

# Master Claretus' Early Didactic Writings on Medicine

Libor Švanda

**Abstract:** Claretus (Bartholomaeus de Solentia) is known as the author of the oldest Latin-Czech dictionaries, but the aim of the article is to introduce his didactic poems *Medicaminarius* and *Complexionarius*. Although quite a number of similar school texts were created during the Middle Ages, not many of them originated in the Czech lands. They provide an insight into medical theory as it was taught in Bohemia in the mid 14th century.

**Key words:** Medieval Literature, Latin Literature, Didactic Poem, Claretus, Medicine

**Abstrakt:** Bartoloměj z Chlumce, zvaný Klaret, je známý jako autor nejstarších latinsko-českých slovníků. Velikost jeho slovníkového díla a jeho význam pro českou a obecně slovanskou lexikografii zastihuje Klareta jako autora dalších spisů, mimo jiné i dvou latinských didaktických básní s lékařskou tematikou: *Medicaminaria*, jehož tématem je zdravý způsob života, péče o zdraví, léky a léčba, a *Complexionaria*, který pojednává o čtyřech lidských *complexiones* (temperamentech).

V příspěvku jsou představeny oba Klaretovy texty s lékařskou tematikou jako příklad středověkých učebních textů a je poukázáno na některé jejich formální a obsahové aspekty.

Byť podobných veršovaných učebních textů, jako jsou *Medicaminarius* a *Complexionarius*, vznikla ve stejném období v Evropě řada, v českém prostředí se jich mnoho nedochovalo a obě Klaretova díla tak poskytují cenný vhled do některých oblastí medicíny v Čechách poloviny 14. století.

## Introduction

Although the name Claretus is recognized among those who are interested in medieval didactic literature, in history of early Prague University or in Czech (or generally Slavic) lexicology, his writings directly related to medicine are quite unknown and for a long time his authorship was even questioned. People know him as the author of dictionaries from which we may learn a lot about the old Czech language, especially its vocabulary, and about the way of learning a language at that time. It is clear that Claretus' lexicography works overshadow his other writings. The aim of this article is to show that his other texts deserve our attention as well. Since we are in the context of medical terminology or history of medicine, it is an opportunity to publicize his didactic poems *Medicaminarius* and *Complexionarius*.

## Author

We do not know much about Claretus and we have only a few clues from his works. Although there were some attempts during the 20th century to identify him with people that we know about from elsewhere (e.g. Petrus Clarificator, prior of the monastery in Roudnice nad Labem, or doctor M. Bartoloměj of Hostýň), these were

not successful.<sup>1</sup> In one of his works Claretus calls himself *Bartholomeus de Solencia dictus Claretus* (a neologism which means ‘famous’, derived from the verb *claresco*, *-ere* meaning ‘to become famous’).

Claretus was probably a son of an unknown clergyman in Solencia (Chlumec nad Cidlinou – town in eastern Bohemia). He became a student and teacher at the monastic school in Opatovice, later moving to Prague where he was probably one of the first Prague university graduates. Subsequently he became a teacher and even the *rector* at St. Vitus Cathedral School in Prague, which was the most important school of that type in Bohemia. As for his professional status, his commentators call him simply *Magister* (‘Master’), which means *Magister artium* (‘Master of Arts’) in this context. Most probably he was neither monk nor doctor; otherwise it would be mentioned by the commentators. He died in Prague circa 1370.<sup>2</sup>

## Writings

The number of Claretus’ writings that we know about is 10. Both pieces that we focus on – *Medicaminarius* and *Complexionarius* – were written together with *Astronomicus* at the very beginning of Claretus’ career – probably before he came to Prague, already at the monastic school in Opatovice roughly in the mid 1340s.<sup>3</sup> Not much later he composed *Secundus liber de naturalibus*, but he was already a teacher and rector of the above mentioned cathedral school in Prague when he wrote his famous dictionaries *Vocabularius*, *Bohemarius* and *Glossarius* and the other texts with the titles *Enigmaticus*, *Ortulus phizologye* and *Exemplarius auctorum* (unfinished). It is possible that some of his students or colleagues took part in writing some of Claretus’ later texts.<sup>4</sup>

*Medicaminarius* (718 verses) belongs to the genre of *regimina sanitatis* (*regimen sanitatis* – ‘rule of health’), so it contains recommendations and instructions how to stay healthy. The author writes about exercise, rest, food, remedies and medical treatment. In general: the content of *Medicaminarius* more or less covers what was already in the Galenic theory of health and disease called *res non naturales* (non-naturals): the physiological, psychological and environmental conditions that affect health (air, food and drink, motion and rest, sleep and waking, repletion and excretion, passions and emotions).<sup>5</sup> Scholastic medicine adopted this concept from the old Hippocratic-

---

<sup>1</sup> Bartoš (1933: 153–157), Ryba (1943: note 4), Bartoš (1943–1944: 143–147).

<sup>2</sup> Vidmanová (1980: 216, 223).

<sup>3</sup> Vidmanová (1980: 216–217).

<sup>4</sup> For basic information about Claretus and his writings see Nechutová (2007: 184–186).

<sup>5</sup> *Aer, cibis et potus, somnus et vigilia, evacuatio et repletio, motus et quies, accidentia animae*. Generally about the concept *res naturales* – *res non naturales* – *res contra naturam* see e.g. King (2001: 44–52), Schmitt (1976: 17–21), Schmitt (1995, 750–752), Siraisi (1990: 100–101), Střelická (2004: 136–143).

-Galenic tradition through Arabic medical writings such as *Canon medicinae* from Avicenna, *Isagoge Iohannitii*, *Liber Pantegni* from Haly Abbas etc.

*Complexionarius* (944 verses), on the other hand, deals with the *res naturales* (the naturals), which are elements, humours, complexions, body parts, virtues (forces inside the body), physiological processes and a special substance called *spiritus*.<sup>6</sup> The poem describes the four human *complexiones* (temperaments) and puts them into context of these *res naturales* (talks about elements, humours and complexiones). The human *complexio* is derived from the four elements (earth, water, air, fire) and can be described as a balance of basic qualities (hot, cold, moist, dry), which is determined by the amount of the elements in the human body. The four *complexiones* (temperaments) – sanguine, phlegmatic, melancholic and choleric – are presented and anatomical, physiological and behavioural features which are characteristic for them are described in detail, e.g. choleric individuals according to Claretus have usually big hearts, small heads, cold brains, warm stomachs, red or dark hair; they are tall and have light skin, they are agile, easy to upset, untruthful, talkative, passionate etc.<sup>7</sup>

## Structure

Claretus used to compose his didactic poems in verses. Many of them survived with rich commentary in the margins. They were all meant to be school books and their practical use at school was always the main purpose for writing them. Their author had certainly experienced how hard it was for students to learn without understanding what they actually learn, so as a teacher he started writing handbooks in verses in order to make it easier for the students to memorize them and to learn. Such school-books were quite common at that time in western Europe; however, in 14th century there are few authors in the central European region whose literary production is qualitatively comparable with those in the West.

Both poems were used most probably as school texts, but the literary ambition of their author is obvious. As was usual in this genre, they were composed in so-called leonine hexameters<sup>8</sup> (each hexameter with a strong *caesura penthemimeres* and an internal rhyme between a word before caesura and the word at the end of the verse). It needs to be mentioned that if we talk about hexameters or metrum, we mean their medieval form. Medieval poetry is usually *Scheinprosodie*, as it is sometimes called, because the verses were not composed with regard to the natural length of syllables

---

<sup>6</sup> *Elementa, humores (compositiones), complexiones (commixtionnes), membra, virtutes, operationes (actiones), spiritus*. See Schmitt (1995, 750), Siraisi (1990: 101).

<sup>7</sup> For more characteristics see Švanda (2013, 180–182).

<sup>8</sup> The name is derived from the prose rhythm associated with Pope Leo I.

(long by nature), only the positional length (long by position) was observed, so from the classical metrical system point of view the metrum seems to be corrupted.<sup>9</sup>

The primary purpose for composing a didactic text in hexameters was to help the readers to memorize it, and, together with other literary features, it could also reflect the author's literary ambitions. Short but distinct prologues and epilogues belong among such features in Claretus' texts, and especially the prologues were carefully composed and have a typical structure, as we see in *Medicaminarius* (verses 1–10):

Suscipe, germane, celer hoc munus, Mariane,  
hoc opus electum, vario de stipite fictum.  
Ex variis libris medicinam collige fibris,  
qua tibi prodesse poteris multisque preesse.  
Omnipotens Domine, confer regimen medicine, 5  
sanans in fine, ne dentur membra ruine.  
Ex causa bina cunctis prodest medicina:  
prodest insanis et sanis et mage canis;  
convalet infirmus, melior fit corpore firmus.  
Hec data scripta lege, medicine te rege lege.<sup>10</sup> 10

Within these 10 verses we can recognize a dedication<sup>11</sup> (v. 1–2), an exhortation (v. 3 to 4,10), an invocation (asking God for help, v. 5–6) and a part which can be called *laus medicinae* (in praise of medicine, v. 7–9).

Similar structure of the prologue can be seen in *Complexionarius* (v. 1–22): dedication (v. 1), exhortation (v. 1–2, 10, 15–16, 20–22), *laus medicinae* (v. 11–14), instead of an invocation we have rather a profession of faith in God's guidance (v. 3–9). The only difference is that there is a content outline of the subsequent text (v. 17–19), which is missing in *Medicaminarius*.

O bone germane, si poscis vivere sane,  
hec precepta tene, firmans ea pectore plene:  
nam Deus ipse dedit vitam, quam mens mala ledit,  
pastus optando nimios, se peste gravando.  
Hinc Deus in rebus vim liquit et in speciebus, 5  
per quas sanatur animal, corpus medicatur.  
Non tamen inpone spem rebus ea ratione,  
sed magis in Cristum, quia stat mors, vita per istum:  
vita resurgendo data, perdita mors moriendo.  
Hunc pete, quod deditam prolongaret tibi vitam. 10

---

<sup>9</sup> More about writing poetry in the Middle Ages see e.g. Norberg (2004: 180–186).

<sup>10</sup> Flajšhans (1926: 244).

<sup>11</sup> Both *Medicaminarius* and *Complexionarius* are dedicated to Claretus' brother Marianus.



Optima doctrina cunctis fit ad hoc medicina,  
 que corpus sanat, anime mores quoque planat;  
 si te non noscis, frustra sanus fore poscis,  
 nam spernit medicus te sepe videre pudicus. 15  
 Noscito naturam nocuam tibi vel placituram;  
 mox te curabis solus morbosque curabis.  
 Sex debent esse, que sunt tibi scire necesse:  
 res, elementa, cadens humor, complexio vadens,  
 quattuor hinc partes anni cum mensibus artes. 20  
 Hec quia si nosses, te solum noscere posses  
 et mala vitares, bona plurima semper amares.  
 Hec lege non spernens, medicinam pectore cernens.<sup>12</sup>

The epilogues, on the other hand, are very brief in both cases: only one verse (v. 718) in *Medicaminarius*:

Que posui plane, capias, frater Mariane!<sup>13</sup>

and three verses (v. 942–944) in *Complexionarius*:

Ecce scies per te, quid sit complexio certe,  
 omnia cognosces sic, que discernere posces.  
 Sic, pie germane, vives sanus, Mariane.<sup>14</sup>

That shows that the form of both epilogues is an exhortation to the person to whom the poems are dedicated.

The text itself is divided into chapters: *Medicaminarius* has 22 and *Complexionarius* 21 chapters. The beginning of each chapter is signaled only by a large initial letter. Originally there were no titles for individual chapters, the text within chapters was not structured by any subtitles, marginal notes, graphic features or even by leaving a larger space.

## Sources

We do not know what sources were actually used by the author. When he refers to Aristotle (called usually Philosophus), Avicenna or Arnaldus de Villa Nova, he probably knows them only indirectly from florilegies (compilations of excerpts from the writings of popular authorities) that circulated in many versions throughout Europe and were commonly used by many authors.

---

<sup>12</sup> Flajšhans (1926: 207).

<sup>13</sup> Flajšhans (1926: 270).

<sup>14</sup> Flajšhans (1926: 240).



In both texts, especially in *Medicaminarius*, we can find many verses that are identical or similar to those in *Regimen sanitatis Salernitanum* (*Flos medicinae scolae Salerni*, 'Salernitan rule of health'), which is a *regimen sanitatis*, allegedly composed in Salernitan medical school, that became very popular in the 14th century. In *Medicaminarius* there are over 50 Salernitan rule of health, although there is no explicit reference to that work.<sup>15</sup> Verses from Salernitan rule of health are not so frequent in *Complexionarius* (its genre is different after all), but whenever you come across them,<sup>16</sup> there is usually an explicit reference, although Claretus does not name the source and refers to it only as to an unspecified *poema* (v. 454), *dicta poete* (v. 337), *versus* (v. 600), or *poetica* (v. 796).

When he borrows verses from other sources he usually adapts them so they correspond with his style and type of versification. For metric reasons he often uses periphrastic expressions or synonyms, e.g. when he gives a list of elements in *Complexionarius*, instead of more common terms *terra* and *ignis* he chooses *ops* and *rogus* (v. 28), or where we would expect *terra* and *aqua* he uses the words *tellus* and *latex* (v. 53). Similarly according to the situation he uses either *humidus*, *humens* or *madidus* for 'moist', *calidus* or *calens* for 'warm', *frigidus* or *frigens* for 'cold', *coleratus* or *colerans* for 'choleric' etc.

## Manuscripts and edition

We have only two manuscripts with *Complexionarius* and one with *Medicaminarius*. They are preserved in the Library of the Metropolitan Chapter in Prague. The first one (L 52, fol. 149r–168v<sup>17</sup>) is from the first half of the 15th century and contains *Medicaminarius* as well as *Complexionarius*; the second one (M 108, fol. 33v–44r<sup>18</sup>) is older (probably already from the 1360s), but contains only *Complexionarius*. The first one is orderly, it has no commentary in the margins and it was written by one person, while the older manuscript is full of notes: the text itself was written by several different scribes, who added margin notes that make it easier for the reader to follow the text, using red ink, initial letters and even intertextual notes. The rich commentary on both margins was added much later and is not connected directly with the text. Despite the disorderly character of this manuscript we can clearly distinguish the original text from the later additions, which is important for us because we are able to recognize what the original text was and what was added later. On the contrary, in the manuscript L 52 some notes were merged with the text, which made it confusing and more difficult to understand for the reader.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> The parallels are listed in Švanda (2012, 222–226).

<sup>16</sup> Verses 338–339, 455–456, 601–602, 797–798.

<sup>17</sup> Podlaha (1922: 230–231, No 1296).

<sup>18</sup> Podlaha (1922: 334, No 1468).

<sup>19</sup> For codicological analysis see Vidmanová (1978: 193–207).



*Medicaminarius* and *Complexionarius* were published by Václav Flajšhans in 1926 together with *Vocabularius*, *Bohemarius* and *Glossarius*.<sup>20</sup> The edition was immediately strongly criticized because the critical apparatus was insufficient, there were many mistakes, few sources were identified, the structure of the text was corrupted by dividing the chapters into shorter parts (the margin notes, which were added later, were adopted as their titles, some notes even becoming a part of the text).<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, the edition made the text accessible for many researchers who were not used to work with medieval manuscripts. It might be surprising that almost 90 years later we do not have a more recent edition but it is not an easy task to accomplish.

## Conclusion

Claretus represents a writer whose work is a good example of the didactic literature of his time. Its literary value is not very high as Claretus was an average author in comparison with other writers of that time in western Europe, but we have few such authors in the Central European region in the 14th century. His two didactic poems allow us to take a closer look at the theory of health and disease as it was taught in Bohemia in the middle of 14th century.

## Bibliography

- BARTOŠ, F. MICHÁLEK. (1933). Claretus de Solencia a Petrus Clarificator. *Listy filologické*, 60, 153–157.
- BARTOŠ, F. MICHÁLEK. (1943–1944) Ještě jednou o Mistru Klaretovi. In *Český časopis filologický*, 2, 143–147.
- FLAJŠHANS, V. (Ed.) (1926, 1928). *Klaret a jeho družina*. Sv. I: Slovníky veršované. Sv. II: Texty glosované. Praha: Česká akademie věd a umění.
- KING, H. (2001). *Greek and Roman Medicine*. Bristol: Bristol Classical Press.
- NECHUTOVÁ, J. (2007). *Die lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters in Böhmen*. Köln – Weimar – Wien: Böhlau.
- NORBERG, D. (2004). *An introduction to the study of medieval Latin versification*. Washington: Catholic University of America Press.
- PODLAHA, A. (1922). *Soupis rukopisů knihovny metropolitní kapituly pražské*. Díl II. Praha: Česká akademie věd a umění.
- DE RENZI, S., & GARZYA, A. (Eds.) (2001). *Flos medicinae Scholae Salerni*. In *Collectio Salernitana I*. Napoli: M. D'Auria, 445–516.
- RYBA, B. (1943) Nové jméno Mistra Klareta. Praha, In *Věstník Královské české společnosti nauk*, 1–13.
- SCHMITT, W. (1976). Geist und Überlieferung der regimina sanitatis. In COGLIATI ARANO, L. (Ed.) *Tacuinum sanitatis*. Das Buch der Gesundheit. München: Heimeran, 17–35.
- SCHMITT, W. (1999). Res naturales. Res non naturales. Res praeter naturam. In *Lexikon des Mittelalters*. Bd. 7. Struttgart – Weimar: Metzler, col. 750–752.
- SIRAISI, N. G. (1990). *Medieval and early Renaissance medicine: an introduction to knowledge and practice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

---

<sup>20</sup> Flajšhans (1926: 203–270).

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Vilikovský (1928: 442–453), Vidmanová (1978: 193, 197, 206).

- STŘELICKÁ, D. (2004). *Summa recreatorum. Středověký sborník intelektuální zábavy*. (Diss.) Brno: Masarykova univerzita.
- ŠVANDA, L. (2012). Klaretův Medicaminarius: jeho obsah a základní pramen. *Graeco-latina Brunensia*, 17 (2), 215–228.
- ŠVANDA, L. (2013). Ke Klaretově spisu Complexionarius. *Graeco-latina Brunensia*, 18 (2), 175–185.
- VIDMANOVÁ, A. (1978). Prolegomena k latinským spisům mistra Klareta. *Listy filologické*, 101, 193–207.
- VIDMANOVÁ, A. (1980). Mistr Klaret a jeho spisy. *Listy filologické*, 103, 213–223.
- VILIKOVSKÝ, J. (1928). Klaret a jeho družina. (Review) *Bratislava*, 2, 442–453.

## Bionote

**Libor Švanda**, e-mail: svanda@phil.muni.cz, Masaryk University Language Centre.

Libor Švanda teaches Latin medical terminology at Faculty of Medicine and Medieval Latin at Faculty of Arts of the Masaryk University. He participates on two editing projects: critical editions of *Iohannis Hus Opera Omnia*, vol. 24, and *Chronicon Aulae regiae*.