

School theater in Slovakia from its inception to the Teresian reforms

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Abstract The paper deals with the development of school theatre in the territory of today's Slovakia from its origin to its official prohibition. The author maps the contemporary functions of the school theatre from didactic through promotional to cultural and artistic. It takes a closer look at the approach of J. A. Comenius's approach to the subject of school plays and their overlap with universities in our territory. It focuses on the activity of school theatre in relation to the cultivation of tradition in evangelical and Catholic education. It takes a closer look at the tradition of school theatre in specific religious orders, mapping the various towns and areas in which school theatre had a significant presence.

Key words: school theater, religious orders, Slovakia, Theresian reforms

1. THE BEGINNINGS OF SCHOOL THEATRE IN SLOVAKIA

As in the case of Humanism and the Renaissance, the emergence of school theatre in Slovakia occurred with a significant delay compared to neighbouring regions. The rise and development of Slovak school theatre, whose roots can be traced to the 16th century, are closely linked to the spread of Humanism, and to the arrival of Martin Luther's (1483–1546) Protestant Reformation from Germany. The establishment of Protestant communities was accompanied by the founding of Protestant schools, which soon became new centres of musical and theatrical culture. It was in these institutions that the earliest school plays were created, most often under the direction of rectors, who had received their academic training at German universities.¹ The reformer Martin Luther viewed school plays very favourably, believing that they had a valuable role to play in the education of children. He recommended them as a means of depicting positive role models through stage characters, while also warning against inappropriate behaviour. Together with his close friend and collaborator, Philipp Melancthon (1497–1560), he promoted, especially in town schools and universities, the study of ancient Greek comedies by Publius Terentius Afer (185?–159 BC) and Titus Maccius Plautus (254–184 BC), which were meant to help students refine their rhetoric and Latin. These works later became the first source texts for school plays. Luther's teachings and attitudes supported the development of

school drama not only in Protestant schools, but later also in Jesuit schools.²

One of the graduates of the University of Wittenberg who contributed to the popularisation of school plays, not only in Slovakia but throughout the Kingdom of Hungary, was Leonard Stöckel (1510–1560)³, a student of Martin Luther and Philipp Melancthon⁴, and later rector of the municipal school in Bardejov.⁵ Stöckel is the author of the first Hungarian school play, *Historia von Susanna* (The Story of Susanna), written in German and first performed at the Bardejov school in 1556. Three years later, the text was printed in Wittenberg. The play gradually gained considerable popularity and was performed not only in Bardejov, but also in Košice and Kremnica⁶, eventually becoming part of local popular culture. Following Stöckel's passing, the tradition of school plays moved from Bardejov to Prešov. By that time, Prešov had already embraced Luther's teachings, and its municipal school was under the patronage of the Evangelical Church. The school enjoyed a strong reputation, and the advancement of education there further contributed to the spread of school theatre.⁷

1.1 John Amos Comenius and theatre

Between 1650 and 1654, at the invitation of Sigismund Rákóczi (1544–1608), John Amos Comenius (1592–1670) worked in Blatný potok (Šárospatak), a town near the Czechoslovak border. As Blatný potok was located relatively close to Prešov, J. A. Comenius

²CESNAKOVÁ-MICHALCOVÁ, 1997, p. 10.

³Philipp Melancthon (1497 – 1560) – humanist scholar and professor at the University of Wittenberg, actively participated in the Reformation of the Church. In Germany, he bears the title of "Teacher of Germany", which he earned for his contribution to the development of German education. He continued and continued the work of Martin Luther.

The Bardejov Humanistic Town School, which was probably established on the grounds of the original parish school, was known for its progressive teaching methods and excellent humanistic teachers. Within the three-year study, the study of Latin grammar became the basis of the second year and the works of classical Latin playwrights were read. With a high degree of probability, students in the third year were also engaged in the study of rhetoric and classical Greek. The school ceased to exist in 1775.

⁴ Leonard Stöckel is the author of several plays, records of which have been preserved – *Terentius Eunuch* (Terentius' Eunuch, 1552), *Kain a Abel* (Cain and Abel, 1553), *Márnotravný syn* (The Prodigal Son, 1554), *Jozef* (Joseph, 1555), *Vdova* (The Widow, 1556), *Zuzana* (Susanna, 1557).

⁵ The Bardejov humanistic municipal school, which was probably established on the grounds of the original parish school, was known for its progressive teaching methods and outstanding humanistic teachers. As part of the three-year course, the second year focused on the study of Latin grammar and the works of classical Latin playwrights. It is highly likely that third-year students also studied rhetoric and classical Greek. The school closed in 1775

⁶ School plays began to be performed relatively early in Kremnica and were very popular. They were performed almost every year, alternating with guild performances. See CESNAKOVÁ-MICHALCOVÁ, 1997, p. 10.

⁷ 7 KOPAS, L.: Činoherné divadlo do roku 1830. In *Dejiny slovenského divadla I*. Bratislava: Divadelný ústav, 2018, p. 27. ISBN: 978-80-8190-039-6.

¹CESNAKOVÁ-MICHALCOVÁ, M.: *Z divadelných počiatkov na Slovensku*. [Collection of Essays]. Bratislava: Národné divadelné centrum, 1997, p. 9. ISBN 80-85455-29-3.

maintained regular contact with the Prešov municipal school during his time in Blatný potok.⁸

The denizens of Prešov even contemplated extending an invitation to Comenius to fill the vacant position of rector of the Prešov municipal school. Although this idea was not realized, Comenius' influence on school practice was felt not only through the use of his textbooks. Comenius significantly influenced teaching methods, which had a particular impact on the development of school theatre.⁹ By the time J. A. Comenius received an invitation to Blatný potok, he already had extensive teaching experience. He started as a young teacher in Přerov, from where he fled to Lešno, Poland, in 1628, after the Battle of White Mountain, as a result of the persecution and oppression of Protestants during the recatholization of the country. At that time, Lešno was an important centre of the Unity of Brethren¹⁰, which operated here under the protection of the Counts of Leszczyński. Comenius first worked here as the administrator of the Brethren congregation, and then became the rector of the gymnasium. In this favourable environment, he reflected on school work and the teaching methods of the time. In 1642, he left for Elbląg, Poland, where he spent seven years and wrote his first textbooks.¹¹

From the very beginning of his teaching career, John Amos Comenius considered school theatre to be an important part of the teaching method. This was despite many opponents of school plays, and the strict moral rules enforced by the Unity of Brethren. Unlike the Jesuits, who used school plays for recatholicisation and political purposes, Comenius brought humanistic content to school plays and used them as an effective educational tool, while also being aware of the social impact of school theatre. Despite prejudice, he managed to organise several school plays in Lešno and Blatný Potok. Probably due to a lack of suitable plays that the Unity of Brethren would be willing to tolerate, he wrote the play *Diogenes Cynicus Redivivus* (Diogenes the Cynic Revived, 1640, published in 1658 in Amsterdam) for his students in Lešno. They premiered it in 1640 and later performed it twice more, which testifies to its popularity, despite the fact that Protestant dogmatists rejected it as pagan.¹²

This was followed by the play *Abrahamus Patriarcha* (Patriarch Abraham, 1641, published in 1661 in Amsterdam), in which, after criticism of the previous pagan theme, he came up with a biblical story.

In Blatný Potok, Comenius also produced his work *Orbis Pictus* (originally *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*; The World in Pictures, published in Nuremberg in 1658), intended to facilitate pupils' learning of Latin.

Despite having disagreements with the school's rector, Ján Tolnai (1606–1660), Comenius was responsible for the staging of several school plays in Blatný potok. To avoid accusations of desecrating the Bible, he resorted to his own language textbook, *Janua*

linguarum reserata, or *Janua linguarum reserata* (The Gate of Languages Opened, or The Seedbed of Languages and All Sciences, 1631). Inspired by Sebastian Macer¹³, he gradually adapted all 99 chapters of *The Gate of Languages* into eight plays and gave them the collective title *Schola ludus, seu Encyclopaedia viva, hoc est, Janua linguarum praxis comica* (School as Play, or Living Encyclopaedia, that is, Exercises from The Gate of Languages in Theater, 1653–1654, published in 1656 in Blatný potok)¹⁴.

Of particular importance and interest are Comenius's reflections and opinions on how to use school plays in teaching. Several writings and theoretical texts have been preserved, in which he comments on the mission of theatre and its function in school practice. These include *Schola Pansophicae Delineatio* (The Omniscient School, 1651), *Leges Scholae Bene Ordinatae* (Rules for Well-Organized Schools, 1653), *Panorthosia* (Universal Remedy, 1645–1670),¹⁵ the prefaces to the dramatic cycle *Schola Ludus* (School as Play) and to the play *Diogenes Cynicus Redivivus* (1658), and also in his *Autobiography* (1628–1658).¹⁶

In his writings defending school theater, Comenius distances himself from established profane forms of theater and affirms that it is a specific type of theatrical art performed exclusively within schools. Comenius thus clearly distinguished between theater as an art form and school theater as an educational tool. In Comenius's conception, theater was a space in which the didactic principles of clarity, naturalness, and activity could be applied, and moreover, a space in which the cognition and parallel development of all the student's abilities and skills took place.¹⁷ For Comenius, theater was a methodological tool that made it easier for students to understand the subject matter being taught. According to him, school theater, by its very nature, promotes healthy competition, activates the student community, encourages diligence, and optimizes moral and social education. Last but not least, Comenius was also concerned with language education, which was to lead to pure and flawless Latin, so important for humanists. His efforts were aimed at transforming school (which until then had been a place of horror for students) into a joyful place, arousing students' interest in learning and dispelling laziness, complacency, and indifference.¹⁸

Comenius' school theatre can be considered the pinnacle of humanistic theatre linked to school education. Although Comenius was the most important representative of Humanism and revived school theater in many Protestant schools, after the conclusion of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648,¹⁹ he no longer had any influence on school theater in his native country.

1.2 Successors of John Amos Comenius

The most faithful continuator of Comenius's teachings in the region was Izák Caban (1632–1707), who, from 1661, served as vice-rector of the Evangelical College in Prešov.²⁰ He carried on the tradition of

⁸ The Prešov municipal school had a rich history, in which theater played a significant role. Didactic plays were performed here as part of the curriculum. Among the most important figures in this regard was the humanist educator and poet Ján Bocatus (1569–1621). This period also saw the unique performance of the school's New Year's play about the adoration of the Three Kings, *Ein zwiefacher poetischer Act* (1651) by Peter Eisenberg. See also VARŠO, M. et al. *Pallas Scepusiensis*. Školské hry Jezuitského gymnázia v Spišskej Kapitule (1648 – 1672). [online]. Centrum spoločenských a psychologických vied SAV, 2017. p. 5. ISBN 978-80-972693-9-5 Available at: https://www.academia.edu/37943035/Pallas_Scepusiensis_%C5%A0kolsk%C3%A9_hry_Jezuitsk%C3%A9_gymn%C3%A1zia_v_Spi%C5%A1skej_Kapitul%C3%A9_1648_1672_Pallas_Scepusiensis_School_Dramas_of_Jesuit_College_in_Spi%C5%A1_Canony_1648_1672 [Retrieved on 2025-07-04].

⁹ KOPAS, 2018, p. 29 – 30.

¹⁰ The Unity of the Brethren is a Protestant Christian church that emerged from the Czech Reformation. In 1632, J. A. Comenius became bishop of the Unity of Brethren.

¹¹ CIPRO, M.: Průvodce dějinami výchovy. Praha: Panorama, 1984. s. 154. 11-088-84.

¹² PŠENÁK, J.: Ján Amos Komenský, tvorca školských divadelných hier. [online]. In *PAEDAGOGICA*. [Proceedings of the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University]. Bratislava: UK, 2005. Vol. 17, p. 131. Available at: https://phil.uniba.sk/fileadmin/fif/katedry_pracoviska/kp/ed/projekty/Archiv_Paedagogica/17_-8.pdf [Retrieved on 2025-07-04]

¹³ Comenius's successor at the Lešno Gymnasium, who adapted Comenius's language textbook (66 chapters) into three plays (1651). See PŠENÁK, 2005, p. 134.

¹⁴ CESNAKOVÁ-MICHALCOVÁ, 1997, p. 18.

¹⁵ *Panorthosia* – Book 6 of *De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica ad genus humanum, ante alios vero ad eruditos, religiosos, potentes Europae* (General Consultation on the Reform of Human Affairs. To the human race, but especially to European scholars, clergy and the powerful).

¹⁶ The work was first published in 1670 under the title *Pokračovanie v bratskom napominaní Samuela Maresia*. See CESNAKOVÁ-MICHALCOVÁ, 1997, p. 22.

¹⁷ PŠENÁK, 2005, p. 128.

¹⁸ CESNAKOVÁ-MICHALCOVÁ, M.: Divadlo ako súčasť výchovného systému J. A. Komenského a jeho ohlas na slovenských školách. In *Slovenské divadlo*. Vol. 5, 1957, No. 4, p. 260.

¹⁹ The Peace of Westphalia is the name given to a total of eleven treaties signed in 1648, which ended the Thirty Years' War. Although as a result of this, the Protestant faith was given equal status with Catholicism in Western countries in the spirit of the principles of the Peace of Augsburg of 1555 "cuius regio, eius religio" (whose realm, his religion), in the Habsburg Monarchy, which retained absolute power, recatholization prevailed and the confiscation of Protestant property remained in force.

²⁰ The Evangelical College in Prešov, founded in 1667, was the successor educational institution to the municipal school in Prešov.

school performances with the plays *Lyceum Eperienze dramaticum* (The Dramatized Prešov Lyceum, 1661) and a cycle of plays entitled *Drama primum isagogicum et eucharisticum* (The First Isagogic and Eucharistic Drama). Following Comenius's example, this series of plays presented educational content in a theatrical form.

In the following years, several more plays were staged at the Evangelical College in Prešov, authored by Comenius's pupil, Eliáš Ladiver (1633–1686). He encountered Comenius in Blatný Potok, where he came at the age of twenty and continued his education at a relatively early stage in Wittenberg. It is not assumed that he participated directly in Comenius's school plays, nor that his work was directly shaped by Comenius's personality. Rather, it is likely that Ladiver's dramatic activity was influenced by the broadly popular principles of educational realism, and by the lively connections that the Prešov College maintained with Comenius during his time in Blatný Potok.²¹ Ladiver's work in Prešov was highly productive. Specifically, it was in the field of school theatre. Both manuscripts and printed editions of his plays have survived to the present day.²²

Thanks to the Evangelicals, school plays spread to other schools in Slovakia, becoming popular in Kremnica, Banská Štiavnica and Levoča. At many schools, the plays were written by teachers. For example, in Prievidza, they were written by Zachariáš Kalinka (1629–1656), a teacher and author of school dramas. In Ilava, by Andrej Sartorius (1630–1680), a religious writer, teacher, and playwright. In Brezno, the Evangelical priest, writer of memoirs and travelogues Ján Simonides (1648–1708) or in Rožňava, the teacher and writer Michal Mišovic (?–1710), etc.

The opening of a new Evangelical grammar school in Bratislava in 1656 was marked by the publication of a play, *Gymnasium sapientiae ac virtutum* (School of Wisdom and Virtue, published in Trenčín, 1657), by Johann Rehlin (Rehlinus, Rhelinus). The Bratislava grammar school had its own well-equipped theatre hall, where plays were performed regularly for several years. While the first permanent school theater hall was established in Bratislava, the first dramatic text written in the Slovak language for school theater came from the Evangelical School in Necpaly. The author of the text was Ladislav Justh²³, who wrote a play entitled *Agon aneb Potýkaní čtvoro Sveta, Tela, Smrti, Spravedlivosti boží a Dušičky vernej* in 1694, after the death of his friend.²⁴

While Slovakia became a refuge for a large part of the Czech exiles after the Battle of White Mountain, it ceased to be a safe place for Slovak Protestants after the discovery of Wesselényi's conspiracy in 1671²⁵. Many priests and teachers, such as Ján Rezik (1650–1711), Daniel Sinapsius-Horčička (1640–1688), Ján Sartorius (1656–1729), Juraj Lányi (1646–1701),²⁶ and others, were forced into exile. Despite this, they continued their teaching activities, and most of them also continued their literary activities. Protestant school drama, under the influence of recatholization, focused mainly on religious

and educational themes. After 1660, a more aggressive approach towards Protestants began, with churches and schools being taken away from them, but despite cruel persecution, the Protestant Church managed to maintain its educational organisation in Hungary, and some schools continued to flourish.²⁷

2. SCHOOL THEATRE IN THE BAROQUE PERIOD

During the Baroque period, Protestant school drama continued to develop in the territory of Slovakia, particularly at schools in Bratislava, Ilava, Prievidza, Kremnica, Necpaly, Banská Štiavnica, Banská Bystrica, Ožďany, Štítnik, Rožňava, Kežmarok, Levoča, Bardejov, and, not least, Prešov.²⁸ School drama enjoyed numerous supporters in Slovakia, not only among Protestants, who sought to influence educated audiences and win them over to their cause, but also among Catholics.

2.1 Jesuit School Theatre

Jesuit school theatre developed under the influence of, and in competition with, Protestant theatre. The Jesuit Order²⁹ was wealthy, and school plays were organised almost from its inception, with students of its founder, Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), already participating. As early as 1591, the Jesuit curriculum recommended school plays as an educational tool. In addition to educating young people, these plays promoted the Order itself. However, strict censorship was imposed on all productions.

Initially, Jesuit school theatre had to compete with the more advanced Protestant theatre, which encouraged elaborate staging and dramatic effects. Greater financial resources, provided by patrons and wealthy students, enabled Jesuits to employ sophisticated stage machinery, richly decorated costumes, and larger casts.³⁰ This visual richness quickly contributed to the popularity of Jesuit school theatre. The Baroque period saw extraordinary audience success for Jesuit plays, which perfectly embodied the aesthetic and moral values of the time. This success continued from the mid-17th century until 1773.³¹ The first recorded Jesuit school play in Slovakia dates to 1601 in Šaľa nad Váhom, where, during Easter, students performed *Josephus Triumphans, seu e carceribus squaloribus liberatus* (Joseph Triumphant, or Freed from the Filthy Prison).³²

The Jesuits were highly active in the Kingdom of Hungary, and from their first play in 1601 until the Order's dissolution, they staged over ten thousand plays, the majority of which were performed in the territory of present-day Slovakia.³³ The largest number of performances in Kingdom of Hungary took place in Trnava, which since 1561 had been the main seat of the Jesuits in the kingdom. Comparing the number of school theatre performances across Hungarian cities, Trnava ranks first, with over 410 staged productions, followed by Bratislava with more than 320 and Zagreb with over 300 performances. Other Slovak cities with regular theatre productions and a high number of performances included Skalica, Trenčín, Košice, and Levoča.

²¹ CESNAKOVÁ-MICALCOVÁ, 1957, p. 343.

²² In Prešov, students from the Prešov College performed several of Ladiver's works, e.g. *Eleazar constans* (Persevering Eleazar) in 1668 and *Papinianus Tetragonos* (Brave Papinianus) in 1669. See CESNAKOVÁ-MICALCOVÁ, M.: *Z divadelnej minulosti na Slovensku*. Bratislava: Divadelný ústav Bratislava, 2004, p. 22. ISBN 80-88987-57-1.

²³ Only that he was active in the 17th and 18th centuries is known about him, with no further biographical details available. See Justovci [online]. In *Encyclopaedia Beliana*. ISBN 978-80-89524-30-3. Available at: <https://beliana.sav.sk/heslo/justovci> [Retrieved on 2025-07-07].

²⁴ CESNAKOVÁ-MICALCOVÁ, 1997, p. 15.

²⁵ The Wesselényi conspiracy (1664–1671) aimed to prepare an uprising and overthrow the Habsburgs' absolutist rule in Hungary, in an effort to restore the supremacy of the domestic high nobility. The conspiracy arose in response to the Peace of Vasvár (1664) but was uncovered before the uprising could take place.

²⁶ In 1685, Juraj Lányi published the play *Agapetus scholasticus et reductor* (The Student Agapetus Led Astray from the Path of Virtue and Brought Back to It Again) in Leipzig. See CESNAKOVÁ-MICALCOVÁ, M.: *Kapitoly z dejín Slovenského divadla*. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo SAV, 1967, p. 91. 71-081-66.

²⁷ GREGOR, V. – SEDLICKÝ, T.: *Dějiny hudební výchovy v českých zemích a na Slovensku*. 2. edition. Praha: Supraphon, 1990, 9. 157. ISBN 80-7058-131.

²⁸ MINÁRIK, J.: *Baroková literatúra svetová, česká, slovenská*. Bratislava: SPN, 1984, p. 136.

²⁹ Jesuits – members of the male Catholic order Society of Jesus.

³⁰ Teachers tried to cast every student in school plays. For example, a play about John the Baptist performed in Trnava in 1715 featured 142 actors and up to 53 dancers in the ballet scenes. See CESNAKOVÁ-MICALCOVÁ, 2004, p. 63.

³¹ This year, the order was abolished (not only in our territory).

³² CESNAKOVÁ-MICALCOVÁ, 1967, p. 93.

³³ CESNAKOVÁ-MICALCOVÁ, 2004, p. 63.

The importance of Trnava increased after 1635, when a university was established there under Jesuit administration. This was the only one in Hungary at the time.³⁴ Approximately 180 school plays in Latin were subsequently published by university press in Trnava, and another 119 plays have survived from Skalica. Thanks to these printed texts, ample documentation of Jesuit theatre has been preserved. Trnava, as the main seat of the Jesuit Order, also had its first permanent theatre hall, which was built in 1692 by Palatine Pavol Esterházy (1635–1713). The building boasted beautiful interior furnishings and decorations, which were brought from Venice on the Palatine's orders. In addition to this hall, theatre was also performed in Trnava in the premises of the Marian Seminary, which was founded in 1690.³⁵ A Jesuit theatre scene also developed in Bratislava. The Jesuits arrived there at the invitation of Péter Pázmány (1570–1637), who commissioned the construction of a college for them in 1630. The first record of Jesuit theatre in Bratislava dates to 1628, when Jesuit students performed *Dialógu o predobrazoch sviatosti oltárnej* (Dialogue on the Prefigurations of the Blessed Sacrament) in front of the Franciscan monastery during a Corpus Christi procession. The dialogue was performed in four languages, one of which was Slovak.

Records of Slovak performances, however, are scarce. In Trnava, on the occasion of a Eucharistic procession in 1632, students of the local Catholic gymnasium performed texts in Hungarian, Latin, and Slovak at the various Stations of the Cross. Other surviving reports concern liturgical plays.

For example, in 1648, a performance of *Apollo Coeli redditus, seu S. Stephanus Protomartyr* (Apollo Returned to Heaven, or St. Stephen the Martyr, published in Levoča in 1648) took place in Spišská Kapitula. Later, specifically in Spišská Kapitula and Trenčín, plays in the vernacular—*idiomate vulgari*, or in Slovak—*slavonicae artinculae*, are also documented.³⁶ However, of the many printed theatre programmes for these plays, only one bilingual programme has been preserved, in which Slovak appears alongside Latin. This programme is for the play *Catharina, Gurzianorum Regina* (Catherine, Queen of the Gurzians), performed in Skalica in 1701.

Jesuit theatre primarily staged tragedies and comedies. The themes were mainly biblical, drawn from the life of Christ or from the legends of the saints. Such plays were performed on occasions such as Corpus Christi, Easter, and Christmas. Comedies were mainly presented during Carnival, and were particularly popular among students. Critical and satirical themes drawn from contemporary life typically had a moral lesson concluded with them. The authors of Jesuit plays were usually teachers or senior students, although authorship is rarely documented. Adaptations of pre-existing texts make up a large proportion of the surviving plays. The first known author of Jesuit plays in Slovakia is Juraj Lippay (1600–1666), who organised Passion plays in Trnava in 1627. In addition to him, records of plays by Daniel Mitis (1629–1683), Pavel Alexandri, and Václav Kubíci of Skalica have been preserved, as well as information about František Beniczky (1679–1715), the author of a play about Ján Hunyadi (1705) written for the students of the Trnava gymnasium.³⁷ Jesuit stages also traditionally featured plays based on classical history; for example, in Bratislava, *Paris* (1750), *Alexander in Syria* (about Alexander the Great, 1752), and *Gaius Julius Caesar* (1754) were performed.³⁸

Music, singing, and often dance, were important components of school performances. For Jesuit colleges in the 17th century, music was composed by notable figures, such as the imperial court organist Ferdinand Tobias Richter (1651–1711) and the bassist of the imperial court orchestra in Vienna, Caspar Liedmayr (Liedtmayr, Lindtmayr; 1669–1724). In 1725, a play about Hymenaeus was performed in Trnava, with music composed by Martin František Tallski, choirmaster in Pezinok. Musical numbers were often indicated in dramatic texts by the brief note “*hic accedunt musici*” (“Here the musicians follow”),³⁹ which provides the only information about the musical component and interludes in school theatre. In addition to music, dance elements were incorporated into school theatre, as evidenced by ballet performances by students from the Notre Dame Convent in Bratislava in 1761 and 1764, under the direction of a ballet master from Vienna. A fondness for music—both choral and solo—and for dance became a prerequisite for the emergence of Baroque opera.⁴⁰

The popularity of Jesuit school plays persisted until 1773, when the order was abolished. Among the last performances were the musical drama *Matka Bolestí* (Mother of Sorrows), staged in Bratislava, and a performance in Trnava inspired by contemporary events, depicting the dispute between Trnava and Buda over the University of Trnava.⁴¹

2.2 Piarist School Theatre

During the Baroque period, school plays in Kingdom of Hungary were not performed exclusively by Jesuits, although their influence in this field was the most significant, and most records of school theatre activity concern them. In addition to the Jesuits, other religious orders were also involved in school theatre. One of these was the Piarists, whose aim was not counter-Reformation, but the education of lower-class youth, in accordance with the spirit of their name—the Order of Poor Clerics of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools. The founder of the Order, St. Joseph Calasanz (1557–1648), was initially opposed to theatre in schools, believing it distracted students from their studies. However, this attitude gradually changed, and schools even began teaching playwriting, as evidenced by the work of Lucas Mösch (or Moesch, pseudonym Pater Lucas, religious name Lucas a Sancto Edmundo, 1651–1701), a Piarist from the College in Prievidza. Mösch was not only the author of several plays, but also of the 1693 textbook on poetics, *Vita poetica* (Poetic Life), in which he addressed dramatic forms.⁴² The oldest centre of the Piarists was Podolíneč, which, however, belonged to the Polish province until 1782; as a result, plays were often performed in Polish. Part of the Piarist library collection is preserved in the State Archives in Levoča, including verses intended for recitation by gymnasium students.⁴³ Other important Piarist centres included Prievidza, Brezno, Svätý Jur, and Nitra. The Piarists arrived in Prievidza in 1666, at the invitation of Františka Khuenová-Pálfiová (1610–1672), who brought them to the Bojnice estate with the goal of re-Catholicization. At the local college, plays were performed on various holidays (regularly on Good Friday), and often in honor of the school's founder, Karol Pálfi. This practice was common at other schools as well, where sons of wealthy or noble families frequently studied. Consequently, plays performed in honour of patrons were costly, elaborate, and ostentatious.

³⁴ POLÁKOVÁ, Š.: Divadlo v baroku – Školské hry na uliciach i v kostoloch Bratislavy. In *Historická revue*, Vol. 5, 1994, No. 4, p. 24. ISSN 1335-6550.

³⁵ CESNAKOVÁ-MICHALCOVÁ, 2004, p. 63.

³⁶ CESNAKOVÁ-MICHALCOVÁ, 1997, p. 18.

³⁷ CESNAKOVÁ-MICHALCOVÁ, 1967, p. 96.

³⁸ POLÁKOVÁ, 1994, p. 24.

³⁹ CESNAKOVÁ-MICHALCOVÁ, 2004, p. 63.

⁴⁰ CESNAKOVÁ-MICHALCOVÁ, 1997, p. 21–22.

⁴¹ CESNAKOVÁ-MICHALCOVÁ, 1967, p. 102.

⁴² POLÁKOVÁ, Š.: Z histórie piaristického školského divadla na Slovensku v 17. a 18. storočí. In *Zborník Slovenského národného múzea. História* 52. Bratislava: Obzor, 2000, p. 34.

⁴³ 43 VARŠO, M.: Kresťanské divadlo v začiatkoch a školské hry v minulosti. In *Javisko*, vol. 47, 2015, no. 3, p. 10. ISBN 978-80-972693-9-5

In addition to celebratory plays, the Piarists, like the Jesuits, favoured dramas—mainly with historical themes—while comedies were performed during Carnival celebrations. The authors of these works were primarily the Piarists themselves, who taught at the schools.

In 1685, in his will, the Bishop of Nitra and Archbishop of Esztergom, Juraj Selepčeni-Pohronec (1595–1685),⁴⁴ bequeathed his property to the Piarists on the condition that they establish a school in Svätý Jur. The first two performances at the school, opened in 1687, were *De Passione Domini* (On the Passion of the Lord) on Good Friday, 20 March 1693, and *Corporis Christi de mysterio* (On the Mystery of the Body of Christ) on 24 May 1693. Both performances were staged in Slovak. As a large part of the population of Svätý Jur was Protestant, conditions for the educational activities of the Piarist school theatre were challenging. The Piarists focused primarily on teaching, and theatrical performances were organized only occasionally.⁴⁵

One of the most important Piarist centres was Nitra. The Piarist College in Nitra was founded in 1701 by the Bishop of Nitra, Ladislav Maťašovský (1643–1705). Many students from noble families were drawn to the gymnasium in Nitra, which was among the most sought-after educational institutions. Among its supporters and patrons, Anton Grasalkovič (1694–1771) is noteworthy; he studied at the school and supported it even before becoming a Baron. In terms of theatrical activity and stage resources, no other college in Nitra could rival it. The Piarists had been performing theatre in Nitra since 1705, as indicated by records of expenditures on decorations. The repertoire included celebratory and historical plays about foreign saints, princes, and kings.⁴⁶ Authors and adapters of the plays included Ján Kubrány, Vavrinec Hromka, Augustín Bielický, and others. The Piarists sought to engage contemporary audiences as fully as possible, often writing in the vernacular, incorporating comic elements, and themes from everyday life, while avoiding romantic motifs. Between 1705 and 1772, they staged almost 200 plays in Nitra—the highest number in the entire Kingdom of Hungary.⁴⁷

2.3 Franciscan School Theatre

Information on Franciscan school theatre is very limited, as no dedicated research has yet been conducted on this topic. Consequently, we lack detailed accounts of theatrical activities within Franciscan schools. The Franciscans arrived in the territory shortly after the death of the Order's founder, St. Francis of Assisi (?–1226), establishing communities in Trnava, Nitra, and Bratislava. Later, they also settled in other locations, such as Okoličné, Slovenská Lupča, and Čachtice. One of the few pieces of information about Franciscan theatre from this period comes from 1763. On Good Friday that year, Franciscan Father Anton Vančo organised a procession through the town of Skalica, in which students from the Jesuit gymnasium performed and recited texts in the vernacular.⁴⁸

Most available information concerning Franciscan theatre relates to Franciscan playwrights of a later period. One notable figure is Bonifác Ďurikovič (1807–1870), who authored the *Christmas play*

Vianoce, t. j. Svätoradostné vyobrazenie Narodenia P. Ježiša Krista... (Christmas, i.e., The Holy Depiction of the Birth of Jesus Christ...) in 1856, and the carnival farce *Triumviát, alebo Traja ako jeden* (Triumvirate, or Three as One) in 1862. Given the Franciscans' engagement in schools and gymnasiums, and their positive attitude toward theatre, it can be reasonably assumed that they also conducted theatrical activities on school grounds. This subject, nevertheless, remains largely unexplored and represents a promising avenue for future independent research.

3. CONCLUSION

With the advent of the Enlightenment, new ideas and progressive efforts began to influence the social structure, including education and upbringing, which ceased to be the exclusive domain of the Church. The state increasingly regulated not only economic life, but also social and cultural life, with the aim of providing education to those who had previously lacked access. During the period of Maria Theresa's school reform (1717–1780), which began in the more advanced Austrian provinces and reached Hungary in 1777, school plays were already considered outdated, and their popularity was gradually declining. The official ban on school plays in 1794 was the final outcome of a process that had already begun even with the shift away from Latin and biblical themes. The gradual transition of school plays from Latin to the vernacular, and the writing of dialogues in Slovakized Czech, contributed significantly to the development of theatre culture in Slovakia. Although school plays continued to exist in Slovakia until the 1830s, in many cases, they had already merged with amateur theatre. Over time, people gradually replaced school plays with secular theatrical performances and dramatic genres that Classicism introduced.⁴⁹

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⁴⁴ During his studies in Rome, Juraj Selepčeni-Pohronec met the founder of the Piarist Order, St. Joseph Calasanz, and decided to support the establishment of the order in Kingdom of Hungary.

⁴⁵ POLÁKOVÁ, 2000, p. 36.

⁴⁶ Interestingly, the Piarists' repertoire in Nitra did not include themes from the lives of local saints and princes, such as St. Cyril and St. Methodius, Svätopluk and Pribina.

⁴⁷ POLÁKOVÁ, 2000, p. 37.

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