysis of the Czech Seven Sages on; he describes it as incredibly unique and modernised.⁷⁷ Jungmann identifies the text as deriving from the 1790-1800 edition.⁷⁸

Mrawná kronyka o Sedmi Mudrcích, aneb: Witězství ctnosti (Skalica: Heirs of J. Škarnicl, 1877).

Digitised at: <<https://ndk.cz/uuid/uuid:7d9db2e0-cae4-11e6-bf97-005056825209>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

This is a reprint of the 1865 edition that Murko's research builds on.

Pamětná historie o Sedmi Mudrejch, trans. by Václav Rodomil Kramerius (Jindřichův Hradec and Tábor: Aloisius Josef Landfras and Son, 1888).

This is another reprint, here of Kramerius' 1860 edition. The 1888 reissue is described as both the 5th and 6th edition within the book.

Mrawná Kronyka o Sedmi Mudrcích, aneb, Witězství ctnosti (Skalica: Heirs of J. Škarnicl, 1889).

1889 brings another edition of the 1865 print.

Polish Editions

[*Poncján*], trans. by Jan z Koszyczek ([s. l.: s. n., 1528-1530]).

⁷⁶ Murko, *Geschichte*, pp. 25-6.

⁷⁷ Murko, *Geschichte*, p. 29.

⁷⁸ Jungmann, p. 269.

This edition would be the original translation by Jan z Koszyczek, with the dating based on early bibliographies and inventory notes. Details of a copy in the Zieliński library in Skepe are provided from Estreicher by Murko, with the provisional note that no copy could be found on a visit.⁷⁹ Assuming that the print did exist, Zieliński's collection was bequeathed to his son, who gave it to the Plock Scientific Society.⁸⁰ No sign of the print can be found in their library catalogue and, considering that parts of their library now form the Polish National Library collection, there is no sign of the print there.

[*Poncjian*], trans. by Jan z Koszyczek ([Kraków: Hieronim Wietor, pre-1540]).

This print has a unique history, in that it was found by Piekarski in an exploration of the bindings of another book.⁸¹ The book itself was from 1540, which led to the dating of the fragment as the same.⁸² Hieronim Wietor was a printer from Silesia, originally with the surname Büttner, who studied in both Krakow and Vienna before settling in Krakow and founding his own publishing house. Interestingly, he worked with Jan z Koszyczek on the first book to be published entirely in Polish, *The Conversations of Solomon and Marcolf*,⁸³ which could suggest that the fragment is earlier or could potentially form part of the original translation. Unfortunately, only three leaves were found by Piekarski, with the first of these photocopied in his 1930 article and the rest transcribed with the assistance of Krzyżanowski's edition.⁸⁴ The fragment was kept in the Jagiellonian University Library under the shelf mark Cim. 1304, where it at some point went missing, leaving us only with the photocopy. Unless another copy is found, it seems unlikely that any conclusive findings about the print will be reached.

Poncjian Ktory ma w sobie rozmaite powiesci mile barzo ku czcieniu wziete [sic] z Rzymskich dzieiow, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek (Kraków: Florian Ungler, 1540). Digitised at: <<https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/view/bsb10858433?page=%2C1>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

This print is listed under Florian Ungler but was in fact published after his death by his widow, Helena Unglerowa.⁸⁵ It is the basis of Krzyżanowski's 1927 critical edition and

⁷⁹ Murko, *Geschichte*, p. 71.

⁸⁰ Anna Maria Stogowska, 'Kolekcja Gustawa Zielińskiego (1809-1881) w zbiorach Biblioteki Towarzystwa Naukowego Plockiego', *Rocznik Towarzystwa Naukowego Plockiego*, 13.1 (2021), pp. 277-302.

⁸¹ Katarzyna Krzak-Weiss, '„Złotodajna” makulatura. Na marginesie badań nad polskimi wydaniem modlitewnika *Hortulus animae*', *Kwartalnik Historii Nauki i Techniki*, 68.3 (2023), pp. 97-110 (p. 98).

⁸² Kazimierz Piekarski, 'Miscellanea bibliograficzne', *Przegląd Biblioteczny*, 4.4 (1930), pp. 415-443 (p. 218).

⁸³ Murko, *Geschichte*, p. 71.

⁸⁴ Piekarski, p. 218.

⁸⁵ Staniszewski, p. 47.

consists of rhymed prose.⁸⁶ The title is heavily hyphenated to preserve symmetry in the title page and information about the date, place of printing, and printer is helpfully added on the title page.⁸⁷ Whilst the digitalisation is of a complete text, Brückner details his finding of a fragment in his 1907 article,⁸⁸ misidentifying it as pre-1538 due to the blurry sheets.⁸⁹ Whilst he concludes in a later article that the fragment is in fact the Ungler 1540 print,⁹⁰ his discovery is reiterated as a new print in other bibliographies and remains a point of confusion. In the original article, the fragment is compared to the 1885-1899 edition to show that, excluding censorship of female nudity, the text remained unchanged, findings which still apply to our digitised version.⁹¹

Historya piękna z przykłady nadobnemi o Poncyanie Cesarzu Rzymskim iako syna swego Dioklecjana dał w naukę y ku wychowaniu siedmi Mędrcom, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek (Kraków: Maciej Szarfenberg, 1540). Digitised at: <<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:29-bv012526491-5>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

The date of this text is not conclusive; whilst 1540 is given in the preface, the end notes are dated 1543.⁹² This could suggest that the first part of the text is a reprint of an earlier 1540 edition, with some small differences in the typography.⁹³ The *Gesta Romanorum* is included at the end of the print, with the symmetry of the style bearing a similarity to Ungler's 1540 edition,⁹⁴ albeit with self-praised improvements.⁹⁵ This text boasts the first mention of 'seven' in any of the Polish editions, a feature which is mostly standardised across versions and helped its overall notoriety across cultures.⁹⁶ A printer's preface is included.

Historya piękna z przykłady nadobnemi o Poncyanie Cesarzu Rzymskim iako syna swego Dioklecjana dał w naukę y ku wychowaniu siedmi Mędrcom, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek (Kraków: Mikołaj Szarfenberger, 1566). Digitised at: <<https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/964154/edition/925080>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

⁸⁶ Brückner, *Unicate*, p. 162.

⁸⁷ Schlusemann, p. 106.

⁸⁸ Brückner, *Ludowe*.

⁸⁹ Aleksander Brückner, "'Poncjani' z r.1540 i «Historje Rzymskie» z r. 1543", *Ruch Literacki*, 10.1 (1926), p. 297 (p. 297).

⁹⁰ Brückner, *Unicate*.

⁹¹ Brückner, *Ludowe*, p. 181.

⁹² Brückner, *Unicate*, p. 164.

⁹³ Brückner, *Poncjani*, p. 297.

⁹⁴ Schlusemann, p. 106.

⁹⁵ Brückner, *Unicate*, pp. 163-4.

⁹⁶ Schlusemann, p. 103.

Notable for its artwork, the woodcuts of this edition are republished by Krzyżanowski in his 1927 edition. It is missing the printer's preface but shows evidence of editing, with many typographic errors corrected.

Historye Rzymskie Rozmaite z Rożnych Dziejow, z wykładami obyczajnymi, krotko zebrane. Ludziom ku rozmyślaniu mądrości, y też innych cnot przywodzące, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek (Kraków: Wojciech Siekielowic, 1663). Digitised at:

<<https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/en/dlibra/publication/951382/edition/913498>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

This edition is noted by Staniszewski as the text which the Russian translation is based on,⁹⁷ and one which has an additional story.

Historya Piękna y Ucieszna o Poncyanie Cesarzu Rzymskim, iako Syna swego iedynego Dyoklecjana, dał w Naukę y ku wychowaniu Siedmi Mędrcom, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek ([s.l.: s.n., 1699–1700]).

Historya Piękna y Ucieszna o Poncyanie Cesarzu Rzymskim, iako Syna swego iedynego Dyoklecjana, dał w Naukę y ku wychowaniu Siedmi Mędrcom, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek ([s.l.: s.n., 1699–1701]).

Historya piękna y Ucieszna o Poncyanie Cesarzu Rzymskim, iako Syna swego iedynego Dyoklecjana, dał w Naukę y ku wychowaniu Siedmi Mędrcom, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek ([s.l.: s.n., 1743]).

Historya piękna y Ucieszna o Poncyanie Cesarzu Rzymskim, iako Syna swego iedynego Dyoklecjana, dał w Naukę y ku wychowaniu Siedmi Mędrcom, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek ([s.l.: s.n.], 1761).

Historya piękna y Ucieszna o Poncyanie Cesarzu Rzymskim, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek ([Kraków: Michał Józef Antoni Dyaszewski, 1743-1753]).

Murko notes that the print is octavo and consists of 64 pages, with a woodcut depicting a woman in a long flowing dress by a tree.⁹⁸

Historya piękna y Ucieszna o Poncyanie Cesarzu Rzymskim, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek ([s. l.: s. n.], 1761).

This version is likely a reprint of Dyaszewski's edition; however, the woodcut is noted to be missing.⁹⁹ Murko details an edition in the Jagiellonian University Library, however I was unable to find it under these details.

⁹⁷ Staniszewski, p. 46.

⁹⁸ Murko, *Geschichte*, p. 72.

⁹⁹ Murko, *Geschichte*, p. 72.

Historia piękna i ucieśzna o siedmiu mędracach którzy ciekawemi powieściami swemi czytającego zabawią, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek ([s. l.: s. n.], 1804).

Murko suggests that this is adapted from 17th century damaged print in the Jagiellonian University Library.¹⁰⁰ It is octavo and has 88 pages total.

O siedmiu mędracach historia arcyciekawa, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek and ed. by S. G. (Poznań: Księgarnia Nowa, 1847). Digitised at: <<http://polona.pl/item-view/11b6694a-275f-4d16-9b49-ed9391b677b0/0/76690cce-49a4-4928-937f-daa2401d476a>> [accessed 29 August 2025].]

Much of the intrigue around this print is regarding the small changes made by the editor, known as S. G. Instead of ruling Rome, Pontian rules Istanbul (Tsargrad); he marries the daughter of a King of Bithynia, and so on. There is no evidence to support why these changes were made and it is difficult to speculate on what effect they would have had on a contemporary audience; however, the text underwent several reprints so must have proved popular. 150 pages total, it is formatted in octavo.¹⁰¹

Historia o siedmiu mędracach, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek (Warsaw: Brothers Hindemith, 1862).

This print is octavo and 143 pages in total.

Historia o siedmiu mędracach, czyli: Dyoklecyan syn cesarza wschodniego, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek (Nowy Sącz: J. Pisz, 1866). Digitised at: <<http://polona.pl/item-view/6af21638-a68c-4c5b-8517-9272d965aa1a/0/9de22ffe-64bc-4949-bc67-6058bbb82ae1>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

This is argued by Murko to be a reprint of the 1847 edition, but with many changes.¹⁰²

Historia o siedmiu mędracach, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek (Warsaw: Jan Breslauer, 1873).

This is the first of many editions printed in Warsaw by Jan Breslauer, and adapted from the 1862 edition.¹⁰³ Brückner indicates that the initial print was prepared for the occasion of the Warsaw fair.¹⁰⁴ Many changes are noted, including exaggeration of numbers, censorship of certain passages, and changed names.¹⁰⁵ This is assumed to be in an attempt to better appeal to audiences at that time. It is 103 pages long.

¹⁰⁰ Murko, *Geschichte*, p. 72.

¹⁰¹ Murko, *Geschichte*, p. 72.

¹⁰² Murko, *Geschichte*, p. 73.

¹⁰³ Murko, *Geschichte*, pp. 72-3.

¹⁰⁴ Brückner, *Ludowe*, p. 171.

¹⁰⁵ Murko, *Geschichte*, p. 78.

Historia o siedmiu mędrkach, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek (Warsaw: Jan Breslauer, 1878). Digitised at: <<http://polona.pl/item-view/61f8da9d-5cd9-4ad2-9944-4da13175c741/0/fd1452a3-fb8a-4fcc-bb80-d28d1db2f558>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

Reprint of Breslauer's 1873 edition.

Historia o siedmiu mędrkach, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek (Warsaw: Jan Breslauer, 1881). Digitised at: <<http://polona.pl/item-view/f8a424e9-bae3-426e-a913-06837cbd4d91/0/51d763af-8d2d-4763-9877-ed29f11feaa9>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

Reprint of Breslauer's 1873 edition.

Historia o siedmiu mędrkach, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek (Warsaw: Jan Breslauer, 1885). Digitised at: <<http://polona.pl/item-view/8b49439a-6dd2-4724-bd6e-9da9c59dedf3/0/e8340963-f0b2-4d4a-8ff6-c11bffb86cd7>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

Reprint of Breslauer's 1873 edition, however this edition has only 97 pages.

Historia piękna i ucieśzna o siedmiu mędrkach, którzy ciekawemi powiściami swemi czytającego zabawią, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek (Chelmno: Władysław Fialek, [1885-1899]). Digitised at: <<http://polona.pl/item-view/7e8d93e2-f9af-4866-8f9d-4500079c8a5f/0/777393ac-0daa-41b4-b9b4-6b6e23f0d6d8>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

Brückner compares this text to his fragment of Ungler's 1540 version, stating that the text is the same as the 1847 edition.¹⁰⁶ He also lists its price at 50 pfennigs, with 120 pages total.

Historia o siedmiu mędrkach. Bardzo zajmująca i powabna powieść dla młodych i starych (Cieszyn: Edward Feitzinger, 1888). Digitised at: <<https://webapp.sbc.org.pl/publication/158211>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

This edition is unique in that it is the first new translation we have since 1528. It is translated from a German 1865 edition of *The Seven Sages*, printed by Landfras und Sohn in Neuhaus and written by Jos Hanfstängl;¹⁰⁷ another translation is found in Czech by Kramerius in 1860, reaching at least 5 editions. Murko speculates based on the translation that the author has access to one of Jan z Koszyczek's translations.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Brückner, *Ludowe*, p. 171.

¹⁰⁷ Murko, *Geschichte*, p. 79.

¹⁰⁸ Murko, *Geschichte*, p. 80.

Historia o siedmiu mędrkach, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek (Warsaw: Jan Breslauer, 1895).

Reprint of Breslauer's 1873 edition.

Historia o siedmiu mędrkach, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek (Warsaw: Jan Breslauer, 1897).

Reprint of Breslauer's 1873 edition.

Historia o siedmiu mędrkach, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek (Warsaw: Jan Breslauer, 1900).

Reprint of Breslauer's 1873 edition.

Historia o siedmiu mędrkach, trans. by Jan z Koszyczek (Warsaw: Jan Breslauer, 1905)

Reprint of Breslauer's 1873 edition.

Historia o siedmiu mędrkach: bardzo zajmująca i powabna powieść dla młodych i starych (Toledo, OH: Antoni Alfred Paryski, 1908). Digitised at: <<http://polona.pl/item-view/8fd49efb-2b74-418a-adf2-c9d8898a0f0d/0/eb90ce1d-3719-4b8b-b8c9-b3ebee30e38c>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

Niezwykła opowieść o siedmiu mędrkach, którzy ucznia swego Dyoklecjana późniejszego cesarza rzymskiego siedmiokrotnie nybawili od niechybnej śmierci (Warsaw: Księgarnia Popularna, 1911). Digitised at: <<http://polona.pl/item-view/16f130fa-ed32-4333-b7ce-d9f8ad30209d/0/799ce000-4f14-4bf9-b79b-22272ea41b78>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

Historia o siedmiu mędrkach: ciekawe opowiadania z czasów starodawnych, ed. by Władysław Izdebski (Warsaw: Ch. I. Rosenwein, 1913).

Niezwykła opowieść o siedmiu mędrkach którzy ucznia swego Dyoklecjana późniejszego esarza [!] rzymskiego siedmiokrotnie nybawili od niehibnej [!] śmierci (Warsaw: Księgarnia Popularna, 1914). Digitised at: <<http://polona.pl/item-view/ac35c2e1-e00c-4f06-9c1f-9d38ff683163/0/c3502b9f-5e77-498c-af61-a00f53a13e04>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

Krzyżanowski, Julian, *Poncján (Historja o siedmiu mędrkach) przekładania Jana z Koszyczek 1540* (Biblioteka pisarzów polskich, 1927). Digitised at: <<https://www.wbc.poznan.pl/dlibra/publication/1163/edition/1764/content>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

The first critical edition published, Krzyżanowski reproduces the text of Ungler's 1540 print, standardising spelling, correcting any missing sections with a Latin text, and adding

a preface summarising scholarship.¹⁰⁹ He adds visuals in the form of the woodcuts from the 1566 edition.

Niezwykła opowieść o siedmiu mędrkach, którzy ucznia swego Dyoklecjana późniejszego cesarza rzymskiego, siedmiokrotnie wybawili od niebibnej [!] śmierci (Warsaw: Księgarnia Popularna, [1931]). Digitised at: <<http://polona.pl/item-view/ef0e839c-5910-4bd5-9648-42e29eab48f3/0/f2b76ffa-85ba-4bd2-acdb-97512272b756>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

Hungarian Editions

[*Ponciánus historiaia*], [trans. by Gáspár Heltai] (Cluj: Gáspár Heltai, [1570–1574]). Digitised at: <https://real-r.mtak.hu/29/1/RMK_I_0087a_RM_I_8r_0707.pdf> [accessed 29 August 2025].

This first translation was probably first printed in Kolozsvár,¹¹⁰ with the source text being a 1565 Frankfurt am Main print.¹¹¹ The print itself is not complete, as its title page is missing. Heltai introduces the work, which allows us to suggest he is also the translator. In it, he emphasises the moral aspects of the work, giving a summary of each lesson to be found in the stories, and is especially critical of Pontianus' indecision and the overall wickedness of women.¹¹² Gábor accords much significance to the author's misogyny, which she identifies as characteristic of Heltai's work.¹¹³ Controversially, Heltai does not mention the sages themselves, conflicting with the importance he places on the story's Latin roots.¹¹⁴ Instead, his framing serves to emphasise the frame story and Pontianus himself, by using formulaic structures at the end of each embedded story to return to the frame.¹¹⁵ This technique further serves to reinforce the moral nature of the stories whilst keeping Pontianus centred.

Ponciánus historiaja (Vienna: Ebervs Balázs, 1573). Digitised at: <https://oszkdk.oszk.hu/storage/00/00/67/05/dd/1/RMK_I_0092.pdf> [accessed 29 August 2025].

¹⁰⁹ Krzyżanowski, *Poncján*, p. xiv.

¹¹⁰ Schlusemann, p. 94.

¹¹¹ Gábor, *Frame*, p. 177.

¹¹² Gábor, *Frame*, pp. 185-6.

¹¹³ Gábor, *Frame*, pp. 185-6.

¹¹⁴ Gábor, *Frame*, pp. 185-6.

¹¹⁵ Gábor, *Frame*, pp. 187, 190.

Another distinct translation, the translator of this version is unknown.¹¹⁶ It is dedicated to Count Eck Salm, who was the commander of Bratislava Castle and captain general of Transdanubia and Győr, for his wedding. The translation itself is noted as very literal,¹¹⁷ but less moralistic, more entertaining, and with a better balance between frame and inset stories than the Heltai version.¹¹⁸ The title page lists this as the 10th translation, and symmetry is again a key feature.¹¹⁹ Woodcuts are included. The 1898 Heinrich edition reprints the text from this version.

Poncianus császár historiaia: Mikeppen az ő Fiának Dioclecianusnak hét bölcs és tudós Mestereket fogada, kik azt tanyitának az hét bölcs es nemes tudományokra, [trans. by Gáspár Heltai] (Levoča: Brevver Loerintz, 1633). Digitised at: <https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/RMK_I_0630-Rath_0146> [accessed 29 August 2025].

Pontianus tsaszár historiaia. Mikeppen az ő fianak Dioclecianusnak hét bölts és tudós Mestereket fogada, kik azt tanitanák az hét nemes Tudományokra, [trans. by Gáspár Heltai] (Levoča: Brevver Loerintz, 1653).

Pontianus tsaszár historiaia. Mikeppen az ő fianak Dioclecianusnak hét bölts és tudós Mestereket fogada, kik azt tanitnák az hét és nemes tudományokra, [trans. by Gáspár Heltai] (Levoča: Brevver Loerintz, 1676).

Pontianus tsaszár historiaia. Mikeppen az ő fiának Dioclecianusnak hét bölcs és tudós mestereket fogada, kik azt tanyitanák az hét és nemes tudományokra, [trans. by Gáspár Heltai] (Levoča: Brewer Samuel, 1679).

Ponciánus császár históriája (Pozsony-Komárom: [s.n., 1750-1800]).

Poncianus históriája, ed. by Heinrich Gusztáv (Budapest: Franklin-Társulat, 1898).

The text is a reprint of Balázs' 1573 translation.

Ponciánus históriája, trans. by Ebervs Balázs and ed. by Antal Kováts (Budapest: Szent-István-Társulat, 1906)

Ponciánus históriája (Budapest: Bíró, [1906]).

Ponciánus históriája (Budapest: Bíró, [1908]).

¹¹⁶ Gábor, *Frame*, p. 178.

¹¹⁷ Murko, *Beiträge*, p. 27.

¹¹⁸ Gábor, *Frame*, pp. 185, 189.

¹¹⁹ Schlusemann, pp. 106-7.

A hét bölcs mester, vagy: Miként ajánlja Poncziánus római császár fiát Dioklecziánust a hét bölcs mester nevelésébe (Budapest: Rózsa, 1911)

Ponciánus históriája (Budapest: Bíró, [1912]).

Ponciánus históriája, azaz a hét bölcs mestereknek beszédei, melyekkel a császár fiát hétszer mentették meg a haláltól, trans. by Ebervs Balázs and ed. by Lengyel Dénes (Budapest: Szent Hilárus kiad., [1943]).

This edition republishes Balázs' 1573 text.

Ponciánus császár históriája, trans. by Gáspár Heltai and ed. by István Nemeskürty (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Kiadó, 1976)

Ponciánus császár históriája, trans. by Gáspár Heltai and ed. by István Nemeskürty (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Kiadó, 1978)

Ponciánus császár históriája, trans. by Gáspár Heltai and illus. by László Kékesi (Budapest: Pátria Nyomda, 1979)

Ponciánus császár históriája: miképpen az ő fiának, Diocleciánusnak hét bölcs és tudós mestereket fogada, kik azt tanítanák az hét és nemes tudományokra, trans. by Gáspár Heltai and ed. by István Nemeskürty (Szentendre: Mercator Stúdió, 2006)

This is a critical edition of the 1633 text.

Ponciánus császár históriája, [trans. by Gáspár Heltai] (Gyula: Digi-Book Mo. K., 2012).

Ponciánus császár históriája, [trans. by Gáspár Heltai] (Gyula: Digi-Book Mo. K., 2013).

Appendix B: Translated summaries of Czech anomalous tales

All translations were done by me with the source text from Murko's 1890 article.¹²⁰

Sylwius

There was once a King, who ruled peacefully and justly his whole life. He was most fortunate to have courtiers and councillors who loved him like a father and, because they knew that he saw the greatest blessing of his reign to be not creating enemies, they always strove to settle disagreements without resorting to violence.

Amongst the councillors was a minister who, through his wit, was able to solve many of the hostilities which had arisen; the King loved him and held him in special honour.

Once, for the amusement of his courtiers, the King organised a hunt for various game. When they reached the forest, they scattered in all directions, in accordance with the hunter's custom. The young minister was so unlucky on the hunt that he could not spot any game, despite having travelled deep enough into the forest. Already impatient, he was about to return when he was suddenly startled by an indistinct voice from nearby; when he listened closer, he recognised it as the voice of a small child. He followed the voice, and his suspicions were confirmed when he found a child in a meadow, rather neglected and very exhausted from crying. The minister stood before it and, in pity, said to himself: "Oh innocent child! What have you done to your harsh mother, for her to leave you exposed to the birds and animals of the forest as food?" He picked up the child, carrying it in his arms, and hurried to find the King and his courtiers.

He arrived at the King's door, who became frightened when he noticed that his minister, instead of an animal, carried a child in his arms.

"Most gracious sir!" said the minister, "I am greatly saddened by the fact that, in the land of such a good King, there is a heart of stone. This innocent child was left by a stubborn mother to be fed to wild beasts; luck led me to where this innocent victim was to be torn to pieces by the teeth of wild beasts."

The King looked with pity upon the child, called his servants, and ordered them to take the child from the minister and hurry it to court, where it could be provided for. The minister was a single man, with no inclination to change his status, and begged the King to allow him to raise the child, to his delight. The King laughed at his good minister's wish and said: "Dear child! You have come into the hands of a good father." Then he ordered the hunting horn to be blown and

¹²⁰ Murko, *Geschichte*, pp. 30-65.

all the courtiers to be called. When they had gathered, he ordered the huntsmen to load the game onto wagons, while he himself returned with his courtiers to the court.

On the way, the minister was telling himself of the great joy he would have with the child in the future. But when they arrived at court, his greatest concern was that the child would be well cared for. He gave him two nursemaids, who would do everything for him. The following day, he had his little son baptised and gave him the name Sylwius.

The minister, who we will now call father, soon was as overjoyed as he had predicted, for when Sylwius weaned, he had the sole joy, increasing day-by-day, of spending time with his little son after work.

Sylwius thus grew up having the greatest care and, with his age, his intelligence and wit increased. When he reached his seventh year, his caring foster father began to teach him literature, which he excelled in, to his father's joy: he made constant progress in useful learning, until he had acquired all the knowledge of higher education.

When the minister realised that his son's great ability could be useful in the court, he asked the royal councillors to take him to train in their office. This request from the minister was received with special thanks, and Sylwius made such progress in his learning that he was not only praised by his teachers but also received rich gifts from the King.

In a short time, the young man was admitted to the Council of Court Judges, to which he brought his particular utility and acumen.

With his elevation came an increase in self-confidence, so much so that his fellow councillors held him in special esteem. Sylwius' arrogance was often rebuked by the minister; however, this fatherly admonition stoked anger in the proud man's heart. He began to consider how he could get revenge on the minister, his father. First of all, he incited the courtiers so carefully that it only took him a short time to win them all over. He claimed that his foster father was constantly showered with favours and gifts by the King but regardless was disloyal.

The trust which the minister enjoyed throughout the court soon turned to hatred, until finally they had little respect for him and rarely noticed him.

It was precisely at this time that the Persians rallied against the good King, who loved peace in his lands above all else; he demanded his loyal ministers and councillors do everything in their power to prevent war with such cruel enemies. However, those who attempted this had no luck, and were dismissed with threats and a disgraceful response.

As such, the King was forced to gather his army and march against the enemy. The war was very bloody, with many thousands of the King's men defeated and a large portion of his land lost.

When this terrible war ended, the King was left in a constant state of great mourning. Sylwius found the time very fitting for his plan to take revenge on his father and for himself to take his place. He wrote a fake letter, forging his father's handwriting, as if his father had been the cause of the Saracen uprising, and at the most opportune time enclosed this letter amongst his others. One day, he came to the King as he sat alone sadly in his room, pondering how the Saracens came to be so hostile. Sylwius, like a flattering courtier, began to pity the King and flatter him as best he could. Finally, he said: "My most gracious King and Lord! Your deep sorrow pierces my soul when I see you so constantly distressed, and I can no longer conceal the cause of your distress. My heart weeps when I have to reveal this! But loyalty and love for Your Grace allow me to conceal this no longer. Send some of your loyal courtiers to my father, and they will find a letter among his writings, with which he incited the Saracen enemies against you."

As a result of these words, the King became supernaturally enraged. He ordered his judges to go immediately to the oldest minister, to read through all his letters diligently and carefully, and if they found one amongst them which incited the Saracen enemies against him, to have the minister executed immediately, without any mercy or delay. This was indeed done as the King commanded.

Summary of Sylwius

A well-respected minister finds a child in the woods, whom he takes in and names Sylwius. He raises Sylwius to be an intelligent boy who joins the court at an early age, but Sylwius becomes too prideful and turns against his father after he criticises this. Sylwius turns the court against his father and, when a war is announced, fakes a letter which blames his father for the conflict. He shows this letter to the king, who executes the minister.

Heres Regni

An Arab master, who ruled over the whole country and had a multitude of slaves in his service, who all bowed before him as if he was God, was a man of great wit and humour, and his entire people loved him because he could predict a great many things that would happen to his subjects. He had a multitude of wives, but none could please him with their fruit. One day, when he was thinking that he would not have an heir to rule Arabia, it occurred to him to dismiss all his wives and choose a new wife from a foreign people.

His decision was soon carried out. He had a large palace built and ordered all of his wives to be brought there, assigned many eunuchs to serve them, and surrounded the palace with guards so that none could escape. He did this so that his wives would not learn of his strange plan.

And he summoned some of his advisors and presented his plan to them. Since they all considered him a prophet, they were not able to advise on this unusual decision but bowed their heads and praised his plan.

From that time on, he considered what kind of maiden and from what country he should take his wife. Finally, he chose the Grand Vizier's daughter, whom he in fact married. The celebration was done in the Arabian custom, with special solemnity and a grand feast. Now the ruler began to live in the greatest contentment with his beloved, only wife. But this contentment did not last long, for he had not been with his wife for half a year when he received the news that one of his wives, who he had kept locked up in the palace and who had previously been his desert, had given birth to a healthy prince.

Because it was established in the country that the eldest son of the ruler was always the heir, he was sorrowful at the news and ordered that no one in the palace should dare to utter a single word about the birth of his son. His command was fully obeyed, and so the child was raised by the mother with no one but the ruler knowing anything about it.

After not even a year of the new marriage had passed, the new wife also gave birth to a son. This joy soon became known to the estates and to the common people. Everyone placed green trees in front of their homes and rejoiced around them.

The ruler was the only one who felt sorrow in his heart instead of joy; for he feared that the new wife might receive news of the other son. But his worry was unwarranted; for his command was kept sacredly by all. He was outwardly quite at peace, but in his heart felt a burden, because he had sworn to never see any of the wives in his palace ever again, and even less to go into their castle.

Now, the two sons grew up in the best of health until the age of seven; the younger was already being encouraged to study and passed over to teachers; the older, however, had no one to continue his instruction but his mother.

For a few years, the ruler was very pleased with his younger son's ingenuity, but still not completely at peace. He considered how he might be able to give the older one teachers; however, after thinking for a long time, he still could not come up with a solution. Finally, he decided to entrust one of his most discreet courtiers with the task of teaching his oldest son. The

ruler's plan was quickly and secretly carried out in the best possible way, which brought great relief to the father.

The ruler's satisfaction lasted a full seven years until the elder son, already fully trained in the liberal arts, wrote to him asking for permission to return to his homeland. This wish distressed the ruler; for he could have easily known in advance that, with his son's return, the secret of the true heir, illegally concealed for so long, would become known to the entirety of the common people. He pondered, but could find nothing to calm him, and was unable to completely conceal his inner and outer turmoil.

His wife soon recognised his sadness and tried to find a time where he had a cheerful face to speak to him herself and ask what was troubling him. This wish was soon granted when the ruler himself came into her room and said: "Dearest of all the women of our land, I can no longer hide from you what I have concealed for so long, and what no one knows except my only secret friend. I have another son, by my first wife, who I ordered to be raised in secret so as not to cause you any grief. It has been seven years since he was taught all the necessary arts in foreign lands; now he has asked for permission to return to our country. Will his visit be unpleasant for you?"

"Oh, my dearest husband," she answered, "how could you have concealed this from me for so long, when the joy in my heart would have doubled? Oh, that I could only embrace your son! I beg you, send messengers for him so that I can press him to my heart." The ruler was very pleased with this unexpected answer and, from that moment on, was most anxious to see his son as soon as possible.

This joy was shared by both spouses, who were, in a sense, satisfied; however, the arrival of the son soon disrupted this. He spoke little, and what he did say was ambiguous; he also remained constantly alone in his little room and would not allow anyone to approach him, except for a single servant.

The unusual behaviour of the son angered the father, and he called on him to discover the reasons for the rare behaviour and asked him why he was so sad and constantly thinking so deeply. "Gracious father," he said, "I remain constantly in my little room for your sake, so that the common people do not rebel against you because you have hidden your firstborn son for so long. The reason I am full of melancholy and sorrow is my mother's long imprisonment."

“My decision,” said the father, “is the decision of a ruler who cannot change a single word; but you shall be allowed to visit your mother whenever you wish. I will report this to the chief guard.” The son thanked him for the favour and went to his mother the very next day.

You, my dear Rhodrygo, can imagine the joy this sorrowful mother must have felt.

When the son returned from his mother to the court and stood before his father, he was even sadder than before and said: “My most gracious father! I have found my mother just as she was about to depart the world; but my arrival kept her soul in her body, and she longs to see you once more. Oh, do fulfil the only wish of your dying first wife!”

This request moved the ruler to pity. “My dearest son!” he said, “how can I do this so that no one will see me when I have to go into the castle? You must know from the laws of our country that a word spoken by the ruler and not kept will send the entirety of the people into revolt.” “Gracious father,” said the deceitful son, “if this fear alone prevents you from fulfilling your wife’s last wish, then I will gladly help ensure that no one at court, let alone anyone among the common people, will have the slightest knowledge of it. Put on women’s clothing and go alone at night to the rear wall of the castle, where I will firstly make a passage so that you can enter inside; I will wait for you, and when you have fulfilled my mother’s wish, I will secretly lead you out again by the same way.” This advice pleased the ruler, and they set the third day for it.

Now, the ungrateful son took particular care to dig the hole in the wall so carefully that no one would see it. He succeeded in this task, as he had hoped. When evening came, the son called a watchman, led him to the broken wall, and said: “Inattentive people! Who made this entrance into the castle, and who is in the habit of coming here at night? I thereby command you, stand by this hole and if anyone creeps through here, cut off his head immediately.”

The watchman did as the future ruler commanded. And when he saw a woman crawling through this hole, he cut off her head and then pulled her inside. When the murderous son heard that the guard had fulfilled his duty, he approached him and said: “Look, you are unfaithful guards of your ruler! This person must have visited the castle often; therefore, if you wish to keep your life and prevent your comrades’ death, bury this corpse immediately so that no one may learn of it.” So, it was done, and no one could know where the ruler had fallen into ruin.

Summary of Heres Regni

An Arab king is unable to conceive an heir, so has all his current wives imprisoned and marries a foreign woman. One of the imprisoned wives is pregnant and gives birth to a boy only a year before the foreign wife, raising the son in the castle-prison. The custom in the country is that the

oldest is the heir, so the elder son is kept a secret from the people until fourteen years old. He comes to visit the palace, where he tells the king that his mother is dying and her last wish is to see her husband again. The king agrees to this and is given strict instructions by his son to dress as a woman and enter the castle through a hole in the rear wall at night. His elder son digs the hole and then points it out to the watchman, instructing him to cut off the head of anyone entering. When the king tries to enter, he is perceived as a stranger and beheaded, and the son has him buried in secret.

Tonstrix

In the English capital, London, there lived a very rich merchant; he kept some of his own ships to increase his wealth and sent them to the Eastern countries for the most expensive goods, and he was so fortunate that they always returned to him without misfortune.

He had only one son, who was well-built but lacked a beautiful face. He cared little for his father's business, for he realised that it was unnecessary for him to strive for greater wealth.

After his father's death, he inherited a large amount; he did not completely abandon the business but kept only one ship for himself and sold the others.

He began to live now very contentedly, lacking nothing except a wife to make the contentment complete. The great wealth of this young merchant attracted many maidens, but he found none who could touch his heart, because he was seeking the most beautiful maiden in the entire city.

Finally, he found one whose beauty was much talked about. He made an effort to win this maiden over and spent a great deal of money to see and speak with her. He truly found in her everything that was said, and from that time on, he loved her sincerely.

Because a golden key opens all locks, it was no wonder that this rich merchant managed to touch the heart of the beautiful Karoline. The magnificent gifts he showered on his bride also awakened within her love for her future master, and so they soon entered into matrimony.

This merchant now loved his wife more than all his wealth; wherever she wanted to go, he was her companion; he left the house with her and returned with her.

Because after his downfall, he wanted to live more carefree and not run as big a business as his deceased father had, he dismissed all the staff except an elderly clerk, to make infidelity on his wife's part impossible. He also disliked company, so his house was always empty of guests. Only a female barber, who lived nearby, had permission to visit his wife whenever she pleased. But

because this neighbour was still a young woman, they mostly talked about her previous single status. The barber greatly won the merchant's wife's love through her detailed stories, and thus she often received gifts from her. These gifts increased the barber's talkativeness, but this was expressed not in flattery, but in truth: for many young men awaited the exit of this beautiful woman from the house, just to be able to see her.

Meanwhile, the merchant received a letter instructing him to set out for the capital without delay, to arrange for and collect the withheld customs duties from his father. Although the merchant reluctantly received this letter, he nevertheless decided, because it was very important to him, to begin the journey in two weeks.

When the merchant's wife was informed that her husband was about to embark on such a long journey, she expressed great sorrow, but in her heart, she rejoiced that she would at least be able to walk around the city alone for once. From that moment on, she spoke to the barber about nothing but the upcoming entertainment. At just this time, a young count from a foreign country arrived in London to visit the large, beautiful city. He soon found like-minded companions who took him to various entertainment venues and also showed him many sights. During their various conversations, the count saw a beautiful maiden walking towards him on the path; he stopped and looked at her intently. One of those present asked the count what had made him stop so unexpectedly. "The beauty of this maiden," the count replied. "One finds more of them here," the other said, "but a young merchant's wife surpasses all others in beauty." The count eagerly enquired as to which part of town she lived in. When he had learned everything from his companions, he was eager to see her.

The following day, the count rose very early and went into this street, which, along with the house, was already familiar to him. There, he passed by the shop several times to catch sight of the much-praised woman; but his efforts were in vain, for, apart from the clerk, he could see no one else. As he was about to return, he saw a sign hanging on a house not far from the merchant's shop indicating that a barber lived there.¹²¹ And it occurred to him to have his beard shaved there, in order to obtain some further information about this famous woman. He entered the ground-floor room prepared for this purpose; but apart from the barber's wife and two small children, he saw no one there. He was about to leave, but this honourable woman held him back with humble acknowledgement, saying: "Exalted sir, if you command that your beard be shaved,

¹²¹ During translation, there was some discussion about whether the friend was a female barber or the barber's wife. In old-fashioned German, there is no distinction drawn between the words; however, the title of *tonstrix* with its feminine ending suggests that she was a barber in her own right

I can serve you myself with pleasure.” The count laughed and said: “I will be especially pleased if I can be served by a woman.” He sat down on the chair that the barber had prepared for him, and in a short time, she had completely finished her work. The count stood up and gave her a ducat.

The glitter of the gold not only moved the barber to express her special thanks, but she also offered him her services in all things. “You can oblige me to express my deep gratitude, dear lady,” said the count. “I have heard much praise about a merchant’s wife who is said to live not far from here; would it not be possible for me to see her?” “Oh, good sir!” cried the barber, “she’s like my own sister, she can’t be without me for a single day. It’s true that it is very difficult for anyone to get to her, because her husband is always at home, watching his wife’s every move, but if one could stay here for a few days, they could not only see her but also talk to her about anything they like; for her husband is preparing for a long journey, and once he has left, nothing will prevent them from speaking to her. I’ll take care of everything else myself.” The count was particularly pleased with this complete explanation, took out another ducat, gave it to the barber, and said: “Dear lady, in the meantime, accept this little thing and if you fulfil your promise well, I will repay you as much as possible.” And so, he left her.

As the count had not yet even left the alley, the barber’s husband came home. She immediately hurried to the merchant’s wife with great joy, and when she saw that no one else was in her room, she began to speak to her in a low voice, as if in a state of distress: “OH dearest little sister! I cannot express the joy I felt a short while ago. Oh, the beauty, the grace of the young gentleman who was with me! I am much older than you, but I had to fall in love with him.” “Well,” asked the merchant’s wife, “have you not forgotten that you have your husband?” “You have truly guessed it. For his beautiful blond hair, his rosy face, and his blue eyes truly numbed my sensibilities so that I truly forgot my husband. But guess what he was looking for with me!” The merchant’s wife began to laugh loudly and said: “He didn’t want you to shave his beard when he was so young?” “That was the first reason he came to my house,” replied the barber’s wife, “but everything else concerns you.” Now she told her everything so touchingly that the young woman was already eager to see the much-praised youth; therefore, she promised her that she would speak with him after the master’s departure.

When the time for the master’s leaving came, he called the barber to him and said to her: “Dearest friend! You know that I must embark on a long journey away from my wife, and because she loves you so much, I beg you not to forget to visit her often and cheer her up from her sadness; I will gratefully reward this love upon my return.” The talkative woman promised to

do everything carefully. The merchant gave her some ducats and asked her to stay in the house until he parted from his wife.

When he had everything prepared for his departure, he went into his weeping wife's room. He embraced her and said: "It is already time, my dearest wife, that I part from you. Keep your pure heart and marital fidelity until I return to you." At these words, his wife fell to the floor and fainted. The frightened merchant called the barber, who immediately rushed into the room and tried to bring the woman back to consciousness. After much effort, she succeeded and excused her feminine weakness, which stemmed solely from her great love for him. And she said: "Good sir, it is my advice that you hurry out of the house without further increasing your wife's pain; I will take care of the rest myself, as I have to calm her down!" The merchant kissed his wife once more and sadly left the house.

With the merchant's departure, soon his wife's feigned sadness disappeared once the barber again told her of the count's desire to see her. "Dearest sister," she said, "now we are sure that we can say and do as we please. Karl must always be in the shop and even if we notice anything, you can rely on me to tie his tongue so tightly that he cannot reveal anything. Now confess to me, do you want to see this beautiful count who awaits you with such longing?" "My dearest," replied the merchant's wife, "I fear some stranger might notice him when he enters our house." "Leave your unnecessary worries" the barber interrupted her speech and left her with these words.

The young count had been walking around the house for a long time, impatiently awaiting the barber's arrival. When she noticed him, she went to him and said: "My gracious sir! Now everything is arranged according to your wishes; come with me now without worry, I will lead you into the room where the person you wish to speak with will be completely alone." The count happily followed the barber. As they entered the house, Karl was just closing the shop door and saw this unknown guest coming in with his wife; but he paid no attention and quietly went into his little room.

The count followed his guide into the room with a trembling heart, kissed the hand of the merchant's wife, and begged for forgiveness for daring to pay his humble respects. When the merchant's wife saw this handsome count, she blushed and could only bow and utter no sound; but the talkative barber immediately persuaded the two young people to begin a more intimate conversation.

Then the merchant's wife beckoned to her procuress and gave her the sign to bring a bottle of wine and some of the sweets from the shop, so that she could somehow honour this guest who was already beginning to inflame her heart. The count, recognising this, intercepted the barber's wife and the door and pressed two ducats into her hand, demanding that she buy the best wine. The wise woman didn't allow herself to be encouraged for long, because she knew she would have to taste everything.

While they were waiting for the barber's wife to return with the wine, the two lovers were able to talk more intimately. We are certain of this because the barber's return through the door interrupted the lovers' last kiss.

Then the barber poured delicious wine into the glasses, and, within a short while, it had made them all merry with heated blood in their veins. When the barber realised that her stay had run long, she took her leave and courageously returned home.

The wife, who was usually abstinent but had become intoxicated by the wine, completely forgot her husband's wish and, drowsy from the wine, laid down in bed. Since the count now had no one to talk to, he followed her example, and they both fell asleep without a care in the world.

When the merchant had already travelled several miles from the city, he realised that he had left the main statement of his accounts at home. It occurred to him that he would not be able to carry out his plan without it, and he was forced to return home. In order to complete his journey more quickly, he left the carriage with a servant at an inn, while he himself hurried home on horseback.

He arrived in the city at exactly midnight, dismounted his horse in front of his house, tied it to the gate, took out the master key, and went to wake the clerk, who needed a lamp in his room every night. OH, how terribly frightened Karl was when he recognised his master's voice, for he knew that the unknown guest had not yet left the house; he jumped out of bed and opened the door. The master, without saying a word, lit the candle on the table and quickly hurried to his room.

OH, what joy filled him as he thought of his most faithful wife sleeping sweetly. He quietly went to her room, slowly opened the door, and entered.

A man who had seen a lightning strike in front of him would not be as frightened as the merchant in the moment when he saw men's clothing scattered on the table and two people lying in bed; his blood heated and he rushed from one room to another like a man possessed,

seized two pistols, loading each with two bullets, and designated one for his faithless wife and one for her lover, placing them on the table and calling Karl as a witness.

When the clerk entered the room, half-dead, his master cried out angrily: "Wretched man! Who have you let into my house?" Karl, trembling all over, apologised that he had not seen anyone aside from the barber entering or leaving the house. "Come with me into the room," said the merchant, "and you will find the faithless woman lying in bed with the adulterer; you shall watch her well-deserved death so that you may be a witness." Now he took the pistols, one in each hand, and continued: "Watch how these bullets will pierce both of your accursed hearts!" He then ordered Karl to take the candle and lead the way into the room where his wife and the count were fast asleep.

As they entered the room, the merchant said: "Now, look at the bed, and you will not be able to deny how heinous the sin is between the villain and the lascivious woman." Then he cocked both pistols and aimed them at the sleeping bodies.

"Oh, by God, most sublime sir," cried Karl, falling to his knees before him, "have mercy on their souls, lest they be lost forever; just grant them enough time to reconcile with God." This reasonable request from Karl calmed the merchant and he said to him: "Go to the Franciscan monastery and quickly bring one of the clergymen, so that he may prepare them for eternity."

Karl, quite distraught, rushed first to the barber, knocking loudly on the door, and when she opened it, he began to tell her what had happened, trembling all the while. She had little patience for his long-winded account and instead ordered him to wait there until she returned. She rushed herself to the house of her godfather, who was the tailor to the Franciscan monastery, knocked on the window, and begged him politely to lend her a habit so that she could frighten her children who were constantly playing tricks instead of sleeping. The sleepy tailor didn't think much about this; he got out of bed, took an old habit, and handed it to her at the window. The barber hurried home and told Karl to immediately return to his master with the news that a priest would shortly follow him.

Now the barber put on the habit, dyed her face, pulled the hood over her head, and hurried into the merchant's house.

When the disguised priest entered the merchant's room, he bowed and asked why the master had summoned him there. The merchant began to tell him everything and finished his speech:

"Spiritual father, do not delay my unalterable resolve any longer, or I will be forced to send their souls to hell without preparation."

When the barber realised that she did not have much time to carry out her plan and that her pleas would not persuade the merchant to forgive her, she demanded that he go to his room until she had prepared these two souls for the death decreed.

Now, the barber's wife quietly went into the room, where the merchant's wife and the count were still enjoying their deep sleep, went to bed, and began to gently wake them both. Oh, how frightened they were when they opened their eyes and saw a priest standing before them with a lit candle! But the barber's wife, anticipating their terror, said: "Quiet, do not be frightened, little sister. Nor should you, Count, but stand up willingly!" The Count recognised the barber and quickly fulfilled her order, but the merchant's wife, struck by lightning, could not utter a single word.

Now, the barber quickly took off the habit and said: "Count, put on this habit with great haste, and when you come out of the other room, this woman's husband will undoubtedly be waiting for you. You must say to him with bold courage: 'Good sir! It is a sin against God to joke with us poor monks at night when we are saying our prayers. You called me to prepare your wife for death with an adulterer, but there are two women in that bed. It is against God's will to joke with clergy and make fools of them.' When you have scolded him properly, go to my house and await my arrival there."

As the barber was speaking, she was also putting on the count's clothes. And when the disguised monk had finished his speech to the merchant and was already descending the stairs the barber, dressed in men's clothes and laughing, ran to the merchant and said: "OH dearest sir, now take a good look at me, how gallantly these men's clothes fit me. I am certain that you would never recognise me."

The merchant, stunned, looked at the barber and could not understand the strange incident. "Oh, my dearest sir!" the barber continued, "when you left, your wife began to lament for you so much that she fell from one faint to another. I did everything possible to make her feel better, eventually succeeding after great difficulty, and she became calmer. Then I went home and dressed as a man, so that I could somehow amuse her after she had laid down in bed and fallen asleep, to transform her grief into such laughter and amusement that we both lay down in bed, reassured, and fell asleep so soundly that we did not hear your arrival. I therefore beg your pardon."

Summary of Tonstrix

A rich and jealous merchant marries an incredibly beautiful woman, who he keeps in isolation out of fear for infidelity. When he has to travel for work, he leaves her in the care of his clerk and her best friend, a barber. At the same time, a count arrives in town and hears of the merchant's wife's beauty. He approaches the barber to arrange a meeting, and she agrees in exchange for cash. The three meet and drink wine, but the count and the merchant's wife fall fast asleep from the wine. The merchant finds he has forgotten an important document and returns to the house, where he is enraged to find his wife in bed with a man. The clerk requests that a priest cleanses the souls of the count and the wife before the merchant kills them, which he agrees to. Under the guise of fetching the priest, the clerk makes the barber aware of the situation. She borrows a robe and, pretending to be the priest, asks to be alone with the adulterers. She wakes them up and tells the count to swap clothes with her and scold the merchant for playing a trick on a priest, as there are two women in the bed. She then goes and explains to the merchant that she has dressed up as him to cheer up his wife, who was depressed after he left, and, exhausted from laughing, they had fallen asleep.

Filius Profusus

A country gentleman who lacked neither property nor wealth lived in the greatest contentment with his beloved wife, who had borne him a son in the sixth year of their marriage. This child was their greatest joy in the world; they had longed a long while for him, in order to obtain an heir to their vast estates. When the little son came to a more mature reason, they tried to have him educated as much as possible whilst he was still of tender age. The more time passed, the more Rudolf showed his abilities, until he was completely witty and intelligent.

The caring father spared no expenses in increasing Rudolf's knowledge, so that one day he could have the greatest pride in his son. He sent him to the capital city of Peru, where he was to receive a higher education. This large city, with no shortage of various activities and entertaining companions, satisfied Rudolf quite well, so much so that he sought out entertainment more than a useful education. However, this required a lot of money, and so he wrote frequently to his parents under various pretexts to empty their purses. His mother often argued with her husband, urging him not to send Rudolf so much money, as it could ruin him. The husband talked her out of it in every way that he could and, in order to avoid this reproach, decided to keep it all a secret from his wife in the future.

When Rudolf realised that things were going his way, he continued with this lifestyle, constantly thinking about what new entertainment he could indulge in with his friends. If you have enough money, everything will go your way. Rudolf was diligent in writing to his father and promised him that he would repay everything in the future; he told him all the skills he was learning, how many languages he understood, and how he had often distinguished himself above all others in the art of chivalry and received public praise for this. All these lying reports moved his fatherly heart to decide to spend everything on his son.

The blind love of the careless father for his son knew no bounds; even though he had already noticed the significant losses to his fortunes, he thought constantly of the great honour and joy of Rudolf, whom he hoped to find happiness through.

When seven years had passed since Rudolf left his parents, his mother demanded that the master call Rudolf home so that he could represent himself in the household. The nobleman happily fulfilled his wife's wish and sent for Rudolf.

The father received his son with such joy, when he noticed his magnificent stature and his still handsome face! He kissed him for a long time and paid him almost undue honours. His wise wife showed no great joy in her son, for she knew how Rudolf had diminished their wealth, but felt that she could prevent him from future extravagance when she saw him. However, her plan did not have a happy ending, for Rudolf had only been with his parents for a short while and was already showing great dissatisfaction at not having his merry companions with him. He begged his father to allow him to travel to foreign lands, as he hoped to find his fortune elsewhere and make both himself and his parents happy. The careless father immediately agreed to his son's wish, but his mother would not allow it under any circumstances. The ungrateful son thus began to persecute his mother so much that she soon died.

The death of his venerable mother meant that the world was open to Rudolf. Because he knew that he would receive anything he wanted from his father, he made his request again not after his mother's death and obtained his permission easily. However, due to the large debts already incurred through Rudolf's extravagance, the father was now forced to sell his estate and retain only a farm to support himself. The prodigal son felt no pity for his father, who had squandered all his wealth for his sake. After gathering all the money, he equipped himself with everything that he would need on the journey and, accompanied by two servants, left his weeping father for foreign lands.

Along the way, especially in large cities, he once more found many cheerful companions who helped him open his chest of ducats. Because he knew how to keep himself entertained in all sorts of social groups, he always had everything that money could get him.

He was not yet fifty miles from home, but he had already pulled half the bags out of the chest and emptied them. By the end, all that remained was the horses and the carriage. He dismissed his servants and remembered his father for the first time. He thought about what to do for a short while, until it occurred to him that his father still had a farm to support him.

He immediately wrote a lengthy letter, but it was full of lies, how great luck had struck him and that a rich and beautiful countess had chosen him as her husband. His father therefore could sell his farm and all his possessions and go to him for a comfortable life, since his wife awaited him daily with unspeakable joy and pleasure.

This flattering and deceitful letter awakened new love in the father's heart. He hastened to carry out his son's advice, sold everything, and set out on his journey with great joy that he could embrace his son all the sooner.

His desire to see his son shortened his journey, and so he arrived in the city sooner than expected. Oh, with what longing he thought of the house that his son promised in his letter! Just as he entered, his wayward son approached him from the stairs. When he recognised his father, he kissed him with joy and led him into his room. Rudolf's first question was where his father had left the carriage. When he was told this, he immediately sent for the money, had the chest brought into the room, paid the coachman, and ordered him to return.

He then began to tell his father what good fortune had befallen him there: "Dearest father," he said, "my wife has left the estate to arrange all matters for her arrival; this entire house has been designated by the countess for your convenience. So that when she returns, she does not think that we are poor, put out the money, even though no one will need it."

The father opened the chest with pleasure and gave the last of the money to his son, who carried the little bags into another room and, after the last one, said: "A little patience, kind father! I must send for the countess, who is eagerly awaiting your arrival." Meanwhile, this debauched, wasteful son smuggled the money out through another door into his carriage and left the city.

When the grieving father could wait no longer for his wayward son, he was forced to ask after him; but he never saw him again. Because of his unreasonable love for his son, he had to earn his living in the city until his death.

Summary of Filius Profusus

A country couple have a child, whom they name Rudolf and raise proudly to have the finest education. As part of this, they send him to Peru, where he squanders their money on entertainment with friends, regularly asking for more. His mother is suspicious of his behaviour and asks for him to return, which he does. The father is overjoyed at his return, but Rudolf misses his amusements and begs to be allowed to travel. When his mother denies this request, Rudolf persecutes her so much that she dies. His father allows him to go abroad, selling his estate to fund the trip and only keeping a small farm to sustain himself. Rudolf soon squanders this too and writes to his father pretending to have found a rich wife who wishes to care for them both and asking him to sell the farm and travel to him. His father is delighted and rushes to his son, who secretly unloads the money into his own carriage and runs off with it. His father is left to work for the rest of his life in an unknown city.

Papirius

Benjamin's mother died when he was three years old. His inconsolable father one day noticed a beautiful maiden on the street, whom he then married. Her marital fidelity gradually declined, and, with the help of a procuress, she obtained a young man who was disguised as a virgin.

In his tenth year, Benjamin came to the town hall. To probe him, his stepmother took him for a walk in the garden, which pleased his father so much that he even admonished his son to be grateful to her for it. Benjamin soon tired of his stepmother's questioning and judged that what was under question was whether a woman can have two husbands. Incited by his stepmother, the women of the town organised a revolt and came to the town hall, where they forced the decree banning this to be revoked. In their opinion, it could indeed be the case that a woman might have two husbands, but the other way round was unacceptable.

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