

Lexicon of Common Figurative Units

First volume: Intertextuality. Idioms in four languages

Below we will list those idioms which are treated in the first volume. All of them go back to *intertextuality*. This means that once familiar texts or influential authors contributed to the development of these idioms which are well-known in many current languages. They are parts of today's Lexicon of Common Figurative Units, although their textual origins may be unknown to the speakers or lost in the mists of the distant past. In various cases not only the idioms but most notably the sources and motifs have been widespread since early times.

The relations between the textual sources and the idioms are different. There can be direct references: Various literary fragments were initially used as quotations and thus clearly related to a text passage before they developed into idioms. Alternatively, there can be indirect references to an entire text, summarising a certain situation or the gist of a text. Another group is idioms which were already in circulation in ancient or medieval times and in fact are much older than the texts in which they appear for the first time.

The idioms will be presented as follows: (i) the code number, (ii) the English version of the **IDIOM** (if it does not exist in English this is marked with a *), (iii) the main sources in brackets (Chapters 3-6), (iv) a short description of the figurative meaning of the idiom, and (v) examples of three further languages: Italian, Polish and Hungarian. If an idiom does not exist in one of these languages, we choose a most closely related language.

Chapter 3: Antiquity as a Source of Widespread Idioms

Classical Mythology and Narratives (A 1 – A 11)

(A 1) TO RISE (LIKE A PHOENIX) FROM THE ASHES – (Hesiod, Herodot, various classical authors)

‘to emerge as new from sth. that has been destroyed; to find renewal in destruction’

Italian *risorgere/rinascere, come la fenice, dalle ceneri / sorgere dal polvere come Fenix*

Polish *powstać jak Feniks z popiołów*

Hungar. *főnixként támad fel hamvaiból*

(A 2) TO OPEN A PANDORA’S BOX / OPENING PANDORA’S BOX – (Hesiod, Greek and Roman authors)

‘to start sth. that unintentionally causes many new and unexpected problems’

Italian *(aprire/scoperchiare) il/un vaso di Pandora*

Polish *otworzyć puszkę Pandory*

Hungar. *felnyitja Pandora szelencéjét*

(A 3) A/THE TROJAN HORSE – (Vergil: Aeneid)

‘an enemy concealed within sb. or sth. that attacks the group or organization it belongs to’

Italian *un/il cavallo di Troia*

Polish *koń trojański*

Hungar. *trójai faló*

(A 4) TO SUFFER THE TORMENTS OF TANTALUS – (Odyssey)

‘to suffer great torments’

Italian *soffrire/patire il supplizio di Tantalo*

Polish *cierpieć męki Tantala*

Hungar. *tantaluszi kínokat szenved/áll ki*

(A 5) BETWEEN SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS – (Odyssey)

‘between two great dangers of which the attempt to avoid one increases the risk of the other’

Italian *cadere da Scilla in Cariddi / essere tra Scilla e Cariddi*
Polish *między Scyllą a Charybdą*
Hungar. *Szkiilla/Scylla és Khariübdisz/Charybdis között*

(A 6) (TO BE THE/SB.'S) ACHILLES' HEEL – (Iliad)

‘(to be) a perceived vulnerable point in sb. or sth. otherwise considered solid and infallible’

Italian *il tallone d'Achille*
Polish *pięta achillesowa*
Hungar. *az Achilles sarka*

(A 7) TO TAKE TIME/THE OCCASION BY THE FORELOCK – (Greek poets)

‘to act quickly and decisively; to use a favorable moment, to not let an opportunity slip’

Italian *afferrare l'occasione pei capelli* “to grab the opportunity by the hair”
Czech *chytit příležitost za pačesy* “to grab the opportunity by the forelock”
Hungar. *kihasználja az időt* “to take time by the forelock”

(A 8) TO SWEEP/CLEANSE THE AUGEAN STABLES – (Lucian)

‘to make a clean sweep of a terrible mess; to bring order into sth. which is in utter confusion’

Italian *pulire le stalle di Augia*
Polish *sprzątać/czyścić/stajnię Augiasza*
Hungar. *rendbe teszi Augiász istállóját*

(A 9) A SWORD OF DAMOCLES HANGS OVER SB.'S HEAD – (Horace, Cicero)

‘a danger is looming ahead and threatens sb.'s well-being’

Italian *avere la spada di Damocle sulla testa* “to have the sword of Damocles over the head”
Polish *coś wisi nad kimś jak miecz Damoklesa* “sth. hangs over sb. like the sword of Damocles”
Hungar. *Damoklesz kardja ott lebeg/függ vkinek a feje fölött*
“Damocles' sword floats there/hangs over the head of sb.”

(A 10) TO BURN ONE'S BRIDGES – (Plutarch and others)

‘to make an irrevocable step, to put oneself in a position from which there is no return’

Italian *rompere i ponti i ponti (dietro di sé)* “to break/cut the bridges (behind oneself)”
Polish *palić za sobą mosty* “to burn bridges behind oneself”
Hungar. *minden hidat feléget maga mögött* “sb. burns all bridges behind him/herself”

(A 11) (TO KNOW) THE PLACE WHERE THE SHOE PINCHES – (Plutarch)

‘(to recognize) the cause of sb.'s hidden grief; (to see) what is bothering or troubling sb.’

Italian *sapere dove lo stringe la scarpa* “to know where the shoe pinches him”
Czech *vědět, kde ho bota/střevíc tlačí* “to know where sb. pinches the boot/shoe”
Hungar. *tudja, (hogy) hol szorít a cipő/csizma* “to know where the shoe/boot pinches”

Proverbial Phrases Current in Antiquity (A 12 – A 23)

(A 12) A NECESSARY/INESCAPABLE EVIL – (Plato and other authors)

‘something disagreeable which cannot be avoided’

Italian *il male necessario*
Polish *zło konieczne*
Hungar. *a szükséges rossz*

(A 13) TO BECOME/BE SECOND NATURE TO SB. – (Aristotle, Cicero)

‘to become habitual, almost instinctive to sb.’

Italian *diventare una seconda natura*
Polish *stawać się czymś drugą naturą* “to become sb.'s second nature”
Hungar. *vkinek második természetévé válik (vmi)* “(sth.) becomes second nature to sb.”

(A 14) THE LESSER EVIL – (Menander and others)

‘the somewhat less unpleasant of two poor choices; the matter with the smaller disadvantage’

Italian *il malo minore*

Polish *mniej zło*

Hungar. *két rossz közül a kisebbet választja* “sb. chooses of two evils the smaller”

(A 15) THE DIE IS CAST – (Greek proverb, quoted by Caesar etc.)

‘an important decision about the future has been made, and it is impossible to change it’

Italian *il dado è tratto*

Polish *kości zostały rzucone*

Hungar. *a kocka el van vetve*

(A 16) TO PREACH TO DEAF EARS – (Plautus, Vergil etc.)

‘a request, advice etc. is ignored by people’

Italian *predicare/ parlare ai sordidi*

Slovene *pridigati/ govoriti gluhih ušesom*

Hungar. *süket füleknél beszél*

(A 17) TO BE (ALL) IN THE SAME BOAT – (Cicero and others)

‘to be in the same (unpleasant) situation together with other people’

Italian *essere nella stessa barca*

Czech *být na jedné lodi*

Hungar. *egy csónakban evez vkivel*

(A 18) TO ADD FUEL TO THE FIRE / TO THE FLAMES – (Horace and others) See [examples with maps](#)

‘to make a difficult situation even worse, exacerbating a conflict, to aggravate sb.’s rage’

Italian *gettare/versare olio/benzina sul fuoco*

Polish *dolewać oliwy do ognia*

Hungar. *olajat önt a tűzre*

(A 19) A WHITE CROW – (Juvenal and others)

‘a very rare exception’

Italian *una mosca Bianca*

Polish *biały kruk*

Hungar. *fehér holló*

(A 20) TO HAVE ONE FOOT IN THE GRAVE – (Greek poets)

‘to be very ill or very old; to be close to death or in terrible condition’

Italian *avere un/essere con un piede nella tomba/nella fossa*

Polish *być jedną nogą w grobie*

Hungar. *fél/egyik lába a sírban van*

(A 21) *TO MAKE AN ELEPHANT OUT OF A MOSQUITO – (Classical authors, Lucian)

‘to pointlessly exaggerate the importance of something trivial; to aggregate trifling difficulties’

Italian *fare di una mosca un elefante*

Slovene *narediti iz muhe slona*

Hungar. *a bolhából (is) elefántot csinál*

(A 22) TO HAVE IMBIBED STH. WITH ONE’S MOTHER’S MILK – (Roman authors, St Augustine)

‘to have learned sth. from early childhood on’

Italian *aver succhiato qc. con il latte materno*

Polish *wyssać coś z mlekiem matki*

Hungar. *az anyatejjel szív magába vmit*

(A 23) TO MAKE A VIRTUE (OUT) OF NECESSITY – (St. Jerome, Greek origin)

‘to make the best of a difficult or unsatisfactory situation, to derive some credit or benefit from an unwelcome obligation’

Italian *fare di necessità virtù*
Polish *uczynić cnotę z konieczności*
Hungar. *szükségből erényt csinál*

Quotations from Greek and Roman Authors (A 24 – A 35)

(A 24) WINGED WORDS – (Iliad and Odyssey)

‘often quoted expression, highly apposite words’

Spanish *aladas palabras*
Polish *skrzydlate słowa*
Hungar. *szállóige*

(A 25) TO BE BALANCED ON A KNIFE-EDGE – (Iliad)

‘to be in a difficult or dangerous situation in which something very bad may very easily happen’

Italian *essere/trovarsi sul filo del rasoio* “to be/find oneself on the edge of the knife“
Slovak *niečo je na hrane noža* “sth. is on the edge of the knife”
Hungar. *borotvaélen táncol vki/vmi* “to dance on a razor-edge”

(A 26) AN/THE UNWRITTEN LAW – (Solon)

‘a law which is generally recognized, although it has not been committed to writing’

Italian *una legge non scritta*
Polish *niewpisane prawo*
Hungar. *íratlan törvény*

(A 27) IT’S IN THE NATURE OF THINGS – (Lucretius)

‘that is of the essence of the things; as is typical or inevitable’

Italian *essere nella natura delle cose*
Polish *to leży w naturze rzeczy*
Hungar. *vmi a dolog természetéből fakad*

(A 28) THE GOLDEN MEAN – (Horace)

‘a middle way which avoids extremes’

Italian *il giusto mezzo/Latin aurea mediocritas*
Polish *złoty środek*
Hungar. *az arany középút*

(A 29) THE NAKED TRUTH – (Horace)

‘the plain, unvarnished truth which may be unpleasant, without concealment or embellishment’

Italian *la nuda verità*
Polish *naga prawda*
Hungar. *a meztelen igazság*

(A 30) TO COMBINE/MIX BUSINESS WITH PLEASURE – (Horace)

‘to combine work with social activities or enjoyment’

Italian *unire l’utile al dilettevole*
Polish *łączyć przyjemne z pożytecznym*
Hungar. *összeköti a kellemest a hasznossal*

(A 31) THE ETERNAL CITY – (Tibull)

‘epithet of the city of Rome’

Italian *la Città Eterna*
Polish *Wieczne Miasto*
Hungar. *az örök város*

(A 32) TO TAKE STH. WITH A PINCH/GRAIN OF SALT – (Pliny the Elder)

to believe only a part of what you have been told, to allow for considerable exaggeration'

Italian *prendere qualcosa con un pizzico di sale/Latin cum grano salis*

Polish *ze szczyptą soli*

(A 33) *TO HAVE GOOD LUCK IN BAD LUCK – (Flavius Josephus)

'it could have been a great deal worse'

Italian *aver fortuna nella sfortuna / essere fortunati nella disgrazia*

Polish *(mieć) szczęście w nieszczęściu*

Hungar. *szerecsse a szerecsétlenségben*

(A 34) TO BE (ONLY) A SHADOW OF ONE'S FORMER SELF – (Lucanus)

'to be emaciated, weakly; to have lost a lot of one's capabilities'

Italian *essere l'ombra di se stessi/stesso*

Polish *być cieniem samego siebie*

Hungar. *(csak) árnyéka önmagának*

(A 35) A WALKING DICTIONARY – (Eunapios)

'a person who has an impressive knowledge of facts or words'

Italian *essere un dizionario ambulante*

Polish *chodząca encyklopedia*

"a walking encyclopedia"

Hungar. *két lábbon járó lexikon*

"a lexicon walking on two feet"

Chapter 4: The Bible as Source of Widespread Idioms

The Old Testament (B 1 – B 18)

(B 1) FORBIDDEN FRUIT – (Gen 2:9 and 3:2-6)

'something one finds attractive or desirable because one is not allowed to have it (sth. immoral or illegal, especially illicit love); forbidden pleasure'

Italian *il frutto proibito*

Polish *zakazany owoc*

Hungar. *tiltott gyümölcs edesebb*

"forbidden fruit is sweeter"

(B 2) *IN ADAM'S SUIT; IN EVE'S SUIT – (Gen 3:7)

'completely naked'

Italian *in costume adamitico*

Polish *w stroju Adama/adamowym*

Hungar. *ádámkosztümben*

(B 3) BY THE SWEAT OF ONE'S BROW – (Gen 3:19)

'by very hard work, either physical or mental; very toilsome; with the greatest effort'

Italian *con il sudore della (mia) fronte*

"with the sweat of (my) forehead"

Polish *w pocie czoła*

"in the sweat of the forehead"

Hungar. *arca veritékével (szerez meg vmit)*

"(sb. obtains sth.) with the sweat of his/her face"

(B 4) AS OLD AS METHUSELAH – (Gen 5:27)

'incredibly old'

Italian *vecchio come Matusalemme*

Polish *matuzalemowy/matuzalowy wiek*

"Methuselahian age"

Hungar. *(olyan) vén, mint Matuzsálem*

(B 5) SODOM AND GOMORRAH – (Gen 19)

‘a place regarded as exceptional center of vice and immorality; a state of greatest depravity’

Italian *Sodoma e Gomorra*

Polish *Sodoma i Gomora*

Hungar. *Szodoma és Gomorra*

(B 6) *TO STAND LIKE A SALT PILLAR – (Gen 19: 26)

‘to stand as though paralyzed (with fright, horror, bewilderment etc.)’

Italian *diventare una statua di sale*

Polish *stać jak słup soli*

Hungar. *áll, mint a sóbálvány*

(B 7) THE PROMISED LAND / LAND OF PROMISE – (Gen 28: 13, Gen 15:18ff)

‘a rich and happy country with many good opportunities where one is not at the moment but hopes to come to once; a place of expected happiness or fulfillment’

Italian *la Terra Promessa*

Polish *Ziemia Obiecana*

Hungar. *az ígért földje*

(B 8) THE BLACK SHEEP (IN THE FAMILY) – (Gen 30: 32)

‘sb. who is very different from the other persons of his/her family or group and is considered worthless by them because s/he is less successful or more immoral than the rest’

Italian *essere la pecora nera (della famiglia)*

Polish *czarna owca*

Hungar. *a fekete bárány a családban*

(B 9) SB.’S OWN FLESH AND BLOOD – (Gen 37:27, 29:14; 2 Sam 19:12f)

‘sb.’s own child or children, nearest blood relatives, especially one’s immediate family’

Italian *sangue del proprio sangue / carne della propria carne*

Slovene *svoje/lastno meso in kri*

Hungar. *húsból-véréből való*

(B 10) TO WORSHIP THE GOLDEN CALF – (Ex 32; Deut 32:19; Kings 12:28)

‘to be greedy for money, to subordinate everything else to mercenary considerations’

Italian *adorare il vitello d’oro*

Polish *złoty cielec* ‘the golden calf’

Hungar. *az aranyborjút imádja*

(B 11) AS IF THE EARTH HAD SWALLOWED HIM UP – (Num 16:31f)

‘sb./sth. has disappeared into nowhere very suddenly’

Spanish *como si a alg./a algo se le hubiera tragado la tierra*

Czech *jako by se po něm zem slehla*

Hungar. *(úgy eltűnik,) mintha (csak) a föld nyelte volna el*

(B 12) TO BE GROPING IN THE DARK – (Deut 28:29)

‘to search in a hesitating and a clumsy way in the blind, without being able to see sth.; not to have any clue for solving a problem (a matter that must be solved)’

Italian *brancolare nel buio*

Czech *tápat ve tmě*

Hungar. *sötétben tapogatózik/tapogatódzik*

(B 13) *TO TAKE CARE OF STH. LIKE ONE’S APPLE OF THE EYE – (Deut 32:10; Ps 17:8 etc.)

‘to cherish sb./sth. like life itself; be sb.’s most treasured possession’

Italian *essere la pupilla degli occhi di qualcuno*

Polish *strzec kogoś/czegoś jak oka w głowie*

Finnish *vaalia/varjella jkta/jta kuin silmäteränsä*

(B 14) A JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON – (1 King 3:16-28)

‘a wise, balanced judgment; a compromise solution’

Italian *un giudizio salomonico / decisione salomonica*

Polish *salomonowy wyrok / wyrok salomonowy*

Hungar. *salamoni bölcsesség*

(B 15) THERE IS NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN – (Ecc 1:9)

‘there is nothing new’, including just about everything, everything has been seen before

Italian *non c'è nulla di nuovo sotto il sole/ niente di nuovo sotto il sole*

Polish *nic nowego pod słońcem*

Hungar. *nincs(en) új/semmi új a nap alatt*

(B 16) TO TURN TO DUST AND ASHES – (Ecc 3:20; 12:7)

‘to die’

Spanish *convertirse en polvo (y ceniza)*

Polish *obracać się w popiół/w proch*

Hungar. *visszatér a porba, amelyből vétetett*

(B 17A) TO HAVE FEET OF CLAY – (Dan 2:31-35)

‘to have an insecure base (of persons or governments of seemingly great power which conceals some fatal weakness)’

Italian *avere i piedi d'argilla*

Czech *stát na hliněných nohách*

Hungar. *agyaglábón/agyaglábakon áll*

(B 17B) *A COLOSSUS ON FEET OF CLAY

‘a person, government etc. of seemingly great power which conceals some fatal weakness’

Italian *un colosso dai / con i piedi d'argilla*

Polish *kolos na glinianych nogach*

Hungar. *agyaglábú kolosszus/óriás*

(B 18) TO SLEEP THE SLEEP OF THE JUST – (various biblical passages)

‘to be sound asleep’

Italian *dormire il sonno del giusto*

Polish *spać snem sprawiedliwego*

Hungar. *az igazak álmát alussza*

Old and New Testament (B 19 – B 27)

(B 19) TO BE A THORN IN ONE'S FLESH / IN ONE'S SIDE (SOMEONE'S EYE) – (Num 33:55, 2; Cor 12:7)

‘to annoy someone intensely; to be a constant source of irritation’

Roman. *a fi un spin în ochii cuiva*

“to be a thorn in sb.'s eye”

Czech *být někomu trnem v oku*

“to be a thorn in sb.'s eye”

Hungar. *szálka valakinek a szemében*

“sb. is a splinter in sb.'s eye”

(B 20) TO WASH ONE'S HANDS OF SOMETHING – (Deut 21:1-9 and Matt 27:24)

‘to absolve oneself from responsibility; to declare that one no longer wish to be involved in the matter and will therefore not be implicated in the outcome of events’

Italian *lavarsene le mani*

Polish *umywać ręce (od czegoś)*

Hungar. *mossa (a) kezzeit*

(B 21) TO SAY AMEN TO EVERYTHING – (Deut 27: 15ff; Matt 5:37; Rev 22:20)

‘to say yes, agree to everything’

Italian *dire amen a tutto (not familiar)*

Sorbian *k wšemu haj a hamjeń prajić*

Hungar. *áment mond vmire*

(B 22) TO GRIT ONE'S TEETH / CLENCH ONE'S TEETH TOGETHER – (Ps 37:12; Matt 8:12; Acts 7:54)

‘to suppress one’s feelings when suffering a painful or frightening experience’

Italian *stringere i denti*

Polish *zagryźć/zacisnąć zęby*

Hungar. *összeszorítja (a) fogát*

(B 23) TO TAKE SOMEONE UNDER ONE'S WINGS – (Ps 61:5; 93:4 and Matt 23:37)

‘to provide someone with help, friendly encouragement or protection, especially someone who is younger or less experienced’

Italian *prendere qo. sotto la propria ala*

Polish *brać kogoś pod swoje skrzydła*

Hungar. *szárnya alá vesz vkit*

(B 24) (TO BE) A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD – (Prov 5:4; Sir 21:2; Hebr 4:12; Rev 1:16)

‘(to be) a benefit that carries also some significant but non-obvious risk’

Italian *un'arma a doppio taglio / una spada a due tagli*

Polish *miecz obosieczny*

Hungar. *kétélű fegyver (vmi)*

(B 25) A VOICE (CRYING) IN THE WILDERNESS – (Isaiah 40:3; Matt. 3:3)

‘someone who admonishes in vein, without being listened to’

Italian *una voce (che chiama) nel deserto*

Polish *głos wołającego / wołający na puszczy*

Hungar. *pusztába kiáltott szó* “a word shouted into the desert”

(B 26) TO PAVE THE WAY FOR/TO SB./STH. – (Isaiah 40:3 and Matt 3:3)

‘to create the necessary conditions for sth., usually followed by some event, to make progress or development easier’

Italian *spianare il cammino/la strada a qualcuno*

Polish *torować komuś/czemuś drogę*

Hungar. *egyengeti vminek/vkinek az útját*

(B 27) (TO GO) LIKE A LAMB/SHEEP TO THE SLAUGHTER – (Isaiah 53:7 and NT)

‘to do sth. or to go somewhere calmly and innocently, without realizing that sth. unpleasant is going to happen to them’

Italian *andare come agnello al macello*

Polish *(iść) jak barany na rzeź*

Finnish *mennä teuraalle kuin lammas*

The New Testament (B 28 – 42)

(B 28) TO PASS THE BAPTISM OF FIRE – (Matt 3:11ff)

‘to pass one’s first test, often painful’

Italian *passare il battesimo del fuoco*

Polish *przejsć chrzest ogniowy/bojowy*

Finnish *saada tulikasteensa*

(B 29) TO SEPARATE THE WHEAT/GRAIN FROM THE CHAFF – (Matt 3:12; Luke 3:17)

‘to decide which things or people in a group are good or necessary, and which are not, to distinguish valuable from worthless’

Italian *separare il grano dal loglio*

Polish *oddzielać ziarno od plew*

Hungar. *elválasztja/szétválasztja az ocsút a búzától*

(B 30) TO HIDE ONE'S LIGHT UNDER A BUSHEL – (Matt 5:15)

‘to keep quiet about one’s abilities, knowledge and achievements, to show extreme modesty’

Italian *mettere la fiaccola sotto il moggio*

Sorbian *swoju swěčku pod kórc stajić*

Hungar. *véka alá rejt (vmit)*

(B 31) (TO CHANGE) NOT AN IOTA/ NOT ONE JOT – (Matt 5:18)

‘(to change) not even the smallest thing’

Roman. *fără să schimbe o iotă*

Polish *(nie zmienić się) ani na jotę*

Hungar. *egy jottát/jottányit sem enged (vmiből)*

(B 32) THE DAILY BREAD – (Matt 6: 11)

‘everything, the food or money you need to live’

Italian *il pane quotidiano*

Polish *chleb powszedni*

Hungar. *mindennapi kenyeriünk*

(B 33) TO CAST PEARLS BEFORE SWINE – (Matt 7:6)

‘to offer sth. that is helpful or valuable to sb. who does not appreciate or understand it’

Italian *gettare (le) perle ai porci*

Polish *rzucać perły przed wieprze*

Hungar. *disznók elé gyöngyöt szór*

(B 34) TO BE BUILT ON SAND – (Matt 7:26)

‘to be without secure foundation and so liable to collapse’

Italian *aver costruito sulla sabbia / costruire sulla sabbia*

Polish *budować coś na piasku*

Hungar. *homokra épít*

(B 35) TO BEAR ONE’S CROSS/A CROSS TO BEAR – (Matt 10:38; Luke 14:27)

‘to have a heavy burden of responsibility or a problem that they alone must cope with’

Italian *portare la propria/la sua croce*

Polish *dźwigać/nosić swój krzyż*

Hungar. *hordja a keresztet*

(B 36) TO FALL ON FERTILE GROUND – (Matt 13:8, Marc 4:8)

‘to be heard or accepted favorably, to be effective’

Roman. *a cădea în pământ roditor*

Polish *trafić/padać na podatny grunt*

Hungar. *termékeny talajra hull/talál*

(B 37) A SIGN OF THE TIMES – (Matt 16:3)

‘sth. that you think is typical of the present state of society’

Italian *il segno/i segni del tempo*

Polish *znak czasu / czasów*

Hungar. *a idők jele*

(B 38) TO RENDER (UN)TO CAESAR THE THINGS THAT ARE CAESAR’S – (Matt 22:21; Luke 20:25)

‘to fulfil one’s duty in view of one’s authority’

Italian *dare a Cesare quel che/ quello che è di Cesare*

Polish *oddać cesarzowi, co cesarskie, a Bogu, co boskie*

Hungar. *add meg a császárnak, ami a császáré, és istennek, ami istené! (imperative)*

(B 39) NOT TO LEAVE ONE STONE UPON ANOTHER – (Matt 24:2)

‘everything will be destroyed’

Spanish *no dejar piedra sobre piedra*
Polish *nie zostawić kamienia na kamieniu*
Hungar. *kő kövön nem marad*

(B 40) TO CAST/ THROW THE FIRST STONE (AT SB.) – (John 8:7)

‘to make the first accusation, to be quick to blame, criticize, or punish’

Italian *scagliare la prima pietra*
Polish *rzucić pierwszy kamień*
Hungar. *az vessen rá követ / az vesse rá az első követ*

(B 41) THE SCALES FALL FROM SB.’S EYES – (Acts 9:18)

‘to you suddenly realize that one has been deceived, to be able to understand the truth about something’

French *les écailles lui tombent des yeux*
Polish *łuski spadają komuś z oczu*
Hungar. *leesik a hólyag a szeméről*

(B 42) THE ALPHA AND OMEGA/ ALPHA AND OMEGA – (Rev 1:8)

‘the thing people think is most important about a process, situation, or activity; one’s reason for being’

Roman. *Alfa și Omega*
Polish *być alfa i omegą*
Hungar. *vminek az alfája és ómegája*

Chapter 5: Various Ancient Sources of Widespread Idioms

Ancient Texts and the Bible (C 1 – C 15)

(C 1) TO TEAR/PULL ONE’S HAIR OUT – (Iliad and OT Ez 9:3)

‘to be unbearably frustrated or worried about sth.; to show extreme desperation, to be in deep despair’

Italian *strapparsi i capelli*
Polish *rwać (sobie) włosy z głowy*
Hungar. *a haját tépi/ tépi a haját*

(C 2) GOD/HEAVEN (ONLY) KNOWS – (Homer and the Bible)

‘that is very uncertain’

Italian *Dio solo lo sa*
Polish *Bóg wie / Bóg raczy wiedzieć*
Hungar. *Isten tudja / tudja Isten*

(C 3) TO HAVE A HEART OF STONE / SB.’S HEART IS OF STONE – (Odyssey and OT Ez 36:26f; Dickens)

‘to be cruel and have no sympathy for people; to be pitiless, unfeeling’

Italian *avere il/un cuore di pietra*
Polish *mieć serce z kamienia*
Hungar. *kőszíve van vkinek*

(C 4) SB.’S HAIR STANDS ON END / TO HAVE ONE’S HAIR STAND ON END – (Iliad etc. and OT Job 4:15)

‘sb. feels very frightened, nervous or angry; sth. is awfully terrifying him/her’

Italian *avere i capelli ritti in testa*
Polish *włosy się (komuś) jeżą (na głowie)*
Hungar. *égnék áll a haja*

(C 5) AN EYE FOR AN EYE, A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH – (OT Ex 21:34 etc., Code of Hammurabi)

‘a punishment in which the offender suffers what he victim has suffered, exact retribution’

Italian *occhio per occhio, dente per dente*
Polish *oko za oko, ząb za ząb*

Hungar. *szemet szemért, fogat fogért*

(C 6) TO BE IN SEVENTH HEAVEN (OF DELIGHT) – (Apocrypha, Koran, Cabbalists)

‘to be extremely happy because sth. good has happened to you recently; to be in a state of sheer delight’

Italian *essere al settimo cielo*

Polish *być w siódmym niebie*

Hungar. *a hetedik mennyországban van érzi magát*

(C 7) TO MAKE A NAME FOR ONESELF – (OT Gen 11:4; 2 Sam 8:13 and Plautus)

‘to make oneself a reputation; to become prominent or well known’

Italian *farsi un nome*

Polish *wyrabiać sobie nazwisko*

Hungar. *nevet szerez magának*

(C 8) THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY – (OT Ex 3:8; Ez 20:6 and antiquity)

‘a country or place where the living conditions are excellent and it is easy to make money’

Spanish *la tierra de la leche y la miel*

Polish *kraj/kraina mlekiem i miodem płynąca*

Hungar. *tejjel-mézzel folyó (Kánaán)*

(C 9) TO MOVE HEAVEN AND EARTH (TO DO STH.) – (OT Isaiah 13:13 etc. and Vergil etc.)

‘to do everything you can to achieve sth., to exert the utmost effort’

Italian *muovere cielo e terra*

Polish *poruszyć niebo i ziemię*

Hungar. *eget-földet megmozgat*

(C 10) TO SHUT SOMEONE’S MOUTH – (OT Ps 107:42 and Phaedrus)

‘to make sb. keeping silent’

Italian *chiudere /tappare la bocca a qd.*

Polish *zamknąć komuś usta*

Hungar. *bedugja/betömi vkinek a száját*

(C 11) TO SWIM AGAINST THE CURRENT/TIDE – (OT Sir 4:26 and Ovid etc.) See [examples with maps](#)

‘to do or say sth. which is the opposite of what most people are doing or saying, to go against prevailing opinion or thought’

Italian *andare/remare/nuotare contro corrente*

Polish *iść/płynąć pod prąd*

Hungar. *árral szemben úszik*

(C 12) A WOLF IN SHEEP’S CLOTHING – (Aesop and NT Matt 7:15)

‘a person who pretends to be good but is bad in reality, is not as pleasant and harmless as first appears’

Italian *un lupo in veste di agnello/un lupo vestito/travestito da agnello*

Polish *wilk w owczej skórze*

Hungar. *báránybőrbe bújt farkas*

(C 13) TO SEE THE MOTE IN ANOTHER’S EYE AND NOT THE BEAM IN ONE’S OWN – (Menander, Cicero; and NT Matt 5:5, Luke 6:42)

‘a fault-finder’s shortcomings are worse than those of the person he or she is criticizing’

Spanish *ver la espiga en el ojo ajena y no la viga en el nuestro*

Polish *widzieć źdźbło w czyimś/cudzym oku, a belki w swoim oku nie widzieć*

Hungar. *más szemében a szálkát is meglátja, a magáéban a gerendát sem*

Ancient Texts and Other Sources (C 14 – C 22)

(C 14) NOT TO BE ABLE TO HURT A FLY/FLEA – (attributed to Seneca and other sources)

‘to be a gentle and mild person who would never cause harm to anyone’

Italian *non far male a una mosca*

Polish *(ktoś) muchy by nie skrzywdził*

Hungar. *a légynek sem árt*

(C 15) TO LEAD SB. (AROUND) BY THE NOSE – (Lucian and old customs)

‘to control sb. completely so that s/he does everything you want him/her to do, esp. in a way that makes the person seem stupid’

Italian *prendere/menare qualcuno per il naso*

Polish *wodzić kogoś za nos*

Hungar. *(az) orránál fogva vezet vkit*

(C 16) TO THROW/CAST DUST INTO SB.’S EYES – (Plutarch; medieval knighthood)

‘to mislead or betray someone willfully’

Italian *gettare polvere/ sabbia negli occhi (di qualcuno)*

Polish *sypać/rzucać komuś piaskiem w oczy*

Hungar. *port hint vkinek a szemébe*

(C 17) TO FOLLOW IN SB.’S FOOTSTEPS – (1 Pet 2:21 and other sources)

‘to do the same job or the same things in your life as sb. else, especially a member of your family’

Italian *seguire/ripercorrere i passi di qln.*

Polish *iść w czyjeś ślady*

Hungar. *vkinek a nyomdokain jár/halad*

(C 18) *TO PUT THE/ONE’S HAND INTO THE FIRE FOR SB./STH. – (Livius and medieval ordeal)

Italian *mettere la mano sul fuoco per qualcuno*

Czech *dát ruku do ohně za někoho*

Hungar. *tűzbe teszi/tenné a kezét valakiért*

(C 19) (NOTHING BUT) SKIN AND BONES / TO BE ALL SKIN AND BONES – (Plautus; natural experience)

‘(to be) undernourished, very thin’

Italian *essere pelle e ossa*

Polish *(sama) skóra i kości*

Hungar. *(csupa) csont és bőr*

(C 20) FROM HEAD TO TOE/ FOOT – (Iliad; natural experience)

‘the whole of sb.’s body; completely, totally’

Italian *dalla testa ai piedi*

Polish *od stóp do głów* “from feet to heads”

Hungar. *tetőtől talpig*

(C 21) NIGHT AND DAY – (Hesiod, Homer, Horace; natural experience)

‘all the time, constantly’

Italian *giorno e notte*

Polish *dzień i noc*

Hungar. *éjjel- nappal*

(C 22) TO PRICK ONE’S EARS – (Pliny the Elder; animal behavior)

‘to start listening very attentively, because s/he suddenly hears an interesting sound or piece of information’

Italian *drizzare/rizzare gli orecchi*

Polish *nadstawiać ucha/uszu*

Hungar. *hegyezi a fülét*

Ancient Scientific Theories and Conceptions of the World (C 23 – C 29)

(C 23) TO BE IN ONE'S ELEMENT – (conceptions of the four elements)

‘to be in one’s familiar, preferred environment, where one feels confident and most at ease’

Italian *essere nel suo element*

Polish *być w swoim żywiole*

Hungar. *elemében van*

(C 24) THE PHILOSOPHERS’ STONE – (alchemy)

‘the solution of all problems, difficulties or riddles’

Italian *la pietra filosofale*

Polish *kamień filozoficzny*

Hungar. *bölcsek köve*

(C 25) TO BE GREEN WITH ENYI – (doctrine of the four fluids of the body)

‘to turn or be extremely envious because one wishes one had sb. else’s possessions, abilities, success etc.; extremely covetous’

Italian *diventare verde d’invidia*

“to turn green of envy”

Polish *zelenieć z zazdrości*

“to turn green of envy”

Hungar. *eszi a sárga irigység*

“sb. eats the yellow envy”

(C 26) *SOMEONE’S GALL FLOWS OVER/SOMEONE’S BILE COMES UP– (doctrine of the four body fluids)

‘to turn or be extremely envious because one wishes one had someone’s possessions, abilities, etc.’

Italian *avere un travaso di bile*

Polish *żółć w kimś wzbiera*

Hungar. *előnt az epe valakit*

(C 27) TO BE IN SOMEONE’S BLOOD – (ancient medical theories)

‘to be naturally good at doing something and always want to do it, especially something inherited by one’s parents or family’

Italian *avere qualcosa nel sangue*

Polish *mieć coś we krwi*

Hungar. *vkinek a vérében van vmi*

(C 28) TO BREAK SOMEONE’S HEART – (HEART as symbol of love)

‘to cause sb. to feel considerable grief and disappointment (esp. in matters of love and personal relationship); to make sb. who loves you very sad’

Italian *spezzare il cuore di/a qualcuno*

Polish *łamać/złamać komuś serce*

Hungar. *összetöri/összeszúzza vkinek a szívét*

(C 29) TO TAKE STH. TO HEART – (old concept of HEART)

‘to be deeply offended by sb.’s criticism; to take sth. badly that sb. says to you, so that you are upset by it or think seriously about it’

Italian *prendere a cuore qualcosa*

Polish *wziąć sobie coś do serca*

Hungar. *a szívére vesz vmit*

Literature and the Bible or Classical Texts (C 30 – C 34)

(C 30) SB.’S BETTER HALF / MY BETTER HALF – (OT Gen 2:23f.; Milton)

‘sb.’s/my husband, spouse (wife or partner)’

Italian *la dolce metà*

Polish *czyjaś lepsza druga połowa*

Hungar. *vkinek a jobbik fele*

(C 31) TO LIVE/BE IN AN IVORY TOWER – (OT Song 7:4; Sainte-Beuve)

‘to live in a haven from the harsh realities of life, especially preoccupied with lofty, remote or intellectual considerations rather than practical everyday life’

Italian *vivere/stare in una/nella torre d'avorio*

Polish *żyć w wieży z kości słoniowej*

Hungar. *bezárkózik/elzárkózik az elefántcsonttoronyba*

(C 32) CANNOT SEE THE WOOD/FOREST FOR THE TREES – (Horace etc., spread by Wieland)

‘to focus only on small detail and not to recognize the main issues or facts of the matter’

Italian *non vedere la foresta a causa degli/per gli alberi*

Czech *pro stromy nevidět les*

Hungar. *nem látja a fától az erdőt*

(C 33) A STORM IN A TEACUP – (Cicero, spread by Montesquieu)

‘a violent agitation over a trifle; a petty argument or fight over nothing serious that soon forgotten’

Italian *una tempesta in un bicchier d'acqua*

Polish *burza w szklance wody*

Hungar. *vihar egy pohár vízben*

(C 34) TO BE CONSPICUOUS BY ONE’S ABSENCE – (Tacitus, spread by Tibère)

‘to make a bad impression by one’s absence, glaringly obvious by the fact of not being there’

Italian *brillare per (la propria) assenza/brillare per (l’) assenza*

Polish *świecić nieobecnością*

Hungar. *távollétével tündököl/tündöklök*

Chapter 6: Post-classical Literary Works as Sources of Widespread Idioms

Novels and Dramas of World Literature (D 1 – D 6)

(D 1) (THIS IS) THE BEGINNING OF THE END – (Shakespeare)

‘it becomes clear that a process will end, although not immediately’

Italian *(è) l’inizio della fine*

Polish *początek końca*

Hungar. *a vég kezdete*

(D 2) MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING – (Shakespeare; probably older)

‘a lot of trouble and excitement about sth. which is not as important or significant as they think it is’

Italian *molto/tanto rumore per nulla/niente*

Polish *wiele hałasu o nic*

Hungar. *sok hűhó semmiért*

(D 3) *WITH ONE LAUGHING AND ONE WEeping EYE – (Shakespeare)

‘with mixed feelings: partly happy, partly sad’

Portug. *com um olho a rir e outro a chorar*

Czech *jedním okem se smát a druhým plakat*

Hungar. *egyik szemre sír, a másik nevet*

(D 4) THE TOOTH OF TIME – (Ovid, spread by Shakespeare)

‘the damages caused by time’

German *der Zahn der Zeit*

Polish *zab czasu*

Hungar. *az idő vasfoga* “the iron tooth of time”

(D 5) TO TILT AT WINDMILLS – (Cervantes)

‘to squander one’s energy; to face an imagined evil, to waste time on ideas that are not practical or not important’

Italian *combattere contro i mulini a vento*

Polish *walczyć z wiatrakami*

Hungar. *szélmalomharc(ot vív)*

(D 6) AN OPEN SECRET – (Calderon)

‘a fact that is supposed to be a secret or officially kept as a secret but that is generally known’

Spanish *un secreto a voces*

Polish *publiczna tajemnica*

Hungar. *nyílt titok*

Literary Works of Modern Times, Light Fictions, Cinema Films (D 7 – D 16)

(D 7) THE LAW OF THE JUNGLE – (Kipling 1894/95)

‘the way in which only the strongest and cleverest people in a society stay alive or succeed’

Italian *la legge della giungla*

Polish *prawo dżungli*

Hungar. *a vadon törvénye*

(D 8) THE MOMENT OF TRUTH – (spread by Hemingway)

‘a critical or decisive time, at which one is put to the ultimate test or important decisions are made’

Italian *l’ora/il momento della verità*

Polish *godzina prawdy*

Hungar. *ütött az igazság órája*

(D 9) TO BURY THE HATCHET – (Cooper, films) See [examples with maps](#)

‘to end a feud with one’s enemy; to restore a relationship after a long quarrel, to make up with sb.’

Italian *seppellire l’ascia di Guerra*

Polish *zakopać topór wojenny*

Hungar. *elássa/eltemeti a csatabárdot*

(D 10) TO SMOKE THE PIPE OF PEACE/ THE PEACE-PIPE WITH SOMEONE – (Cooper, films)

‘to make one’s peace with someone again’

Italian *fumare il calumet (della pace) con qco.*

Polish *wypalić z kimś fajkę pokoju*

Hungar. *elszívja a békepipát vkivel*

(D 11) THE LAST MOHICAN/ THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS – (Cooper 1826, films)

‘the last one; the last survivor’

Italian *l’ultimo dei Mo(h)icani /*

Polish *ostatni Mohikanin*

Hungar. *az utolsó mohikán*

(D 12) (TO GO TO) THE HAPPY HUNTING GROUND – (Cooper, films)

‘to die’

German *in die ewigen Jagdgründe eingehen*

Polish *odejść do Krainy Wiecznych Łowów*

Hungar. *elköltözik az örök vadászmezőkre*

(D 13) TO BE ON THE WAR PATH WITH SB./STH. – (Cooper, films)

‘to be in an aggressive mood, in search of one’s enemy in order to start a fight with him’

Italian *essere sul sentiero di guerra*

Polish *być z kimś na wojennej ścieżce*

Hungar. *hadiösvényre lép vkivel*

(D 14) THE LAND OF LIMITLESS OPPORTUNITY – (Goldberger 1902)

‘epithet of America, the USA’

Italian *la terra dalle infinite opportunità*

Polish *kraj nieograniczonych możliwości*

Hungar. *a korlátlan lehetőségek hazája*

(D 15) THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG (filming 1912)

‘part of an unpleasant problem or a serious situation which is much more complex than it appears; evidence that a great deal more exists but remains hidden’

Italian *la punta dell’iceberg*

Polish *wierzchołek/czubek góry lodowej*

Hungar. *a jéghegy csúcsa*

(D 16) LA DOLCE VITA (THE GOOD LIFE) – (Fellini 1960)

‘a life in luxury and idleness’

Italian *la dolce vita*

Polish *dolce vita*

Hungar. *édes élet*

Chapter 7: Folk Narratives and Legends as Sources of Widespread Idioms

Jests and Comical Tales (E 1 – E 8)

(E 1) TO CARRY WATER IN A SIEVE

‘to take futile trouble, to slave away at useless things; to try to achieve a goal by using a totally inappropriate tool, which inevitably leads to failure and seems very strange and unusual’

Roman. *a căra apă cu ciurul*

Polish *sitem czerpać wodę*

Hungar. *szítával/rostával mer vizet*

(E 2) TO BUILD CASTLES IN THE AIR

‘to make unrealistic plans for the future; to have unfounded hopes and expectations’

Italian *fare/costruire castelli in aria*

Czech *stavět si vzdušné zámky*

Hungar. *légvárákat épít*

(E 3) *TO SAW OFF THE BRANCH UPON WHICH ONE IS SITTING

‘to deprive oneself of the basis for one’s livelihood; to cause one’s own decline, to lose out through one’s own fault’

Italian *si taglia il ramo su cui si siede*

Polish *podcinać gałąź, na której się siedzi*

Hungar. *(ön)maga alatt vágja a fát*

(E 4) TO LOOK FOR/TO SEARCH A NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK

‘to try to find sth. very small that is lost among many other things; to look for sth. that is impossible to find; to be bothered with searching without any prospect of success’

Italian *cercare un ago nel pagliaio*

Polish *szukać igły w stogu siana*

Hungar. *tűt keres a szénakazalban*

(E 5) *LIKE AN ELEPHANT IN A CHINA SHOP

‘behaving in a rude way without paying attention to the consequences; causing damage by one’s clumsy behavior’

Italian *come un elefante in un negozio di porcellane*
Polish *jak słoń w składzie porcelany*
Hungar. *elefánt a porcelánboltban*

(E 6) *TO FIRE AT SPARROWS WITH CANNONS

‘to use disproportionate means on an insignificant matter; to take stronger action than is necessary to deal with a problem or situation’

Italian *sparare ai passeri con un cannone*
Czech *jít/chodit s kanonem na vrabce*
Hungar. *ágyúval lő verébre*

(E 7) TO SELL THE SKIN BEFORE YOU HAVE CAUGHT THE BEAR

‘to count on future benefits that may never materialize; to divide expected profits etc. from a job that has not yet been accomplished’

Italian *vender la pelle dell'orso prima d'averlo preso*
Polish *dzielić skórę na niedźwiedziu*
Hungar. *előre iszik a medve bőrére*

(E 8) *THE EGG OF COLUMBUS

‘sth. that looks impossible or very difficult but can be solved very easily; an ingenious idea or discovery that seems simple in hindsight’

Italian *(scoprire) l'uovo di Colombo*
Polish *jajko Kolumba*
Hungar. *Kolombusz tojása*

Fairy Tales (E 9 – E 13)

(E 9) AN UGLY DUCKLING

‘an unattractive, unsuccessful young person who becomes beautiful or successful in the course of time’

Italian *un brutto anatroccolo*
Polish *brzydkie kaczątko*
Hungar. *rút kiskacsa*

(E 10) OPEN SESAME!

‘exclamation when sb. tries to gain access, to obtain admission or wants to solve a problem easily, without effort, etc.’

Italian *apriti Sesamo!*
Polish *Szesame otwórz się!*
Hungar. *Szezám, tárulj/nyílj meg!*

(E 11) *THE FRIED DOVES DON'T FLY INTO SB.'S MOUTH

‘this is not a place where the living conditions are excellent; one has to work hard in order to make money and have a good life’

French *attendre que les alouettes tombent toutes rôties (à qn.)*
“to wait that the larks fall completely roasted (onto sb.)”
Polish *pieczone gołąbki nie lecą same do gąbki*
“fried little pigeons don't fly into one's little gob”
Hungar. *várja, hogy a sült galamb a szájába repüljön*
“sb. waits that the roast dove will fly into his mouth”

(E 12) TO RUN/APPROACH WITH SEVEN-LEAGUE BOOTS

‘to run/approach very quickly, in great speed’

Italian *camminare/correre con gli stivali delle sette leghe*
Czech *mít sedmimílové boty*
Hungar. *hétmérföldes léptekkel megy*

(E 13) TO BE A BIRD IN A GILDED CAGE / TO LIVE IN A GOLDEN CAGE

‘to live in affluence, prosperity but lacking of freedom’

Italian *vivere/stare in una gabbia dorata*

Polish *ptak w złotej klatce*

Hungar. *aranykalitkában tart (vkit)*

Animal Tales and Fabled Animals (E 14 – E 19)

(E 14) TO BE/FIGHT LIKE CAT AND DOG

‘(of two people who know each other well) to frequently have violent arguments with each other, to keep quarrelling and get very angry with each other most of the time’

Italian *essere (come) cane e gatto*

Polish *żyć z (kims) jak pies z kotem*

Hungar. *úgy élnek/vannak, mint a kutya meg a macska*

(E 15) TO PLAY CAT AND MOUSE (WITH SB.)

‘to stall sb. off, letting him/her wait for a (negative) decision; to manipulate an opponent in a way alternately designed to provoke and spoil him’

Italian *giocare con qd. come al gatto col topo*

Polish *bawić się z kims w kotka i myszkę*

Hungar. *(úgy) játszik vkivel, mint (a) macska az egérrel*

(E 16) AS POOR AS A CHURCH MOUSE

‘very poor, having no wealth and few possessions’

Roman. *la fel de sărac ca un șoarece de biserică*

Polish *biedny jak mysz kościelna*

Hungar. *szegény, mint a templom egere*

(E 17) TO WEEP/SHED CROCODILE TEARS

‘to show sadness that is not sincere, to display insincere grief; to pretend that one is weeping’

Italian *versare lacrime di coccodrillo*

Polish *wylewać/ronić krokodyle łzy*

Hungar. *krokodilkönnyeket hullat/ejt*

(E 18) TO HIDE/BURY ONE’S HEAD IN THE SAND

‘to ignore or hide from obvious signs of danger; to pretend a problem does not exist and deliberately refuse to accept the truth about sth. unpleasant’

Italian *nascondere la testa sotto la sabbia (fare lo struzzo)*

Polish *chować głowę w piasek*

Hungar. *homokba dugja a fejét*

Chapter 8: Fables of the Aesopic Type as Sources of Widespread Idioms

Aesop’s Fables (F 1 – F 8)

(F 1) TO DANCE TO SB.’S TUNE

‘to always obey sb. who has power over you; to do everything what sb. wants you to do, whether you agree with it or not’

Italian *danzare al suono di qu.*

Polish *tańczyć jak komuś zagrają* ‘sb. dances as is played to him’

Hungar. *úgy táncol, ahogy vki füttyül (neki)* ‘sb. dances in this way as if sb. whistles (to him)’

(F 2) SOUR GRAPES

‘disparaging sth. that one desires but cannot obtain, by persuading oneself that it is useless and hiding one’s disappointment’

Italian *uva acerba*

Czech *jsou to kyselé hrozny*

Hungar. *savanyú a szőlő (vkinek)*

(F 3) TO NOURISH/WARM A VIPER/SNAKE IN ONE’S BOSOM

‘to lavish attention, care on a person who later turns out to be ungrateful, treacherous; to have one’s kindness repaid with spite or ingratitude’

Italian *allevare/scaldare una serpe in seno*

Polish *hodować żmiję na własnej piersi/na własnym łonie*

Hungar. *kígyót melenget a keblén*

(F 4) TO ADORN ONESELF WITH BORROWED PLUMES / TO STRUT IN BORROWED PLUMES

‘to pretend the merit of another person is one’s own merit and to gloat over it’

Italian *vestirsi/coprirsi con le penne del pavone*

Polish *stroić się w cudze piórka*

Hungar. *idegen tollakkal ékeskedik/ büszkélkedik*

(F 5) TO ENTER THE LION’S DEN

‘to expose oneself to great danger by entering an opponent’s territory; to go and see sb. who has power or authority over you and tell them what you want or why you disagree with them’

Italian *entrare nella gabbia del leone/cacciarsi nella tana del leone*

Czech *odvázat se do jámy lvové*

Hungar. *belép/bemeréskedik/bemegy az oroszlánbarlangba*

(F 6) THE LION’S SHARE

‘the biggest part of something that is taken or done by one person instead of being shared fairly among other people; much more than one’s fair share’

Italian *la parte del leone*

Polish *lwia część*

Hungar. *oroszlánrész*

(F 7) TO KILL THE GOOSE THAT LAYS THE GOLDEN EGG(S) / TO KILL THE GOLDEN GOOSE

‘to destroy a reliable and valuable source of income; to sacrifice future reward or benefit for the sake of present gain or satisfaction, because of sheer greed’

Italian *uccidere la gallina dalle uova d’oro*

Polish *zabić kurę znoszącą złote jaja*

Hungar. *megöli/levágja az aranytojást tojó tyúkot*

(F 8) TO FISH IN TROUBLED/ MUDDY WATERS (Aesop, Aristophanes etc.)

‘to try to take advantage of a confused situation, to make capital out of sb. else’s misfortune’

Italian *pescare in acque torbide*

Polish *łowić ryby w mętnej wodzie*

Hungar. *(a) zavarosban halászik*

Fables of Other Origin (F 9 – F 10)

(F 9) TO PULL THE CHESTNUTS OUT OF THE FIRE FOR SB.

‘to get sb. out of a predicament, often at some risk to oneself, or to solve their problems for them; to achieve sth. difficult on another’s behalf’

Italian *togliere/cavare le castagne dal fuoco a/per qd.*

Polish *wyjmować/wyciągać dla kogoś / za kogoś kasztany z ognia*

Hungar. *másnak kaparja ki a gesztenyét (a tűzből)*

(F 10) *TO DO SB. A BEAR’S SERVICE

‘to do someone a disservice; to do sth. with the best of intentions that actually harms the one who was supposed to benefit’

French *(c'est) le pavé de l'ours* “(that is) the bear’s paving stone”
Polish *oddawać/wyświadczać komuś niedźwiedzią przysługę*
Finnish *tehdä jkllle. karhunpalvelus*

Chapter 9: Proverbial Phrases of Medieval and Reformation Times as Sources of Widespread Idioms

Medieval Proverb Collections (G 1 – G 8)

(G 1) TO FOUL/BEFOUL ONE’S OWN NEST

‘to talk negatively about people of one’s own surroundings, e.g. one’s own family, company or country; to denigrate or bring disgrace to a group one belongs to’

Polish *kalać własne gniazdo*
Hungar. *saját fészékébe piszkít*

(G 2) (TO BE) THE FIFTH WHEEL ON THE CARRIAGE

‘(to be) an unwelcome and unnecessary extra person; (to be) someone who is with a group of people even though that group does not want to be with them or feel comfortable with them’

Italian *essere l'ultima ruota del carro/essere la quinta ruota del carro*
Polish *być jak piąte koło u wozu*
Hungar. *az ötödik kerék*

(G 3) TO TAKE THE BULL BY THE HORNS

‘to deal fearlessly with a problem; to act decisively and with determination in order to deal with a difficult situation’

Italian *prendere il toro per le corna*
Polish *brać byka za rogi*
Hungar. *szarvánál ragadja meg a bikát*

(G 4) TO FALL BETWEEN TWO STOOLS

‘to be unable to choose between two alternatives and to forfeit both because of one’s indecision, hesitance’

French *être (assis) entre deux chaises/le cul entre deux chaises*
Slovene *sedeti med dvema stoloma*
Hungar. *két szék között a pad alá esik*

(G 5) TO BUY A PIG IN A POKE / TO BUY A CAT IN THE SACK

‘to buy or accept sth. without inspecting or thinking about it carefully first; with the result that one gets sth. that they do not want; to make an uninformed decision’

Roman. *a cumpăra mîța-n sac*
Polish *kupować kota w worku*
Hungar. *zsákbamacskát vesz*

(G 6) TO HAVE ONE’S TAIL BETWEEN ONE’S LEGS

‘to have feelings of dejection and humiliation or surrender, to be embarrassed or ashamed and unhappy, especially after a defeat or being proven wrong’ appearing frightened or cowardly.

Italian *(avere) la coda tra le gambe / con la coda tra le gambe*
Polish *podwinąć ogon*
Hungar. *behúzza farkát*

(G 7) TO HOWL WITH THE WOLVES

‘to adapt oneself to the habits and customs of the society that one belongs to’

French *hurler avec les loup*
Slovak *vyt' s vlkmi*
Hungar. *együtt üvölt a farkasokkal*

(G 8) TO BREAK THE ICE

‘to overcome sb.’s shyness or reserve, usual in a social setting; to say or do sth. that makes people feel less nervous and willing to talk when they have just met each other’

Italian *rompere il ghiaccio*
Polish *przelamać (pierwsze) lody*
Hungar. *meztöri a jeget*

Medieval Proverb Illustrations (G 9 – G 14)

(G 9) TO BEAT/BANG/RUN ONE’S HEAD AGAINST A BRICK WALL

‘to waste one’s time and energy attempting the impossible and get frustrated by doing so; to make fruitless endeavors in a hopeless enterprise (even using force)’

Italian *sbattere la testa contro il/un muro*
Polish *walić głową w mur*
Hungar. *fejfel megy a falnak*

(G 10) TO BE ARMED TO THE TEETH

‘to possess a lot of weapons or any effective weapon; to be overly well equipped or prepared’

Italian *essere armati fino ai denti*
Polish *być uzbrojonym po zęby*
Finnish *olla hampaisiin asti aseistautunut*

(G 11) *TO BE SITTING (AS IF) ON GLOWING COALS

‘to be very nervous and excited because one is waiting for something to happen, with respect to anxious expectation; to feel most uncomfortable because of one’s impatience’

Italian *stare/camminare sui carboni ardenti*
Polish *siedzieć jak na rozżarzonych węglach*
Hungar. *parázson áll*

(G 12) TO PUT THE CART BEFORE THE HORSE

‘to put things in the wrong order or with the wrong priorities; to mistake the effects for the cause; to reverse the right or natural order of things’

Italian *mettere il carro davanti ai buoi*
Slovene *sedlati konja pri repu*
Hungar. *lovak elé fogja a kocsit*

(G 13) TO WEAR THE PANTS/BREECHES (AT HOME, IN THE FAMILY)

‘it is the wife rather than the husband or partner who makes decisions in the family; to be the dominant party in the marriage, to exercise controlling authority in a household’

Italian *portare i pantaloni*
Polish *nosić spodnie*
Hungar. *az asszony hordja/viseli a nadrágot*

(G 14) TO LOOK THROUGH THE FINGERS

‘to be lenient, forbearing; to make allowances for sb./sth.; to overlook sb.’s incorrect behavior’

Aroman. *ãlj mutri pi tu dzeadzite*
Polish *patrzeć na coś przez palce*
Hungar. *keresztülnéz az ujjain*

Medieval Literary Texts (G 15 – G 21)

(G 15) *TO BREAK ONE'S HEAD (OVER STH.)

'to think intensely/deeply about sth. trying to find a solution; to make a great intellectual effort, e.g. by working for a long time on a problem, or trying to recollect some forgotten experience, name, etc.'

Italian *spremersi le meningi / rompersi/spaccarsi la testa/il capo*

Polish *łamać sobie głowę (nad czymś)*

Hungar. *töri a fejét*

(G 16) *TO WASH SB.'S HEAD / TO GIVE SB. A HEAD WASHING

'to strongly rebuke sb., to give him/her a good talking-to'

Italian *dare una lavata di capo a qn.*

Polish *zmyć komuś głowę*

Hungar. *megmossa vkinek a fejét*

(G 17) TO GO IN (AT) ONE EAR AND OUT (AT) THE OTHER

'(of advice, instructions etc.) to be heard without making any lasting impression on the listener; to be utterly ignored and unheeded, not to be taken note of intentionally'

Italian *entrare da un orecchio e uscire dall'altro*

Czech *jít někomu jedním uchem tam a druhým ven*

Hungar. *az egyik fülén be(megy), a másikon ki*

(G 18) TO SPEAK WITH FORKED TONGUE / WITH TWO TONGUES

'to say one thing and mean another; to talk equivocally, making false promises or to speaking in a dishonest way'

Italian *avere la lingua biforcuta*

Slovene *govoriti z razcepljenim jezikom*

Eston. *kahe keelega/kahekeelne olema*

(G 19) TO THROW THE BABY OUT WITH THE BATH (WATER)

'to discard something valuable along with something not wanted; to proceed too radically, destroying what is good or important by mistake while trying to change and improve it'

Italian *gettare/ buttare il bambino con l'acqua del bagno/con l'acqua sporca*

Polish *wylewać dziecko z kąpielą*

Hungar. *a fürdővízzel (együtt) a gyereket is kiönti*

(G 20) TO REOPEN OLD WOUNDS

'to make sb. remember an unpleasant event or embarrassing experience in the past that they would rather forget about'

Italian *riaprire vecchie ferite/riaprire una piaga*

Polish *rozdrapywać stare rany*

Hungar. *felszakítja/feltépi a régi sebeket*

(G 21) TO CATCH/ CLUTCH/ GRASP AT STRAWS/ A STRAW

'to make use of desperate means as a very last resort'

Italian *aggrapparsi a un filo di paglia*

Polish *chwycić się (jak tonący) brzytwy*

Hungar. *minden szalmaszálba belekapaszkodik*