

Metternich's Rare Medieval Codex Restored

by Milan Svoboda

A unique medieval codex in the library of the Château of Kynžvart that once belonged to Prince Clement Wenzel von Metternich has been restored on the initiative of and with the financial support of The Friends of Czech Heritage. In 2017 the Chairman of The Friends, Peter Jamieson, visited the château during a Friends' working holiday taking place in nearby Krásný Dvůr. During a tour of the château certain medieval manuscripts from the collection of the Austrian Chancellor Metternich were shown and it was clear that they were not in a good state and that they needed conservation.

In the moment when Peter Jamieson asked the property manager of the château, Ondřej Cink, if he would accept help to conserve one of the manuscripts, there began the long but successful process of rescuing a real treasure of the princely library. The parchment manuscript, until recently in a perilous state, was professionally conserved thanks to a happy chance and is now preserved for future generations. Prior to conservation it was not fit even to be digitised.

The codex consists of four parts in seven chapters and was written by three individuals. Its subjects are logic, physics, poetry, church law and practice, making it clear that this is a university work of reference or a textbook. It is dated to the first half of the 13th century, but some parts may be from the late 12th century. It contains these titles:

- 1/ Lamberti de Atissiodoro seu de Liniaco Castro Summulae et Summa logicae. Ex Aritotelis Physicorum.
- 2/ Guilelmi de Conchis Philosophia mundi.
- 3/ Wernheri de Schussenried. Compendium Decreti.
- 4/ Summa Richardi ad iniungendam penitentiam. Compendium tractatus de poenitentia. Compendium tractatus de consecratione.

The first part had suffered the most serious damage due to excessive temperature, which led to the shrinking of the parchment, making it brittle and causing it to split and crumble. However, this part of the manuscript is the most decorated and contains eight gilded, illuminated initials. An interesting decorative motif is the rabbit with a hunting dog, popular in French work.

In terms of historical knowledge the most valuable part is the less decorated part, namely the Compendium of Werner von Schussenried. This is an excerpt from Gratian's famous Concordia discordantium canonum (The Concordance of Discordant Canons). This work is among the oldest works of legal science: it does not survive in its original form, only through copies. The Compendium of Werner von Schussenried is, thanks to its precisely structured approach, the nearest to the original work by Gratian.

The restored codex was displayed in the chancellor's library during the Easter celebrations 2022. The Friends supported the conservation with a £500 grant, the Friends' Chairman donated the same sum, as did a private donor from the Czech Republic. The sum of the £1,500, a third of the necessary cost, was the basis for developing the project. The Friends initiated the process to conserve a valuable medieval treasure.



Above, left to right, Chairman of The Friends Peter Jamieson with property manager Ondřej Cink and curator Petra Jadlovská at the initial showing of the conserved codex in Kynžvart at Easter 2022. Below, two pages of the codex

