

# CAN THERE BE A BIOGRAPHY OF A BOOK?: COMPARATIVE OBSERVATIONS ON PUBLICATIONS BY FRANCYSK SKARYNA AND ERIK PONTOPPIDAN

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**Summary.** *In a comparison of bibliographical approaches to Francysk Skaryna's The Little Traveller's Book (1522) and Erik Pontoppidan's Natural History of Norway (1752) this article argues that attempts to write a book biography can benefit from extensive archival research as well as close physical examination of surviving copies, using new forensic technologies as well as adapting more traditional modes of investigation. Ultimately, however, the concept of 'biography' or 'life cycle' is questioned. The article examines the intellectual genesis, writing, translation, critical review, reception and collection of the Natural History as well as its extraordinary legacy – a legacy that is helpfully comparable to and distinctive from that of Skaryna's work. Both writers moved in a world of circuits, of typographical and bibliographical innovation and comment, of travel and translation, of new and emergent accessibility to language and books – all, from their perspective, from the beneficence of God and to His glorification. Skaryna's journey took him from Polatsk and Vilnius to Kraków and Padua, to his first Psalter and other biblical publishing in Prague and his The Little Traveller's Book in Vilnius, to travels to*

*Moscow, Poznan, Königsberg and back to Vilnius and Prague. As with Skaryna, Pontoppidan engaged in wide travel, also establishing far flung contacts and correspondence. Both faced constraints, and most notably the impact of war, disease, political and religious intervention and fires that destroyed cities and printing houses. Both writers were determined to write in the vernacular, Skaryna working to translate and create new type, all to make books of the Bible available in an accessible language. Skaryna contributed to the development of the Belarusian literary language just as Pontoppidan's writing and interest in dialect contributed both to the standardization of Danish and the distinctive linguistic origins of Norwegian. Both composed prefaces to their editions, in which they emphasized that the purpose of their publishing activities was to help ordinary people, in Skaryna's words to "become acquainted with wisdom and science." The legacies of both diverged from literary references and directly derivative sightings of sea monsters in the case of Pontoppidan, to numerous statues and other material commemorations in the case of Skaryna who remains embroiled symbolically in different claims over national identities.*

*The concluding assessment of whether such study can contribute to a 'book biography' or 'life cycle' is guarded, suggesting alternative concepts that might be tested. This includes the idea of a 'book biology' whereby, in such study of a 'life', a book is conceived by its intellectual creator with very specific intentions and is then transmuted by other actors and agencies into different material, visual and linguistic forms. In the case of Skaryna, the creations amounted to numerous unstable texts, variously arranged, with uncertain survival rates and relatively poor evidence of use. In the case of Pontoppidan, three more stable editions, Danish, German and English, were all also materially different and each copy reproduced in separate operations of printing and collation. Each copy pursued thereafter its own life – no more reproduction and so no book genealogy – but hugely diverse and differently influential lives. In such ways the biosphere might be renamed the bibliosphere. Some book lives were terminated in relative infancy, some moved around the world and through many hands, some mutilated, others preserved in situ and symbolically represented at anniversaries or for political and cultural ends.*

**Keywords:** *Book biography, Erik Pontoppidan, Francysk Skaryna*

## Ar gali būti knygos biografija? Pranciškaus Skorinos ir Eriko Pontoppidano leidinių lyginamosios išvalgos

**Santrauka.** Šiuo straipsniu, lyginant bibliografinę prieigą prie Pranciškaus Skorinos Mažosios kelionių knygelės (1522) ir Eriko Pontoppidano Norvegijos gamtos istorijos (1752), tvirtinama, kad bandymams parašyti knygos biografiją didelės naudos gali suteikti nuodugnus archyvų tyrimas ir kruopšti išlikusių knygų egzempliorių analizė pasitelkiant naujausias teismo medicinos srities technologijas bei pritaikant labiau įprastinius tyrimo būdus. Tačiau vis dėlto yra iškeliamos abejonės dėl pačių „biografijos“ ir „gyvenimo ciklo“ sąvokų. Šiame straipsnyje yra tiriama Gamtos istorijos parašymo idėjos genezė, rašymo, vertimo procesai, kritinės apžvalgos, visuomenės reakcija, medžiagos surinkimas bei jos išskirtinis palikimas, kuris labai parankiai gali būti lyginamas ir su Skorinos knygos paveldu, atskleidžiant ir svarbių skirtumų. Abiejų autorių gyvenimai sukosi tokiais ratais, į kuriuos pateko ir spaudos inovacija, ir komentarai apie keliones ir vertimus, naujos ar vis labiau paplintančios su kalba ir knygomis susijusios galimybės – ir visa tai iš jų perspektyvos, tikint Dievo gerumu ir Jį šlovinant. Skorinos kelionė jį vedė nuo Polocko ir Vilniaus į Krokuvą ir Padują, link pirmojo Psalmyno ir kitų biblinių leidinių Prahėje, o Mažosios kelionių knygelės – Vilniuje, iki kelionės į Maskvą, Poznanę ir Karaliaučių, o tada atgal į Vilnių ir Prahę. Kaip ir Skorinai, Pontoppidanui teko daug keliauti, jis palaiškė ryšius ir susirašinėjo su įvairiausiose tolybėse gyvenusiais žmonėmis. Abi asmenybės susidūrė su apribojimais – visų pirma karo, ligų, politinių ir religinių intervencijų poveikiu bei gaisrais, naikinusiems miestus ir spaustuves. Abu autoriai buvo pasiryžę rašyti vietinėmis kalbomis. Skorina vertėjavo bei sukūrė naują šriftą ir darė viską, kad tik Šventojo Rašto knygos taptų prieinamos visiems suprantama kalba. Skorina prisidėjo prie gudų literatūrinės kalbos raidos lygiai taip pat, kaip Pontoppidano rašymas ir dėmesys dialektams prisidėjo ne tik prie danų kalbos standartizavimo, tačiau ir prie aiškiai išreikštos norvegų kalbos kilmės. Jie abu parašė įžangas savo kūriniams, kuriose pabrėžė, kad jų spausdinimo veiklos tikslas buvo padėti paprastiems žmonėms, Skorinos žodžiais tariant, „susipažinti su išmintimi ir mokslu“. Jų abiejų paveldas yra toli pažengęs nuo literatūrinių klišių, perpasakojimo apie jūrų pabaisų stebėjimą (Pontoppidano atveju) ar daugybės statulų ir kitokio materialaus įamžinimo apraiškų (Skorinos atveju, kuris vis dar išlieka simboliškai įveltas į įvairiausias pretenzijas savinantis jo tautinę tapatybę).

*Baigiamoji išvada kalbant apie tai, ar toks tyrimas gali prisidėti prie „knygos biografijos“ ar „gyvenimo ciklo“, yra atsargi; pasiūlomos alternatyvios sąvokos, kurias būtų įdomu patyrinti. Tarp jų patenka ir „knygos biologija“, kuri atskleistų „gyvenimą“, kuomet knygą jos intelektualusis kūrėjas suvokia turėdamas labai konkrečių tikslų, o tuomet kiti veikėjai ir veikiančiosios institucijos perkuria į kitokią medžiagą, vaizdines ir lingvistines formas. Skorinos atveju tokiais kūriniais tapo įvairūs nestabilūs tekstai – įvairių struktūrų, kurių tik menka dalis išliko, o mes turime tik menkų įrodymų apie tai, kaip šie tekstai buvo naudojami. Pontoppidano atveju buvę trys stabilesni leidimai – daniškasis, vokiškasis ir angliškas – taip pat buvo iš esmės skirtingi, ir kiekvienas jų gimė po skirtingų spausdinimo ir parengiamųjų bei peržiūros darbų. Vėliau kiekvienas leidimas ir gyveno savo atskirą gyvenimą, kadangi pakartotinių leidimų nebuvo, taigi nebuvo ir knygos genealogijos – tačiau šie gyvenimai buvo itin įvairūs ir pasižymėjo įvairausio lygmens poveikiu. Tokiu būdu biosferą galima pervadinti bibliosfera. Vienų knygų gyvenimas baigėsi iš esmės jų kūdikystėje, kitos keliavo po pasaulį ir pateko į daugybę rankų, dar kitos buvo subjaurotos, o kai kurios išliko pradinėje vietoje ir simboliškai pažymi jubiliejus ar pasitarnauja politiniais ar kultūriniais tikslais.*

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** *knygos biografija, Erikas Pontoppidan, Pranciškus Skorina.*

In a presentation to the international research conference organised by the Faculty of Communication at the University of Vilnius and the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences to celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *The Little Traveller's Book* by Francysk Skaryna, I reflected upon the experience of writing a global history of the origination, publication, translation, reception and legacy of a single work, relating this to other experiments in constructing book biographies and life-cycles of books. The question results from many years of studying the history of books, most recently in terms of the 'global turn' and the definition of a 'book' itself. How, by concentration on a single title, might we chart the history of an individual work from its intellectual genesis and antecedents, writing, material replication, circulation and influence in different forms and in different places across generations of use and conservation? An essential task of the book historian is surely to demonstrate how different material forms of books produce different readings and multiple meanings.

Numerous bibliographers and book historians have written enthusiastically about the construction of ‘book biographies’. In a conference contribution (never published but inspirational to all who heard it), Roger Chartier sketched a theoretical model of a book’s history from its genesis, publication, circulation and reception in different forms and in different places across generations of use and conservation.<sup>1</sup> Earlier, Ann Blair had offered a ‘histoire totale’ of the *Universae naturae theatrum*, the last, 1596, work of the political philosopher Jean Bodin.<sup>2</sup> Isabel Hofmeyr’s influential study of *Pilgrim’s Progress* then showed what can be done when a book is charted according to its multiple republication and translation in unexpected places around the world.<sup>3</sup> Paul Eggert followed Henry Lawson’s 1896 collection *While the Billy Boils*, as he developed his writing career from short stories and sketches for newspapers.<sup>4</sup> Fred Appel edited the *Lives of Great Religious Books* series published by Princeton University Press in which ‘all great religious books are living things whose careers in the world can take the most unexpected turns’ The Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit, is cited by Appel as declaring: ‘You know what I’d like to read? A biography of a great book—the story of its reception over time.’<sup>5</sup> Dozens of smaller initiatives have drawn inspiration from such ambition. In early 2017, for example, Robin Naughton at the New York Academy of Medicine Library, began his ‘Biography of a Book’ project, an interactive exhibition exploring the production and use of twelve books and manuscripts across time. A few months earlier, Robert Thake published his study of the publishing and diffusion of de Vertot’s *Histoire de Malte*, an exacting pursuit of ‘un livre sans frontières’ which identifies its editions, translations and far-flung reception networks subverting attempts at prohibition.<sup>6</sup> The challenge extended by Appel can never fully embrace so

- 1 CHARTIER Roger. Address to The Centre for the History of the Book Conference, *Technology, Textuality and Transmission*, University of Edinburgh, 16 July 2010.
- 2 BLAIR, Ann. *The Theater of Nature: Jean Bodin and Renaissance Science*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- 3 HOFMEYR, Isabel. *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- 4 EGGERT, Paul. *Biography of a Book: Henry Lawson’s While the Billy Boils*. Sydney: Penn State University Press and Sydney University Press, 2013.
- 5 Cited in BRAUNSTEIN, Ruth. ‘I would love to read the biography of a book . . .’, interview with Fred Appel, 24 Mar. 2011 NYU launch event for ‘Lives of Great Religious Books’, In *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere, 13 April 2011*. Access through Internet: <https://tif.ssrc.org/2011/04/13/i-would-love-to-read-the-biography-of-a-book/> [accessed 4 April 2023].
- 6 THAKE, Robert. *A Publishing History of a Prohibited Best-Seller: The Abbé de Vertot and his Histoire de Malte*. New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2016.

hugely and diversely replicated productions as the Bible, or even one edition of it, but particular and widespread religious books might be so studied – as notably undertaken by John N. King for Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*.<sup>7</sup>

Not all historians, however, have been comfortable with this concept of ‘book biography’. James A. Secord resisted the concept in his seminal *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*. In a view shared by others, he suggested that the ‘biography’ of a book failed adequately to address the interventions of a book’s multiple readings. Secord stated explicitly that his aim was *not* to write the ‘biography of a book.’ Examples of those, he suggested (and he named Robert Darnton’s 1979 ‘publishing history’ of the *Encyclopédie*<sup>8</sup>), had ‘centered on production and authorship rather than reading’, and because ‘in any event, books do not have a “life” of their own independent from their use.’<sup>9</sup> Instead, Secord argued that

‘reading has often been seen as a profoundly private experience, but it is better understood as comprehending all the diverse ways that books and other forms of printed works are appropriated and used. Taken in this sense, a history of reading becomes a study of cultural formation in action. My strategy will be to follow a single work in all its uses and manifestations—in conversation, solitude, authorship, learned debate, religious controversy, civic politics, and the making of knowledge.’<sup>10</sup>

Leslie Howsam was further unsurprised that ‘contemporary publishers are identifying this [idea of a ‘biography of a book’] as an aspect of the “object biography” genre’, adding that ‘to my mind it doesn’t entirely work with the dual concepts of authorship, publishing, and reading on the one hand, and materiality on the other.’<sup>11</sup> The ideal is to combine both concepts: to understand how different material forms address different readerships and elicit different interpretations. In Howsam’s own edited *Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book*, Sydney Shep stressed the mobility and mutability of the book in

- 7 KING, John N. *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs and Early Print Culture*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- 8 DARNTON, Robert. *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie, 1775–1800*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1979.
- 9 SECORD, James A. *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, p. 297, note 2.
- 10 SECORD, James A. *Victorian Sensation...*, p. 12.
- 11 HOWSAM, Leslie. Contribution to on-line discussion, SHARP-L archives, 4 January 2020.

transnational perspective, proposing a model more dynamic than the communication circuit.<sup>12</sup>

An alternative is to conceive of a 'life-cycle of a book' something which if not exactly cyclical in the sense of returning, does speak to one possible trajectory of a work's existence as birth/creation, maturity/influence and possible death/destruction or at least a decline in republication, circulation and popularity. But this notion also, and perhaps even more so than a 'biography', seems to attend more to a single book as a single material object than to the collective history of a reproduced and multiply circulating (or sometimes very static) text. Charlie Gleek has proposed a further perspective grounded in the idea that a book 'articulates its own autobiography,' readers understanding this when they read it as a 'text.'<sup>13</sup> Such an approach follows Philippe Lejeune's theorizing about the autobiography as embodying a retrospective statement about its material as well as intellectual identity, one certainly including its material peritextual and non-narrative features.<sup>14</sup> Gleek argues that the writing of a biography of a book is needless because what he calls 'an autobiography' of the book already exists when we encounter it. Rather, he suggests that scholarship should be directed to 'apprehending and articulating the stakes that such autobiographies play in mediating meaning,'<sup>15</sup> a caution approaching Secord's objection that 'biography' downplays multiple individual and contingent readings.

The way forward, then, seems to be to extend both materially and social-historically the approach taken by those promoting 'biography' and 'life-cycle' as concepts revealing the broadest historical influence of a literary work. In their introduction to *Books in Motion in Early Modern Europe*, Daniel Bellingradt and Jeroen Salman argue that book history would benefit from greater interest in concepts of materiality but also of 'sociality' and spatiality.<sup>16</sup> All contribu-

12 SHEP, Sydney. Books in Global Perspectives, In Leslie Howsam, *Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 53–70.

13 GLEEK, Charlie. What Is The History of Your Book? Self-Determined Classroom Research Experiences in South Florida. Cconference paper, 2019; GLEEK, Charlie. This is It: A Review of Larry Brown's *Tiny Love: The Complete Stories*, *The Chattahoochee Review*, 2020, 40: 1, p. 150–155; GLEEK, Charlie. Southernness on Display in Recent Little Magazines, *Humanities Commons*, 2021. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/yyg2-t110>.

14 Notably including LEJEUNE, Philippe. *Je est un autre. L'autobiographie de la littérature aux médias*. Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1980; and *La Pratique du journal personnel*. Centre de sémiotique textuelle, Université de Paris X, 1990.

15 GLEEK, Charlie. *This is it...*

16 Daniel Bellingradt, Paul Nelles and Jeroen Salman (eds.), *Books in Motion in Early Modern Europe: Beyond Production, Circulation and Consumption*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

tors to the volume edited by Bellingradt for *Biographien des Buches*, attend to the ‘careers’ of a book or of its ‘object biography’, understanding this to be a history of a book’s combined material and communicative characteristics. In ways which sometimes expose differences as well as common cause, literary and book scholars, historians, philosophers, Judaists, librarians and restorers discuss the possibilities and limits of a biographical approach. Given that the volume’s editors and some of its contributors are distinguished rare books librarians their attention to a book biography usefully re-emphasizes the legacy of books, of their collection and conservation, and, for some works, of their alternate neglect, rediscovery and reinterpretation.<sup>17</sup>

## NEW TEST-CASES

My own testing of the concept of a book biography centres on *Det første Forsøg paa Norges naturlige Historie* by Bishop Erik Pontoppidan,<sup>18</sup> but it is a research exercise that can be extended by comparison with the history of publication by Francysk Skaryna, not a theologian but a committed religious translator and printer.<sup>19</sup> Born in 1470 in modern-day Belarus and dying between 1551 and the end of January 1552, Skaryna is known as a humanist scholar, physician, translator, and, above all as the earliest printer of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania whose endeavours contributed to the development of Belarusian Church Slavonic. In 1506, Skaryna graduated from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Six years later, he received a doctorate in medicine at the University of Padua and five years after that, in 1517, he arrived in Prague where he rented a printing house and in August printed his first book of the Psalter, with others following in the next months before four were published simultaneously in August 1518. Between 1517 and 1519 his Prague printed translation of the Bible extended to twenty-three books of the Old Testament, before he opened a new printing house in Vilnius in 1522 where he published *The Little Traveller’s*

- 17 The first volume in a series ‘Cultures of Collecting. Actors, Objects, Media’ published by the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbüttel: <https://www.wallstein-verlag.de/9783835331457-biographien-des-buches.html> [accessed 4 April 2023].
- 18 See RAVEN, James. *Monsters, Myths and Methods: The Making and Global Reception of a Norwegian History*, ch. 4 of James Raven (ed.) *Exchanging Knowledge: Ideas, Materialities and Global Perspectives, c. 1650–1850*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, forthcoming, 2024; a monograph is also in progress.
- 19 Also transcribed as Franciśak Skaryna or Francisk Skaryna and in Latin as Franciscus Scorina. Claimed as a figure of national importance by several countries, he appears in Belarusian as Францыск (Францішак) Скарына; in Polish as Franciszek Skaryna; and in Czech as František Skorina.



*Book* followed three years later by the *Apostol* (released in the same order as it is used in Orthodox worship today. A later visit to Moscow to distribute his books proved unsuccessful.

Some two hundred years later, in 1737, and following important early writings, Erik Pontoppidan, pietist and Copenhagen intellectual, published his *Sandhed til gudfrygtighed* (Truth to Godliness) a commentary on Luther's Catechism and written in Danish to ensure widespread understanding and compliance. *Sandhed til gudfrygtighed* remained in use in schools for the next two hundred years. Eleven years after its first publication, and towards the very close of what we might term the Northern European Renaissance, Pontoppidan was installed as Bishop of Bergen. Here, he began collecting materials for his natural history of Norway – the subject of my putative book biography. Pontoppidan published the finished work in two parts, the first *quarto* volume printed in Copenhagen in 1752 and the second in 1753. A year later, the *Historie*, modestly titled in the original as 'a first attempt' [*Det første Forsøg*], was translated into German as *Versuch einer natürlichen Geschichte Norwegens* and published in *octavo*, again in Copenhagen and again in two parts, in separate volumes in 1753 and 1754. A year after that, the two parts of the work were translated into English and published together in a *grand folio* volume in London as (a less tentatively titled) *The Natural History of Norway*. There were no further editions. A German edition of 1769 only republished the first part of the *Historie*, although the publications of the 1750s spawned numerous later extracts, commentaries, and references. It was, however, the three original editions of, together, 1752 to 1755 that forged the reputation of the *Historie*, with no further, later edition of the full work.

The size and format of these richly illustrated editions of the 1750s are very different, as is the typography and design. The first, Danish edition boasts neat, well executed printing, very largely in black letter, although on variable paper with some print, on the poorest, often showing through the page. The effect of different typefaces can also prove distracting, at least to the modern eye, with some footnotes when in Latin in roman, with titles in roman italics, but others also in small blackletter, and using asterisks, double asterisks and asterisms to mark the notes. The different printed editions were also famously illustrated with copper-plate engravings, printed separately (and, of course, by different printing techniques) from the text and inserted between the other printed pages. How readers physically viewed the images varied according to the format of the editions. The pages of engravings were tipped-in and folded as pull-out pages for the Danish and German editions. All the images were further copied

and recut in London for the English *folio* edition. Here, given the size of the pages, there was no need for pull-out pages (save for the insertion of a new and grand folded introductory map of Norway). Engravings appeared centrally and often with lavish surrounding space.

## WRITING AND NOTORIETY

Pontoppidan's early reputation was as the writer of religious tracts and then as a historian and antiquarian, originally writing and publishing in Latin and in the expected German (the language of the Court).<sup>20</sup> Pontoppidan's most famous work, the *Sandhed til gudfrygtighed* was printed at the Vajsenhuset in Copenhagen, a royal foundation which served as a hub for like-minded clergy and scholars, and which had been given its own printing privilege. The Missionskollegiet had also been established to fund and direct Protestant missions under royal patronage, including in the Danish colony of Fort Dansborg (Tranquebar) which was to be a notable distant recipient of copies of the *Historie*. Notably, these endeavours at the Vajsenhuset demonstrated the utility of collaborative information networks, something to be vital to the construction of the *Historie*.

Everything changed for Pontoppidan in 1746. The accession of Frederick V brought the rejection of his father's, Christian VI's, famously pious Court and a censure of pietism. The new king's criticism of Pontoppidan's sympathies led, it seems, to his despatch from Copenhagen to be bishop of the northern trading city and port of Bergen. Arriving in June 1748, Pontoppidan's exceptional energy was evident from the outset. Within months, he conceived the writing of *Norges naturlige Historie*. It was, he wrote, partly to demonstrate the glories of God,<sup>21</sup> but to this tumult also came an Oplysning which might be interpreted as 'Enlightenment', but also, notably, translates as 'information', 'disclosure' and 'awareness'. Verifiability underpinned this oplysning, but, as recent scholarship on natural history of the period has also insisted, *credulity* was also integral to its methods.

20 The standard but elderly biography is NEIENDAM, Michael. *Erik Pontoppidan, bind I (1698–1735). Studier og bidrag til pietismens historie*. Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad, 1930; *Erik Pontoppidan, bind II (1735–1764). Studier og bidrag til pietismens historie*. Copenhagen, G. E. C. Gad, 1933; see also NILSEN, Halkild. *Biskop Erik Pontoppidan og skolestellet i Bergens stift, Årbok for Bjørgvin bispedøme*. Bergen: Bjørgvin bispedømeråd, 1955, p. 67–82.

21 PONTOPPIDAN, Erik. *Natural History*, 'The Author's Preface', [1]: iii–v.

Essential to Pontoppidan's planned work was the collecting of materials, a process enabled by the annual visitation tours allowed by the three summer months and the development of a clerical network of informants. Pontoppidan's letter-book of 1751–1753, which survives in Bergen, contains references to information requested and received, while he explained in the *Historie* that by providing him with specimens and observations the clergy of his diocese would 'make useful discoveries or improvements, from the products of nature, to the lasting benefit of their country, which it is their duty to promote'.<sup>22</sup> In June 1749, after months of collecting materials, Pontoppidan began writing the determinedly titled 'first attempt' (*Det første Forsøg*) as a detailed survey of the flora, fauna and topography of Norway, with sections also on habits, costume and folklore – and purposefully writing in the vernacular, in Danish, like his friend the dramatist Ludvig Holberg. Completion of his writing was interrupted by a great fire in Bergen in August 1751 (just as Skaryna had to cope with the devastation of Vilnius in 1530), and, as he wrote, the interruption shocked him into speedier writing and to publish the work in two parts, one year apart.<sup>23</sup>

Pontoppidan was determinedly scientific, and he sought exacting confirmations and verifications. In the eighth chapter of Part II of the *Historie*, however, Pontoppidan provides, as well as famous images, a series of witness statements verifying sightings of sea snakes, other sea monsters, mermen, and mermaids – some of them Danish speaking. From the outset, Pontoppidan envisaged his *Historie* to be illustrated for reference, even though this increased the complexity of the publication process. Pontoppidan's title-page announced the work as illuminated by copper-plates – 'Oplyst med Kobberstikker' – a further instance of 'oplysning'. The key illustration of the sea monster or 'sea worm' however was markedly derivative. The drawing, originally penned by Hans Strom and given to Pontoppidan, closely resembled early Renaissance and even more longstanding representations circulated over several centuries. One image dominated. A lengthy book published in 1555 by Olaus Magnus, and much translated (and known in English as *A Description of the Northern Peoples*), became the standard reference on Scandinavia.<sup>24</sup> Like Albertus Magnus in the

22 PONTOPPIDAN, Erik. *Natural History*, [1]: viii; Statsarkivet i Bergen/Archivverket, Bjørgvin biskop, kopibok 2 (1747–1749), 3 (1749–1751), 4 (1751–1753), 5 (1753–1754); and see DAHL, Gina, *Biskop Pontoppidans brevbok 1751 01501753*. Bergen: Kapabel Press, 2019.

23 PONTOPPIDAN, Erik. *Natural History*, 'The Author's Preface to the Second Part' [2]: iii.

24 MAGNUS, Olaus. *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus, earumque diversis statibus, conditionibus, moribus, ritibus...* Rome: Giovanni Maria Viotti, 1555. Translated into Italian 1565, German 1567, and English 1658.

thirteenth century,<sup>25</sup> and with reference to ancient Nordic myth, the many editions of Magnus described a menagerie of exotic sea creatures, a giant sea horse with bifurcated fish tail, a swamfish, the most ravenous animal in the sea, and, above all, a colossal sea serpent that specifically prowled beyond the rocky coastline of Bergen.<sup>26</sup> Among notable readers of Olaus Magnus, Conrad Gessner (1516–65), Renaissance Swiss physician, naturalist and bibliographer, repeated the descriptions and redrew the alarming illustrations of two species of sea serpent: a smaller type (up to 40 feet long) and the dragon-like mega-serpent.<sup>27</sup> These were the abiding imaginaries, we might suggest, for Pontoppidan, his parish priests and his testifying sea-farers.

## TRANSLATING AND REPUBLISHING

In his preface to part two of the *Historie* Pontoppidan added the hope that translation of his work ‘in time, will usefully reveal unusual things for different Nations as well as for ourselves’ and he linked translation specifically to broadcasting the section on sea monsters.<sup>28</sup> The translation into German began a few months after the appearance of the first volume of the *Historie* in the summer of 1752. The translator, Johann Adolph Scheibe was a German-Danish composer who kept himself afloat by translating.<sup>29</sup> It was for good reason perhaps that Scheibe was fully acknowledged on the title page of the translation. In his sixteen-page foreword to the first part, dated 15 April 1753, Scheibe offered an extended commentary on the work and he detailed problems translating obscure terms (dialect and language evolution was another important interest of the *Historie*). In his preface, he complained that he had been forced to rush because the bookseller wanted it to be ready for the Ostermesse [the Easter Fair, probably the trade fair at Leipzig].<sup>30</sup> In his seventeen-page preface to the

25 MAGNUS, Albertus (1193?–1280), ‘De animalibus’.

26 Notably, *Historia Olai Magni Gothi archiepiscopi Upsalensis, de gentium septentrionalium variis conditionibus statibusque, & de morum, rituum superstitionum, exercitiorum, regiminis, disciplina, victusque mirabili diversitate*. Basel, ex officina Henricpetrina, 1567, p. 432–438.

27 GESSNER, Conrad. *Historia animalium* 4 vols. Zurich, 1551–1558; *De aquatilibus*, 1040; compare also BELON, Pierre, *De Aquatilibus*. Paris, 1553, esp. p. 38; RONDELET, Guillaume, *Libri de piscibus marinus*. Lyon, 1554; Ambroise Paré *Les Œuvres D’Ambroise Paré*. Lyon, 1685 (initially published in 1573); and ALDROVANDI, Ulisse. *Monstrorum historia cum paralipomenis historiae omnium animalium*. Bologna, 1642.

28 PONTOPPIDAN, Erik. *Natural History*. II, v.

29 See HAUGE, Peter. *Johann Adolph Scheibe: A Catalogue of his Works*. Copenhagen: Dansk Center for Musikudgivelse, and Museum Tusulanum Press, 2018.

30 PONTOPPIDAN, Erik. *Versuch einer natürlichen Historie*, vol 1, p. 25.

second volume, Scheibe is even more defensive of his work. Fascinatingly, this translator's preface to the second volume, with all its extraneous material and tedious length, is now a rare item: it has been removed from most surviving copies. Rarity, as Skaryna scholars know, is both evidentially problematic but historically suggestive.

Within six months of the first appearance of the work in Danish, reviews and commentaries about both editions of the *Historie* circulated widely, and encouragement for an English translation quickly formed. The English edition was published in February 1755. Germane to these timings, are the contrasting financing arrangements. Pontoppidan seems to have engineered some financial support for his original two volumes. After Pontoppidan's death in 1764, the bookseller Andreas Hartvig Godiche issued an auction catalogue which reveals that Pontoppidan had retained as his property both plates and superfluous engraved pages together with 'the publisher's copyrights to the same book' [forlags rettigbed til samme bog].<sup>31</sup> By contrast, the London edition was financed on a subscription basis by Andreas Linde on 1 October 1754. The 'conditions' announced in the *Public Advertiser* included that the *folio* work would be printed in a new Letter, and good Paper'. The German bookseller Linde, who commissioned the translation into English, was originally from Saxony, and an active member of the German and Scandinavian community in London centred in the Strand and the respective Lutheran churches.<sup>32</sup> It was a densely inhabited and expanding area, populated especially by European immigrant traders and notable and well-established booksellers.<sup>33</sup>

The work was translated by Andreas Berthelson, a Norwegian-born London-based clergyman, and printed by John Reeves of Drury Lane. The typographical

31 *Catalogus over Endeel Exemplaria af adskillige Sal Hr Procantzser Pontoppidans egne i Trykken udgivne Skrifter... Auction i residentzen paa Nørregarde Mandagen den 24 Martii 1766...* Copenhagen: Andreas Hartvig Godiche, 1766.

32 See JEFCOATE, Graham. 'Andreas Linde' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry; JEFCOATE, Graham. German printing and bookselling in eighteenth-century London: evidence and interpretation, *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens*, 2003, 57, pp. 147–248; JEFCOATE, Graham. *Deutsche Drucker und Buchhändler in London 1680–1811: Strukturen und Bedeutung des deutschen Anteils am englischen Buchhandel*. Berlin, Munich and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015; and JEFCOATE, Graham. *An Ocean of Literature: John Henry Bohte and the Anglo-German Book Trade in the Early Nineteenth Century*. Hildesheim: George Olms Verlag, 2020, p. 50–51, 90.

33 See RAVEN, James. Transforming the eighteenth-century book trade: John Nourse and his bookshops on the Strand, In Neil Keeble and Tessa Whitehouse (eds.), *Textual Transformations: Purposing and Repurposing Books from Richard Baxter to Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, ch. 1.

work of Reeves underscored its authority, and for the first time the two parts were printed simultaneously and bound as one volume. All is in marked contrast with the typographical complexity of the original Danish and the German language edition. Despite the excellence of the design and composition, however, some copies of the *Natural History* were poorly printed by Reeves. Notably imperfect examples reside at the University Library of St Andrews and the Advocates Library of Edinburgh. Both libraries appear to have been sent substandard copies, with variable quality of impression and several of the engravings printed or inserted irregularly. Linde, it seems, unloaded unsellable copies of inferior quality to those libraries requesting gratis volumes under the 1709/10 Copyright Act.

### CIRCULATION AND READERSHIP

The further demonstration of the influence of the *Natural History* is simply the rapidity and extensiveness of its travel around the world. The two-part volume was bought by dozens of institutions and significant writers and collectors around the globe. Many surviving copies bear the bookplates of numerous institutions, naturalists and interested gentlemen, including Edward Gibbon, Joseph Banks, and Benjamin Franklin's Library Company of Philadelphia. Other copies were ordered by scholars, writers, clerics and colleges in St Petersburg, Hesse, Kraków, Glasgow, Cambridge, Oxford, Westminster, Boston and many dozen more.

Without the hundreds of thousands of readings of the book, whether careful, selective, prejudiced or in whatever of thousands of modes and circumstances, there would be no inclusive history of this or any other well-circulated book. And it is the marginal comments, other annotations and pasted-in notes by readers in surviving copies which attest most vividly to engagement with the *Historie* – and with the section on sea snakes in particular. One copy, now back at Bergen, was once owned by an amateur naturalist and former mayor of Margate in southern England, a Mr Arthur Rocoe, who proudly signs it when bought in 1910 but who also faithfully notes on the flyleaf 'Chapter on the Serpent Kraken read February 1914'. There are also many written insertions attesting to sightings of such a monster. Glued in close to the kraken description in the copy owned by the great naturalist Joseph Banks and now held at the British Library, is a four-page letter intended for 'the Printer of the St James Chronicle'. A Danish edition held at the National Library in Oslo bears marginal notes against the *serpens marinus* dated 1868 and made by Ludvig

Daae (1829–1893) Norwegian jurist, landowner and politician. Daae references sightings recorded in 1837 and 1839 in the daily weekday Oslo newspaper *Morgenbladet* (founded 1819). These are long, intense sightings themselves referencing Pontoppidan. Mirroring the image in the *Natural History* of two men in a rowing boat facing the surfacing monster, the newspaper recounts the ‘terrible guest’ met by the 1830s boatmen, each ‘entirely trustworthy’ witnesses.<sup>34</sup>

## THE LEGACY

Comparisons between the differently formatted, printed, illustrated, translated and anthologised editions of the work can thus be made in many ways, all energising the debate (as Pontoppidan himself anticipated) about sightings from the sea. This proved the most toxic aspect of this history of writing, production, circulation and reception. Pontoppidan’s affirmation of giant sea creatures as part of God’s creation depended on the explicit presentation within his text of testimonials and verified sightings, all as contributions to an increasingly popular exploration of ‘natural science’. Pontoppidan afforded models and encouragement to subsequent recorded sightings the world over from appearances – both monsters and Pontoppidan references – off the coasts of the Baltic, Ireland, Scotland, Newfoundland, South Africa, Argentina, India, and the Strait of Malacca. In 1851, for example, Herman Melville referenced ‘the great Kraken of Bishop Pontoppidan’ [sic] on the arrival of a giant squid in a dramatic passage in *Moby Dick*.<sup>35</sup> In 1869–1870, Professor Pierre Aronnax, fictional natural scientist and narrator of Jules Verne’s *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* asserts that ‘un autre évêque [that is, other than Olaus Magnus], Pontoppidan de Berghem, parle également d’un poulpe sur lequel pouvait manœuvrer un régiment de cavalerie’ (another bishop, Pontoppidan of Bergen, also tells of an octopus so large a whole cavalry regiment could manoeuvre on it).<sup>36</sup>

Reference books of the late nineteenth century such as Henry Lee’s *Sea Monsters Unmasked* (London, 1883) also used Pontoppidan assiduously. And many modern newspaper accounts name Pontoppidan as their source, however hazy they often are about the nature and origins of his work. A typically vivid

<sup>34</sup> *Morgenbladet* 15 Sept 1837, p. 2. I am most grateful to Siv Gøril Brandtzæg for the translation.

<sup>35</sup> MELVILLE, Herman. *Moby-Dick* 1st American edn, 1851, ch. 59, p. 275–277.

<sup>36</sup> VERNE, Jules. *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*. Paris: J. Hetzel, 1870, ch. 18, p. 389.

account was provided by *The Days' Doings*, an illustrated newspaper published in October 1871, and describing a dramatic sighting at Kilkee in Ireland.<sup>37</sup> Such widespread and long-lasting influence was based on both the ideas in the text (and their resonance with existing cultural freight) and the form of the text itself. Even cinematic creatures in such films as *It Came From Beneath the Sea* (1955), *Behemoth the Sea Monster* (1959) and *Gorgo* (1961) and spin-offs that continue in twenty-first century computer games, bear uncanny resemblance to the drawings of sea monsters in the *Historie*.

## COMPARISONS WITH SKARYNA

The earlier Renaissance case of Skaryna compares in complex ways with that of Pontoppidan. As noted earlier, the 'Bible' is an impossible subject for a specific 'book biography,' while no history of a single work of Skaryna is quite recoverable to the extent that is possible with the *Natural History* but his 'work' is similarly unstable in terms of its varied and reassembled production. In both its legacy and its textual genealogy (intellectual but also material) we see significant and instructive parallels.

Despite living and working two centuries before Pontoppidan, Skaryna's was also a world of roving circuits, typographical and bibliographical innovation and comment, of travel and translation, of seeking accessibility to language and books – all to the glorification of God. He was hugely travelled within his orbit, from his studies in Polatsk and Vilnius and then in Kraków and Padua, to his first Psalter and other biblical publishing in Prague and his *Little Traveller's Book* in Vilnius in 1522, to astonishing travels to Moscow, Poznan, Copenhagen (possibly), Königsberg (certainly), and of course, back to Vilnius and again to Prague. Like Pontoppidan later, Skaryna's immensely wide travel, contacts and correspondence encountered constraints, and most notably the impact of war, disease, political and religious intervention and fires that destroyed cities and printing houses. Like Pontoppidan later in his determined writing in Danish, Skaryna sought to make the Bible available by printing in an accessible language. Both also composed prefaces to their editions, in which they emphasized that the purpose of their publishing activities was to help ordinary people, in Skaryna's words to 'become acquainted with wisdom and science'. Skaryna contributed to the development of the Belarusian literary language

37 Made newly available by the digitisation of Victorian illustrated newspapers at the Mary Evans Picture Library in London



just as Pontoppidan's writing and interest in dialect contributed both to the standardization of Danish and the distinctive linguistic origins of Norwegian.

Other parallels are also clear. Many Skaryna fonts, for example, are distinctively original but others have antecedents with black and red letters of individual design and long narrow ornamental strips running across the page. In at least one instance a turned Cyrillic 'C' is an adapted Latin 'U' from the initial letter of an existing North German designer. The five woodcuts in *the Little Traveller's Book* also accompany a liturgical text that includes use of a hymn dating back to at least the twelfth century. The character of the text therefore remains distinct from the accepted designation as the *Little Traveller's Book* which, nonetheless, reflects its format and likely intention to accompany merchants in their voyages. Discoveries have also continued: it was only in 1971 that Alexander Nadson when examining the microfilm of an unknown copy of the *Little Traveller's Book* belonging to the Royal Library in Copenhagen found that it contained the missing Paschalia for the years 1523 to 1543, so leading to greater certainty about *the Little Traveller's Book's* dating.<sup>38</sup>

It is also in terms of its legacy that we might best see the sort of book biographical aspect described above for *the Little Traveller's Book*. Whereas the most enduring result of the *Naturlige Historie* is the diverse material representation of monsters that in turn drew upon an earlier pedigree of ancient images and myths, so the legacy of *the Little Traveller's Book* is embodied more by religious and nationalistic claims, embodied indeed in further material forms. In 2017, Viktor Babaryka, former Chief Executive Officer of Belgazprombank, philanthropist and currently detained political prisoner, claimed that his bank's promotion of an exhibition displaying a copy of *the Little Traveller's Book* 'emphasizes the strong links connecting all the European states and highlights the historical unity of the cultures of the countries of Europe'. In fact, Skaryna has often been pulled this way and that in a nationalist tug of war. Courtesy of Belgazprombank, *the Little Traveller's Book's* public appearance on the 'Day of Belarusian Writing' in Polatsk was part of an international exhibition project 'Along Skaryna's Road Together' which opened at the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania in Vilnius, moved to the Belarusian Printing Museum in Polatsk,

38 NADSON, Alexander. Skaryna's Prayer Book, *Journal of Belarusian Studies* 1, 1972, p. 339–358: [http://belarusjournal.com/sites/default/files/JBS\\_1972\\_1\\_Skaryna's%20Prayer%20Book.pdf](http://belarusjournal.com/sites/default/files/JBS_1972_1_Skaryna's%20Prayer%20Book.pdf) [accessed 4 April 2023]; and in Belarusian: Nadsan, Aleksandr. *Izbrannyye molitvy iz Malen'koy podarochnoy knigi*. London: Bozhny put', 1992. Access through the Internet: [https://files.knihi.com/Knihi/scanned5/Malaja\\_padaroznaja\\_knizka.Vybranyja\\_malivy.pdf](https://files.knihi.com/Knihi/scanned5/Malaja_padaroznaja_knizka.Vybranyja_malivy.pdf) [Accessed 4 April 2023].

and then moved to Kaliningrad (the former Königsberg), where Skaryna had lived at the invitation of Prussian Hertzog Albert of Brandenburg in 1529–1530.

More widely, the various statues and memorials honouring Skaryna attest to proud national traditions and assertions, as well as to invented and manipulated claims, many fiercely contested. In the earliest such statue, erected in 1974 in his birthplace of Polatsk, Skaryna stands deliberately as a scholar in contemplative pose in flowing academic robes on a stone plinth. The plinth is of about the same dimension as the bronze statue which takes the monument to an imposing twelve metres in height. The idea for that monument apparently originated in the 1920s and the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the beginning of Belarusian book printing in 1925. It equated with a festival largely shaped by Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski, the Belarusian historian, literary critic, and political figure, who also lauded Skaryna in his magazine *Kryvich*, published in Kaunas in Lithuania. Plans for the statue were, however, overtaken by political events, Stalin's repressions and the abandonment of a 'Belarusization policy', and it was another forty years before, once again, the celebration of Belarusian book printing in Prague offered an opportunity for statement. For this 450th anniversary a Belarusian sculptor Alaksiej Hlebaŭ modelled a bronze monument for installation in Polatsk, a work eventually cast by his students Ihar Hlebaŭ and Andrej Zaspitski and, erected by the architect Valdemar Marokin. In 1976, Alaksiej Hlebaŭ was posthumously awarded the State Prize of the BSSR for his Skaryna.

Standing six-and-half metres high, the statue to Skaryna erected in Lida is more religious, his right hand outstretched in blessing and his body overlaid with a cross-emblazoned vestment. In Minsk, Skaryna stands in still more heroic, even revolutionary mode, six metres tall in bronze and granite, with both hands aloft and one clasping his printed Bible in front of the National Library of Belarus. Sculpted by Aleš Dranits, the monument was conceived in 1989 and unveiled in August 2005, a year before the completion of the new National Library in 2006. By contrast, the metre high bust in Chisinau, Moldova, was carved in 2017 as part of a design contest organized by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus. In Prague, the statue to Skaryna is located in the gardens of the castle near to where he served as botanist to the Emperor Ferdinand. At three metres high, the bronze statue, dedicated in October 1996, is more modest than those in Belarus but no less heroic. The work of the Belarusian sculptor Eduard Astafjeŭ. Skaryna is shown in academic garb with a quill in his right hand with his left cradling the translated Slavonic Bible clearly identifiable with its Cyrillic script.

These statutes attest not only to a particularist pride which emanates more from twentieth- and twenty-first-century nationhoods than from the original, if highly composite, patria of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, but also to protest and symbolic repurposing. Skaryna had been depicted on a Soviet Union one-ruble coin, and just as the statue in Polatsk, when it finally appeared, bore the design of a Cold War intellectual warrior of commanding, towering proportions, so was the Minsk statue conceived and erected over a long period of political tensions as all neighbours to the north, east and south of Belarus broke free from Soviet control. The statue in Prague appeared a few years after the independence of Poland, the Baltic States and Ukraine and has since, notably, been the site of protest over the incarceration of intellectuals and political prisoners in Belarus.

Other memorials include streets named after Francysk Skaryna in Polatsk, Minsk, Vitebsk, Nyasvizh, Orsha, and Slutsk, while since 1995 the highest awards in cultural service in Belarus include both the Medal and the Order of Skaryna. Streets are – or were – named for Francysk Skaryna in Polatsk, Vitebsk, Nesvizh, Orsha, Slutsk, and many other cities of Belarus. Street naming in fact points to more subtle recognition of the winds of political change. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, a newly confident Belarusian government renamed Leninsky Prospekt (Lenin Avenue), the main thoroughfare of the capital Minsk, Skaryna Avenue.<sup>39</sup> In 2005, however, by order of the pro-Russian Alexander Lukashenko, Skaryna Avenue was retitled Independence Avenue. Dates and anniversaries figure largely. In addition to the prompt for statues and monuments, UNESCO proclaimed 1990 as the Year of Skaryna in celebration of 500 years since his birth, an anniversary that spurred the opening of a printing museum in Polatsk in 1991, still the only one of its kind in the country,

Such cultural freight is fascinating and its semblances continue from statues and memorials to digital representations and extensions of centuries-old imaginaries, but ultimately, the test of approaches to the history of what might be deemed book biographies or the life-cycle of books remains in the quality of the grounding bibliographical scholarship: of an intimate understanding of subtle changes between successive editions, in typography and format, in paratextual developments, in the nuances of different translations, in different accompanying illustrations, and in the variations of emphasis in public reviews and individual readings.

<sup>39</sup> The Starabarysauski trakt (Old Barysau Way) was also renamed Vulica Skaryny (Skaryna Street).

Supportive heritage issues range from concepts of Skaryniana and its political implications to current websites hosting Skaryna research and initiatives. These digital sites include the on-line Laboratory of Francysk Skaryna Studies (with invaluable article summaries and book reviews), the Francysk Skaryna Cultural Route project, and the London website of the Francis Skaryna Belarusian Library and Museum. As we have seen, textual analysis of his work – both in font and paratextual design and innovation, together with delicate illustration, fosters extraordinary scholarship and his linguistic legacy has both endured and offered critical archetypes through the centuries. Conservation research also attests to wider holdings and influence, with Skaryna’s editions preserved in libraries in Minsk, Moscow, St Petersburg, Kyiv, Vilnius, Lviv, London, Prague, Copenhagen, Kraków and elsewhere. His name is adopted variously, including for the distinguished Francis Skaryna Library and Museum in north London, where Nadson first dated the book we are celebrating as 500 years old. Here, at least four recreations of Skaryna’s typefaces have been achieved since the 1990s, beginning with Siarhiej Šupa’s creation of a very basic font for Nadson of the Skaryna Library to use on a Mac computer. Two other Skaryna-inspired fonts appeared in a prayer book in 2002, followed by another in 2017 to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Belarusian book printing. The Skaryna Press has also been launched in London, its current and forthcoming publications focusing on cultural plurality in another testimony to the long legacy of this Renaissance scholar.

The definition of knowledge exchange and with it, the concept of translation, extend far beyond the linguistic, central though this is to the reproduction and circulation of ideas. Exchange and translation encompass material forms that range from typography, orthography, the redrawing, reproduction and repositioning of images and *mise-en-page*, to physical binding, transport, shelving and cataloguing. We need further to challenge current spatial and temporal assumptions about such encounters by understanding the particular perspectives of readers, producers and agents in different parts of the globe. Such adjustment requires an appreciation of how both metropolitan and remote cultural, political and economic realities and exigencies interacted and interfered with the circulation of texts and the mediation of ideas.

Such ambition benefits from recent and diverse foundations: pioneering studies which examine how ideas travelled, were translated, and, in their different ways, received between the mid sixteenth and mid nineteenth centuries.<sup>40</sup>

40 Notable among these contributions are MACLEAN, Ian. *Learning and the Market Place: Essays in the History of the Early Modern Book*. Leiden: Brill 2009; Louisiane Ferlier and

Notable among this suggestive scholarship going forward are essays collected together by Lise Andries and her fellow collaborators on the ‘Cultural transfers between France, Britain and Ireland’ project which examined the ideas of French translators (and translators from the French) in transforming texts ‘in order to give their readership what they were supposed to expect’ and itself developing from work by Ann Thomson, Simon Burrows, Edmond Dziembowski and others addressing what ‘transfer’ actually meant within the ‘circulation of knowledge’.<sup>41</sup> In turn, both sets of essays drew inspiration from the understanding of a dynamic concept of transfer advanced, also collaboratively, by Michel Espagne and Michael Werner for Franco-German contexts.<sup>42</sup>

At the very least, therefore, the postulations in early modern book biography from Skaryna to Pontoppidan challenges certain assumptions about the relationship between ideas and forms and expands radically the geographical and social range of such history. The physical construction of texts from paper to type and engraving, their critical apparatus and paratextual features, their coverings, their modes of travel and (informal and later formal) advertisement, the manner of their collection and the changing contemporary perception of all of these things (among numerous material aspects and conditions) have been noted and integrated within numerous earlier studies, but for most, such concerns were subsidiary to the principal aim of a ‘history of ideas’ rather than a more broadly social understanding of a book’s influence and its readership and even of a contribution to a ‘Republic of Letters’ and later an Enlightenment transaction. Conversely, the hugely increased interest in ‘book history’ (and the even more casually used ‘print culture’) has not always bridged the material with ideological historical scholarship.

Conceptually, indeed, and even in the case of Pontoppidan’s work, is all this a ‘book biography’ or the ‘life-cycle of a book’? Ultimately, I think, neither. It is

Bénédicte Miyamoto (eds.), *Forms, Formats and the Circulation of Knowledge: British Printscape’s Innovations, 1688–1832*. Leiden and Boston MA: Brill, 2020; and Hanna Hodacs, Kenneth Nyberg and Stéphanie van Damme (eds.), *Linnaeus, Natural History and the Circulation of Knowledge*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2018.

- 41 Lise Andries, Frédéric Ogée, John Dunkley and Darach Sanfey (eds.), *Intellectual Journeys: The Translation of Ideas in Enlightenment England, France and Ireland*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013, esp. p. 2; Ann Thomson, Simon Burrows and Edmond Dziembowski (eds.), *Cultural Transfers: France and Britain in the Long Eighteenth Century*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2010.
- 42 Michel Espagne and Michael Werner (eds.), *Transferts: les relations interculturelles dans l’espace franco-allemand (XVIII<sup>e</sup>–XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles)*. Paris: Éditions recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988; ESPAGNE, Michel. *Les Transferts: culturels franco-allemand*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999.

not a book biography because it is not about one book – one originating text, yes, but as translated, transformed linguistically, materially and visually, the result is more one of book biographies, in the sense of being a collective biography – the history of hundreds of individual copies, and none of these really conforming to a life *cycle* either because each history has a more linear and for some copies, a continuing and open ended and still evolving existence. As Jim Secord writes of the *Vestiges*, “The work was not a stable entity, but the sum total of an expanding array of representations.”<sup>43</sup> This is most definitely the case for the various productions of Skaryna: including in Prague the twenty-three books of the Hebrew Bible, and in Vilnius *The Little Travel Book* and the *Apostol* (Apostle), comprising the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles.<sup>44</sup>

Is it, then, better to attempt a different type of analogy that also apprehends the book as having a life – a book biology perhaps rather than a biography, whereby, in such study of a ‘life’, a book is conceived by its intellectual creator with very specific intentions and is then transmuted by other actors and agencies into those different material, visual and linguistic forms – in the case of Skaryna into numerous unstable texts, variously arranged and rearranged and with uncertain survival rates and relatively poor evidence of use; and in the case of Pontoppidan, three more stable editions, Danish, German and English but all also materially different and each copy reproduced in separate operations of printing and collation. Each copy pursued thereafter its own life – no more reproduction, so no book genealogy – but hugely diverse and differently influential lives – some terminated in relative infancy, some moving around the world and through many hands, some mutilated, others preserved *in situ* and totemically represented at anniversaries or for political and cultural ends. The biosphere becomes the bibliosphere, and one where other models of book biology exist – where a book might be revived from near death and translated in different ways at many years remove from the birth period, for example, or where a greater hybridity bibliographically or in cross cultural terms might spawn different forms, functions and ecologies.

43 SECORD, James A. *Victorian Sensation...*, p. 68.

44 Summaries of recent articles and reviews of pertinent studies appear in the on-line Laboratory of Francysk Skaryna Studies (<https://skaryna.com/en/>).

1. ALDROVANDI, Ulisse. *Monstrorum historia: cum paralipomenis historiae omnium animalium*. Bologna, 1642.
2. Ambroise Paré. *Les Œuvres D'Ambroise Paré*. Lyon, 1685.
3. Ann Thomsson, Simon Burrows and Edmond Dziembowski (eds.), *Cultural Transfers: France and Britain in the Long Eighteenth Century*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2010.
4. BELON, Pierre, *De Aquatilibus*. Paris, 1553.
5. BLAIR, Ann. *The Theater of Nature: Jean Bodin and Renaissance Science*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.
6. BRAUNSTEIN, Ruth. 'I would love to read the biography of a book...', interview with Fred Appel. In *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere, 13 April 2011*. Access through Internet: <https://tif.ssrc.org/2011/04/13/i-would-love-to-read-the-biography-of-a-book/> [accessed 4 April 2023].
7. *Catalogus over Endeel Exemplaria af adskillige Sal Hr Procantzser Pontoppidans egne i Trykken udgivne Skrifter... Auction i residentzen paa Nørregarde Mandagen den 24 Martii 1766...* Copenhagen: Andreas Hartvig Godiche, 1766.
8. CHARTIER Roger. Address to The Centre for the History of the Book Conference, *Technology, Textuality and Transmission*, University of Edinburgh, 16 July 2010.
9. DAHL, Gina, *Biskop Pontoppidans brevbok 1751–1753*. Bergen: Kapabel Press, 2019.
10. Daniel Bellingradt, Paul Nelles and Jeroen Salman (eds.), *Books in Motion in Early Modern Europe: Beyond Production, Circulation and Consumption*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
11. DARTON, Robert. *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie, 1775–1800*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1979.
12. EGGERT, Paul. *Biography of a Book: Henry Lawson's While the Billy Boils*. Sydney: Penn State University Press and Sydney University Press, 2013.
13. ESPAGNE, Michel. *Les Transferts: culturels franco-allemand*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999.
14. GESSNER, Conrad. *Historia animalium* 4 vols. Zurich, 1551–1558.
15. GLEEK, Charlie. Southernness on Display in Recent Little Magazines, *Humanities Commons*, 2021. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/yyg2-t110>.
16. GLEEK, Charlie. This is It: A Review of Larry Brown's *Tiny Love: The Complete Stories*, In *The Chattahoochee Review*, 2020, 40: 1, p. 150–155.
17. GLEEK, Charlie. What Is The History of Your Book? Self-Determined Classroom Research Experiences in South Florida. Conference paper, 2019.
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