

VECU Project, part „Proverbs“.

4. The role of Latin language for the origin and distribution of European proverbs.

Where do proverbs come from? As senior students at some European universities, especially at the UDA in Bratislava, we asked ourselves:

Is there an interference, an influence between European proverbs?

We have got our cultural and philosophic origin from the so called „Occidental Culture“, so it is logical to look for the sources of our proverbs in the philosophy and literature of the ancient world.

Proverbs transfer wisdom, experience and philosophy of life. Therefore we looked for roots of our proverbs in Latin texts. (Also in Greek, see chapter 5. „proverbs and religions“)

It was important as well to look, besides after the ancient proverbs, after their authors.

The most ancient proverbs well known today are quotations of wise men of the past: Ovid, Vergil, Cicero, Seneca, Platon, Aristoteles, of the „Book of Proverbs“ etc.

In the table of Latin proverbs we wrote down the authors in case we were able to identify them.

Later, in the Middle Ages, Latin became the language of scientists, intellectuals and of the church. Thanks to St. Augustinus, St. Benedictus, St. Thomas and others we got a rich heritage of texts.

Already in the Karolingian time Latin was very important for communication.

So in these time Latin became not only an every day language, but also quotations on monuments, memorials, medals and coins were distributed, well known even today as proverbs or aphorisms, existing and used in many European languages.

Latin had been used in our countries not only by scientists and in the liturgy of the church, but also as the official language in some European states like Hungary until 1848.

A crucial role for the distribution of proverbs played the collections of Agricola and Erasmus von Rotterdam in the period of Humanism, which were written in Latin and edited several times.

Naturally it is not easy to identify the origin of a Latin proverb, because certainly many of them had their source at universities of the Middle Age: Plenus venter non studet libenter...
...a full tummy doesn't want to study.

Also Martin Luther collected German and Latin proverbs for his own use in church and his polemic texts (see chapter 5., proverbs and religions), and so contributed to their distribution. Already 1508 German proverbs had been translated into Latin (Heinrich Bebel, Tübingen), which demonstrates, that not only Latin proverbs integrated national languages, but also national proverbs were distributed all over Europe.

Certainly proverbs nowadays cover a broad and complex area with various perspectives, for example: Common, regional, religious proverbs, country proverbs etc.

In this study we looked for the common roots of the proverbs.

Let`s return to the Latin language, which nowadays , in the “digital period” is considered to be a “dead language”. Time has gone since intellectuals communicated exclusively in Latin. However Latin has survived. At the Council Vatican II communication was in Latin and in theology it is greatly appreciated because of its clear terms, in medicine as well. Many words used in every day life, quotations, proverbs and aphorisms with Latin roots are visible in European languages. Therefore, in our study about proverbs we put attention to the Latin language and to the ancient world.

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