

VIKTOR WINTNER

Masaryk University, Brno

## ***Vita divi Pauli Primi Eremitae* by Valentin Eck, Shortly Introduced and Poetically Translated**

*Valentin Eck (1494–1556) also known as Valentinus Ecchius is one of the most prolific humanist authors associated with the territory of current Slovakia. Though born in the Bavarian city of Lindau, he spent the majority of his life in the eastern Slovak city of Bardejov serving, at first, as the principal of the local school until he finally reached the position of the city judge (der Richter). Behind his rise to prominence stood the patronage of Alexius Thurzo, one of the most influential royal dignitaries of Louis II. and Ferdinand I., to whom he dedicated most of his works including the epyllion *Vita divi Pauli Primi Eremitae*, a poetic adaptation of the legend about the anchorite Paul of Thebes written by Jerome more than a thousand years ago. Our paper contains a short introduction both into the life and works of the poet trying to describe his political and literary activities in the then Kingdom of Hungary in connection with other eminent humanist scholars of those times such as Rudolf Agricola Junior and Leonard Cox. Then it compares the Eck's versified version of Paul's life to its prosaic original briefly trying to identify the main changes which the Hieronymian work underwent. Neither the aesthetic appraisal of the poem is neglected. The heart of the paper is, however, represented by the commented translation of the aforementioned Pauline epyllion into English hexameter the purpose of which is to popularize the literary production of this humanist scholar abroad.*

**Keywords:** Christian humanism, Valentin Eck, Alexius Thurzo, Paul the First Hermit, epyllion, hexametric translation

## A Very Short Introduction into the Life and Works of Valentin Eck

Valentin Eck or *Valentinus Ecchius* (1494–1556) was born in the Bavarian city of Lindau. He studied at Leipzig and Cracow, and in 1518, with the help of a Hungarian aristocrat, Alexius Thurzo, he settled down in the city of Bardejov (currently eastern Slovakia). There he served as the school principal gradually advancing to the offices of the city scribe, notary and mayor.<sup>1</sup> During the internal power struggles which followed the Hungarian defeat at Mohács in 1526, he supported the claims of archduke Ferdinand Habsburg serving as an envoy of eastern Slovak cities.<sup>2</sup>

The beginning of his political career is, however, closely associated with literature. He was one of those humanist scholars who tried to use their literary skills to be accepted as teachers, courtiers or clerks, dedicating their writings to the mighty in order to gain their support.<sup>3</sup> Together with his contemporaries Rudolf Agricola Junior and Leonard Cox who found patronage in Poland, he managed to connect himself to the most influential dignitaries of the then Jagiellonian realm acting as a representative of classical learning and Christian morality.<sup>4</sup> His attitude to the Reformation seems to match Erasmus' Christian humanism<sup>5</sup>, which tried to improve the state of the Church from within, focusing not only on the ecclesiastical but also on the pedagogical aspect of the crisis it was going through.<sup>6</sup>

The list of his prosaic works includes a manual for writing poetry known as *Ars versificatoria* and philosophical dialogues *De mundi con-*

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<sup>1</sup> ŠKOVIERA (2008: 125).

<sup>2</sup> ŠKOVIERA (2002: 24–25).

<sup>3</sup> BERNSTEIN (1998: 45–64).

<sup>4</sup> GLOMSKI (2007: 185).

<sup>5</sup> ŠKOVIERA (2008: 126).

<sup>6</sup> FRIMMOVÁ (1998: 28).

*temptu et virtute amplectenda* and *De rei publicae administratione*. His poetry is, however, of no less importance including both the versified lives of the saints *Vita divi Pauli Primi Eremitae*, *De divo Alexio, patricio Romano* or the reflections on friendship and marriage *De amicitiae et concordiae utilitate* and *Utrum prudentissimo viro sit ducenda uxor* and many others. Apart from that, he produced several editions of classical and patristic authors such as Horace, Prudentius and Augustine.<sup>7</sup>

As for the *Vita divi Pauli*, it is a 300-verses-long epyllion introduced by the poetic recommendations by his acquaintances Leonard Cox, Johannes Rullus and Matthias Pyrser<sup>8</sup>, and author's prosaic dedication to Alexius Thurzo whose designation to the office of the royal treasurer by king Louis II the whole work celebrates. The narrative itself closely follows Jerome's *Vita sancti Pauli Eremitae*<sup>9</sup> with a few exceptions. Whereas about the half of the original is devoted to Saint Anthony who comes to visit Paul in his seclusion<sup>10</sup>, Eck focuses upon Paul himself, omitting the passages where Anthony contemplates his own primacy as a hermit, speaks to his disciples or takes Paul's tunic. The supernatural is reduced, the mention of a centaur, the speech of a satyr and the lions' pleading for Anthony's blessing being entirely omitted. Finally, Jerome's comments are reduced too as there is no discussion on Paul's hermitic priority over Anthony, evidence that satyrs really exist or explanation of Paul's asking for the tunic of Athanasius. In general, we can say that Eck tries to make the original narrative more rational, fluent and 'Paul-centered'.<sup>11</sup>

When it comes to the aesthetics of the poem, its hexameter is smooth and elegant with rare occurrence of elision, synizesis and *correptio iam-*

<sup>7</sup> ŠKOVIERA (2006: 12–15).

<sup>8</sup> Johannes Rullus and Matthias Pyrser belonged to the group of the young Erasmians, mostly of Silesian origin, who had gathered around Leonard Cox in Cracow. GŁOMSKI (2007: 44).

<sup>9</sup> ŠKOVIERA (2007: 122).

<sup>10</sup> ŠUBRT (2002: 35).

<sup>11</sup> ŠKOVIERA (2007: 121–129).

*bica*. It is rich in the poetic figures of all kinds and golden verses are also present. The poem is visibly inspired by the classical poets Virgil, Horace and Ovid. It contains many elements typical of the ancient epic such as invocation, catalogue, speeches, digressions and ancient deities also appear, at least, symbolically – *Eois campis* (60), *dona Cereris* (156) or *Mavortis ira* (282).<sup>12</sup> The choice of Paul as a protagonist of a new epyllion was influenced by the strong tradition of worshipping this hermit by the Hungarian monastic order of Paulines, the fondness of Thurzos's family for him and also by the author's personal piety.<sup>13</sup>

Considering our translation, we try to imitate the rhythm of dactylic hexameter, the original metric form of the poem similarly to the way Rodney Merrill and Frederick Ahl successfully did in their translations of Homer<sup>14</sup> and Virgil.<sup>15</sup> Our hexameter consists of six feet, each of which starts with the stressed syllable. Spondees and trochees are treated as equals. Every verse ends with heroic clausula with the exception of the elegiac couplets at the beginning. With respect to the 'non-native English speakers' (one of whom is the author of this text himself), the correct pronunciation of the most tricky names is provided in explanatory notes. We take the liberty of poetic licence when it comes to the occasional elision of a definite article followed by a vowel and use the old-fashioned contractions such as 'Twas or 'Twill in some places.

Yet, we hope that this attempt for the hexametric adaptation of *Vita divi Pauli* will help to make Valentin Eck better known among foreign scholars, attracting their attention to the other works of his, whether written in verse or in prose.

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<sup>12</sup> ŠKOVIERA (2007: 129–140).

<sup>13</sup> ŠKOVIERA (2007: 113–114).

<sup>14</sup> MERRILL (2009).

<sup>15</sup> AHL (2008).

## **The Life of Saint Paul, the First Hermit<sup>16</sup>**

### **To the industrious reader from Johannes Rullus**

Grasp this booklet at once, dear reader, with both of your hands if  
it is the new and divine your heart does truly desire,  
for it speaks of Saint Paul of Thebes, of his life and his death, since  
he, as the first of all men, decided to live in the wild.  
Is there anyone who is still willing to take the same path, the  
path of the holy? If so, then he is true Cato the Third.  
Therefore, I hope that nobody doubts what the poet deserves – our  
genuine prayers that he lives a long and fortunate life.

### **From the same author**

Small is this poem, indeed. Despite its smallness, however,  
it is the proof that the heart and soul of its author are great.

### **To the kind reader: An ornament of the Ecchian Muses and verses by Matthias Pyrser, Yours forever**

Nature made sure that there is a place for all her creations.  
Thus the things that are small in size are great in their use.  
So a beryl and carbuncle<sup>17</sup> – both are tiny; however,  
masses of gold they adorn and look how their beauty stands out!  
There is no doubt that this poem inspired by the Muses of Lindau  
will be a great delight and proper amusement for all,

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<sup>16</sup> We follow the first edition of this work: *Vita divi Pauli Eremitae Valentino Ecchio Lendano autore*. Crachoviae 1522. URL: [https://www.google.hu/books/edition/Vita\\_divi\\_Pauli\\_primi\\_eremita/Hr5eAAAACAAJ?gbpv=1](https://www.google.hu/books/edition/Vita_divi_Pauli_primi_eremita/Hr5eAAAACAAJ?gbpv=1). A hexametric translation into Slovak by professor Daniel ŠKOVIERA, whose work we wish to continue in, is included in the aforementioned anthology ŠKOVIERA (2008: 150–160). Our translation into English was checked by associate professor Petra MUTLOVÁ from the Department of Classical Studies, Masaryk University, Brno.

<sup>17</sup> Precious stones.

as Calliope<sup>18</sup> on her own it is who retells the  
 story of Reverend Paul, the man who rejected all wealth  
 following Jesus and hid in the distant wastelands of Egypt  
 where he spoke to no man, but him who buried his corpse.

### A premature poem from the same author

There are no jokes and feasts and games in the verses below for  
 they are extolling the saint whose bones Pannonia<sup>19</sup> keeps.

### Recommendation by Leonard Cox<sup>20</sup>

You, amazed by the glorious deeds of Homer's Achilles<sup>21</sup>  
 and astonished by what Odysseus<sup>22</sup> had to come through,  
 you, who admire Aeneas's<sup>23</sup> sense of duty and strength while  
 singing of Hannibal, who so often went back on his words;  
 do not devote yourself to old stories, unreal and unworthy. 5  
 There is much more to be sought and found in the works of our times.  
 Hear, o Reader, about the hero who did not destroy the  
 city of Troy but the realm of darkness where Erebus<sup>24</sup> ruled.  
 Hear of the man who conquered the sea of sinfulness after  
 fighting its violent storms and terrible billows for long. 10  
 There is no castaway any more who was sailing rough seas and

<sup>18</sup> \ kə-'lī-ə-(,)pē \ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/calliope>. A muse regarded as the patron of epic poetry.

<sup>19</sup> \ pə-'nō-nē-ə \ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Pannonia>.

<sup>20</sup> An English humanist who studied in Tübingen under Philipp Melanchthon, taught at the university of Kraków and led the grammar schools in Levoča and Košice (currently, Eastern Slovakia). After his return to Kraków in 1525 he published his pedagogical works *Libellus de erudienda iuventute* and *Methodus humaniorum studiorum*. Kuzmík (1976: 153–154).

<sup>21</sup> \ ə-'ki-lēz \ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Achilles>.

<sup>22</sup> \ ō-'di-sē-əs, -'dis-yəs \ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Odysseus>.

<sup>23</sup> \ i-'nē-əs \ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Aeneas>.

<sup>24</sup> \ 'er-ə-bəs \ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Erebus>. The personification of darkness.

whom its ponderous waves were pushing down to its depths.  
 Since he finally climbed the towering mountains of virtue  
 he has been living up there among the gods of the sky.  
 Hear, then, about the deeds of this man which, Valentin Eck, a 15  
 poet of consummate skill, like Virgil is going to sing.

**Tetrastich for great and noble Alexius Thurzo by the same author**

Please, accept these verses, most noble Alexius<sup>25</sup> Thurzo –  
 after all, you are the man for whom each one was composed –  
 and remember that if they delight you, just let us be told and  
 there will be more to be read and praise your house to the skies.

**To the great and noble lord Alexius Thurzo of Betlanovce<sup>26</sup>, the Royal  
 Treasurer and Master of Royal Chamberlains, our most honourable lord  
 and patron, Valentin Eck recommends himself.**

As soon as we received the news that on the advice of all royal dignitaries you,  
 most noble lord, were unanimously trusted with the administration of the roy-  
 al treasury, we had to congratulate ourselves both in our mind. We congratu-  
 late you, your Lordship, for being promoted to the position distinguished and  
 eminent like no other. We congratulate ourselves too, however, because it is  
 our lord, the success of whom we wished, who attained this honour and who,  
 as we hope, will administrate our kingdom so that we all can live as wealthy  
 and abundant lives as possible.

We had noticed long ago how diligently and industriously you care for  
 your own possessions and we became convinced that you would care for the  
 possessions of our kingdom equally. You always genuinely wanted them to  
 prosper and to produce more and so most people used to say about you the

<sup>25</sup> \ ə-ˈlek-sē-əs \ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Alexius%20I%20Comnenus>.

<sup>26</sup> Betlanovce, Betlenfalva or Betlensdorf is a village in the Košice region of eastern Slovakia.

same thing as the famous commander of the Greek army used to say about his comrade Nestor: 'If only our Pannonia had more men like Thurzo.'<sup>27</sup>

Now, when all tyrants are gone, we should not nourish our mutual disagreements but instead, cemented by our Christian faith, we should make an attempt, at least, to avoid our destiny which seems to be insidiously instigating us day after day to begin war against each other. No one wants to be remembered as the one who did not contribute to the greatness of our kingdom and even less as the one who shamefully lost what our ancestors had gained thanks to their courage and strength. Yet, we all have to live with fear that, if we do not come to our senses quickly, all we have will be looted and plundered by the enemies of Christianity.

At last, however, our desperate hope has been brought back to life thanks to you, the man who is watching over the interests of our country without thinking about the ones of his own. It is you, after all, who is trying to earn it fame, increasing its wealth and refining its morals every day, because you know that a good country has to be built upon the blossom of virtue the same as upon the growth of possession. And, in fact, virtue is above everything else for, as the comedian put it aptly, it has the power to protect liberty, welfare, life, property, parents, homeland and relatives.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, no one will persuade me that wealth alone, however great it can be, will keep this kingdom safe, for it is virtue, faith, piety and reverence for our greatest divine protectors which ensure our safety. At first, it is the immaculate mother of God, Mary, a venerable patron of our country, and then many other patrons of our own, among whom Paul the First Hermit is surely not the last one. It is he who can repel the ferocious attacks of Muslims even alone if worshipped properly, for as long as he lived, he was able to do the same with savage beasts.

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Hom. *Il.* 2, 371–374.

<sup>28</sup> Plaut. *Amph.* 2, 19–21.



As we heard that he is loved and worshipped by your Lordship and many others, we thought that it would not be improper to make his life better-known by this hastily written poem of ours. Bearing in mind that it is you whom we owe everything we have, we earnestly ask your Lordship to accept this humble gift with the same kindness with which it was composed. We wish you a long and happy life.

Bardejov, the day before St. Elisabeth day, 1522

**To the great and noble lord, Lord Alexius Thurzo of Betlanovce, the Royal Treasurer and Master of Royal Chamberlains etc, The Life of Saint Paul the First Hermit by Valentin Eck of Lindau in Rhaetia, the scribe of the city of Bardejov.**

What was the reason why Paul, the first eremite, chose to give up the  
splendor of home? What power inscrutable urged him to leave and  
spend the rest of his life in the depths and darkness of caves? When  
I am thinking of this, my heart is filled with unspoken  
warmth and is happy to go to the distant country of Sita, 5  
seeing the homes of the Thebans and Nitria with its recesses<sup>29</sup>  
where the fathers of old used to silently live in their caves. The  
Muses will not accompany me, nor Phoebus Apollo<sup>30</sup>  
do I ask for his help. 'Twill be the Son of the mighty  
Thunderer, Christ, who will helpfully show me the way through th'Egyptian 10  
flourishing plains, through the hundred-gated City and through the  
Nile, the rich currents of which are spilling over its bed. Then  
I will reach the forsaken abode of the hermit and see his

<sup>29</sup> Nitria – a mountain range to the south of Alexandria, a former center of hermitic life in Egypt. Šubrt (2002: 18) The poet describes the three toponyms in the margin simply as *Antiquorum patrum solitudines*. ECCHIUS (1522).

<sup>30</sup> \ ə-'pä-(.)lō \ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Apollo>.

shelter, the sacred place to which he, though an innocent man, was  
 forced to resort because of the Emperor Decius<sup>31</sup>, during 15  
 whose tyrannical reign a storm was raging with fire,  
 persecuting the people of Christ and showing no mercy.  
 Such was the hatred that Decius felt down deep in his heart that  
 he desired to remove the name of God from the earth and  
 so he threatened all worshippers of the Trinity with a 20  
 rack and a wheel, with iron and fire, scourges and swords. O,  
 terrible was the suffering caused to numberless Christians  
 both the young and the old becoming the martyrs of Christ. When  
 Agnes<sup>32</sup> escaped the danger of flames, a furious headsman  
 put the blade of his sword to her neck, which was whiter than snow. A 25  
 maid of Catania<sup>33</sup>, Agatha<sup>34</sup>, also was tortured, her body  
 being rolled over the burning shards from the right to the left and  
 so the virgin whose name was derived from noble Apollo<sup>35</sup>;  
 losing her teeth, she happily jumped right into the fire.

<sup>31</sup> In order to ensure the ideological unification of the Roman empire, Decius (ruling in 249–251) decreed that all citizens had to perform a religious sacrifice demonstrating their loyalty to the empire. Given that the second commandment prohibited the worship of the other gods, it resulted in the first organized persecution of Christians. ŠUBRT (2002: 44).

<sup>32</sup> Saint Agnes – a patron saint of girls who, when 12 or 13 years old, refused to be married to anyone else than Jesus Christ, for which she was exposed in a brothel and later, refusing to renounce her faith, sentenced to die by fire. However, she remained unharmed in the flames, and so finally was decapitated. GULLEY (2001: 5–6).

<sup>33</sup> \ kə'tanjə \ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Catania>.

<sup>34</sup> Saint Agatha – a virgin of noble birth, whose beauty reportedly attracted the Roman consul Quintinian. When she refused his offer of marriage because of her dedication to Christ, she was accused of being a Christian and then brutally tortured, among other ways, by being rolled over burning coals and broken potsherds. It is this punishment to which Eck, probably, refers when saying: *Nymphe Catanea coruscis subiicitur testis Agathe*. GULLEY (2001: 4).

<sup>35</sup> Saint Apollonia – a patron saint of dentists who, upon being threatened to be burnt alive if she did not deny Christ, answered by jumping into the flames on her own. GULLEY (2001: 32).

Horses were dragging Hippolytus<sup>36</sup> till he died while his nurse, whose 30  
 name was Concordia<sup>37</sup>, had to go through the flogging by leaden  
 whips and Lawrence<sup>38</sup> was roasted alive. This murderous plague, this  
 thirst for the blood of the Christians was everywhere. Even the bold felt  
 terrible fear in their hearts and therefore the seven young men from  
 Ephesus<sup>39</sup> fled to the hills where some cave provided them shelter. 35  
 In the face of this imminent danger, Paul did not know what he  
 was to do next and given the greed of his own son-in-law, who  
 tried to denounce him to get to his wealth, he worried the more, so  
 he decided to leave his town and his property with it,  
 trying to find some refuge where he would wait out this storm – the 40  
 same a helmsman does when the sea is becoming so rough that  
 he, at the stern, is quivering just like his boat in the winds. Young  
 Paul was treading and treading ahead. His vigilant eyes were  
 studying the country around and oftentimes looking behind, for  
 big and deep was the fear that troubled his innocent soul. A 45  
 sheep, a defenceless sheep, which luckily fled the ferocious  
 wolves and which is now trying to soothe its quivering soul, still  
 scared of those bloodthirsty mouths of theirs and their terrible teeth – this  
 lamb that was him still dreading the beasts can attack from behind. But

<sup>36</sup> \ hi- 'pä-lə-təs \ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Hippolytus>. Saint Hippolytus – sometimes confused with the theologian Hippolytus of Rome, a soldier and jailer of saint Lawrence who, under his influence, converted. RULÍŠEK (2006: 151–152).

<sup>37</sup> \ kòn- 'kòr-dē-ä \ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/concordia%20discors#f>. Saint Concordia – a nurse in the house of Hippolytus and patron saint of nurses. GULLEY (2001: 224).

<sup>38</sup> Saint Lawrence – due to his decision to give the church's treasures to the needy and alleged execution on a gridiron, known as a patron saint of the poor and of cooks. GULLEY (2001: 204–205).

<sup>39</sup> Seven Sleepers of Ephesus – legendary Christian soldiers who tried to escape the Decian persecution of Christians by hiding themselves in a cave near Ephesus where they fell into a miraculous sleep. During the reign of emperor Theodosius II. (408–450) they woke up and explained the meaning of their experience affirming the resurrection of the dead. GULLEY (2001: 304).

there was a place in the country of Isis beyond the town walls of 50  
 famous Canopus<sup>40</sup>, the place which was hid in the tangle of vales and  
 masses of sand where Paul the young Theban was heading his footsteps  
 being the only one far and wide. There under one peak he  
 managed to find a cave surrounded by sun-baked crags. The  
 cave had a spring of its own, a few orderly cells and apart from 55  
 that, some anvils worn out by the passing of time since this hollow  
 used to serve as a hideout for those who were making false coins. As  
 somebody said, it was during the times when Caesar Augustus<sup>41</sup>  
 sank the fleet of his rivals at Actium, conquered the East and  
 brought such spoils to the city of Rome as no one before him. 60  
 When he entered the cave its homeliness pleased him so much that  
 he decided at once to leave the sins of this world and  
 start a new life, devoid of sinfulness living alone. O,  
 wise is the young man whose will is so strong that he boldly resists the  
 whims and wishes arising out of worldly possessions. 65  
 He exchanged the wealth of this world for the blessing of heaven  
 fully aware of the darkness his heart had to win through if he was  
 really so eager to follow the path which leads to the skies. The  
 kingdom of heaven is whiter than snow and not even the gold of  
 Lydia matches its brightness. No sin can sully its gates, so 70  
 only the one who is pure in his heart is allowed to get in while  
 those of black souls will be carried away by Stygian waters.  
 Thinking of all of this deeply inside his heart he resolved to  
 leave the world of the sinful, expelling all wicked affections  
 out of his heart. And just as a snake he acted, the snake which 75  
 crawls among the sharp rocks and stones in order to slough – so  
 Paul got rid of the languor which vexed his body and soul. His

<sup>40</sup> \ kə-'nō-pəs \ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Canopus>.

<sup>41</sup> \ ɔ-'gə-stəs \ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Augustus>.

mind did not get corrupted by pride, by the terrible poison  
 which arose from the Phlegethon's subterranean streams and  
 which the Gorgons themselves disgorge from their infamous mouths, nor 80  
 was his stomach polluted by gluttony. Burnt in the sun, his  
 body was dressed in the leaves of a palm, a fruitful tree which was  
 giving him nourishing food but only so much as to keep his  
 limbs so exhausted alive. Yet he was deriding the rich with  
 all of their feasts as he did know well they feed their diseases. 85  
 There was just one and only food that he really cared for and  
 that was the bread immortal - the Son who descended from heav'n to  
 enter the womb of the Virgin thus saving the world from the sin, its  
 terrible prison. So day and night he was pushing the other  
 thoughts aside as down deep in his mind he truly desired to 90  
 suffer the same as the King of Olympus<sup>42</sup>, the Maker almighty  
 contemplating His merciless torture again and again. Since  
 it is for us, for our pitiful souls that he willingly took the  
 weight of the cross and as soon as His mother gave birth to Him in the  
 poverty of a stable, His innocent blood had to trickle 95  
 down His delicate limbs because an old custom required it.<sup>43</sup>  
 Afterwards, due to the terrible fury of Herod the king, His  
 parents were urged to take Him to Egypt, the land of rich crops where  
 seven long years of His life he was forced to spend till the time had  
 come to return. Then, reaching the age of thirty and having 100  
 Mary, his mother, always beside Him, He, led by His faith, set  
 out to spread the good news of salvation which everyone longed for.  
 He was doing what doctors do - healing the festering wounds of  
 those in need – and just out of His piety, He did expose his  
 heart to th'abasement of spit and the torments of fists, whips and wedges. 105

<sup>42</sup> \ ə-'lim-pəs \ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Olympus>.

<sup>43</sup> An allusion to the custom of circumcision.

Having carefully thought of these things, Paul made up his mind to  
 cast away all the haughtiness that was kept in his chest and  
 bearing the kingdom of heaven in mind, he finally chose the  
 life of a hermit contented with all that nature provides. While  
 he was living his self-denying life bless'd by the Lord a 110  
 man called Anthony<sup>44</sup>, urged by the silent call of his soul, set  
 off to find the Paul's cave, a poor place he had made his new home, though  
 weak was his body and each of his steps was slowed by his age. While  
 walking through desert he, all of a sudden, encountered a Satyr<sup>45</sup>.  
 Wondering at th' appearance and voice of this savage, the pilgrim 115  
 burst into tears and these were the words he cried out aloud: 'O  
 land of Memphis, how foolish you are! Forgetting your Lord, you  
 worship your powerless idols in vain while even this stupid  
 animal knows the Messiah and so it celebrates Jesus.'  
 Then he went onwards but far and wide the only thing he could 120  
 see were the sands of the desert – a place unknown to the feet of  
 men where only the prints of the beasts which strayed could be found – but  
 finally, led by a she-wolf, he spotted the cave he was seeking  
 where the hermit of old was living in secret seclusion.  
 Standing in front of its entrance, at first, he carefully listened. 125  
 When, however, he noticed a beam of light in the darkness  
 trying to get to its source too fast, he stumbled and all the  
 walls of the eremite's cave, then, started to echo this sound. The  
 moment he heard that noise, Paul hastily came to his door and  
 latched it at once to make sure that the stranger would not get inside. But 130  
 strong was the zeal that his visitor Anthony felt in his chest. He  
 lay in front of the door in the voice of friendship exclaiming:

<sup>44</sup> Anthony of Egypt (died in 356), the first-known anchorite. His life, *Vita Antonii*, was depicted by his contemporary, Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria (died in 373). ŠUBRT (2002: 42–43).

<sup>45</sup> \ 'sā-tər \ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/satyr>.

'Father, you know who I am, the same as you know where I came from.  
 Nor is my reason for travelling here unknown to your heart and  
 I am not worthy to look at your face, I know that for sure, but 135  
 there is one thing, o holy father, you have to remember:  
 I will not leave this cave, this shelter of yours (and I mean it!)  
 sooner than you allow me to see you and you should know too that  
 I am willing to give up my life in front of this door and  
 when the time comes 'twill be you who will have to bury my body.' 140  
 Then he fell silent calmly awaiting the eremite's answer.  
 After those words a smile appeared on Paul's elderly face and  
 oping the door, he finally let his visitor in. The  
 host, at first, embraced his new guest, who had dreamt of this moment.  
 Then he offered a seat to him as exhausted he seemed to 145  
 be and at last in a voice of kindness the hermit addressed him:  
 'Look at me stranger! I am the poor old man you are seeking!  
 These are my legs distorted by ageing, my quivering hands – my  
 pitiful body, the fate of which is to turn into dust. But  
 you, my dear guest, relate about the world of these days, please! 150  
 What is the life of the people outside? What laws do they follow?  
 Is there someone who still believes in the gods of the gentiles?  
 Someone who worships them still attending their infamous temples?'  
 This and even much more Paul wanted to hear from his guest but  
 all of a sudden a bird of Phoebus Apollo<sup>46</sup> flew down from 155  
 heaven and carried a gift of Ceres, the same as he used to  
 do whenever he saw the lights of the stars in the East. He  
 put it in front of the starving hermits, in front of their eyes and  
 spreading his feathery wings, he flew up into the air. As  
 soon as it happened the face of the older one brightened and so he 160

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<sup>46</sup> Jerome speaks explicitly about a raven: *Inter sermocitationes suspiciunt alitem corvum in ramo arbotis concedisse...* MIGNE (1845: 25–26, 10).

spoke: 'Be assured, my friend, that it was our Lord the Provider,  
 who was so good and kind that he sent us this food as a gift. As  
 long as I have been living there (which is for sixty years now) this  
 bird has been flying down from the skies and day after day one  
 loaf of bread he has brought me but never so big as today. It 165  
 has to be you, my guest, for whom the One who is feeding  
 all the birds in the sky and all the fish in the ocean  
 doubled my usual share as a generous shepherd he is. So  
 let us express our gratitude now for that is becoming.'  
 After these words they both gave thanks to the Lord for his mercy. 170  
 Then, however, a struggle of decency broke out between them,  
 both the hermits unwilling to help themselves to the food. The  
 younger one claimed that the elder should start because of his age. The  
 elder, in turn, responded the young man should start as a guest. For  
 hours and hours this pious dispute continued but neither 175  
 felt that he was the one who was worthy of such a great honor.  
 Hence they agreed that they both would reach for the bread at one time and  
 tear it apart. Their hunger relieved and bodies refreshed, they  
 quenched their thirst with a drink from a spring which was lying nearby and  
 sending the word of praise to the Lord for His generous gift they 180  
 spent the rest of the day and night conversing devoutly.  
 When, however, Apollo repelled the darkness of night so  
 that the sun could return, Paul sensed his life was about to  
 end. Desiring to die alone he spoke to his guest: 'O  
 dearest friend, Anthony, I must confess I knew that before: I 185  
 knew that you had been living for long in this country deserted  
 all the time devoting your life to the deeds of a saint. The  
 Lord of Olympus, the Ruler of all did send you, my friend, to  
 do me a favour. The time has come when the spirit of mine shall  
 leave the withering flesh of my body and out this prison; 190



it shall move from the earth and enter the kingdom of heav'n, where proper rewards are waiting for those who truly deserve them.

This is the reason why He led you there right into this cave that you might burry my elderly body, though poor be its grave.' Much more he wanted to say but Anthony, moved by his sorrow, 195 cut in on him and with tears in his eyes he weepingly begged that Paul would permit him to go where he went enduring what he did.

This is, however, what Paul replied to his pitiful prayers:  
'Anthony, curb those cries of your heart, those mighty affections vexing your soul, for this sorrow of yours, though painful for now, will 200 turn into overwhelming delight when the proper time comes. So bear this grief and stay calm in your mind, for after this pain, when all the dark clouds are carried away, the merciful sky will show you the brightest light of her stars and those will thereafter drive away all the darkness of death and gloom of despair. Go 205 forward, my friend, persist and go forward to face all the grief. Your soul, however, is not the only thing you should care for. If it is the path that leads to salvation you want to discover, know that you should look after the others much more than you do. I see that your soul would like to depart from your body at once and 210 zealously follow the lead of the Lamb of God if it could, but verily, there is much greater commitment awaiting you here – your brothers, those numerous crowds of your mates, for them you must stay that your example, your sacred knowledge and life-giving care might lead and protect them against the dire contagion of morals 215 vexing our times, for, as everyone knows, the hearts of the young do seek the path of the good if one cares about their upbringing. You, however, will see to their needs when the proper time comes. Now open your heart, my reverend guest, that I can reveal my wish which, as I believe, you will not reject to fulfill. I 220

beg you, my friend, I beg you to go as fast as you can and  
 fetch me the tunic which Athanasius<sup>47</sup> himself gave you once, for  
 it is the will of the Lord Almighty that when the time comes – the  
 time when my spirit escapes from this elderly body – my bones be  
 wrapped up into its fabric and buried thus under the ground. Poor 225  
 Anthony being unable to say a word for his sorrow  
 took the hands of the eremite into his own and then kissed his  
 cheeks after which he left and went back to the wasteland where he spent  
 all the long years of his life as a man untouched by the stain of  
 sin together with many distinguished young lads to assist him. 230  
 In the meantime, however, Paul's spirit was freed from his body.  
 Leaving this prison terrestrial, up it fled to the skies and  
 there, accompanied by the angels of heaven, it settled.  
 Anthony, seeing this miracle on his way back to the cave, fell  
 down on his knees and scattering sand right over his head cried 235  
 out: 'Paul, why did you leave me alone? Why did you forsake me?  
 Why did you leave so soon after we had encountered each other?  
 Where can I now when the most pre-eminent part of yourself to  
 heaven ascended which I am for now forbidden to enter?  
 Well, if nothing remains to be done, then I will go back right 240  
 into your cave and for the last time, I will look at your face.' When  
 he got inside the eremite's shelter – now silent – again, at  
 once he noticed Paul's body. His head, however, was raised, his  
 arms held out and the same as his face directed to heaven.  
 One might suppose that this kneeling figure was, even when dead, still 245  
 sending its humble prayers to God and giving Him thanks, but  
 Anthony, seeing that Paul is not breathing, broke into tears and  
 wasting no time he covered his pitiful corpse with the tunic  
 he had been asked to provide. Then taking Paul's body outside, he

<sup>47</sup> \ ,a-thə-'nā-zh(ē)-əs \ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Athanasius>.

paid his last respects to the saint and started to sing a 250  
funeral hymn by which he bewailed his sudden decease. But  
when he wanted to bury the eremite's body, he noticed  
there was no mattock nor hoe in the cave to dig into sand so  
he was completely unsure about what he should do next. At  
first he thought that the best would be just to leave the corpse yonder. 255  
This, however, was too inhuman for him to be done. As  
he was standing in front of the eremite's cavern for hours he  
started to think that he too would give up his ghost on this place, but  
all of a sudden a couple of furry lions came close. Their  
necks were festooned with a mane, but no teeth stuck out of their mouths.  
They 260  
gently approached the dead body and laying down next to Paul's head, they  
started to roar, but tearfully as if expressing their sadness.  
Then they began to dig into sand with their powerful claws and  
even though hard to believe it is, these magnanimous beasts were  
able to dig such a grave that it perfectly suited Paul's corpse. Then 265  
Anthony nodded his head to imply that the lions can leave and  
when those two diggers were gone he put the eremite's body  
into the grave. Then bitterly weeping he also departed.  
There on this place these sacred remains had been hidden for many  
centuries, always protected by heavenly powers until the 270  
emperor Manuel<sup>48</sup>, who decided to leave the large plains of  
Thrace, called out by his piety, brought them to Constantinople<sup>49</sup>  
and, accompanied by the triumphant procession of prelates,  
placed them into the temple of Mary, the mother of God. From  
there an Italian Jacob transferred them to Venice, his home town, 275

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<sup>48</sup> Manuel I. Comnenus, Byzantine emperor in 1143–1180. ŠKOVIERA (2008: 560).

<sup>49</sup> \ ,kän-,stan-tə-'nō-pəl \ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/constantinople>.

whence, in turn, they were taken by Louis of Hungary<sup>50</sup>, who then  
 placed them up on the mountain nearby the city of Buda,  
 where the remains of the saint had been peacefully resting till now, still  
 lending an ear to the worries of man and averting all dangers.  
 Father of hermits, be merciful, please, be merciful to your 280  
 servants and set your eyes on the lands of Pannonia now. Please,  
 let the terrible fury of Mars diffused by the mouths of  
 Cerberus angrily barking on us from the depths of inferno  
 fade that we may extoll your grace in these times of despair. Please,  
 push the enemies of our religion out of this land and 285  
 do not allow their barbarian frenzy to ravage this kingdom.  
 Make our commanders virile enough to expel the invading  
 Ottoman Turks beyond the strait of the Hellespont that the  
 flags announcing our victory might be carried throughout our  
 homeland with pride proclaiming that peace has finally come. But 290  
 I, o merciful father, would like to ask you for more: Please,  
 let my generous patron live long and fortunate life and  
 let him enjoy your paternal protection whenever he needs. Please,  
 may his house be abundant in properties, honours and titles.  
 May it be also blessed with glorious children and let his 295  
 grandsons become, one day, the equals of angels in heaven.  
 Finally, when he attains the peaceful age of an old man,  
 let him ascend to the kingdom celestial under your guidance.  
 This I implore you to do for him and also for me, o  
 virtuous Paul. Please see that this prayer of mine will be answered. 300

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<sup>50</sup> Louis I. also called Louis the Great, king of Hungary (1342–1382) and of Poland (1370–1382). ŠKOVIERA (2008: 560).

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