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Article abstract

Two of Marsilio Ficino's letters among his correspondence—the letter *De officiis* and the letter *Veritas de institutione principis*—enjoyed heightened popularity in the sixteenth century. One of the first translations of Ficino into the vernacular is a translation of these two letters into Czech, printed in Prague around the year 1500. Czech humanist Řehoř Hrubý of Jelení (ca. 1460–1514) seems to be a plausible candidate for the authorship. The second translation into Czech was published in 1520 by Oldřich Velenský of Mnichov (1495–1531). This article examines the Czech humanistic translations of Ficino's letters and places them into the context of the Czech humanistic movement at the beginning of the sixteenth century, which emphasized moral topics from Italian Renaissance Platonism. It argues that these letters from Ficino supported the moral claims of Czech pre-Reformation and Reformation thought at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

Two Letters of Marsilio Ficino and Their Translations in Humanistic Bohemia¹

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Two of Marsilio Ficino's letters among his correspondence—the letter De officiis and the letter Veritas de institutione principis—enjoyed heightened popularity in the sixteenth century. One of the first translations of Ficino into the vernacular is a translation of these two letters into Czech, printed in Prague around the year 1500. Czech humanist Řehoř Hrubý of Jelení (ca. 1460–1514) seems to be a plausible candidate for the authorship. The second translation into Czech was published in 1520 by Oldřich Velenský of Mnichov (1495–1531). This article examines the Czech humanistic translations of Ficino's letters and places them into the context of the Czech humanistic movement at the beginning of the sixteenth century, which emphasized moral topics from Italian Renaissance Platonism. It argues that these letters from Ficino supported the moral claims of Czech pre-Reformation and Reformation thought at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

Parmi la vaste correspondance de Marsile Ficin, deux missives – la lettre De officiis, adressée à Cherubino Quarquagli, et la lettre Veritas de institutione principis, écrite pour le jeune cardinal Raffaele Riario – connurent un important succès au XVI^e siècle. Les deux documents ont un contenu moral, le premier traitant des devoirs, le second jouant le rôle de miroir pour le prince. Les deux lettres furent imprimées séparément et même traduites en langue vernaculaire. L'une des premières traductions de Ficin en langue vernaculaire est une traduction de ces deux lettres en tchèque, publiée à Prague vers 1500. L'humaniste tchèque Řehoř Hrubý de Jelení (ca. 1460–1514), connu comme traducteur des œuvres d'Érasme et des humanistes italiens, pourrait en être l'auteur, même si l'identité du traducteur n'est pas avérée. La deuxième traduction en tchèque de la lettre Veritas de institutione principis de Ficin fut publiée en 1520 par Oldřich Velenský de Mnichov (1495–1531). Le présent article traite d'abord du contenu moral des deux lettres. Il examine ensuite les traductions humanistes tchèques des lettres de Ficin et les met en contexte, en l'occurrence celui du mouvement humaniste tchèque du début du XVI^e siècle, qui mettait l'accent sur les thèmes moraux du platonisme de la Renaissance italienne. Il explore l'hypothèse que ces lettres de Ficin ont soutenu les revendications morales de la pensée de la pré-Réforme et de la Réforme, en Bohême, au début du XVI^e siècle.

1. This article is based on a paper on the same subject delivered at the 2016 RSA meeting in Boston. The study follows the Czech edition of Ficino's letters, including the edition of a Latin text, the modern Czech translation, and the edition of old Czech translations (Ficino, *O Povinnostech*). The publication of the article was made possible thanks to targeted funding provided by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for specific research, granted in 2021 to Palacký University Olomouc (IGA_FF_2021_006).

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1. Introduction

The importance of a Latin writer for his sixteenth-century readers can be assessed not only from the number of editions of the works and of references by other authors but also from the number of translations into the vernacular. Florentine philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433–99), one of the most influential thinkers of the fifteenth century, enjoyed great popularity among diverse learned authors of the sixteenth century; his works became known to unlearned or semi-learned readers, as translations into the vernacular indicate. This latter part of Ficino’s legacy remains less explored. It is almost unknown in Ficino studies that one of the first vernacular languages into which Ficino’s works were translated was Czech, as these translations are inaccessible to the majority of Renaissance scholars, and references to them in modern secondary literature were for a long time inaccurate.² The first translation was printed around 1500 in Prague and contains a translation of two letters, one to Cherubino Quarquagli, *De officiis*, and one to Raffaele Riario, *Veritas de institutione principis*.³ A second translation of the letter to Riario into Czech, published in 1520, was not known to international scholarship for a long time.⁴

2. Paul Oskar Kristeller included Marsilio Ficino’s work *Epistulae* in his list of editions published by Johann Camp in Prague around 1500. It is not apparent from the data provided by Kristeller, however, whether it was an edition of a Latin text or a translation of two of Ficino’s letters into Czech (Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, lxviii). This more specific information was accessible from *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke* (GW), under the number 09875, where the edition entitled specifically *Epistolae duae* is correctly described as a Czech translation of two Ficino letters, under the Czech title *O tom, co maji všelijací lidé činiti* (What all manner of men should do).

3. Basic information about the edition, with the reference to the *Gesamtkatalog*, is also available to scholars thanks to Kristeller’s “Marsilio Ficino and His Work after Five Hundred Years,” in “Appendix VII: List of Translations of the Writings of Marsilio Ficino” (Garfagnini, 165). See the subsequent reprinting of this article in a book (Kristeller, “Marsilio Ficino and His Work”). The edition is also mentioned in the fourth volume of the English translation of Ficino’s letters, containing the letter to Riario (Ficino, *The Letters*, Volume 4, xxii), while the second volume containing the letter *On Duties* repeats earlier incorrect information and refers to an undated Prague edition as a Latin edition (Ficino, *The Letters*, Volume 2, xxi).

4. No reference to it was included in any fundamental work. Only recently, in the first volume *Bohemia and Moravia* of the series *Europa Humanistica*, has the existence of both translations been noted primarily from the point of view of the history of printing in the Czech lands (Boldan, Neškudla, and Voit, 162).

The aim of this article is to provide more detailed information about Czech humanistic translations of Marsilio Ficino's letters. I will first analyze both letters, *De officiis* and *Veritas de institutione principis*, and assess their significance for sixteenth-century readers by means of their editions and translations into the vernacular. After that, I will introduce the first and second Czech editions, their translators, and the circumstances surrounding both editions. Finally, I will place them into the context of Czech humanism at the beginning of the sixteenth century in order to determine the possible motivations for the translations.

2. Ficino's moral letters

2.1. *De officiis* (On duties)

Out of the 603 published letters,⁵ some appeared to be more popular than others and were thus printed individually. The letter entitled *De officiis*, in particular, was included in the third book of Ficino's letters and was also published separately—twice in Leipzig by the printer Jacob Thanner, in 1499 and 1502, and once in Magdeburg in 1506 by the printer Jakob Winter—as a supplement to the work falsely attributed to Seneca, *Liber de moribus humanae vitae*.⁶ In 1519, it was also included in a separate Basel edition of six of Ficino's letters, under the title of the first letter, *Epistola Veritatis de institutione principis*.⁷ Both the 1561 and 1576 Basel editions of the letter in the *Opera omnia* show the special importance of the letter: unlike the other letters in the volume, the typographer

5. Some letters were not published; see the list in Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*. For an amended list of Ficino's letters, see Kristeller, "Marsilio Ficino and His Work"; compare with Overgaauw and Sanzotta.

6. The edition is titled *Seneca Cordubensis moralissimi Liber de Moribus humanae vitae. Cum epistola Marsilii Ficini de Officiis cuiuslibet necessaria*. The book *Liber de moribus humanae vitae* was long considered to be Seneca's work; however, it is a forgery first referred to in the sixth century (Colish, 19).

7. The book was published by Thomas Wolff (Ficino, *Epistola Veritatis*) and consists of letters from various books by Ficino, in the following order: 1) *Veritas de institutione principis*, letter 27, book 5; 2) *Oratio Christiani gregis ad Xistum (sic!) Pontificem Romanum*, to Pope Sixtus, letter 1, book 6; 3) *Declamantiuncula ad genus humanum de Vitae institutione*, under which title two letters are included, *Felix est, qui vere gaudet*, letter 50, book 5, and *Omnia mundi bona illi mala sunt, qui immundus vivit in mundo*, letter 40, book 3; 4) *De officiis*; 5) *Oratio ad Deum Theologica*, letter 116, book 1.

separated individual paragraphs by leaving blank spaces. It must have been expected that the letter would be read and notes made.⁸

The addressee of Marsilio Ficino's letter entitled *De officiis* was Cherubino Quarquagli, notary and poet, one of the earlier members of the so-called Platonic academy in Florence.⁹ Quarquagli came from San Gimignano; allegedly he was the tutor of the future archbishop Giovanni Niccolini,¹⁰ which is, again, documented by Ficino in one of his prolific letters addressed to Niccolini.¹¹ Quarquagli lived from 1468 in Rome at the court of later cardinal Cosimo Orsini and was still in correspondence with Ficino after leaving Florence. It is evidenced also from the letter *De officiis* which contains a postscript with the date 15 February 1477, and with greetings to the cardinal of Urbino, Giovanni Battista Mellini.¹² It seems that Quarquagli was close to Mellini at that time and may have held an administrative position at his court in Rome, for Ficino named him as a man who is weighed down with duties to a great extent. The letter *De officiis* was included in the third book of Ficino's correspondence with no mention of its date, which is found in only two manuscripts.¹³ As well as *De officiis*, Ficino addressed to Quarquagli a letter on human folly and misery: *De stultitia et miseria hominum*.¹⁴

Quarquagli's occupation as a notary and secretary made him busy with administrative duties, which is why Ficino called him a man "extremely dedicated to duties" (*officiosissimus*), which can also mean a person who is fully pre-occupied with his duties. The Latin word *officium* can mean the office that an individual holds. The interconnections between duty and office in ancient Rome

8. Valery Rees reached this conclusion (Rees, 145).

9. The basic data is provided by Arnaldo Della Torre (Torre, 795–96); compare with Ficino, *The Letters*, Volume 2, 113.

10. Compare with Kristeller's article "Marsilio Ficino and the Roman Curia" (267).

11. In the letter addressed to Niccolini, Ficino says that Niccolini visited the Florence Academy as a child together with his teacher Quarquagli (Ficino, *Lettere I*, letter 121, 221). See the English translation (Ficino, *The Letters*, Volume 1, trans. Fellowship, 185) and its revised edition (Ficino, *The Letters*, Volume 1, ed. Rees, Bertoluzzi, and Farn dell).

12. A postscript with the date can be found in two manuscripts (Ficino, *The Letters*, Volume 2, 100).

13. The letter from the *editio princeps* (Ficino, *Epistolae*, 75v–76v) was later identified as Letter No. 53 (Ficino, *The Letters*, Volume 2, 64–67).

14. Besides Quarquagli, Pietro Vanni and Domenico Galleti were the addressees of the letter (Ficino, *Lettere I*, letter 58, 112–13; *The Letters*, Volume 1, trans. Fellowship, 104–05; *The Letters*, Volume 1, ed. Rees, Bertoluzzi, and Farn dell, 74–75).

are aptly described by Cicero in his treatise *De officiis*. Here, Cicero follows the Stoic ethics of virtue and, being a Roman, he particularly emphasizes the duties of man towards the state: to engage in politics and other public affairs. These duties are manifested in holding an office. In fact, Cicero's treatise serves a clear didactic purpose: to encourage his son Marcus, to whom the work is addressed, to engage in public life. In his theory of virtues, he emphasizes the practical and political aspects.¹⁵ Even though virtue gives rise to love for wisdom and is associated with the learning of truth, according to Cicero, it is still necessary to take into account the interests of society. For example, when people devote themselves fully to the learning of truth and then let themselves be "drawn by study away from active life it is contrary to moral duty. For the whole glory of virtue is in activity."¹⁶ The terminological link between duty and office in Cicero has its own reasoning and ideological background.

It is to Cicero's work *De officiis* that Ficino refers implicitly in the title of his letter, and explicitly in its introduction, where he declares that he cannot compete with the thoroughness of Cicero's explanation. He also refers to the Stoic philosopher Panaetius's interpretation, the delicacy of which his letter lacks.¹⁷ The reference to Panaetius is also borrowed from Cicero's treatise, which says "Panaetius, then, has given us what is unquestionably the most thorough discussion of moral duties that we have."¹⁸ Panaetius's treatise *On Duties*, now lost, is known to us particularly thanks to Cicero's *De officiis*, which was conceived as the supplement to Stoic theory, extending it with issues that Panaetius did not explore.

Cicero's *De officiis* was reworked in the fourth century by St. Ambrose of Milan in the three books of *De officiis ministrorum*. St. Ambrose supplemented his Roman pattern with a Christian view with the aim to show that Christian ethics stems from its own source, which is scripture. Ambrose's book was extremely popular during the Middle Ages and was printed several times in the Renaissance period.¹⁹ It is inconceivable that Ficino was not aware of this Patristic reinterpretation of Cicero.

15. The interpretation was provided by Miriam Griffin ("The Politics of Virtue").

16. English translation in Cicero, bk. 1, ch. 6, para. 19, p. 21.

17. "If I were as dutiful in discourse as you are in action, I should be as subtle as Panaetius and as abundant as Cicero in this subject" (Ficino, *The Letters*, Volume 2, 65).

18. "Panaetius igitur, qui sine controversia de officiis accuratissime disputavit" (Cicero, bk. 3, ch. 2, para. 7, p. 277).

19. See the preface to the edition (Ambrosius Mediolanensis, xlii).

Ficino, however, does not mention St. Ambrose and explicitly links his letter with genuine Stoic thought, referring only to Cicero, and through him Panaetius, as his two predecessors. Cicero is a model for Ficino, as Valery Rees says, in several aspects, although at first sight it might seem that the Roman philosopher's influence on the author is marginal, considering the small number of actual quotations.²⁰ However, in the early stages of Ficino's writing, Cicero was one of his sources for getting acquainted with Plato and other ancient authors before proceeding to the original texts. Through reading Cicero, Ficino learned about classic stylistics and rhetorical devices, which he later used himself, and Cicero's Latin terminology provided Ficino with the instrument for his translations from Greek to Latin. Finally, it was Cicero's *Epistolae ad familiares* which became Ficino's model for composing his own *epistolarium* (collection of letters).

It is obvious that, in all cases, Cicero was Ficino's inspiration for formal aspects more than for content. Even though Ficino's reference to Cicero in his letter *De officiis* is one of his rare explicit references to the Roman author, it does not mean that Ficino used Cicero's treatise *De officiis* as a significant source for his letter. Ficino's letter is not a treatise on the relationships between virtue, duty, justice, practical activity, and benefit as it is in Cicero. Ficino understands duty as "the action proper to each man, which keeps to what is fitting and honorable as circumstances, person, place and time require."²¹ It is particularly the latter part of this definition that Ficino focuses on in his letter. His *De officiis* in fact starts as a catalogue of duties characterized on the basis of people's positions and roles in society and in family. It begins with the duties of clerics, rulers, officials, and private citizens (i.e., those who do not hold any office); continues with the duties arising from affiliation to a certain class (knights, craftsmen, farmers); and distinguishes between the duties of lords and subjects. Then follow the duties arising from the roles in family, from individual occupations (lawyer, doctor, orator, poet, musician, or philosopher), and from gender, age group, etc.

It is also the Platonic overtones that distinguish Ficino from Cicero. Early in the letter, the author admits that he himself is not devoted to his duties to

20. A systematic account of Cicero's influence on Ficino was given by Valery Rees who, in "Ciceronian Echoes," distinguished the four areas of Cicero's impact on Ficino mentioned here.

21. Ficino, *The Letters*, Volume 2, 65.

the extent that he should be, which is, actually, common among philosophers.²² Later, when he speaks about the duties of philosophers, he appeals to philosophers not to get involved in human affairs and even not to risk their lives by engaging in politics, referring to Plato and Aristippus.²³ But it is exactly the act of standing aloof from public service that Cicero speaks against. In Ficino's opinion, a philosopher's task (duty) is, in accordance with Platonism, a theoretical activity, i.e., searching for divine things and exploring nature. Ficino takes a reserved attitude towards active participation in political affairs.

Ficino understands viewing the divine as a philosopher's task as the point where Platonism and Christianity converge. He Christianizes the antique theme of duties in a different way from St. Ambrose of Milan, who considered the Holy Scripture to be the source for Christian theory on virtues and duties. Although some parts of Ficino's letter show his inspiration from the Bible, particularly the passages of the New Testament concerning the duties of man, woman, lord, and subject,²⁴ the core of the letter consists of the Christianization of Plato's philosophy. When some Hellenistic philosophers relativize the duty of participation in patriotic activities, referring to cosmopolitanism,²⁵ Ficino takes a further step; in accordance with Christian tradition, he sees the true homeland in Heaven. A philosopher "is a son of heaven, not of earth,"²⁶ he states in his letter. In the end, he considers the Platonic duty of seeking the divine to be a universal duty, not only the domain of philosophers. After all, even Ficino's famous argument for the immortality of the soul in *Platonic Theology* is based on Plato's thesis that the purpose of human life is contemplation, i.e., the contemplation of ideas in the divine realm. The tenor of the letter *De officiis* appears at the beginning to be Stoic, when it is mentioned that every person

22. "Although, as is customary for those occupied in the study of philosophy, I am perhaps sometimes less dutiful than is appropriate" (Ficino, *The Letters*, Volume 2, 64).

23. "The philosopher is unique in this: that he is rightly not pressed by Plato and Aristippus to hazard his life for his country" (Ficino, *The Letters*, Volume 2, 60–61). The reference to Aristippus is paradoxical, as this hedonistic philosopher was otherwise unacceptable to Ficino. Here, the quotation is convenient for Ficino as it supports a distance from an active engagement in politics. The quotation from Diogenes Laertius, which Ficino refers to, in fact relates not to Aristippus but to Megarian philosopher Theodorus (Laertius, vol. 1, bk. 2, paragraph 98, p. 227).

24. Allusion to St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians 3:18–4:1.

25. This was actually, according to Diogenes Laertius, Theodorus's attitude towards his homeland: "He said the world was his country" (see note 23).

26. Ficino, *The Letters*, Volume 2, 67.

must bear in mind the volatility of Fortune. Then it is surpassed by pointing at the heavenly homeland, the homeland of all true citizens, which is what everyone has to keep in mind at all times.

Besides the background of *De officiis*, set by the tradition of classical antiquity, the immediate context of Ficino's letter is the contemporary humanistic discourse on genuine nobility. Extensive and frequently boisterous discussions started developing at the end of the fourteenth century, when hereditary nobility was confronted by true nobility—the source of which lies in genuine, moral, virtuous behaviour. The most famous and most important work in this field was the dialogue *De vera nobilitate liber* by the humanist Poggio Bracciolini, who polemicized against earlier, mainly classical concepts of nobility based on family lineage.²⁷ True nobility, as Bracciolini says, arises from virtue; it is moreover the result of the active engagement of a virtuous individual in political affairs. A true noble is one who performs duties arising from virtues.²⁸

The theory of duties then represents a cornerstone of true nobility. Only when we know the relevant duties arising from virtues can we determine whether a certain individual is *homo nobilis*. This approach is apparent in the works of Ficino's contemporary and member of the Florentine Platonic circle that gathered round him, Cristoforo Landino. Landino's treatise *De vera nobilitate* (after 1487) is, at first, based on Plato's theory of the four cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, moderation, justice (*prudencia, fortitudo, temperantia, iustitia*). After that, he examines how the virtues are fulfilled within individual functions in society, i.e., in active life (*vita activa*), which is the realization of true nobility. Finally, he deals with the status of a philosopher in a state and evaluates purely intellectual virtues.²⁹

When discussing nobility, Landino's predecessors—Poggio Bracciolini and, for example, Bartolomeo Sacchi da Platina, who was the author of another treatise entitled *De vera nobilitate*—distinguish between the virtues and duties of knights on the one hand, and philosophers on the other. In this sense,

27. To Bracciolini's conception of true nobility, see Castelnovo.

28. "ut nobilitas in eo sit qui exercuit officia virtutum" (cited in Leinkauf, *Grundriss Philosophie des Humanismus*, 1:865).

29. This work by Landino (*De vera nobilitate*) remained in manuscript form only. At the end of his book, Landino praises Lorenzo the Magnificent, de' Medici, ruler of Florence, as the true *homo nobilis* since hereditary nobility, moral nobility, and the nobility of both active and contemplative lives are combined in him.

they show an obvious distinction between active and contemplative lives (*vita activa, vita contemplativa*). However, in his own treatise, *De vera nobilitate* (after 1487), Landino gives a list of various groups in society and corresponding virtues and duties when searching for the criteria to define nobility: in addition to knights and philosophers, he mentions clerics, soldiers, orators, lawyers, and merchants. A similar list is included in his earlier *Commentary on Dante's Divine Comedy* (1481).³⁰ Landino could have taken his guidance from Ficino's *De officiis* from 1477, copies of which, as already mentioned, circulated among humanists and could have provided the basis to Landino for the evaluation of the role of *vita activa* in defining *vera nobilitas*. Alternatively, the approach shared by Ficino and Landino could have emerged during their discussions of the matter.

Landino's treatise *De vera nobilitate* shows not only the contemporary context of Ficino's letter but also one of its various forms of reception. As already mentioned, the letter was published in several editions, which points to its importance for the legacy of Ficino's philosophy. The popularity of the letter, mainly its ethical aspects, is proven by its printing: for example, its inclusion in a book by Nicolaus Reusner, *Ethica philosophica et Christiana*, at the end of the sixteenth century. Reusner uses Ficino (and Cicero) when trying to present a systematic treatise on virtues and duties, introducing the book with Ficino's letter to Cosimo de' Medici on the way to happiness³¹ and printing Ficino's *De officiis* together with the letter on the definition and purpose of the virtues in the supplement.³² This special topicality also characterizes certain parts of *De officiis*. Above all, the paragraph on the duties of merchants found its way from Ficino to various works of literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³³ The letter as a whole received attention even in the Czech lands in the sixteenth century. Before we proceed to this topic, however, we will deal with Ficino's other, similarly influential letter, *Veritas*.

30. This finding was reached by Tilmann Jorde (Jorde, 200).

31. Reusner introduced his book on ethics with letter 2 from the first book of Ficino's correspondence (Ficino, *Lettere I*), *Quae sit ad felicitatem via* (Reusner, *Ethica philosophica*).

32. Letter 106 is titled *Virtutum definitio, officium, finis* (Ficino, *Lettere I*, 184–85; Reusner, 124r–125v).

33. The paragraph can be found, for instance, in works by Giovanni Battista Bernardo Farnese (Farnese, 596), Joseph Lang (Lang, 700), Giovanni Domenico Peri (Peri, 2:9), and Francesco Strada (Strada, 530).

2.2. Truth on the education of a prince

The letter *Veritas de institutione principis* (Truth on the education of a prince) dates to the same period as the letter *De officiis*. It is dated 1 February 1477 in the key manuscript;³⁴ however, Ficino only included it in his fifth book of letters.³⁵ As with *De officiis*, the content relates closely to the addressee, but the issues are of a general nature and are presented systematically.

The addressee of the letter *Veritas de institutione principis*, Cardinal Raffaele Sansoni Riario (1461–1521), was one of Ficino's important correspondents engaged in contemporary high politics. Ficino addressed ten letters in total to him, and *Veritas de institutione principis* was one of the earliest and certainly the most famous. Riario, whose mother was Pope Sixtus IV's sister, became a cardinal at the age of sixteen when he was a student at the University of Pisa and the titular bishop of San Giorgio al Velabro in Rome. It is this event to which Ficino's letter relates, hinting at the young age of the cardinal and the difficulties of the office arising from that.

Riario's church career did not go well at the beginning. When Ficino was writing his letter—in which, among other things, he appeals to the young cardinal to choose to surround himself with good people—Riario was sent to Florence where Jacopo Bracciolini became his secretary. Three months later, Bracciolini took part in the plot against the Medici, led by Riario's father, Girolamo, and the Pazzi family, supported by Pope Sixtus IV, which culminated in an assassination attempt resulting in the murder of Giuliano de' Medici during Sunday Mass in Florence Cathedral, while his brother, Lorenzo, escaped.³⁶

Riario apparently did not take part in the conspiracy, so his subsequent imprisonment was rather to protect him from the raging mob of Florentines searching for and punishing the murderers. However, by September of the same year he became the archbishop of Pisa, replacing Francesco Salviati, who had been executed as one of the Pazzi conspirators. After that, Riario held high positions in the Roman church up to 1501 when he fled Rome and the tyranny of Pope Alexander VI of the House of Borgia. He returned to Rome with his uncle,

34. The manuscript is in Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, sign. Magl. VIII, 1441 (Ficino, *The Letters*, Volume 4, 139–42).

35. The letter from the *editio princeps* (Ficino, *Epistolae*, 105r–106v) bears the number 27 in the English translation (Ficino, *The Letters*, Volume 4, 37–42).

36. On the conspiracy see Martines.

Alexander VI's successor, Julius II, and again fell into disfavour in 1517 due to his passive participation in the plot against Pope Leo X, whom he was allegedly supposed to replace on the papal throne after the assassination. Despite the reconciliation between the two dignitaries in 1518, Riario never regained his previous influence, and in 1520 he left for Naples where he died a year later.³⁷

Riario was a voracious collector of classical antique sculpture and a lover of ancient theatre. He played an important role in the revival of Roman comedy, namely the plays of Terence and Plautus. He maintained an extensive correspondence network in the first decades of the sixteenth century—including, for example, Erasmus of Rotterdam, whom he knew personally, regarding the publication of his *New Testament* and the Johannes Reuchlin affair.³⁸ Riario was the cardinal protector of the Augustinian order. He was Michelangelo's patron in Rome, and his Roman circle made an effort to combine Augustinian mysticism with Cicero and Vergil.³⁹

These intellectual interests of his might have been influenced partly by Ficino's correspondence. A number of Ficino's letters were addressed to the young cardinal even before the murderous events in Florence Cathedral; however, only *Veritas de institutione principis*⁴⁰ was included in this publication. Riario kept in contact with Ficino even after the Pazzi conspiracy, as letters from the following period show. In a letter to Riario dated 1491, Ficino says that the letters he addressed to him are known not only in Italy but also in Spain, France, Germany, and the Kingdom of Hungary.⁴¹ Most likely he meant *Veritas* in particular.

In respect to its genre, *Veritas de institutione principis* can be considered to belong to the long tradition of so-called "mirrors for princes"⁴² which reached its peak at the beginning of the sixteenth century with the book by Erasmus of

37. On Riario's biography see Ficino, *The Letters, Volume 4*, 184–85.

38. The relationship between these figures was described by Peter Bietenholz ("Erasmus und die letzten Lebensjahre Reuchlins").

39. Edgar Wind mentions Riario's activities (Wind, 215).

40. The letter bears the number 27 (book 4) in the English translation (Ficino, *The Letters, Volume 4*, 37–42).

41. Ficino says it in letter 6 (book 11), entitled *Purgatio de litteris non redditis* (Ficino, *The Letters, Volume 10*, 8). On the relationship between Ficino and Riario see Kristeller ("Marsilio Ficino and the Roman Curia," 272–73).

42. The detailed interpretation of the letter was provided by Ursula Tröger (Tröger, 235–86).

Rotterdam, *The Education of a Christian Prince (Institutio principis Christiani)*.⁴³ Their purpose is to provide advice on how to educate a young ruler so that the country flourishes under his reign. In the case of Ficino's letter, the advice is given to the young prince himself, to the church dignitary, on how to act for his own benefit and for the benefit of the church. Thematically, the letter is closely related to the letter *De officiis*. However, as a mirror for princes, Ficino's letter to Riario is very specific, due to the special position of the addressee who is, on the one hand, a church dignitary and, on the other, a very young ruler. That is reflected in the content of the letter.

To emphasize the urgency and importance of the message of this key letter to Riario, Ficino uses the rhetorical device of personification. It is not Ficino who speaks; it is *Truth* herself who speaks to Riario about the education of a prince. She speaks, of course, through Ficino's voice and, at the end, recommends him for the attention and favour of the cardinal. It is striking to have Truth demanding the cardinal's attention, and further rhetorical devices and metaphors borrowed from the classical tradition are used: Truth is unclothed, unarmed, not clad in the beauty of words but beautiful by herself, being the brightest of lights.⁴⁴ The personification of Truth also makes it possible for Ficino to join in the contemporary criticism of the luxury in which the highest representatives of the church lived. After all, who other than Truth should tell the truth about the fact that luxury is far removed from the apostolic mission; that he who does not live in apostolic holiness, but cares for his own welfare without concern for the welfare of the church, is not a cardinal but sacrilegious person.⁴⁵

The entire letter can be divided in several parts. After the introduction, where Truth introduces herself as the speaker of the letter, church issues come into play, i.e., an explanation of why such a young person has been chosen for the cardinal's mission and what duties it brings to Riario. Here Ficino strictly distinguishes between Fortune and Providence, as in other letters (e.g., one

43. The possibility cannot be excluded that Ficino's letter influenced Erasmus as he wrote *Institutio principis Christiani*, but this specific topic has not been dealt with in detail yet. Erasmus was familiar with Ficino's writings and their influence can be found in both *Enchiridion militis Christiani* and *Laus stultitiae* (Kristeller, "Erasmus from an Italian Perspective").

44. Ursula Träger identified the classical sources (Cicero, Seneca, Augustinus, Lactantius) of Ficino's metaphors (Tröger, 243).

45. "Furthermore, they should do, think, and speak nothing which is unworthy of apostolic sanctity. Those who do the contrary are not cardinals but robbers of the Church. They are not vicars of the Apostles, but their enemies" (Ficino, *The Letters*, Volume 4, 39).

dealing with astrology),⁴⁶ and he considers Riario's selection exclusively as an act of divine wisdom. The above-mentioned criticism of wealth and lavishness also forms part of this section. In the final section, Ficino focuses on advice to the young cardinal as a prince. It is based on a Platonic care of the soul: living in morality, cultivating virtues, and endeavouring to gain wisdom.

The fact that a cardinal is the successor of the apostles and, at the same time, a secular prince results in a position of both servant and sovereign. As a servant, he is subject to divine laws; as a sovereign, he rules over "outer servants." Here, Ficino places emphasis on the equality of all members of humanity and on love as the power that can unite all humanity. He does so in compliance with his metaphysics of love and with the heritage of Stoic philosophy. On the metaphorical level, "reign" also means the reign of reason over senses. The crucial part of Ficino's advice to the prince is on ethical issues based on a Platonic understanding of the soul, i.e., that a leading position is given to reason in order to control greed and short temper.

What links Ficino's letter to the tradition of mirrors for princes is its emphasis on correctly selecting advisors and the warning against flatterers and fawners in the final part of the letter. Besides that, the emphasis on humility, resulting from the correct handling of the office and related duties, and on responsibility and sensibility, as belonging to a superior ethical category, makes the letter a work of ethics, which can be ranked among letters with moral implications: a *paraenesis*. However, here ethical issues are dealt with more systematically than in a simple rhetorical appeal. Moreover, it was the systematic conception of ethical content within the frame of popular mirrors for princes aimed at their education that ensured the future popularity of the letter. Short in length, it was destined to become the alternative to Erasmus's much more extensive book, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, as is suggested by the separate edition of the letter in 1519, the period shortly after two Basel editions of Erasmus's work appeared in 1516 and 1518.⁴⁷

46. It can be found in letter 46 (book 5) entitled *Prospera in fato fortuna. Vera in virtute felicitas* (Ficino, *The Letters*, Volume 4, 61–63).

47. On the content of the edition, see note 7.

3. Czech translations of Ficino's letters

From the point of view of the legacy of Ficino's *epistolarium*, the existence of Czech translations is exceptional as there are not many translations of the letters into the vernacular. Besides the Italian (Tuscan), and these Czech translations, there is one more translation of a letter, into German. Ficino himself strove to have his works translated into Italian, and most likely the first book of his *epistolarium* was translated into his mother tongue by the author himself, though it was not published. It was in the middle of the sixteenth century when Felice Figliucci published his two-volume translation of all twelve books of letters with the omission of about ninety letters.⁴⁸ In German, the letter to Riario, *Veritas de institutione principis*, was the only letter out of all Ficino's correspondence that was translated in the sixteenth century.⁴⁹ This same letter was translated twice at the beginning of the sixteenth century into Czech—first, with the letter *De officiis* and then with so-called duodecalogues, i.e., the spiritual, ascetic works of Ficino's contemporary Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.⁵⁰

3.1 The first Czech translation of *Epistolae duae*

A number of questions remain unresolved concerning the first edition of Ficino's letters in Czech. Only the publishing house is certain. The book was printed by the so-called "Printer of the Prague Bible," which was the largest print shop in Bohemia at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century. The printer himself is of uncertain identity: earlier identified with Johann Camp, the printer is today considered more likely to have been the rich Prague merchant Severinus; he and later his son were the owners of the printing shop. In any case, the printer was of Utraquist inclination, meaning he belonged to the church derived from John Hus and the Hussite Reformation of the fifteenth century; his first print in 1488 was the so-called Prague Bible, which was the translation of

48. A modern facsimile reprint of both volumes of Figliucci's translation (Ficino, *Le divine lettere del gran Marsilio Ficino. Tomo primo* and *Tomo secondo*) was prepared by Sebastiano Gentile (Ficino, *Le divine lettere del gran Marsilio Ficino*, trans. Figliucci).

49. Ficino, *Ein Sendbrief*.

50. An old Czech translation of Giovanni Pico was analyzed by Tomáš Nejeschleba ("Dignity or Misery of Man?").

the Holy Word into Czech.⁵¹ Moreover, the year of publication of the edition of Ficino's letters in Czech is uncertain. It was once thought to be around 1500, but recently the dating has been moved forward to between 1501 and 1506, following an analysis of the diacritics of the printed letters.⁵²

Finally, even the name of the translator and his motivation are uncertain, for the edition is neither signed nor introduced by any foreword. Out of the small group of Czech intellectuals of the given period, only two seem to be good candidates for its authorship: Viktorin Kornel of Věšhrad (Victorinus Cornelius, 1460–1520) and Řehoř Hrubý of Jelení (1460–1514). The former was a close friend of probably the most important Czech humanist of the fifteenth century, Bohuslav Hasištejnský (Hassenstein) of Lobkovic (Bohuslaus Hassensteinus a Lobkowicz, 1461–1510), the owner of a large library containing one manuscript and ten prints of Ficino's works, including the *editio princeps* (Venetian) of his letters.⁵³ Nevertheless, Viktorin Kornel, who was a jurist, usually translated only church authors, such as John Chrysostom and Cyprian, into Czech, and there is no evidence that he occupied himself with contemporary Italian humanism. Viktorin Kornel never mentions Ficino in any of his works. In addition, the relationship between Hasištejnský and Viktorin Kornel had changed due to confessional reasons as early as 1494. While Hasištejnský was Catholic and pleaded for bringing Utraquists back to the Roman church, Viktorin Kornel as an Utraquist radically refused the attempt to unify Czech churches.⁵⁴ He had broken with Hasištejnský after 1494 and therefore had no access to his library⁵⁵ and could hardly have shared his interest in Ficino's books.

51. Summary information can be found in the chapter "The Printer of the 1488 Bible (Prague)" in Boldan, Neškudla, and Voit, 91–100.

52. This conclusion was reached by Petr Voit (Boldan, Neškudla, and Voit, 99).

53. Hasištejn was a leading figure of humanism in Bohemia; see below. From his studies in Bologna and Ferrara he brought love to humanistic poetry, literature, and also book culture such that he gradually bought books for his library, containing at the end about eight hundred volumes. Incunabulas of Ficino's writings comprised a part of it and included editions of Mercurius Trismegistus (1471), *Theologia platonica* (1482), *Platonis opera* (1484), *De vita* (1489), *Plotini opera* (1492), *De sole et lumine* (1493), *Epistolae* (1495), *Commentaria in Platonem* (1496), and *Jamblichi de mysteriis et alia* (1497). The manuscript, which was a part of the library as well, contains excerpts from different translations by Ficino of classical philosophers and originated no earlier than 1492. See Karfik, "Ficiniana v knihovně Bohuslava Hasištejnského z Lobkovic" and "Bohuslav von Lobkowicz."

54. Pražák, *Řehoř Hrubý z Jelení*, 25–26.

55. This circumstance is emphasized by Jan Martínek (Martínek, 94).

Řehoř Hrubý of Jelení is far more likely to be the author of the translation of Ficino's letters. An autodidact, renowned at present as the author of the first translation of Erasmus's *Laus Stultitiae* into the Czech vernacular,⁵⁶ he published in 1501 with the same publisher, i.e., the Printer of the Prague Bible, his translation of Petrarch's *De remediis utriusque fortunae*.⁵⁷ Hrubý then translated into Czech a number of other works of Petrarch and other Italian humanists, such as Giovanni Pontano and Lorenzo Valla. He was therefore clearly interested in contemporary authors and praised Plato, though he did not follow Platonic philosophy as such. In the commentary to his translation of Erasmus's *Laus stultitiae*, Hrubý shares Ficino's praise of Plato as he maintains:

And thus all those were cited and also many were named who were filled with *studia humanitatis*, that is poets, orators, and historians, and mostly Plato's teaching which Plato learned, as St. Augustine and St. Ambrose believe, in Egypt from Jewish tradition. And this Plato was rejected by our professors and they read and follow only Aristotle, although Plato is much nearer the Christian truth than all the other philosophers.⁵⁸

Finally, Hrubý was without any doubt familiar with Ficino's work, for he explicitly makes reference to him twice in the foreword and in the exposition to his translation of Erasmus's *Laus stultitiae*.⁵⁹

Hrubý mentions Ficino first as a translator, who, according to him, shares with Cicero and Erasmus the method of translating not word for word but according to meaning, which enables the addition of new words in the target language where they are needed.⁶⁰ Ficino was very well known as a translator among the fifteenth-century Czech learned society. In the library of Hasištejnský, Ficino's translations of Plato, Plotinus, Hermes Trismegistus, and Jamblichus were included, and the translations of Plato and Hermes Trismegistus in particular

56. See Svatoš.

57. For the translation of Petrarca (*Kniehy dvoje o lékařství*) see Boldan, Neškudla, and Voit, 98.

58. Cited according to František Novotný (Novotný, 403–04).

59. Pražák, "České humanistické překlady," 323.

60. Hrubý speaks about Ficino in the so-called "Big collection of translations" preserved in manuscript form in the Czech National Library, Prag, Sig. XVII.D.38, p. 127v.

were read by the owner, for they contain Hasištejnský's marginal notes.⁶¹ In addition, between 1484 and 1494 Plato's *The Republic* was translated into Czech by the scribe Matyáš for the Utraquist Moravian politician Ctibor Tovačovský of Cimburk. Although the translation is now lost, it is known that it was done from Ficino's translation and edition.⁶²

The second explicit reference to Ficino made by Hrubý can be found in his exposition of Erasmus. According to Hrubý, Ficino knew that offices were often held by proud and bad people and that this was the reason why offices were not always considered suitable for good people. This is also, Hrubý says, why Ficino himself did not aim for offices and did not accept them when they were offered to him. One can find the same approach to offices in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Erasmus of Rotterdam, Hrubý adds.⁶³ Hrubý's description of Ficino's attitude toward holding office could be derived from the beginning of the letter *De officiis*, the first of Ficino's works translated into Czech. From Ficino's words—that he does not pay as much attention to duties (offices) as they deserve and that a philosopher is rather an inhabitant of the heavens than of the world—Hrubý inferred Ficino's alleged refusal to hold offices.

Hrubý's relation to the printer of the Prague Bible, publisher of the Czech translation of Ficino's letters, his references to Ficino, and his relations to contemporary authors all combine to suggest that this autodidact from Jelení might have been the first translator of Marsilio Ficino into the Czech vernacular.

3.2 The second translation of *Veritas de institutione principis*

The second edition of Ficino in Czech is all but unknown. It is a translation of only one of Ficino's letters, but it is the same as one of the two included in the first edition, i.e., the letter to Riario, *Veritas de institutione principis*. It was published in 1520 in Bělá pod Bezdězem in the printing shop of Oldřich Velenský of Mnichov (Ulrichus Velenus, 1495–1531), who was with all probability the author of this new translation as well. It was entitled *Spis vtipný, kterak Pravda*

61. The analysis of Hasištejn's Ficiniiana was carried out by Filip Karfik in "Ficiniiana v knihovně Bohuslava Hasištejnského," 101.

62. I am following the interpretation made by Emil Pražák ("Český překlad Platonovy Politeie z 15. století").

63. Řehoř Hrubý included his translation of Erasmus in *Velký sborník překladů* (Big collection of translations, 450r), see above, note 60.

k kardinálu Riarovi přišla (A witty treatise on how the truth came to Cardinal Riario). This edition is supplemented by a translation of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's short texts *Twelve Rules* (*Duodecim regulae*), *Twelve Weapons of Spiritual Battle* (*Duodecim arma spiritualis pugnae*), and *Twelve Qualities of a Lover* (*Duodecim conditiones amantis*).⁶⁴

The question arises whether Velenský knew the older translation of Ficino's letter published by the Printer of the Prague Bible. Emil Pražák, the author of the only previous article on translations of Ficino's letter into Czech, states that Velenský could not have been familiar with the older translation because his own is completely different.⁶⁵ Several years later, Pražák, the same author, in his article on Velenský states the opposite but with the same reasoning. Velenský must have been familiar with the older translation, because his own is completely different. Pražák affirms that Velenský was endeavouring to demonstrate a new stylistic ideal created according to classical models and diverging from his predecessors and their stylistic norms. In his new style, Velenský uses Latin syntactic tools and omits synonyms and specifies adjectives to create a text very close to its original. Therefore, the aim of his edition was to surpass the older translation by means of better stylistic fidelity to the original texts. This is why Velenský chose from a number of Ficino's letters the one that had already been translated into Czech. His goal was to show his new translation approach.⁶⁶

Although this interpretation sounds reasonable, it addresses only the formal aspects and completely neglects the content of the letters translated, as if it had no bearing on the translator's motive. What role would have been played in this case by the translation of Pico, which supplements Ficino's letter? And what was the motivation of the first translator? Regarding content, both of Ficino's letters are systematizing works of moral philosophy. Moreover, the moral content was a particular reason for their positive reception in the sixteenth century. We may also assume that in the Czech circumstances it was the moral content that made the letters interesting works to translate.

64. The authors wrongly describe the supplement as "a disquisition from the work of Giovanni Francesco Pico on the character of a Christian knight" (Boldan, Neškudla, and Voit, 162). In fact, it is a text by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, not by his nephew Gianfrancesco, of three so-called "duodecalogues," which as ascetic-moral writings were very popular in the sixteenth century with the beginning of Thomas More's translations from 1510 (see Parks).

65. Pražák, "České humanistické překlady," 323.

66. Pražák, "Oldřich Velenský a cesta českého humanismu k světovosti," 452.

4. Moral interests of Czech translators

It is often said that both Hrubý and Velenský tried to fulfil the program of so-called Czech national humanism, which lay in translating into Czech important works and thus making them available to a population not reading in Latin.⁶⁷ That means that the choice of authors and the content of their works being translated are crucial and more important than formal aspects.

It is obvious that the moral content of both letters was in full agreement with the interests of Czech intellectuals at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Viktorin Kornel, whom I have already mentioned as a possible but not very probable translator of Ficino's letters in the first edition, supposedly created a program of so-called Czech national humanism⁶⁸ at the end of the fifteenth century. The main points of this program are derived from the dedication to his translation of Chrysostomus's *Libri de reparatione Lapsi* (*Knihy o napravení padlého, Books about the Rectification of the Fallen*), where Viktorin Kornel encouraged the cultivation of the Czech language by means of translations of classical authors into Czech. According to him, a higher moral level can be attained for society by reading classical authors than by preaching and devout singing alone.⁶⁹ Viktorin Kornel himself focused on patristic authors in accordance with the tradition of the Hussite church, the Utraquist church, to which he had personally converted. According to earlier generations of Czech historians, the particularity of this "program" rises from the specific social and cultural background of fifteenth-century Czech society which was confessionally divided. Thus, Catholic authors, and Hasištejnský above all, followed the Italian humanistic movement with its Latin literature based on classical sources, while the Utraquists, following the Hussite reformation, were suspicious of any influence coming from Catholic Italy. It led to a certain isolation of the majority of intellectuals, especially at Prague University. Viktorin Kornel's dedication, clearly influenced by the rise of translations into the vernacular in Germany, corresponds with the social and cultural milieu and supposedly can be viewed as a manifestation of a new era of literary production. Although this concept of Czech national humanism was recently criticized as a construct of twentieth-century Czech historiography influenced by the nineteenth-century

67. Pražák, "Oldřich Velenský a cesta českého humanismu k světovosti," 450.

68. On the issue and discussion, compare with Neškudla, "Czech National Humanism."

69. Quoted by Pražák (*Řehoř Hrubý z Jelení: studie s ukázkami z díla*, 27).

National Revival and supported by Marxist ideology,⁷⁰ nobody can deny that the programmatic text of Viktorin Kornel exists and had its followers even if they were few in number. In this context, however, the question rises: Why were letters of a contemporary Catholic writer, Marsilio Ficino, translated?

Hrubý, doubtless Viktorin Kornel's follower, extended his translation activities to both classical authors and contemporary humanists. Hrubý translated, as had Viktorin Kornel, a number of works of patristic authors such as Chrysostom, Cyprian, and Origen. His translations also included works by Cicero, *Laelius de Amicitia* and *Paradoxa*. Modern authors, however, prevail in the list of Hrubý's translations. Apart from the already mentioned Petrarch's *De remediis utriusque fortunae*, Hrubý translated his *Epistolae sine titulo* and focused in particular on works by Giovanni Pontano: *De fortitudine libri duo*, *De principe liber unus*, *Charon*, *De oboedientia libri quinque*, and *De beneficentia liber unus*. Hrubý also translated commentaries to three proverbs from Erasmus's *Adagia* and above all his *Laus Stultitiae*. Lorenzo Valla's *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione declamatio* is also included in the list of his translations.⁷¹

Only a few of these translations were printed: Petrarch, Chrysostom, and, provided he was the translator, Ficino's letters. The rest of the translations are available only in manuscript form. According to certain historians, Hrubý seems not to have been satisfied with the technical possibilities of printing of his time, for they did not allow him to publish his explanatory notes in columns next to the translated texts.⁷² He consequently later chose manuscripts of large collections as a medium for his translations. These manuscripts were given as gifts to specific recipients, to councillors of the Prague town hall, or to the Czech king. His works were therefore not widespread and did not make a major impact.

Velenský, the translator of the second edition, ranked among the following generation of Czech intellectuals. Although his stylistic ideals differed from that of Hrubý, his interests were similar. He published his only book written in Latin in Basel and Augsburg in 1520 under the title *Petrum Romam non venisse*.⁷³ In it, as a member of the Unity of the Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum*), he

70. A critique of the concept was made by Eduardo Fernández Couceiro ("O národním humanismu").

71. Pražák, "Místo Řehoře Hrubého," 43–47.

72. This is the explanation offered by historians of book printing (Neškudla, "Řehoř Hrubý z Jelení").

73. Antonie Jan Lamping offers an analysis of the book in *Ulrichus Velenus*.

attacked the institution of the papacy. While Hrubý had the same goal in his translation of Valla's treatise on the *Donation of Constantine*, Velenský was more active in this field, for he also translated and published additional treatises against the papacy: Luther's *On the Venerable Sacrament of the Holy Righteous Body of Christ* (*O velebné svátosti*) and especially his *Interpretation of the Anti-Christ in the Vision of Daniel* (*Výklad o Antikristu na vidění Danielovo*). Like Hrubý, Velenský was interested in the works of Erasmus. In 1519 he published in his own printing shop his translation of Erasmus's *Enchiridion militis christiani*.⁷⁴ Shorter translations and printings followed—a translation of Lucian, an antipapal dialogue inspired by Lucian,⁷⁵ and Ficino's letter to Riario, extended by Pico's duodecalogues.

Pico's duodecalogues are short, spiritual incentives on how to lead an ascetic life imitating Christ, which seem to differ only in form from his other works. In the sixteenth century, they enjoyed a wide reception throughout the antagonistic confessional camps particularly, thanks to their spiritual and moral content, and they inspired, among others, Erasmus's *Enchiridion*.⁷⁶ Lucian's works, too, were translated into Latin by Erasmus and became popular thanks to the satirical criticism of manners which was frequently used in anti-Roman polemic. The edition of Erasmus is therefore connected with the edition of Ficino by the practical moral issues which both writings were dealing with. After all, Velenský himself created a link between his edition of Erasmus's antipapal works and Ficino's letter to Riario together with Pico's duodecalogues. In the preface to the translation of Erasmus's *Enchiridion*, he mentioned that Pico, when young, wrote articles against the Roman church and was persecuted, like Erasmus and Luther, who were excommunicated at that time.⁷⁷ The edition of Ficino's letter was therefore important for Velenský, due not only to stylistic issues but especially to its moral content, which was in concord with his other translation activities.⁷⁸

74. Boldan, Neškudla, and Voit, 163.

75. On the reception of Lucian in Bohemia, see Novák.

76. Nejeschleba, 209.

77. Velenský probably derives his interpretation of Pico's hostility to the pope from his *Conclusiones* to which he referred, and which were considered heretical. Then Velenský makes this reference a part of his own anti-papal strategy (Boldan, Neškudla, and Voit, 163, 166).

78. Still, it cannot be ruled out that Velenius did not know the earlier translation. He could have been inspired by the Basel edition of the letter to Riario from 1519.

It is therefore apparent that the moral content of Ficino's letters was the reason why these were translated into Czech, for it was in accord with the translation program of Czech intellectuals of that time. Marsilio Ficino was accepted by the Czech learned society of the beginning of the sixteenth century—specifically as the author of moral treatises and perhaps with a vague connection to political notions, as the lost translation of Plato's *Republic*, which was connected with Hrubý's later translations of Pontano's treatises,⁷⁹ indicates.

In the light of Czech translations of Ficino, it seems that he was reduced by Czech humanists to an author of moral philosophy. This was not only the case for the so-called Czech national humanism, but also for Latin humanism of Czech provenance of that time. Hasištejnský, the main figure of Bohemian Latin humanism, who wrote Latin poetry and literature⁸⁰ and was the owner of Ficino's printed editions—which included not only the letters and Plato's opera but also *Platonic Theology* and *Three Books on Life*—had no interest in his metaphysics or natural philosophy. Around 1500, Jan Šlechta of Všehrad (1466–1522),⁸¹ a close friend of Hasištejnský, wrote a Latin book entitled *Microcosm*, which was probably influenced by his reading of Ficino. Later, however, Hasištejnský advised Šlechta to deal with moral philosophy instead of writing such a useless thing. Hasištejnský discouraged him so much that Šlechta did not print it and probably himself destroyed the manuscript. From the correspondence of both humanists, we can only deduce that the book dealt with differences between Aristotle's interpreters Alexander of Aphrodisias and Averroes on the immortality of the soul.⁸² Thus, the influence of either Ficino's *Platonic Theology* or Ficino's letters dealing with this topic is more than probable, since Šlechta could read both editions in Hasištejnský's library.

5. Conclusion

The Czech reception of Ficino's letters was in tune with their reception in Europe in the sixteenth century and unique at the same time. It was unique first

79. Pražák, "Český překlad Platonovy Politeie z 15. století."

80. The edition of Hasištejnský's Latin poetry was prepared by Marta Vaculínová (Hessensteinus a Lobkowicz, *Opera poetica*).

81. Jan Šlechta, a nephew of Viktorin Kornel, studied in Prague and had a diplomatic career in Buda. He kept a correspondence network with a number of humanists, such as Erasmus, Conrad Celtis, Olomouc bishop and humanist Augustin Käsénbrot, and others.

82. This interpretation was offered by Stanislav Sousedík (Sousedík, 37–44).

because it was confined to creating Czech translations, and second because the letter *Veritas de institutione principis* was translated twice within the first two decades of the sixteenth century and enables comparisons between strategies and styles of translations.

However, out of the whole collection of Ficino's correspondence, the same two letters received special attention in Germany. The letter *De officiis* was published separately four times during the same period (twice in Leipzig, once in Magdeburg, once in Basel). The relative popularity of the letter in Germany can be explained by means of its connections with Cicero's book *De officiis*, at least with respect to its title. Cicero's book belonged to the most frequently printed incunabula in the second half of the fifteenth century in Germany. It played the role of an important source describing civic duties that can be applicable for the duties of magistrates.⁸³

The letter to Riario was published separately twice in Germany, in a Latin version (Basel) and as a German translation (Nuremberg). With respect to its content, by which the letter can be characterized as a mirror for princes, it can be connected with Erasmus's popular *Institutio principis Christiani*.

It is possible that the contact the Czech humanists had with the German lands played some role in the selection of the works. However, this is pure speculation and would relate only to the translation of *De officiis*, as the Czech translation of the letter to Riario preceded German editions. In any case, both letters were accepted particularly for their moral content. They show Marsilio Ficino as a humanist moral philosopher who is concerned with the restoration of morals, which also implies criticism of the contemporary state of society and church. That might have been the reason for the positive reception of the letters in Czech Utraquist and Czech Brethren circles—as shown by their translations into Czech.

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83. See Friedeburg.

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