

HAUSVÄTERLITERATUR IN THE EDUCATION AND SPIRITUALITY OF A NOBLEMAN IN THE EARLY MODERN ERA

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ABSTRACT

Aim. The aim of this study is to discuss how important the so-called *Hausväterliteratur* genre was in the education and spirituality of (not only) aristocrats in the Early Modern Era.

Concept. This article will introduce the *Hausväterliteratur* as a literary genre that strongly influenced the spirituality and morality of its readers –householders, administrators of property, and their wives.

Methods. The method applied was text analysis. The social history method based on research of the primary sources was also employed..

Results. The study confirms that the treatises of the so-called *Hausväterliteratur* genre, kept in high numbers in European libraries in the Early Modern Age, carry a certain type of spirituality which calls for “true Christian life” following what was often a Protestant pattern (exhortation for frequent reading of the Bible).

Conclusion. Most of these books outline an ideal of the Christian life, characterised by the establishment of an order within the “household”, or “house”, i.e., the family in the broader sense, including both the manor owner and those closest to him as well as all his subjects and servants.

Keywords: *Hausväterliteratur*, Early Modern Era, Spirituality, Morality, Early Modern Literature

INTRODUCTION

The term *Hausväterliteratur* was coined in the 19th century to describe the literary genre of exhortative literature that frequently appeared in German-speaking countries in the 16th – 18th centuries (Brunner, 1949; Brunner, 1956; cf. Opitz, 1994; Schaefer & Zeisberg, 2018). This term therefore appeared at the time when the genre was already thought to be obsolete in many respects, as in the 19th century many other issues had to be responded to in social, political and economic terms. At the time they first emerged, these books were referred to as *Oekonomika* or *Hausbücher* and primarily served the educated landlords of countryside properties, especially the aristocracy, but were also popular with the owners of smaller farmsteads, such as Protestant pastors. The authors of these texts continued in the tradition of their ancient predecessors, the so-called *scriptores rei rustice*, the most prominent of whom were Cato, Varro, Columella, and Palladius, and just like their ancient forerunners, these modern-era authors commented upon the household and property management, the duties of the manor owners (the so-called *Hausvater* – “father of the house”) and their wives (*Hausmutter*), bookkeeping, the construction of their family residence and outbuildings, utility and, often to a lesser extent, ornamental gardens, social relations within the family as well with the subjects and subordinates at the manor,

religious duties and animal breeding. The texts also contained a calendar, medical advice, recipes for the preparation of various meals and beverages, and tables to be used for interpreting dreams (Košenina, 2010; Ogilvie et al., 2009; Priesner, 2011; Singhof, 2007). In other words, this literature was focused on the art of running a household by the father of the house, or by the husband and wife, each with their own designated roles and duties. Amongst other things, this type of literature therefore outlined a certain ideal notion of the Christian family, where “family” meant every member of the community who had a firm role within the community (Chapuis-Després & Epstein, 2018; Eibach, 2011; Koschorke, 2000; Schorn-Schütte, 2006). Linked to this was also a certain type of morality and spirituality to be followed within the framework of this functioning unit (the family). This text outlines the key moral motives and imperatives as well as the spiritual aspects upon which this successful type of literature was based.

THE POSITION OF *HAUSVÄTERLITERATUR* IN THE ARISTOCRACY’S LIBRARIES AND THEIR ROLE IN THE EDUCATION OF A YOUNG NOBLEMAN

Hausväterliteratur tracts were frequently found in the libraries of the aristocracy (Rychnová, 2020), but also those of protestant pastors, Catholic parsonages, manor administrators and higher officials, and also of burghers. The popularity of this genre is manifested in the fact that it also frequently occurred outside the Western Christian *milieu*. It also greatly influenced Modern-age Russia (Seppel, 2011; Tarasov, 2011). The genre’s most popular works were *Oeconomia ruralis et domestica oder Haußbuch* by Johann Coler, *Nützliche Hauß- und Feldschule* by Georg Andreas Böckler, *Schauplatz des Allgemeinen Haußhaltens* by Jacob Agricola, von Hohberg’s *Georgica curiosa oder Adeliges Landleben*, *Der kluge Landmann* by Franz Philipp Florin, and one of the most recent books was proverbially *Der Hausvater* by Otto von Münchhausen (Agricola, 1677; Böckler, 1666; Coler, 1604; Florin, 1725; von Hohberg, 1682; von Münchhausen, 1765). Libraries contained so many of these works that there is no question of their influence on the community of readers (Čapská, 2016; Rychnová, 2020). As is implied by the titles as well as by the aforementioned original general name for this type of literature – *oeconomica* – the primary purpose of these books was to provide the readers with guidance on how to properly administer the property in their care (Lis & Ehmer, 2009). They were undoubtedly the first reference aid to which the manor owner or his wife would resort when in doubt over some specific and practical matter regarding the “household”, for instance, sowing the fields, planting trees, crops, making honey, building a house or structuring the garden. From our perspective, this means managing one’s property so as to eventually achieve a certain economic prosperity (Fussell, 1969; Lis & Ehmer, 2009). The reader was thus exhorted to become a “good

housekeeper" and one who develops the family property. At the same time, the reader was confronted with a number of moral principles that the ideal *Hausvater* and *Hausmutter* should firmly adhere to (cf. Koschorke, 2000).

MORALITY AND ORDER

It is indicative that economic prosperity here is based on a certain order and practising Christian virtues, from which all members of the "household" benefit. In this respect, this type of literature referred to Aristotelian philosophy, and drew on the works of theologians, very often Protestant pastors, but also of the nobility, i.e., those written by landowners themselves (Brunner, 1956; Hespanha, 1993; Koschorke, 2000). Here, the household was understood both in the narrower sense as well as in broader terms, as it included both the nuclear family of the owner of the manor or farmstead as well as the other inhabitants of the "house" – servants and subjects. A parallel for such a community can be found in the ancient notion of *oikos*. The manager of the family property was hence thought to become the real "father of the house" and his administration should transcend the boundaries of economy in the present sense of the word, thus going beyond the bounds of moral action.

The roles in this community were properly divided between the aforementioned father and mother of the "house" (*Hausvater* and *Hausmutter*), who then organised the whole community – their children, subjects, servants – and assigned specific tasks (Chapuis-Després & Epstein, 2018; Hausen, 1975; Hespanha, 1993; Reagin, 2001; Wunder & Sebastiani, 2009). This division of roles was supposed to result in a harmonically functioning unit in which everyone knows their place and follows a certain order (Eibach, 2011; Reagin, 2001; Stollberg-Rilinger, 2000). This order reflected the Divine Order of Giving in Creation. The order and structure of the house is often defined by the precisely designated duties of each member of this *oikos* (Brunner, 1959; see also Opitz, 1994). This is, for instance, very clearly apparent in the introductory chapter of Florin's *Oeconomus Prudens et legalis* (Florin, 1725), the opening parts of which give a detailed elaboration on the duties of parents to their children and vice versa. Even the titles of the relevant chapters are explicit enough: "On the duties of parents that they owe their children in general" (Book I, Chapter 7), "On the care of a faithful father for his children, especially his sons, as far as their education in school and college is concerned" (Book I, Chapter 8), "On the provision of a faithful mother for her daughters" (Book I, Chapter 9), "On the obligations of children to their parents" (Book I, Chapter 10), "On a householder's obligations to his servants and hired hands" (Book I, Chapter 11), "On the duties of servants and hired men which they owe to the lordship" (Book I, Chapter 12). The scheme of mutual relationships (Pavlíková, 2016; Majda, 2017; Lojan 2018) and duties also included the deceased (Thurzo, 2015), as is

demonstrated in the following chapter (Chapter 13) entitled “On the duties towards the deceased”. The house, *oikos*, was thus run under a firmly defined order that determined everyone’s rules and duties. Taking a closer look at the principles this life, determined by order, should follow, it is apparent that it was supposed to be the everyday practice of “real” Christianity.

The duties by which the household members were committed to one another were not only of a practical and legal nature, but also of a spiritual one (Akimjaková & Tišovičová, 2017; Maturkanič et al., 2021). The *Hausvater*, the father of the house, was, for instance, obliged to provide his subjects with clothes, a dwelling and food, not only in the physical but also in the spiritual sense. The way to achieve this is to completely follow the Divine example in the “fear of God” and prayer, as one of the most famous authors of these books, von Hohberg, says in the first chapter of his *Georgica Curiosa*:

All house and farm management consists primarily (if it is to be run and maintained fortunately and as desired) in three things: The first and most excellent is God’s blessing without which nothing can be used or done well. This in turn is to be acquired and maintained by fervent prayer and, persistent and primary to all things, fear of God, and Christianly sincere and honest conduct in all our comings and goings. And such doing is presented to us by the Holy Scripture (...) (von Hohberg, 1687, p. 9-10 [translated from German by the author])

Obedience to the Divine law, and thus also order, then gives rise to two other important aspects that the good “father of the house” must adhere to, i.e., a thorough understanding of the qualities, both good and bad, of the property and land in his care, and also those of the community as a whole. And the third aspect is that he must be willing to constantly educate and cultivate himself in his everyday work, i.e., the management of the whole community. All of this, however, should again be done within the framework of the Divine order (von Hohberg 1687).

The establishment and maintenance of order in this type of literature also includes the elimination of “disorders”. If the order established by God and given earthly form as a community, *oikos*, were not maintained, if it were perverted, there is no way for the community to prosper, as von Hohberg also defines:

(...) as far as we wantonly anger God with obstinate sins, the Divine Law now and then equally proclaims serious and terrible threats; where we do not obey the voice of the Lord our God, we shall be cursed, in the city, in the field, in all our ventures and fortunes (...) (von Hohberg, 1687, p. 10 [translated from German by the author])

It is the idea of maintaining order and eradicating disorders that is one of the main lines of spiritual moralisation that recurs in perhaps all the prescriptive tracts of the *Hausväterliteratur* genre. As was demonstrated in the recently published monograph by Veronika Čapská, this way of esta-

blishing order on moral and religious grounds took firm hold in the households of the Central European aristocracy, both Protestant and Catholic, and undoubtedly stemmed from the thinking presented by the *Hausväterliteratur* authors. Čapská takes the early 18th-century Sweert-Sporck house as an example and quotes a period source which reflects on how one of the members of the house, Anna Kateřina Sweert-Sporck, kept her household in such a manner as to:

(...) eradicate all vices, godlessness and indignities, build a school of virtues of the household for every member of her court, and [she] maintained such a Christian order in it that foreigners, clergymen, aristocratic as well as common guests not only admired her but were also amazed (Čapská, 2016, p. 183 [translated from Czech by the author])

It is interesting that in the Catholic environment the idea of maintaining order and establishing it within the family as advocated in *Hausväterliteratur* could also provide the same degree of inspiration in the monastic environment, as many members of the nobility were quite close to the religious orders in different ways (cf. Čapská 2016, p. 176, and also Rychnová, 2019, p. 40). We could therefore understand *Hausväterliteratur* as a project of a substantially ascetic life, one that follows a methodology, where God is the originator as well as the guarantor.

Over time, especially in the later tracts of this genre, the order tends to be referred to as the absolute grounds for every action taken by the “father of the house” and to be almost absolutised and understood even in the mechanistic sense, as can be seen in Book 1 of Otto von Münchhausen’s tract:

It does not make a housekeeper strong yet, if he pays special attention to one or the other part of his dominion (...) The foremost is that he has a complete overview of his entire household and keeps everything in general and on the whole in order. The whole household must run together like clockwork, every wheel must fit in exactly and be useful (von Münchhausen, 1765, p. 335, translated from German by the author)

The rationalisation of the social order inside the “household” is traditionally based on the Divine organisation of the world. God established the world on just terms and everyone must therefore know one’s own place and role as part of the Divine Creation, as is emphasised, for instance, by Agricola in the basic instructions for the “fathers of the house” in his *Schauplatz deß Allgemeinen Haushalten*: “Gegen die Diener und das andere Gesinde soll ein Haus Herr sich also erweisen, daß, wo Gott ihn nicht in den Herrn sondern in den Dienst-Stand gesetzt.” He also draws the attention of the “fathers of the house” to the fact that they, too, are exhorted, within that structured community, to follow Christ in showing mercy and doing good to their subjects and servants:

(...) he could willingly be at peace with his master, according to the rule of the Lord Christ: Whatever you want people to do to you, do it to them. But today many do not consider that God freed them from servitude out of sheer grace and made them lords. Therefore, a Christian house master should recognize this prerogative or advantage, content himself with his rule and his charge, and not deprive the poor servants and farmhands of their pay or due (Agricola 1677, p. 1 [translated from German by the author])

The just and godly order in the “house”, meaning the manor in the broader sense, can only be achieved by following God’s will and by practicing true Christianity (Akimjak & Račková, 2018; Čergetřová Tomanová et al., 2021; Juhás, 2019; Kondrla & Králik, 2016; Máhrik et al., 2020). The *Hausväterliteratur*-type tracts, especially the later ones, also include more detailed “instructions” on how to achieve this just organisation, in some respects almost an ascetic ideal of life, within the house, manor or farmstead (Gavendová, 2019).

FOSTERING VIRTUES AND MODERATION

The way to achieving this, as is implied above, lies in organising the order inside the “house” and the mutual duties of each “household” member. The right order should be guaranteed especially by the “father of the house” who must first find order in himself. More than one of these tracts gives explicit advice for this purpose, therefore teaching the contemporary and future “fathers of the house” how to achieve inner self-control (Reimer, 2015; Tkáčřová et al., 2021; Vivoda, 2019;). For instance, Chapter 2 in the aforementioned popular *Oeconomus Prudens* by Florin is directly headed by the title “How the house father should rule over himself or behave towards himself”. It is primarily the control and reflection over one’s own acts that are required, and they can be achieved both through thorough self-recognition and the intentional fostering of virtues:

(...) so he (house father) must have learned to rule over himself beforehand. Here, however, it will give him good help and significant promotion, if he knows himself well and has already learned the $\gamma\upsilon\omega\theta\iota \sigma\epsilon\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{o}\nu$, nosce te ipsum, know thyself, highly praised already by the heathens as something divine and heavenly (Florin 1750, p. 8 [translated from German by the author])

The sources in this case are indeed ascetic monastic texts and certainly also stoic (and even Socratic) morality and rhetoric.

Success in these efforts can be achieved by controlling spontaneous emotions, such as anger, lust and fear, and the leading role should be left to reason, which is able to recognise and analyse all these emotional states (Martín et al., 2020; Pavlířková & Žalec, 2019). The aim is to achieve a certain type of disengagement, as Florin continues:

The householder should pay careful attention to the impulses in his soul, which one calls emotions, affects, passions and inclinations and usually divides into two types, which are aggressive ones and desirous ones, so that he does not fall on one side through immoderate anger, fear, sadness, etc. into faintheartedness or displeasure, nor on the other side through excessive love, desire, hope, joy, etc. into wantonness so that he might be beside himself and, so to speak, lose himself, but he should always be able to remain indifferent in his order and peace of mind, draw all his strength and thoughts into one, whereby the surrender of his self to Divine Will and the trust in the fatherly provision of God will give him the most certain help (Florin 1750, p. 9 [translated from German by the author])

A substantial role is played here by the virtue of moderation (*temperantia*). This task is all the more demanding because the “father of the house” should set a good example for his children and wife as well as for his subjects (Petschauer, 1986). Ideally, he must not let his weaknesses be apparent (cf. Schorn-Schütte, 2006).

CONCLUSION

The *Hausväterliteratur* genre is one of the substantial sources for “teaching” an aristocrat or administrator of larger or smaller tracts of land in the Early Modern Age. Even though the main purpose of these books is especially to provide practical guidance in the everyday running of a “household”, these tracts exhort the reader to acquire the qualities and habits intended to help the “father of the house” succeed in his actions (cf. Stollberg-Rilinger, 2000). The fundamental aspect of achieving such success is to establish and fulfil a certain order or system, which is based primarily on the *oikos*, understood in the Aristotelian sense and put into practice as a functional unit in terms of economy and society, as defined in the older literature (Králík & Máhrik, 2019). However, what are also important and substantial are the moral imperatives that form more or less prominent themes in various parts of this tract. The cultivation of land by this organised community under the leadership of the “father of the house” should be a reflection of the Divine Order. Whatever was entrusted to the father of the house by God and already present through the givenness of nature should be cultivated (Akimjaková, 2017; Ondrej 2017). The actions of the “father of the house” are therefore in substance the continuation and cooperation in the Divine Creation. There were so many books of the *Hausväterliteratur* genre in the libraries of aristocrats, burgers and parsonages that their influence on the mentality of a young aristocrat or land administrator must have been substantial. Moreover, they appear to have been consulted throughout one’s whole active life, which made them one of the key sources of the “constant”, albeit at first glance less prominent, self-education. At the same time, in return, they are an excellent reflection of the period mindset,

which makes them a unique source of our understanding of the educational process and the approach to property and land in the Early Modern Age.

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