

RKZ – The Dvůr Králové and Zelená Hora Manuscripts

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16th of September 2017 marks the 200th anniversary of the discovery of the Dvůr Králové Manuscript (RK), said to have originated at the turn of the 13th century. In 1818, the Zelená Hora Manuscript (RZ), known at the time as Libuše's Judgement was sent anonymously to the Supreme Land Burgrave František of Kolowrat. It was placed among the collections of the newly founded Patriotic Museum – today's National Museum. This manuscript, which was estimated to have originated in the 9th–10th centuries, had already begun to raise doubts as to its authenticity among some of the scholars of the time, and so the controversy as to the genuineness of both works flared up, continuing in a somewhat more cultivated form up to this day. During the course of two centuries the manuscripts did not only attract attention from a scientific point of view, they also became an ideological means to political struggle. Above all many Czech as well as foreign artists have been inspired by the age-old motives from pagan times, by their epic and lyric poetry, especially from the moment when J. W. Goethe showed his interest in them. The RKZ belong among the most famous and discussed manuscript relics in the collections of the National Museum Library. Are they forgeries or authentic medieval literature? Even the living secrets have their historical value.

The first activities related to the material research on both parchment manuscript fragments were performed shortly after RKZ discovery. The latest and the most comprehensive research was conducted by PhDr. Miroslav Ivanov and his team at the end of 1960's. In connection with the 200th anniversary of RKZ discovery a new research was planned for the year 2017. Its aim was primarily to evaluate a physical condition of both manuscripts and using a modern non-invasive imaging and analytical methods to help to clarify some technological issues of their origin. The curator, conservator and two technologists have prepared research proposal authorized by an expert committee set up for this purpose.

RK consists of seven double leaves (14 ff. 12 x 2–8 cm, illum. – two double leaves were partly cut off on one side) while RZ consists of two double leaves (4 ff. 16 x 12 cm). Extensive photographic documentation of all double leaves was carried out consisting of: high resolution digitisation to offer a substitute for the original manuscript, documentation in visible, UV, side and transmitted lighting, IRR and IRFC imaging, photographic microscope documentation, X-ray fluorescence analysis (XRF), Raman spectroscopy of pigments and inks, and collagen analysis of used parchment. A map of former treatments was created regarding the traces of former research interventions involving numerous micro-chemical tests.

Although authentication of the manuscripts was not among the goals of the current research several interesting facts were discovered that could help to answer similar questions in the future.