Popular Manuscript Prayer Books in Early Modern Bohemia

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1. Introduction

As the Repertorium rukopisů 17. a 18. století z muzejních sbírek v Čechách (Inventory of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century manuscripts from museum collections in Bohemia, hereafter referred to as the Repertorium) reveals, the most common type of manuscript that has survived in Bohemia from this period is the prayer book, making up about a third of all those catalogued in the Repertorium. However, the level of interest these have received in the past does not quite reflect this. Around the time that the Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition was held (1895) they did receive some attention, but at the time the focus was almost entirely on their decorative features, and interest waned once more after a few years. As texts, prayer books – whether printed or handwritten – have attracted little attention from researchers in the past; among the few significant contributions to research in the field is Josef Vašica’s (1995: 161–74) study. This situation has only recently changed, and the number of

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1 This article is a reworking of part of the author’s unpublished dissertation Raněnovověké rukopisy v českých muzeích a možnosti jejich využití pro výzkum českého jazyka a literatury 17. a 18. století, defended in 2008 at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague. It is part of research project GA ČR P406/11/0782 Příprava a vydání Repertoria rukopisů 17. a 18. století z muzejních sbírek v Čechách III (P–Š) and the program for the development of academic subjects at Charles University, no. P12 Historie v interdisciplinární perspektivě, subsection Společnost, kultura a komunikace v českých dějinách.

2 Linda, Stich, Fidlerová, Šulcková, et al. 2003; Fidlerová, Bekešová, et al. 2007; the third volume, comprising museums in towns beginning with the letters P to Š, is currently in preparation. We refer to individual manuscripts by the numbers under which they are listed in the Repertorium.

3 The volumes of the Repertorium so far published record some 1100 surviving non-musical folk religious manuscripts (besides prayer books, which make up the majority of this production, these include various anthologies, prophecies, magical and astrological texts, and so on; see Kuchařová and Nešpor 2012: 313) dating from the eighteenth century (or in the case of transcriptions, the early nineteenth century) and preserved in Bohemia. This represents about a tenth of the total number of manuscripts of this type that Kuchařová and Nešpor (ibid: 311) estimate to have existed (including those from the nineteenth century, which are generally more numerous) throughout the Czech lands (including Moravia and Czech Silesia as well as Bohemia).

4 Articles published in Český lid in particular; for details see e.g. Nešpor 2007 and Čevelová 2010.
studies looking at these historical documents from various social science perspectives has risen substantially in recent years.\(^5\)

Our aim in this paper is to attempt to give an initial overview of surviving seventeenth- and eighteenth-century prayer book manuscripts from Bohemia as a handwritten medium that shifted, during the Early Modern period, from the realm of the elites\(^6\) into popular culture\(^7\) and became almost emblematic of the latter by the end of the eighteenth century. We base this overview largely on information provided in the volumes of the *Repertorium* that have so far been published, and in some cases we also make use of knowledge gained while preparing its further volumes. To begin with, we will look briefly at a few general reflections on the prayer book as a type of manuscript, its place within popular culture, the roles it played, and the ways it may have been received.

With respect to our main source, the *Repertorium*, two things may be noted: first, it is based only on collections in regional museums, and therefore does not include material held in private collections and other institutions; second, it is not yet complete, and therefore does not yet cover all collections in Bohemian museums. On the first point, it is important to add that we, and other scholars in the field (Kuchařová and Nešpor 2012: 314), believe that regional museum collections do indeed hold the majority of popular religious manuscripts.\(^8\) On the second, the volumes that have so far been published\(^9\) include materials from 94 museums and describe 3,298 manuscripts; statistically, this is a sufficiently representative sample of regional museum collections.\(^10\) Furthermore, the material included in the first two volumes fulfils random selection criteria in the sense that it was not selected by any method that would in itself have distorted the results obtained (such as if only certain regions, towns of a certain size, or selected dominant languages had been selected), but by a neutral method: individual museums are included in the *Repertorium* in alphabetical order according to the name of the town. The sections that have been published (A–O) cover the whole of the Bohemian territory.

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\(^6\) E.g. in Germany during the sixteenth century manuscript prayer books were largely produced for convents or for the nobility (see Ochsenbein 2003).

\(^7\) Like Nešpor (2007: 229) we consider “all manuscripts that were used first-hand by the less privileged classes, in particular in rural areas” as belonging to popular culture.

\(^8\) Elite manuscripts from monastic and aristocratic libraries are underrepresented in these collections, but they are not the focus of the present study.

\(^9\) The (relatively) complete *Repertorium*, i.e. volumes cataloguing all the regional museum collections in Bohemia outside Prague, is expected to be published in the early 2020s at the earliest.

\(^10\) It is important to remember that research into Early Modern prayer books is fundamentally always selective, and must be based on the evaluation of a specific sample, since we cannot access the entire production, due to the loss of materials over the past centuries. The question is therefore only whether the chosen sample is sufficiently broad and representative, and not whether we should be working with a sample at all.
relatively uniformly, including museums in both royal and servile towns, in predominantly Czech and predominantly German areas, in poor and wealthy regions, in places that fostered secret non-Catholic communities, and in places where as far as we know this was not the case. The large number of collections analyzed in the Repertorium is in itself notable, as it means that the material studied is not only very broad but also relatively unbiased in content, in terms of personal tastes and individuals’ means.11

2. The prayer book in popular culture during the Early Modern period

2.1 Prayer books and their scribes

One of the specific features of prayer books as a manuscript type is the fact that a significant proportion of them were not written by their owners themselves, but were produced to order by people who used this craft as a way of earning extra income (most often teachers or their assistants, see section 3). Hence we suppose that this subset of prayer books, at least, can be cautiously considered an example of the phenomenon identified for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as “scribal publication“ or “manuscript publication” (see also Woudhuysen 1996; Love 1998).12 This was a means of textual distribution that, for various reasons, consciously eschewed the use of print, and instead made use of scribes, whether paid or voluntary. Indeed, it appears that for a relatively long period it would be wrong to talk of book printing as having a clear victory over manuscript culture in Europe; on the contrary, the two media existed side by side, sometimes in competition, sometimes complementing one another (Woudhuysen 1996: 391). This was true not only during the first decades that followed the invention of printing, but also in later centuries: according to Walsham and Crick (2004: 9), writing out texts remained a competitive technology alongside printing even after the year 1700, only dying out in the nineteenth century. At the same time, texts that were

11 Previous studies have usually been based on much smaller and differently selected collections. Only Nešpor (2007) and Poš (2009) work with larger numbers of manuscripts, but their samples are far less suited to a quantitative analysis of eighteenth-century production than the Repertorium. In Nešpor’s case the manuscripts are sourced from only nine institutions (which are not an entirely representative selection from the regional and confessional perspective), while Poš uses a collection assembled by one individual, which might (even unwittingly) have been affected by certain preferences (such as the manuscripts’ artistic features, etc.). Furthermore, both collections include large numbers of prayer books dating from the nineteenth century, but are far less representative for the eighteenth century.

12 The dissemination of texts via manuscript media has been most extensively researched in England, where it was frequently used not only by local, national, and church authorities but also by poets who considered print to be insufficiently sophisticated, authors addressing a select group of people, mystics not daring to entrust their visions to such profane media, or women and authors from regions where access to printing was limited. School textbooks and records of parliamentary sessions were distributed in manuscript form, as were obscene verse, social criticism, and persecuted religious groups’ texts (see Walsham and Crick 2004: 7–8). Hall (2008) describes manuscript publication in New England in the seventeenth century, while Richardson (2009) describes production in Italy in the sixteenth century.
published as manuscripts functioned in a different way from handwritten texts created for their own creators’ private use. Harold Love defines manuscript publication as occurring when a text and its distribution purposely leave the author’s control, whether on the author’s own initiative or another person’s.\textsuperscript{13} He then distinguishes three types of manuscript publication: “author publication” when on the author’s own initiative, “entrepreneurial publication” when it is the work of a professional scribe or scribal atelier, and “user publication” when the text is distributed on the initiative of an individual whose purpose is not to make a profit, but to own the text\textsuperscript{14} (Love 1998: 46–47). The intention to publish a certain text can be evident even from its formal features: calligraphic text, a clearly readable hand on quality paper, and the addition of artistic decoration all at first sight are more inviting to a reader than abbreviated, untidy, and poorly legible private notes (Love 1998: 42). A further characteristic feature of manuscript media (both in the Middle Ages and in the Early Modern period) is the lack of a clear division between producer and user. Copying involved not so much a precise imitation of a text, but an adventure in elaboration and adaptation; notions such as authorship and originality lose their meaning here (Walsham and Crick 2004: 9; Nichols 1990). Each subsequent copy of a given text could be considered a new publication; the text thus continues to multiply until interest in it subsides and its dissemination stops (Love 1998: 44–45).

All of these features were true not only in general, but also for prayer books. As mentioned, most of these could be considered products of entrepreneurial manuscript publication,\textsuperscript{15} while the remainder were most likely products of user publication (and perhaps author publication in some cases). Yet while scholarly literature on manuscript publication is already quite rich, researchers have so far focused primarily on literary texts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the eighteenth-century popular cultural phenomenon of prayer books, as far as we are aware, has not yet been studied in detail. One of this paper’s aims is therefore to draw attention to this phenomenon as a possible frame through which to interpret folk manuscript culture of the Early Modern period.

When we turn our attention to prayer books that were copied out by their future owners themselves and to the social characteristics or gender of their scribes, we quickly come up

\textsuperscript{13} The moment of publication is therefore also the transition from the realm of private creativity to the realm of public consumption (Love 1998: 39, 36).

\textsuperscript{14} Where user publication is concerned, it is often difficult to separate private from public texts. It is important to remember that every copied text always involved at least two people – the scribe and the provider of the prototype – and that even many nonprofessional scribes provided their texts to others to copy out, especially if they had collected a large number of texts (Love 1998: 79–80).

\textsuperscript{15} Kuchařová and Nešpor (2012: 319), who do not work with the concept of manuscript publication, refer to this practice as a type of “folk commerce” (“Volkskommerz”).
against the fundamental question of how well different sectors of the population at the time knew how to read and write. Unfortunately, very little relevant data is available on rates of literacy and semi-literacy (i.e. the ability to read but not write) among the inhabitants of Bohemia shortly before the beginning of the nineteenth century, but we can at least partially extrapolate the probable situation from later statistics, which suggest that in the first generation subject to obligatory schooling (that is, the generation born during the 1770s), approximately 40–50 per cent may have been literate, and as many as 60–65 per cent if the semi-literate are included. Nevertheless, it is not possible to extend this kind of extrapolation to earlier generations, who were not obliged to attend school.16

Since statistical data on the level of literacy among different sectors of the population are not available for earlier periods, various methods have been used in the past to attempt to estimate these levels, most of which have been based on a comparison of the numbers of signatures and crosses on official documents such as marriage contracts, court records, and so on (see e.g. Burke 1978: 50, 251). Marie-Elizabeth Ducreux (1994: 917–918) also employs this method to estimate differences in literacy between women and men in the Bohemian lands based on records of interrogations involving people suspected of heresy between 1735 and 1780; these reveal that 70 of the 156 interrogated men (45 per cent) were able to sign their names, compared with only 5 of the 69 interrogated women (7 per cent). It might appear, therefore, that the level of literacy among women, and thus the likelihood that they would have become scribes or readers of prayer books, was very low here. However, we must interpret these results with caution: Tóth (2000: 47–94), for example, demonstrates that in Hungary, individuals signed some documents with their name and others with a cross. Marking with a cross, then, may not necessarily indicate illiteracy or semi-literacy, but might be connected with the fact that written confirmation of legal acts was not held in high regard in rural communities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By contrast, the presence of a signature may not necessarily indicate full literacy, as for the same reasons it was perfectly admissible for someone literate to sign for someone who was not. Roger Chartier (2003: 84–86) also refuses to equate the use of crosses in place of signatures with total illiteracy. He points out that during the eighteenth century writing was evidently taught at a somewhat later age than reading, and that many children from the poorest classes left school in the meantime and thus remained only semi-literate. Furthermore, the belief that girls should be taught to

16 The first generation for whom statistical data are available is the group born between 1800 and 1809, 70 per cent of whom achieved full literacy and about a further 10 per cent semi-literacy; literacy levels then rose linearly, reaching more than 97 per cent in the generation born between 1870 and 1879 (Kuzmin 1981: 65–66, 71).
read but not to write, because the ability to write love letters might put their chastity in danger, was not entirely uncommon in pre-revolution France. Chartier suggests, therefore, that official documents may well have been signed with crosses not only by the illiterate but also to a significant extent by semi-literate individuals, that is to say those who could and probably did read books, even though they were not scribes.

Besides the aforementioned gender differences, it is important to take social differences into account when estimating literacy levels. As Stráníková (2013: 146–49) explains, literacy education made the slowest progress among servile populations in the countryside and among the poor more generally, as it went against the traditional mentality of these classes. Their approach to life was primarily focused on providing for their family’s vital needs in the present, and they therefore did not place value on education, which could at best be expected to bring benefits in the future. On the other hand, among artisans of the middle classes, for whom literacy was indispensable among men for professional purposes (signing contracts, keeping accounts, negotiating with the authorities, etc.) and where greater individual mobility made reading and writing necessary skills in the private sphere for both women and men for personal correspondence, basic literacy was usual even before the school reforms of the Enlightenment. It therefore seems that we could expect the scribes and readers of our prayer books to have been, for the most part, individuals from small-town artisan backgrounds or, if from rural areas, then at least from a milieu in which crafts formed a significant part of the family’s livelihood alongside farming.

2.2 Prayer books and their readers

Prayer books, both printed and handwritten, were some of the most widespread texts among the lower classes in various parts of Europe during the Early Modern period. Does the extent of their presence, at least, tell us about the level of (semi-)literacy among the largest sectors of society? Perhaps only partially. The evidence suggests that not only semi-literate individuals but even those who were not literate at all carried prayer books with them permanently and

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17 Božena Němcová noted a similar opinion in the Czech lands, even in the late nineteenth century (Kvapil 2009: 62).
18 Stráníková (2013: 105–10) provides examples of personal correspondence among women from small-town artisan backgrounds born in the mid-eighteenth century.
19 Indeed, Stráníková (2013: 148) considers that one of the distinctive features of the Bohemian middle classes (apart from home ownership and certain typical patterns of behavior) was precisely a targeted upbringing for children of both genders, and their resulting literacy.
20 See e.g. Chartier 1987: 92–93, 179, 233. According to Tóth (2000: 71–72) they were so widespread among Hungarian peasants that the phrase “prayer book” was sometimes used as a synonym for any book, and the verbs “to read” and “to pray” were similarly considered near-synonyms.
“read” them whenever they had the chance (Chartier 1987: 233), and even that these individuals knew how to look up a particular text in the prayer books if they needed to (Tóth 2000: 69–72). This is a result of the fact that prayer books were typical objects of so-called intensive reading (Tóth 2000: 70). This was a characteristic way of treating texts in situations where readers only encountered a limited number of books (depending on their religion and geographical area, perhaps the Bible, hymnals, prayer books, almanacs, and so on), which furthermore often contained texts with similar content or form; these made up their frame of reference and became a literary and linguistic model for whole generations of readers. The process of intensive reading is part of a web of cultural practices connected with books, involving listening to texts read aloud in church or at home, committing the texts heard to memory and later reciting them for oneself or others. Such texts could make a much greater impression than they might have on us today, because their formulations, thus internalized, became a model for the reader’s thoughts, reactions, and perhaps even writing. This is a reading process characterized by slow, careful acquisition through repetition (see e.g. Chartier 2003: 91–96). It meant that reading prayer books was something possible even for almost illiterate individuals, because the process more closely resembled poetry recitation during which the reader occasionally jogs his memory by consulting the text than reading as we know it today (Tóth 2000: 70).

In a society in which full literacy was far from the norm, and where printed and manuscript books existed side by side and in competition with one another, it would be reasonable to ask which of these types of book were more “readable” for the majority of the population, or in other words whether the ability to read manuscript was more widespread than the ability to read printed text, or vice versa. This is no easy question to answer. There exists both literary and biographical testimony of individuals who were able to read printed text but not manuscript (Chartier 2003: 90–91; Tóth 2000: 47–94). On the basis of that evidence, Chartier hypothesizes that semi-literacy did not only mean the inability to write, but also the inability to read cursive text, and that therefore – paradoxically – the number of readers able to read printed books in the Early Modern period would have been greater than the number able to read manuscripts. According to Messerli (2000: 235–36), too, until the 1830s, reading manuscripts was considered difficult by key state and church bodies in Switzerland, and was optional for girls. That could mean that we should rather be looking for manuscript prayer book readers among the more educated members of the popular classes, that is, among artisans. Yet some evidence suggests the opposite: at many Catholic schools in Switzerland during the eighteenth century, children began to learn how to read using manuscripts that
were either brought from home by the children themselves or obtained by the teachers, as there was a lack of printed material available (ibid: 237); a similar lack of printed resources may well have affected village schools in Bohemia. Besides this, the ability to read manuscripts was highly prized for its practicality: parents wanted their children to learn this skill, and older boys in particular would often learn it in extra school hours, while some adults taught themselves (ibid: 235–36, 244–45). Further evidence of the fact that cursive lettering was more accessible (or more prestigious?) than Schwabacher or Fraktur for a certain group of inhabitants in the Czech lands, at least at the turn of the nineteenth century, is found in the fact that at that time some prayer books were printed in a typeface that perfectly imitated manuscript cursive (see Tobolka 1949: 78 and Poš 2009: 37).

2.3 Prayer books and their powers
Reading prayers, whether silently or aloud, was by no means the only use made of manuscript prayer books in the Early Modern period. In popular milieus, these books took on a special importance: as objects considered to have magical protective powers, they were kept in the corner of the living room opposite the doorway, the so-called holy corner, which featured a small table that was the family altar and a corner cabinet in which the family kept its most valued items, papers, money, and indeed prayer books. The prayer books were only removed from this cabinet under certain circumstances – when they were needed as protective objects while traveling (e.g. on pilgrimage), when danger struck (e.g. during a storm), and when the family went to church. In some cases prayer books were also kept in the attic to protect buildings from fire and evil spirits, especially if they had been imbued with more sacred powers by touching a statue of the Virgin and Child, most often while on pilgrimage (Holubová 2001: 37–39; see also Kvapil 2001: 61–68).

Numerous practices connected with prayer books were associated with childbirth, which always represented a significant risk for both mother and child in the Early Modern period. In Silesia prayer books were used after a child’s baptism to predict its fate. In the Chrudim area, when a woman went to be churched (a religious ceremony to mark the end of the mother and child’s period of recovery in isolation after childbirth) she would lay a prayer book on the doorstep and step over it on her way out; stepping across a prayer book on the doorstep, or

21 A lack of awareness of the physiological processes of conception, pregnancy, and childbirth was compensated for in folk culture of the Early Modern period with a series of protective rituals and “compensatory magical discourse” (Tinková 2005: 115). Childbirth (the birth itself and postpartum recovery) was a “transitional ritual” that affected the whole family (Štěpánová 1999: 261).
Several of the manuscripts in the *Repertorium* also tell us about magical practices connected with prayer books, and the belief that they had protective powers during childbirth and various other situations. For example, in one incompletely preserved book of magical guidance and prayers from the turn of the nineteenth century (*Repertorium* 3259) we read that the book should be strapped to a woman’s right hip during childbirth, sewn into sacks of seed to be sown, and placed on the table beneath plates of food on feast days, and even that “If they were to hang someone on the gallows, and he had this book with him, he would not be able to die until they take the book away from him.” (“Když magi někoho věsset na ssibenicy, a on by tuto knižku přisobě měl, nemohl by vmřit, dokud tu knižku od něho newezmau.”)

It is not our intention, in referring to the various magical practices of the time, to consider possible pagan residues in Early Modern peoples’ understanding of the world (as several French scholars, in particular, have done, e.g. in connection with the focus on individual saints for particular purposes and the veneration of Marian springs, groves, hills, etc.), since we believe that this would not make much sense for this period: folk magic during the Early Modern period was certainly not identical to pre-Christian pagan traditions. Piety and religious practice were not always part of official church life in the Early Modern period, especially when it came to the faith of the common folk, for whom magical ideas and practices continued to bear particular significance. On the other hand, many such practices were at least partially tolerated, such as harvest blessings and the exorcism of harmful beasts. Although the educated elites gradually distanced themselves from this type of approach, the lower classes did not let go of such practices even during the Enlightenment, especially in rural areas. And while Protestants often criticized Catholic rituals as

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22 On this see Čornejová 2002: 194. For example, according to Robert Muchembled, folk Christianity in the Early Modern period was distinctly different from the Christianity of the elites and scholars, because superficial Christianization during the Middle Ages did not drown out their animistic world view, which enabled permanent contact with the dead, and the cult of the saints in folk milieus blended with the veneration of local protectors, intercessors, and saints with healing powers (Muchembled 1991: 80–85, 127–33).
23 Some interesting suggestions on the issues of “peasant religion,” “peasant magic,” and the relationship between them are provided e.g. in Moudrý (1942).
24 See e.g. van Dülmen 1994: 8; Muchembled 1991: 127–33.
26 For details see van Dülmen 1994: 55–106.
supposedly magical practices that profaned true religion, they too often made reference to the worldview we would nowadays call magical-superstitious. Richard van Dülmen (1994: 79) goes so far as to refer to magic as a “specific primitive school of thought among the lower classes,” even as late as the eighteenth century.

Many magical rituals and habits were integrated into pious practices from the late Middle Ages, and the use of Christian tools of salvation for magical purposes was tolerated to a certain extent, in particular by the Catholic Church, as a necessary compromise (ibid.: 80). Even the magical use of prayer books, which would nowadays be considered superstitious, was not necessarily in contradiction with church practices at the time, or was at least tolerated. The veneration of holy images, statuettes, amulets, scapulars, and so on was entirely official at this time; indeed, very often these objects were distributed by members of the Catholic Church’s official hierarchy (Kušniráková 2005: 60). Prayer books might, though, have been seen as more questionable, perhaps because they sometimes also contained various magical formulae and incantations. Hence the scribes who wrote folk prayer books, in an attempt to protect themselves against allegations of unorthodoxy, sometimes included in the titles (which tended otherwise to be shorter than printed book titles) a reference to censorship or to other, approved books, from which the prayers they contained had supposedly been taken, for example: “Very Devout Redeeming Prayers both for the Morning and at the Holy Mass! before Confession and after Confession before Holy Communion and after Communion with Litanies and Many Prayers added Cum Litentia Superiorum. Oujezd: A° 1784” (“Welmj. Nabožné SPasytedlne Modlytby gak Rannj tež take. Pržj Swate Mssy! před SPowědį y po SPowědį před Sγν̃ Pržigimanį, y po Pržigimanj SLetaniemj a Mnhymj Modlytbamj pržidanmj Cum Litentia Superiorum. Augezd: A° 1784”: Repertorium 1718), or “Spiritual Treasure – or Catholic Prayers for All Devout Christians To Gratify and Benefit the Soul for Salvation with Permission from Senior Clergy. Newly Written and published 1774” (“Duchowni Poklad – Aneb. Katolicke Modlitby Wssem Nabožnym Křestianum K Potěšseny a Prospěchu Dussy k Spaseny SPowoleni Duchowni Wrchnostи. Nowie wyPsane a na śwětlo wydane 1774”: Repertorium 2749). It is not possible, therefore, to infer simply from this kind of reference to censorship that an immediate printed template for the given prayer book existed. It may have, but did not need to; what was important here was to emphasize that the

See van Dülmen 1994: 62. It is true that the Reformation and Protestantism brought about a fundamental change in approaches to magic and superstitions, including both folk magical and superstitious rituals and many Catholic pious practices, and that they succeeded in breaking their power to a certain extent. Nevertheless for a long time they, too, believed in the Devil as a force persistently threatening people’s Christian lives. In rural areas it was easy to perform forbidden magical practices beyond the Church’s reach (van Dülmen 1994: 80–82, 136).
book was sound from the perspective of Catholic catechism. Indeed, in the Early Modern period, clergy verified (or were supposed to verify) the orthodoxy of books that ordinary folk owned.\textsuperscript{28} Including manuscript books.\textsuperscript{29} Evidence that this did actually happen, at least in some cases, can be found, for example, in the inscription “\textit{Vidi et Revidi. 1807. die 5\textsuperscript{a} Aprilis Wenceslaus Fr. Matiegka Parochus Suchomastensis mp\textsuperscript{prius}v}” in one prayer book from the turn of the nineteenth century (\textit{Repertorium 1710}) and the inscription “\textit{Revidit P. Jacobus Watzek p. t. Capellanus Naczeradecij mp\textsuperscript{ius}}” in a prayer book from the mid-eighteenth century (\textit{Repertorium 1562}). On the other hand, it is true that most of the prayer books and other works in the \textit{Repertorium} lack any such inscription, so these checks were evidently not as thorough as the senior clergy would have liked them to be.

3. An analysis of the prayer book collection recorded in the \textit{Repertorium}

Given the focus of this study, we will limit our analysis of the prayer book collection as detailed in the \textit{Repertorium} to books that appeared before the year 1800 and whose content and format are not far from folk culture (i.e. not much of their text is written in Latin or French, they were not produced within monastic institutions, they do not feature exclusive decoration, etc.). We will focus on the age and language of these prayer books, as well as their scribes, commissioners, and addressees,\textsuperscript{30} and the places where the scribes and addressees were based (i.e. lived or worked). We will not focus on the ratio of Catholic to non-Catholic prayer books, firstly because this topic has already been partially addressed,\textsuperscript{31} and secondly because categorizing the prayer books in this way frequently requires detailed textual analysis,\textsuperscript{32} which is beyond the scope of the present study. Furthermore, we shall not attempt

\textsuperscript{28} Believers were supposed to give their books to the local priest or visiting missionary to be checked; they would look through them and provided they did not find anything inappropriate, would inscribe them with their approval for use (Svatoš 1999: 364).

\textsuperscript{29} The books that were confiscated were not only unsound printed books but also manuscripts, albeit in smaller numbers. On the numbers of each we can look e.g. to the results of Jesuit missionary Antonín Koniáš’s approximately month-long visit to the Opočno estate in 1733, during which he confiscated over 120 printed books, but only about ten manuscript books. These were largely hymnals, prophecies, and unspecified superstitious books, and only one manuscript book of prayers (Svatoš 1999: 366–68).

\textsuperscript{30} That is, people for whom the given book had been written, according to the title or owner record (whether these were made to order, or had been written as “stock” and the owner’s name later added once they were sold). We deliberately avoid the terms “purchaser” or “orderer,” as these could have been two different individuals.


\textsuperscript{32} See e.g. the manuscript prayer book \textit{Studnice vod, vod živých (Spring of waters, living waters)} dating from 1776 and the contemporary printed book of the same name (for a breakdown of the contents of both books see Horáková 2010: 51–98, although no conclusions are drawn there): the manuscript book appears at the beginning to present itself as a copy of the Catholic printed publication, but the vast majority of its text has nothing in common with it and is probably in fact a copy of exiles’ (Protestants’) printed books; in other words, this is a slick attempt at masking a non-Catholic book under a Catholic “cover.”
to examine the manuscripts’ content or their relationship with printed works, as this too would demand a far lengthier study.  

Certainly, many of these manuscript prayer books bear the titles (or variations on the titles) of popular printed prayer books. This is one of the reasons why not much attention has previously been paid to these manuscripts: it was presumed that they were entirely derived from printed books. However, the materials of the *Repertorium* and recently published research demonstrate that the situation is far more complex, and that the relationship between print and manuscript production of prayer and other books in the Early Modern period is rather complicated. Three manuscripts from the Orlické Mountains Museum and Gallery in Rychnov nad Kněžnou (sign. M3-3, M3-13, M3-16) may serve as an example here: all three bear the title “Woeful Dove Painfully Longing for her Lost beloved ...” (“Truchliwa Herlička Postracenem Miláčku swym bolestně taužjcy...”), which refers to a printed prayer book by Jan Beckovský, yet their content is quite different. It is also clear that many manuscript prayer books are not directly derived from printed books, but that different areas developed their own manuscript traditions, producing books that shared a particular title and whose contents and even decoration were similar.

We will begin our analysis by classifying the books in terms of their graphic and artistic features. The first category we can identify by these features consists of prayer books that were written to order, by someone who wrote them as a way of earning additional income (we will say more about who these scribes were later). These books tended to be written in one go, very neatly, and were often decorated with colorful titles, sometimes in silver or gold, and colored watercolor illustrations or pen-and-ink drawings, occasionally even with bound-in

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33 E.g. Alexandr Stich advises not only qualitative but also quantitative evaluation of the contents of these types of book, i.e. how many prayers or songs they contain for particular occasions, how large the sections are, etc. (Stich 1999: 234). This might produce interesting results when investigating cultural shifts and inter-confessional or international differences in identification with a provincially rather than linguistically conceived nation (prayers to the Bohemian provincial patron in German prayer books of Bohemian origin), in the emergence and development of various cults (associated with various individual saints, or e.g. with the Heart of Jesus, etc.), in approaches to death (the percentage of prayers for the dying and the departed in prayer books), and so on.

34 See e.g. Kuchařová (2009), Horáková (2010), and Kuchařová and Nešpor (2012), who made a comparison of the contents of selected manuscript and printed prayer books whose titles are similar, and found that in some cases they are very similar, but in others entirely different. The latter authors refer to this phenomenon as “uniformity in diversity” (“Eintönigkeit in der Vielfältigkeit”; Kuchařová and Nešpor 2012: 339).

35 See e.g. German prayer books from Králíky and surroundings, whose title begins “Auserlesenes und Trost=Reich=es Meß=Büchlein ...” or similar, dating from the years 1791–1825 (*Repertorium* 1778, 1780, 1782, 1788 and 1790). This possibility, i.e. that a manuscript prayer book might be reproduced over a longer period of time without any direct printed prototype, simply being copied out from manuscript to manuscript, is one that we would like to add to the previously defined three options for the production of such manuscripts (direct copy from print without changes, selective copy from print, and compilation of texts from various sources; see Kuchařová and Nešpor 2012: 341).

36 Poš (2009: 12) estimates that as many as 90 per cent of prayer books were thus “professionally” produced.
copperplates, often hand-colored. We can study such scribes’ work not only by comparing surviving manuscripts that bear the same name, but also by comparing anonymous manuscripts from the same time period that are so similar in their content or decoration that they undoubtedly originated from the same source. We categorize this group of manuscript prayer books as an example of entrepreneurial manuscript publication (see section 2.1), not least because they may also have been sold at craft fairs (Nešpor 2007: 235). A second category is composed of books whose scribe and addressee are one and the same. These books’ appearance and design features often show how little ordinary people were used to writing at the time: in most cases the manuscripts have poorly legible, untidy text, typically with chaotic spelling. Some scribes were even unable to correctly separate individual words from each other: “Pray Er s, Chri Stian, Catho Lick, WriTTen fromva Rious Books In which There Aref Ound Prayers, morning Eve Ning, At Holy Mass Before, and After Confession, Before and, After Comm Union, Litany on the SwE Etest name of Lo[r]d jesus” (“Mod Lit by, Krže Stian Cke, Kato licke WiPSane zroz Licžnih Knech W kterich Se Na Chazegi Modlitbi, rani We Cžerny, Prži Mssi Swate Pržed, a Po Spowgedy, Pržed a, Po prţigi Manim, Letanige o PrţeS Ladkem gmenu Pa[na] geţisse,” Repertorium 696). These manuscripts often have no title page, and may have been gradually added to over some time. It is debatable whether they can be considered entirely private, or whether – given that they were evidently handed down to younger generations – they are an example of user publication and perhaps also author publication, in cases when the scribe did not only copy from one or more prototypes, but took a more creative approach, selecting, combining, and adding to the contents.

Holubová (2001: 33) and Poš (2009: 11) maintain that systematic prayer book copying took place in the period 1750–1850; Kuchařová and Nešpor (2012: 315) slightly extend this period and suggest that the practice was common between the first third of the eighteenth century and the second third of the nineteenth. While the date at which this practice ended cannot be

37 E.g. in the 1760s–1790s master blacksmith Josef Padr of Hradec Králové copied both Czech prayer books (Repertorium 959, 973, 1276) and advent liturgies (Repertorium 1038, 1039, 1040, 1046), at least some of which were produced to order: “These prayers are written out for František Tomášek. Blacksmith’s Journeyman born in the Regional Town Chрудим. 1790” and “RORATE Or Joyful and Glad Advent Hymns. Written by Josef Pader Master Blacksmith For Remembrance in the Year 1779. On 21 November on the order of the esteemed Mr Václav Schütz at this time Manor Brewmaster in Hradec Králové” (“Tyto Modlitby gsau přepsany pro Frantisska Tomasska. Towarysse Kowařskeho rodiliho w Krayskym Městě Crudimi. 1790,” Repertorium 1276; “RORATE Neb Wesely a Radostny Spěwowe Adwentni. Ktere wipsal Jozeff Pader Myster Ržemesla Kowařskeho Pro Pamatku Roku 1779. Dne 21 Listopadu Nakladem Slowutneho Muže P. Waclawa Schützu toho Cžasu Panskeho Sladka w Králowem Hradcy,” Repertorium 1046).

38 See e.g. Repertorium 23 and 24, manuscripts that share the title Die ganze Welt ist Gottes Haus.
determined from the materials in the *Repertorium*,\textsuperscript{39} we can attempt to specify and verify the
time at which the practice began.

Graph 1. Growth in the total number of prayer books during the 18\textsuperscript{th} century (undated
books estimated to within a third of a century).

Graph 1 shows the distribution of the prayer books in the *Repertorium* by age: since many
prayer books are not dated, or their date has not been preserved, we have to use fairly broad
categories. The results clearly demonstrate that there was a real increase in the number of
surviving manuscripts around the middle of the eighteenth century, but that more than half of
those date from the last three decades of the eighteenth century, and many were probably
produced at the turn of the nineteenth. None of the manuscripts that might have come from a
non-elite milieu date from before the beginning of the eighteenth century. It is important to
bear in mind while interpreting these results that older manuscripts might well have decayed
or been destroyed, not least because this type of book only became the object of collectors’
interest at the end of the nineteenth century; on the other hand, other manuscripts from the

\textsuperscript{39} We can only confirm the well-known fact that manuscripts of similar type to those of the late eighteenth
century were also produced during the first decades of the nineteenth century, and that when the prayer books of
this period are undated it is usually extremely challenging, if not impossible, to determine exactly when they
were made. This is also because some nineteenth-century scribes copied their prototypes extremely faithfully,
including imitating the shapes of the letters.
seventeenth century are recorded in the *Repertorium* (533 in total, 15.6 per cent of all the manuscripts recorded), but these do not include folk prayer books.

Graph 2. Changes in the numeric share of German- and Czech-language dated prayer books from each decade between 1730 and 1800. The relationship between the age of the manuscript and the language used is statistically significant to the 99 % level: $\chi^2 (6; n = 438) = 24.987; p < 0.01$.

A more detailed description of the prayer books’ distribution over time is only possible for those that are precisely dated (see Graph 2).\(^4^0\) For this purpose we have focused on the period when the previous graph indicated there was a gradual increase in the number of relevant manuscripts, in other words from the 1730s onward. Within the same graph we also look at the language of these manuscripts, to identify whether this increase took place simultaneously

\(^{40}\) In order to include a greater number of manuscripts and achieve a more representative sample, we have also counted here manuscripts that were only dated on their (original) binding. We are aware that the date of the binding may not always be identical with the date when the manuscript was produced; however, the gap between the two is usually not very long. Moreover, the dating of the manuscripts themselves may not always be reliable, as it could have been copied from the prototype, give the date only of when the manuscript was begun, or indeed only when it was finished, or it may for example have been added in at the moment the book was sold.
in both Czech- and German-speaking contexts.\textsuperscript{41} The results are extremely interesting: it appears that until the early 1760s the number of prayer book manuscripts produced remained very small, and that those produced at this time were primarily written in German.\textsuperscript{42} Only from the 1760s onward did manuscript prayer books enjoy mass popularity: in particular, the number of manuscripts written in Czech rose significantly. After this, the number of Czech and German manuscripts remained essentially equal, and the total number of manuscripts continued to rise gradually until the end of the 1780s. A further turning point followed, and manuscripts written in Czech then dominated: while the growth in the number of German manuscripts remained steady at the same rate as during the preceding decades, the number of Czech manuscripts doubled compared with their production during the 1780s. It is clear, then, that enthusiasm for manuscript prayer books began at slightly different times in German-speaking and Czech-speaking milieus, and also that trends in prayer book production continued to diverge in these two communities: while the number of German-language manuscripts rises steadily throughout the period observed, there is a substantial increase in Czech-language manuscript production during the 1790s, reflecting a substantial shift in the educational, cultural, and religious attitudes of the Czech-speaking communities.\textsuperscript{43} This raises several questions: does it suggest that the introduction of obligatory schooling during the 1770s resulted in a greater increase in literacy among the Czech-speaking population than the German-speaking one? Did Enlightenment censorship, which in the later years of Joseph II’s reign and under his successors turned against popular titles of Baroque religious literature (see Nešpor 2009: 53; Kuchařová 2009: 271–72; Kuchařová and Nešpor 2012: especially 319–21, 326–27), affect books printed in Czech more than those in German? Or were the Czech-speaking communities more conservative and more resistant to new approaches to piety? Another question is whether the prayer books primarily originated in villages or in smaller or larger towns. This is not easy to answer, since the books only state where they were produced

\textsuperscript{41} In total, the Repertorium lists roughly equal numbers of Czech- and German-language prayer books, unlike Poš’s collection (Poš 2009: 11) in which roughly two-thirds are Czech; these, however, include a substantial number of manuscripts from the nineteenth century. On the other hand, a prevalence of Czech-language manuscripts in a roughly 2:1 ratio is what we would expect if manuscript prayer book production were independent of language, as the proportion of Czech-speaking inhabitants in the Bohemian lands was approximately 63 per cent in the Early Modern period (see Fialová et al. 1998: 154).

\textsuperscript{42} This finding is in clear contrast with Kuchařová and Nešpor (2012: 315, 342, 350), who claim that folk religious manuscripts written in Czech (often of non-Catholic provenance) gained prevalence first, and that only later did significant numbers of German manuscripts appear. It is of course possible, though, that only a limited proportion of early non-Catholic Czech manuscripts made it into museum collections, for example because they (more often than their Catholic counterparts) were kept in the family in memory of ancestors.

\textsuperscript{43} Here too our results differ somewhat from Kuchařová and Nešpor (2012: 315), who suppose that at the end of the eighteenth century the numbers of Czech and German folk religious manuscripts were equal. As far as prayer books are concerned, our results show that there was an increase in Czech production in the final decade of the eighteenth century that resulted in a prevalence of Czech manuscripts over German manuscripts by about 3:2.
in a very few cases. Some of these give the name of the place where the scribe worked, others the place where the person for whom the manuscript was destined lived, and in a few exceptional cases both. Among the prayer books’ first owners’ places of residence, villages far outnumber both servile towns or townships and royal towns by a ratio of 58:10:6. In other words, around 78 per cent of prayer book owners came from villages and 22 per cent from towns. Relatively unsurprisingly, the proportion of scribes who were based in towns is a little higher at 65:17:18, i.e. 65 per cent were from villages, 35 per cent from towns, but they too largely lived in villages, although some of those villages may have been close to towns and townships such as Popovice, nowadays part of Beroun, or Krčín, nowadays part of Nové Město nad Metují. Nevertheless, if we wanted to draw any conclusions from these figures, we would need to compare them with data on the number of people living in towns and villages in Bohemia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. According to Fialová et al. (1998: 99), during the period preceding the Battle of the White Mountain, about 25 per cent of the population in Bohemia lived in towns, some of which were very small, and by 1843 (the date of the next data, see ibid.: 144) this proportion had not changed. This suggests that the likelihood of owning a prayer book was not substantially dependent on the size or legal status of an individual’s community. In the light of this, Poš’s conclusion (2009: 11) that manuscript prayer books were typically produced in rural settings could only be true in the sense that most of the surviving manuscripts, in actual numerical terms, were indeed produced in village settings. Yet as soon as we compare the estimate that 25 per cent of the population lived in towns and the fact that 35 per cent of prayer book scribes were from towns, as we have seen, then this appears to suggest something different; we cannot rule out the idea that a slightly higher proportion of people able and willing to write such books were found among townspeople.

We now turn to looking at prayer books’ scribes, commissioners, and owners from the perspective of their gender, age, profession, and social standing. Unfortunately, although prayer books are some of the relatively more frequently signed manuscripts, this information is far from consistently provided, not least because in many cases the title page and/or the explicit where these details were most often stated have not been preserved. Scribes included the date of the manuscript far more often than their own name, and when they did include a reference to themselves or to the book’s owner, this was very often only in the form of

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44 We deliberately avoid referring to this as their “home,” because scribes were very often teachers, and we do not know whether they were originally from the place where they were working, or how long they were active there.
initials: in some cases, the owner’s initials are embossed on the book’s front cover. In many cases it is not clear whether the stated name is that of the scribe or the owner, or whether the same individual was both scribe and owner.

It is striking, even if essentially to be expected given the differences in literacy between women and men noted earlier (see section 2.1), that the scribes are almost without exception men: only three of all the prayer books recorded in the Repertorium contain an explicit attribution to a female scribe, and these were certainly not from a folk setting (the Ursuline nun “Victoria Clara Kohot,” Repertorium 1834; “Carolina Michnin geborne baron Voßing Von Woßing und KorpHeim,” Repertorium 1868; “Gebett büchlein Worinn sehr Kräftige undt schöne gebether, zu Ehren des heilligen Joanniß Von Nepomuk, Von mir Josepha Guldenhäfttin gebohrenen dientzenhofferin, Verehrin dieseß heilligen zusam getragen, und mit aigenes handt geschriebens im 60ten Jahr meines alterß angefangen; den 5 september 1790: geendigett; den 15ten december 1790: ...,” Repertorium 1462). It is therefore clear that even at the very end of the Early Modern period women, whom Robert Muchembled (1991: 84–92) considers the principal bearers and vehicles of folk culture, were only very exceptionally active participants in folk manuscript culture. On the other hand, if we focus on the initial owners of these books we discover that here men only slightly outnumber women by a ratio of 99:72, and if we take into account vaguer indications in the books’ titles (“written for a lady / man” and suchlike), then in fact the books destined for women are more numerous at 36:12. Nevertheless, it is difficult to draw any substantial conclusions from these differences, in particular because it is unclear whether we can suppose that both genders were equally present in the population. As a result of various factors, the numerical ratio of women to men in the Early Modern period changed quite significantly: for example, in the seventeenth century women aged 15–29 were more numerous than men in towns, by a ratio of 3:2, while above the age of 40 men predominated. In villages the ratio of the two

45 Their written communication was largely restricted to the private sphere (see section 2.1).
46 Among eighteenth-century printed prayer books from the Bohemian lands whose titles are gender-specific, books intended for women are generally more numerous than those intended for men (Ducreux 1994: 934–42). Ducreux’s research also demonstrates that designation “for women” or “for men” was particularly typical of Catholic production from the end of the seventeenth century, whereas Protestant prayer books typically contained prayers specified for particular ages, situations, professions, etc. Ducreux further points out a confessional difference in the understanding of gender differences: the Protestants, whose relationship with God (unlike the Catholics’) was direct, not mediated by a priest, granted women and men equal dignity (ibid: 916, 929–44).
47 We limit ourselves here only to information explicitly contained in the title material, even though we are aware that a more detailed analysis of the prayers contained in the individual books would enable us to categorize a number of additional books (such as those in which there is a marked prevalence of prayers to female saints, or where prayers are written with feminine grammatical forms, etc.). Nevertheless, here we are interested in explicit dedications to women or men.
genders was generally much more equal; in the eighteenth century numbers of women once again exceeded men in all age groups by some 10 per cent, although these figures may have been skewed, for example by men’s attempts to avoid military service (see Fialová et al. 1998: 106–07, 155–56). Notably, whenever a prayer book states specifically that the scribe copied it out for someone else, the commissioning individual is always a man. It is therefore clear that van Dülmen’s (1994: 59) assertion that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries women began to take a greater part in church life, which had until then been very much dominated by men, may be true in folk contexts at the end of the eighteenth century from a receptive perspective, perhaps, but not in terms of production; even after this, women were largely addressees and recipients, but not creators, even in such derivative creations as copies of prototypes.

On the other hand, this does not mean that prayer books intended for women could not have been designed by their male authors and compilers – both in terms of their contents and format and in terms of their language – so as to correspond with their notions of female taste and attitudes. Whether or not this was the case, the fact that books were marked as being intended for a particular gender suggests that some level of reading material personalization was at work (and with it a personalization of book ownership), even at a time when reading aloud evidently still prevailed over silent reading, at least among the lower social classes of the population.

The age of the scribe is very rarely mentioned. The few examples available that do include it, though, demonstrate that scribes could be very young, or indeed very old. The relatively

48 An example of this could be the frequent use of diminutives, such as in the title “A Short Prayerlet to Saint Leonard Against the Downfall of Cattle” (“Kratka Modlitbíčka k Swatemu Linhartu Protj Padu Dobitka”) of a Czech manuscript prayer book written in 1772 by Jan Kreibich for Kateřina Kreibichová of Klášter Hradiště nad Jizerou (Repertorium 2822).

49 According to Peter Burke (1978: 50), too, at this time, “[w]here they did read, women read distinctive kinds of book.”

50 See Dureux (1994: 919–924), who gives examples from transcriptions of interrogations involving people suspected of heresy (dating from after 1775), in which for example spouses each mention a different prayer book, which was their own personal property.

51 Dureux 1994: 918; van Dülmen 2000: 84. See also excerpts from interrogation transcriptions involving people suspected of heresy (Koblížek 1999). On the other hand, Chartier (1987: 239–41) casts doubt on the idea that the popular classes’ main method of engagement with the written word was listening together to the landlord reading aloud in the evenings, and claims that this is a romanticized image based on literary and artistic elaborations and notes by contemporary intellectuals who did not have any direct experience of the popular classes’ lives.

52 E.g. František Vondra wrote when he was very young: “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son / this book is written / Holy Spirit help / and preserve the reader / Mary Merciful Mother / preserve from all misfortune / Written in my Thirteenth year of age / in the name of Lord Jesus / František Vondra my name / Written in the register./ If there be in it some mistake / would that it be forgiven. / Help us Dear Jesus / to Be with Thee in Heaven. Amen” (“Wegmenu Boha Otce, Boha Syna, / tato, knižka ge sepsana. / Duh Swaty rač pomahatj, / ačtenaře zachowatj. / Marya Matko Milosti, / zachoweg wsseho Nesstěstj. / Trinactj let wěku mehopansa, /
young age of some scribes can also be deduced in cases where their profession is mentioned (school student, journeyman, or similar), although this is of course only a broad indication of age. The age of the book’s first owner is not explicitly mentioned in any of our materials; still, it can be established approximately in cases where the name is accompanied by a status description (“maiden,” “daughter,” “master,” “wife,” “lady,” for men their profession, etc.). Among female prayer book owners younger women predominate: 28 books are addressed to a “maiden” or “daughter,” compared with just five to a “wife,” “lady,” or a female profession (such as mlynárka – “miller’s wife”). To some extent, then, the commentator who noted on a slip of paper inside one of the prayer books that “This – handwritten – prayer book is a rare document from the time when such books were given by grooms to their brides as wedding gifts. Bedřich Kaplan.” (Repertorium 89) was probably right. However, this was not the only possibility; a husband could just as well make a manuscript prayer book (or have one made) for his wife or a father for his son. According to Holubová (2001: 39), manuscript prayer books were also often given as a christening or confirmation gift, and in general the act of giving such books conveyed elements of magic to ensure a successful beginning.

A further interesting aspect, which we have already touched upon and which could help us to understand the social backgrounds of those engaged in written communication of the time, is the individual scribes’ professions. When prayer book scribes stated their own profession this was most often schoolmaster, teacher or tutor; the Repertorium records 26 such prayer books. It is apparent that teachers frequently supplemented their income by copying texts to order, or for a stock to sell later, a practice evident from the relatively abundant examples of prayer books in which the owner’s name was written into the previously prepared dedication inscription in a different hand, or where this page remained incomplete. A wide spectrum of other professions is also mentioned, including artisans, soldiers, and members of the minor clergy, who were often from an artisan background, with examples including smith, weaver, miller’s apprentice, barber’s assistant, innkeeper, hussar, bridle-maker’s son, Franciscan,
Although no one of these professions is predominant, it is noticeable that they do not include any individuals whose living was primarily made in agriculture, such as farmers, shepherds, and so on.

Based on our finding that prayer books’ addressees came for the most part from villages (in terms of absolute numbers), we might well expect them to include a relatively large proportion of farmers. Yet this is not the case: only one book names a farmer, and one a “youngster of the agricultural craft”; apart from these, it is once again only a variety of artisans who are mentioned (young maltster, weaver, blacksmith’s journeyman, son of a master butcher, huntsman, miller’s wife) – although of course it is still possible that some of these at least made their living partially from the land. Here, once again, there is no one predominant profession, and so based on our materials we cannot either confirm or reject the claim that weavers and shoemakers were among the most educated artisans of the Early Modern period (Burke 1978: 37–39). We can more generally state, though, that in the eighteenth century writing and owning manuscript prayer books was more widespread among artisans than among farmers, or at least that artisans more often stated their name and profession in the books, and hence that personal ownership of (manuscript) books was a more stable part of the value system in the artisan milieu than in simple agricultural settings. Both of these findings are entirely in line with the suppositions made in section 2.1.

4. Conclusion

With reference to the materials described in the first two volumes of the Repertorium, we have attempted to verify a number of hypotheses relating to manuscript prayer books of the Early Modern period and, based on recent international research, to propose a new frame of interpretation through which to examine the manuscript prayer book phenomenon. We have focused in particular on books produced in the eighteenth century, since no folk prayer books from the seventeenth century are recorded in the Repertorium.

Our analysis of the sample of prayer books described in the Repertorium has been quantitative as far as possible, although precise numbers (in particular those against which we would need to compare the data from the materials) are not always available, or are too scarce to produce conclusive results using statistical methods; our conclusions remain, therefore, necessarily tentative. Despite this limitation, we venture to maintain that we have confirmed a number of

55 Poš (2009: 12) reports similar findings.
previous hypotheses, such as the predominance of teachers among prayer books’ scribes, at least where the scribe’s profession is stated, to narrow others down, such as the period of time in which manuscript prayer books enjoyed mass popularity, the beginnings of which we can see emerging in the 1730s, but which was only in full swing from the 1760s onward, and to cast others into question, including the extent to which these manuscripts were typical of rural settings, and the supposed earlier rise in Czech-language prayer books compared to those written in German.

The new frame of interpretation we propose consists in seeing manuscript (prayer) books as a distinctive medium within a broader communicational context and in clarifying their relationship with printed production of the time; that is, we propose that this manuscript production should be considered part of the phenomenon known as (entrepreneurial) manuscript publication. We believe that this approach is appropriate to the material and its interpretive potential and that, at the same time, it opens up the possibility of restoring this previously rather underrated production to its rightful place, perhaps to a greater extent than could be achieved by pointing out the differences in content between manuscript prayer books and their printed counterparts. Indeed, it is our belief that manuscript production of the Early Modern period should be approached as an individual medium, and not simply – as has so far been the case – as an extension of print production, a “substitute” used when print was unavailable for various reasons. This reason for producing manuscripts should of course not be underestimated, yet it is important to see it as part of the mutual influence of two separate means of communication on one another. 56 Beyond the Czech context, this study is also innovative in focusing on folk manuscript production rather than on production by the elites, and in the fact that ours is the first such analysis to be extended to include the whole of the eighteenth century. This approach should, in our opinion, enable us in future research to achieve a more appropriate overview of Early Modern written communication, in all its diversity and changeability, and to better discern both the strategies used by various groups of its participants and the features of and interactions between the various types of communicative media used at the time.

56 We must also be rather careful about asserting Nešpor’s theory of Joseph II’s censorship as a key driving force behind and explanation of manuscript prayer book production (see Kuchařová and Nešpor 2012: esp. 319–21, 326–27). This theory is certainly interesting and thought-provoking, and has great interpretive potential; however, it could lead to manuscript publication being underestimated as a medium and instead considered as dependent, second-best, directly derived from print production.
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