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ON THE CURRENT LOCATION OF THE OLD PRUSSIAN "TRACE OF BASEL"

The reason underlying the choice of the current location of the Trace of Basel[1] could be found in the talking drawing around which it was written[2]. It is the "visual" element of the *colophon*[3] that underlies the motive for the inclusion of the micro text in the page [Fig. 75][4].

The *colophon* consists of two complementary modules which should be considered as a whole.

The first includes the textual part (three lines and a hexameter, penned in a Gothic cursive rather *formata*) [Fig. 76, 25], which offers a diachronic collocation of the copy and, from the second line below, gradually introduces the expression of the subject which the author of the *colophon* seems more interested in, that is, expressing his state of mind.

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[1] About the name "Trace of Basel", "Traccia di Basilea" and "TB" cf. D i n i 2004 and *infra*.

[2] For preliminary information on the "non-linguistic" aspects of TB, cf. A r d o i n o 2012a; 2012b; 2012c; for general information, cf. D i n i 1997, 405–408; M c C l u s k e y, S c h m a l s t i e g, Z e p s 1975.

[3] The *colophon* is the main between "*les points stratégiques du texte*" (D e B i a s i 1990) and, thus, between the complements the scribe could include in his own copy. This is a device which is placed at the end of the *opus scriptorium*, containing information of various kind, typically the date and the location of the copy, the name of the author, the name of the copyist and, therefore, his intentions, desires, complaints, (more or less pious) appeals etc. Transcribing was a rather thankless task due to both the difficulty inherent in the process itself and the compulsory invisibility and anonymity the copyist had to maintain. Both of these circumstances tended to obliterate the scribe's identity in proportion to his ability and this, as one can well imagine, could be exceptionally frustrating at times. For this reason the *colophon* assumed a large value for the copyist, representing the only place where he, besides providing information about the copied work, could disclose and express his individuality.

[4] The references in brackets refer to the reproductions presented in A r d o i n o 2012b.

The second module [Fig. 77, 24], which is to be found in the talking drawing, is fully dedicated to the copyist's emotional side and is introduced by the formulaic hexameter that concludes the first module and constitutes so to speak a "bridge", a *trait d'union* between the two. The *colophon*, therefore, consists not only of an "analytical-discursive" but also of a "synthetic-figurative" expression, thus highlighting its potential for "hyper communicative resource" (Bartoli Làngeli 1995, 5).
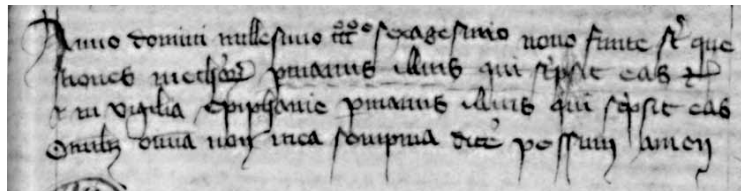
Anno domini millesimo cᵒcᵒcᵒ ſexagesimo nono finite sunt que
ſtiones metheororum per manus illius qui scripsit eas et
*c in vigilia epiphanie per manus illius qui scripsit ea*s
Omnibus omnia non mea sompnia dicere possum amen

The *colophon* on the whole does not indicate any difficulty in reading or in language itself, but it seems rather vague and ambiguous[5]. This indeterminacy, however, disappears starting from the formulaic hexameter[6], the ge-

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[5] Some indexes seem to relate the person who introduced the *colophon* with the ecclesiastical environment:

- the choice of the impersonal form *finite sunt* "are over" hides the agent and is likely to be adopted to conceal, out of humility, the identity of the copyist. Not mentioning his own name as a sign of modesty before God is a stylistic device commonly used in religious environment;
- the periphrase <*per manus illius qui scripsit eas* (*scil. questiones*)>, which typologically constitutes a module that focuses on establishing the identity of the scribe (who speaks of himself in third person), once again out of modesty tends to conceal it. Such reticence is as well a fairly common attitude to the copyists working in religious centers;
- the expression <*amen*>, which typically closes prayers and liturgical forms, was inserted at the end of the formulaic hexameter;
- although the apostrophe of the drawing is clearly aimed at the readers, it is actually addressed to Jesus;
- in order to indicate the day on which the copy was completed the copyist refers to the Christian feast of Epiphany <*in vigilia epiphanie*> and its *vigilia*, which in classical terms indicates the vigil (the copyist would in this way show it to be dutiful to work at night) and in religious terms the day before a feast, on which the fasting prevailed (in this case the condition of abstinence would help to highlight the discomfort presented in the talking drawing).

The name of God is actually also mentioned by the hand that completed the *questiones* (<*et sic est finis questionum Oren super methororum ad honorem Dei gloriosi amen Deo gracias*>) [Fig. 78, 01] and by the one that wrote the *registrum* (<*Et tantum de questionibus methororum magistri •N•Orem deo gracias*>) [Fig. 79, 02]. Thus it seems that the hand which completed the *questiones* (which, to my belief, could be the same one that introduced the *colophon*) and the one to which the *tabula quaestionum* can be ascribed, both refer to a religious environment (cf. A r d o i n o 2012a).

[6] This is a verse recurring in more *colophon* that, like many others, on one hand manifests a polyvalent semantics (that is, sufficiently vague as to be applicable to most situations), and on the other shows a great attention paid from the formal point of view. It is a holodactylic hexameter (moved by a quick and articulate rhythm) which, except for the fifth foot – the most defining – in arsis always has the vowel <o> (the choice of the hexameter refers to an age-old practice: since ancient times it became the verse deputed for riddles and *sententiae*). Most likely its rhythm and cliché character may have had some weight on the entrance of TB in the page, a proverb characterized by a pronounced rhythmic structure and numerous figures of sound.

neric meaning of which (since interpretable in different ways depending on the context) is defined and further clarified by the talking drawing. In short, the reticence identified in the first part of the *colophon* (where any reference to the scribe's identity is eliminated) seems to mutate into a sort of "communicative emergency" leading the author of the *colophon* to express his condition of discomfort with an increasing intensity (the first person singular is used in both the formulaic line and the apostrophe in the drawing) firstly through the hexameter and then by representing himself iconically in the talking drawing, thus reaching the climax. To my belief, this shifting attitude suggests to think of the scribe as an impulsive and troubled young man rather than a mature person who, given the same situation, most likely would not have used such strong emotional expressions.

The most effective immediate care for those experiencing a hardship is to share the burden with someone else, which is precisely the purpose of the final part of the *colophon*, in which the scribe physically represents himself.

Although the drawing is a rather raw sketch with no particular artistic qualities[7], it conveys a very strong emotional charge. In fact, the drawing effectively exercises a strong fascination on the interlocutor, rendering the intents of the copyist with effectiveness otherwise difficult to reach. The appearance of the depicted person is eloquent: the stooped posture (the hump was often associated with the figure of *studiosus* and refers to the fatigue connected with the transcription itself) and the facial expression, which lacks any reference to a smile, manifests in physical suffering. The sense of discomfort (both physical and mental) is epitomized in the message conveyed in the banner, a kind of a cry for help which leads to the global organization of the figure fully directed to the left, which in its raised arm, disproportionate in size compared to the rest of the body, reaches its culmination. The raised right arm with the palm facing the interlocutor is a gesture of goodwill, greeting (the drawing is located at the end of both the copy and of the *colophon*), peaceful intent but also of surrender, of helplessness and of a cry for help. The arm directs the attention of the interlocutor from the figure to the message conveyed in the banner, wielded by an enormous, disproportionate hand which, like the *maniculae* it patently refers to [Fig. 70, 71, 72], further draws the attention to the message communicated in the banner.

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[7] Most likely, those which at first glance may seem long hair is actually a hood-shaped hat falling down the back, which was fashionable in a period that coincides with both the date indicated in the *colophon* and the one suggested by the watermark. About the clothing of the figure cf. B o l l o s i 1974, 43–44.

The phrase *<iħs ich leid >*[8] "Jesus, I am suffering"[9] performs the same function as balloon[10] and gives voice to the already eloquent figure[11].

The choice of the German language is most likely due to:

- the emotional tension of the moment (the scribe was probably very tired), which led the copyist to spontaneously use his own mother tongue, as if the message expressed in such way was more effective and sincere.
- the search for empathy, expressed by the drawing itself and the words it utters. The message expressed in the vane, even though is directed

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[8] K o r t l a n d t (1998a; 1998b) based his interesting and intriguing interpretation of TB on two assumptions:

- TB has been written by the same hand that wrote both the talking drawing and the message in the banner *<iħs ich leid>*;
- the copy of Oresme's *questiones* at the end of which TB was inserted originates from the University of Prague.

Moving from these assumptions he elaborates on his interpretation by using the words in the banner to explain:

- the origins of the author of TB
- the numerous and sometimes problematic final *-e* in the micro text.

Without expanding on the subject (I will deal with this topic in greater detail elsewhere) it is sufficient to say that the first premise to which Kortlandt refers is certainly false: the hand that inserted TB undoubtedly differs from the one that wrote *<iħs ich leid>* and is more recent. The second one is also almost certainly false, even though this issue is actually not so relevant to the study of TB. In fact it is by no means clear whether the copy of the *questiones* really comes from Prague.

[9] Schmalstieg presents an alternative reading of the message: "*My colleague, Professor A. Klimas of the University of Rochester points out to me that the German expression Jesus ich leid could possible be translated as 'Jesus I adore,' i.e., 'I adore Jesus' since at that time the verb leiden could mean 'to approve, to be fond of.*" (S c h m a l s t i e g 1982, 21). This is a rather weak hypothesis since it is in a clear contrast with both the attitude expressed by the figure and the message conveyed by the first module of the *colophon*. Moreover, if we accept the assumption of Klimas, we would expect the name of Jesus to be written in the accusative case, in the form *<iħm>*, instead of the actually attested nominative *<iħs>* (cf. C a p p e l l i 1973, 174–176). Such hypothesis would also result in a marked word order which is unusual in German.

[10] "*a rounded outline in which the words or thoughts of characters in a comic strip or cartoon are written*" (S o a n e s, S t e v e n s o n 2003, 124)

[11] Given that the two abbreviations are actually different (*<iħs>* vs *<i.h.s>*), *<iħs>* could be also resolved into *<in hoc sepulcro>* (C a p p e l l i 1973, 174–176). This might therefore be an amphibology sought by the scribe.

to Jesus, is in fact openly addressed to a multiplicity of interlocutors who could have read the page and, therefore, should have been able to understand it.

Both factors suggest that the person who made the drawing had definitely worked in a German-speaking environment (otherwise he would have used another language) and spoke German himself, probably as a native speaker.

A reader of the *colophon*, patently surprised by the meaning conveyed by the talking drawing (so strong as to be pathetic, almost grotesque) instinctively responded to the copyist by inserting an ironic and mocking micro text, probably a proverb or a saying, around the figure. The person who introduced the drawing wanted the readers to understand his message, wishing, as happens for example with the so-called "talking gravestones", to draw some relief from the empathy of others.

However, this goal could be achieved only if the eventual interlocutors understood the message, which must have been expressed in a language familiar in the environment in which the manuscript of Oresme's *questiones*

was present when the author of the drawing introduced it in the page.

On the contrary, a person who inserted TB did not worry about others grasping his message. He introduced the micro text spontaneously and instinctively by extracting it directly from his own cultural background (and thus retaining it in its original language[12]) for the sole purpose of mocking the one who had showed so clumsily such strong desire for compassion. Therefore, it does not seem surprising that the author of TB, while drawing it used his own mother tongue (or at least a language with which he had long been in contact), that is, a variety of Prussian or a Baltic dialect strictly adjacent to it.

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[12] Nothing that would recall TB or at least that would constitute its translation model has been found in the main repertory of medieval Latin proverbs and sayings (cf. W a l - t h e r 1965; W e r n e r 1966).

On the denomination of these two lines

The name "Traccia di Basilea" (that can be translated into English as "Trace of Basel") proposed by P. U. D i n i (2004) emerges from the absence of a specific word which would describe the record found in Basel and from the inadequacy[13] of the terms used up to now (essentially "epigram", "fragment" and "text").

What concerns the denominations "text" (which refers to a much broader textual dimension than the one exhibited in TB) and "fragment" (which refers either to an *exerptum* from a larger text or to the rest of a preceding ones) I concur with Dini. However, both terms (unlike the term "epigram") seem to be used in general terms without much regard to their specific meaning, so that in relation with TB they can be considered synonymous. The term "epigram" essentially refers to a particular metric matrix which, what concerns TB, is plausible though far from definitively proven. The term "epigram" refers to the following senses:

- an original and narrow meaning "*breve componimento poetico in origine di carattere funerario e in seguito di vario argomento, spec. satirico*" (D e M a u r o 2000, 831);
- a more extensive meaning "*frase o descrizione vivace, breve e incisiva*", (D e M a u r o 2000, 831), which leads to the usage of the term as a synonym for "aphorism", "witticism" and "slogan".

The features highlighted in the two definitions[14] are, therefore, those of brevity, vivid expression of the meaning and, especially in the first one, the presence of a metric structure. The new denomination which Dini suggests to apply to the Basel micro text is linked to the casual, coincidental character which TB seems to manifest and to the fact that it seems to be alien to the context in which it was inserted[15]. However, it has been shown that TB is not

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[13] "*Mi pare ben poco si possa obiettare circa l'ascrizione della scritta in prussiano antico di Basilea al genere epigrammatico, ritengo invece fuorviante la sua designazione come frammento e migliorabile (cioè ulteriormente precisabile) anche la sua generica designazione come testo.*" (D i n i 2004, 244).

[14] The meaning of Italian "epigramma" and English "epigram" is almost the same: epigram: "*a pithy sayng or remare expressing an idea in a clever and amusing way. (…) a short poem, especially a satirical one, with a witty or ingenious ending*" (S o a n e s, S t e v e n - s o n 2003, 583).

[15] "*vorrei attirare l'attenzione dei colleghi baltisti su un fenomeno grafico che nell'alto Medioevo occidentale acquistò diffusione generalizzata: le scritte avventizie. Si leggano le*

completely disconnected from the environment in which it is located. It is indeed the talking drawing around which TB was inserted that constitutes the cause for its insertion. It is also likely that the author of TB was not an occasional writer but rather a professional copyist who possibly compiled[16] the *registrum* or inserted some other element on the page (cf. Ardoino 2012a). These clarifications do not in anyway dissuade from adopting the technicality coined by Petrucci (1999) and adopted by Dini (2004) to designate the Basel micro text, since, compared to the prototypical definition of "trace", TB appears to be only slightly different. The Basel micro text, however, is a clearly adventitious record which is not completely *ab-solutum*, i.e. independent of the context to which it belongs, as it maintains a link with the talking drawing (i.e. an unusual iconic appendix of the *colophon*). Although some doubts concerning both the explanation of the micro text meaning and its hypothetical metric articulation remain, the adoption of the name *trace* seems rather useful. Hence the aforementioned neologism defines the Basel record much better than the partial and connotative terms "fragment", "text" and "epigram", while the neutral and hyperonimic denominations "micro text", "record" and "evidence" are excellent stylistic solutions to alternate with.

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seguenti definizioni tratte da uno studio di Armando Petrucci (1999) dedicato precisamente a questo fenomeno:' Esso consiste nella scritturazione, all'interno di spazi rimasti vuoti in codici già compiutamente scritti e corredati di ogni altro possibile accessorio, grafico e non, di microtesti di diversa natura ed estensione ad opera di scriventi occasionali. Si tratta, insomma, di un tipico fenomeno di reimpiego di un manufatto, già graficamente completo, per iscrivervi, ovunque fosse possibile, qualcosa di nuovo e di estraneo, a distanza di poco tempo o di qualche secolo'. [Petrucci 1999: 981-982] e 'La principale caratteristica dei microtesti avventizi è di essere estranei al testo o ai testi intorno ai quali si dispongono. Qui non si tratta dunque né di peritesto, né di paratesto... ma di testimonianze grafiche del tutto autonome, che si accompagnano solo in senso fisico ad un determinato testo, secondo scelte del tutto occasionali'. [Petrucci 1999: 983]'* (Dini 2004 *passim*).

[16] The hand which introduced the *registrum*, not the one which later traced it, using a different ink.

APIE PRŪSŲ „BAZELIO PĖDSAKO"
LOKALIZACIJĄ PUSLAPYJE

Santrauka

Remiantis kodikologine, paleografine ir filologine analize atskleidžiama, kad Bazelio epigrafas yra parašytas vėliau nei 1369 m., kaip iki šiol buvo manyta. Epigrafo įterpimą puslapyje lėmė kolofonas, ypač jo ikoniškasis priedas. „Pėdsakas" (ang. *trace*) atrodo pats geriausias pavadinimas mikrotekstui įvardyti.

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