

Osińska, Wanda

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Wanda Osińska (Poland)

THE HERRNHUT TREASURE: *ARCHIVUM UNITATIS*

In the autumn of 1970, the 300th anniversary of the death of Johann Amos Comenius (1592–1670), the outstanding Bohemian patriot, philosopher and humanist, was celebrated. In virtue of his teaching activities he won the reputation of the first educationist to have attempted the development of a scientific conception of the educational process. Advocating the promotion of education Comenius published a project for a uniform schooling system (1657) for all, irrespective of their social or financial status. This idea was later picked up by the 1789 French revolution in its endeavours to equalize all citizens by instituting a uniform school. But the practical implementation of the principle of uniform schooling was completed not earlier than in the former half of the 19th century, and that in the United States. This principle is, among others, the foundation of the educational systems in all socialist countries today.

But besides his educational activities Comenius was also a philosopher, encyclopaedist, writer, theoretician of literature and homilies, poet, author of hymns, theologian, a social worker and senior of the Czech Brethren. Comenius was strongly involved in the intellectual life of 17th-century Poland. For more than 28 years—if we disregard his short travels abroad—he lived and worked at Leszno (in the province of Poznań). He taught at the local gymnasium, and in 1634–41 was its rector. It was in this town that his important works—*Didactica Magna* and *Janua linguarum* were written; they were subsequently published by Polish printers in the dissident offices at Leszno and Gdańsk, as well as in Warsaw, Königsberg (now Kaliningrad) and Wrocław. Comenius befriended many Polish scholars staying then at Leszno, among them the mathematician, cartographer, technologist and Reformational writer Maciej Głuskowski, the well-known erudite, naturalist and polyhistor Jan Jonston, and the humanist, philologist, poet, mathematician, theologian and teacher at dissenter schools Jerzy Vechner.

From his earliest years Comenius joined the religious movement of the Czech Brethren, which had commenced in the middle of the 15th century as a continuation of the radical trend in Hussitism.¹ After Ferdinand I of the Habsburg dynasty, an irreconcilable enemy of the Czech Brethren, had ascended the Czech throne, a period of persecution and repressions against the movement followed. After the defeat of a national rising against the foreign sovereign, in which the Czech Brethren also participated, Ferdinand issued two decrees, one prohibiting all meetings and religious observance as well as confiscating part of the property of the Czech Brethren, the other banning all members of noble or bourgeois origin from the country unless they should change their creed. The Czech Brethren preferred exile and faithfully stood by their religion. Thus, the first Czech emigration to Poland began in 1548. At first the Brethren settled in the Poznań province in the estates of Andrzej Górką and of Jakub and Stanisław Ostroróg, whose ancestors had adopted Hussitism already in the 15th century, as well as in the estates of Rafał Leszczyński; later at Toruń, Poznań, Kuźminek, Łobzenica, in Silesia and in Mazury—at Dąbrowa, Działdowo, Nidzica, Olsztynek and at other towns, thus creating centres of a new humanist culture and thought. As in the previous case, the second emigration was due to further persecution, specifically to a new decree (1627) banning from the country all non-Catholics who within an 18-month period should refuse to adopt the Catholic faith. Whereas the first emigration remarkably strengthened the movement, the second resulted in its decline due to the specific political situation that at that time was unfavourable to the Czech Brethren. In consequence of the eventual victory of the Counter-reformation, they were deprived of all hope to get back to their homeland.² Still in the 18th century some of the tradition of the Brethren organized in the earlier coherent movement was continued by the third Czech emigration, which went predominantly to Silesia and to what is now the province of Łódź, but it did not play any historic role.

Comenius, who saw the only hope for and foundation of the national renaissance and the social liberation of the Czechs in the movement of the Brethren, was among those who left their country in the second wave of emigration.

At first one of the most active centres of the Brethren in the Poznań province was the town Ostroróg, a property of Jakub Ostroróg and residence of the seniors of the movement. There they had their seminar

¹ P. Brock, *The Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brothers*, Moulon, 1957; R. Ričan, *Die Böhmischesen Brüder*, Berlin, 1961.

² J. Śliziński, *Z działalności braci czeskich w Polsce*, Wrocław, 1959, and „Śladami braci czeskich w Wielkopolsce, Warmii i na Mazurach”, *Pamiętnik Literacki*, vol. 45, 1954, No. 2; T. Grabowski, „Literatura braci czeskich w Polsce XVII wieku,” *ibid.*, vol. 35, 1938, No. 1/4; J. Bidlo, *Jednota bratrská v prvním vyhnání*, Praha, vol. 1–1900, vol. 2–1903, vol. 3–1906, vol. 4–1932.

school, a library of all dissident Polish writers of 1550–60 as well as the archives of the Czech Brethren. The *Archivum Unitatis* contained important papers and parchment documents which had been brought from Bohemia by the emigrants who had feared that they might be lost. Later, official writs and sources referring to the activities of the Brethren, especially to those on Polish soil, were collected there. After the Ostroróg line of their first protectors had died out, the Czech Brethren were deprived of their church, and the community at Ostroróg declined. Then the archives together with the residence of the seniors were transferred to Leszno, where the Brethren were warranted full freedom by king Zygmunt August. The collection was enlarged by the documents of the *Unitatis Fratrum*, that is, detailed descriptions of travels of the emigrants to Poland, which they had brought with them in 1628.³ Soon the town was spoken of as “the Athens of the Czech Brethren in Great Poland.” Its decline started with the fire of Leszno in 1656, in which Comenius’ house was burnt down together with priceless manuscripts, including the materials for a Czech-Latin dictionary that had been collected for about 40 years. Moreover, part of the library and the printing office owned by the Brethren were burnt down too.⁴ The archives were fortunately rescued; they were transferred first to Ursk and next to Karolat (now Siedlisko near Nowa Sól). Next the collection appears in Silesia, probably at Brzeg or Wrocław, where it was kept till about 1720. From Wrocław it was again transferred to Leszno. In the period of D. E. Jabłoński’s office as “superintendent” of the Brethren (1699–1741), who spent most of his time in Berlin and practically fulfilled his office there, many documents, especially those that he needed in his work, were sent to Germany. It is difficult to know exactly if all of them returned to the archives of the Brethren. What is known is that after Jabłoński’s death the documents that had been sent to Berlin were listed by the senior of the Czech Brethren K. Sitkowski in order to send them back to Leszno.⁵ The archives were kept at the evangelical reformed St. John’s church under the care of the pastor that was parson at the time, and he may often have lacked the expert knowledge of preserving archives. This fact accounts for the adverse effects as regards the store and its adequate maintenance. For instance, in 1842 the church council sold many of its documents referring to Comenius to the National Museum at Prague. In 1881 a part of the archives of the Czech Brethren was deposited in the

³ These documents were discovered at Leszno by J. E. Purkyně (1836), who purchased part of them and gave it to the Library of the National Museum at Prague.

⁴ The tragical fire of Leszno was described in Comenius’ *Excidium Lesnae anno MDCLVI factum, fide historica narratum*, Amsterdam, 1656.

⁵ J. Łukasiewicz, *O kościołach braci czeskich w dawnej Wielkopolsce*, Poznań, 1835. This well-known Polish historian thinks that the documents lent out to Berlin were not returned to the archives of the Czech Brethren at Leszno.

Prussian State Archives at Poznań, among them parchment documents, some of the seniors' letters, synodical acts, some manuscripts of historical and religious treatises, and what was called *varia* and *dissoluta*. There is, incidentally, an inventory of these materials made by the German archivist Mr. Bahr, but it is of scarcely any use to the researcher. The classification of the documents within the particular divisions is too rough, not uniform, made in virtue of different criteria, and frequently confused. One may get the impression that the identification and ordering of the materials were largely dependent on the archivist's personal interests.

In 1918 this collection of documents returned to Leszno, where, in the interwar period, it was in the care of the German pastor of St. John's church Dr. Wolfgang Bickerich. As he was particularly interested in the synodical documents he gathered them with the intent to publish the collection in the future⁶. In fact he prepared for publication the chronicle of 1643–1751 and additionally a few minor communications on the archives,⁷ but it did not occur to him to order or bring together the fortuitously separated collections of Poznań and Leszno. In 1944 the archives of the Czech Brethren were taken away westward by the Nazis. For several years it was not known where the collection had been stored. Only in 1960 the Polish Slavist and expert on Comenius Professor Jerzy Śliziński discovered the archives of Leszno at the Evangelische Brüder-Unität in Deutschland at Herrnhut (German Democratic Republic). They were revindicated to Poland in June 1961, and now they are kept in the state archives at Poznań. The collection from Herrnhut includes archive documents, manuscripts, old prints, museum pieces—objects for religious practices (among others, a chalice of 1564, 17th-century altar coverlets and antepedia, embroidered girdles *etc.*). This latter group of objects was given to the municipal council of Leszno for the local museum.

The list appended to the delivery protocols constitutes a preliminary inventory of the part of the archives that had been in the care of the German Protestant religious community at Leszno. At present the State Archives at Poznań make an adequate inventory of the complete stock of documents referring to the Czech Brethren in accordance with the requirements of modern preservation of archives.⁸

The *Archivum Unitatis*, which is one of the most interesting collections concerning the Reformation in Poland, has not been fully used by research-

⁶ Following G. Smend, who had published the synodical documents of the Lutherans in the Poznań province (1930), W. Bickerich prepared analogous synodical acts of the Czech Brethren. Since he died in 1934, he could not implement his project. The archives of the Brethren came into the care of his son.

⁷ W. Bickerich, „Das Tagebuch der polnischen Unität von 1643–1751”, *Aus Posens Kirchlicher Vergangenheit*, vol. 3, 1913; *Lissa und Herrnhut*, Lissa (Leszno), 1908; and *Die ev. ref. Johannes-Kirche zu Lissa-Leszno*, Lissa (Leszno), 1933.

⁸ *Slavia Occidentalis*, vol. 22, 1962, pp. 337f.

ers yet.⁹ It includes materials mainly in Latin, Czech and German from 1507–1792 falling into one of the 7 fundamental divisions: documents, letters of seniors and ministers, materials concerning communities, churches, schools, expenditure lists and bills, chronicles-treatises-manuals, and other materials and collections. Particularly interesting are the letters from the middle of the 16th up to the beginning of the 20th centuries, concerning not only the inner affairs of the Czech Brethren but also the external conditions and the contemporary historical setting. Most letters have been addressed, among others, to the superintendent of the churches of the Poznań province D. E. Jabłoński, Kassjusz K. Sitkowski, J. Bytner, J. Rybiński. Besides private persons, the senders were ecclesiastical notables and political dignitaries, such as counts Francis Rakoczy and Frederic Wilhelm. There are also several letters by Comenius to the seniors concerning the 1645 dispute of Toruń, some issues of ecclesiastical organization from 1647, the collects in Britain (written from Amsterdam) from 1656, and moreover a letter to Johann Wolzogen from 1647 concerning a manual for teaching foreign languages. The materials concerning the Toruń dispute include a letter from Comenius to the archbishop of Gniezno and the documents signed by himself. Moreover, the copies of his letters from Gdańsk, Wrocław and Amsterdam in 1656–58 ought to be mentioned. The letters of the seniors from the 17th century are written predominantly in Polish, whereas those from the 18th century in German. Moreover some notes and directives for some speeches and homilies delivered in the course of the sessions have also survived, among them one to Comenius' speech at the synod of Ostroróg (1634) concerning young people and teaching, and another one referring to his homily on the role of the priest delivered at the synod of Leszno (1647). To the students of Comenius' life and work the manuscript of Comenius' homily delivered at the synod of Leszno on 19th April 1644 on the occasion of the consecration of J. Bytner to the consenior of the Brethren seems to be interesting; it has been so far unknown. To the works written in Poland belongs also the manuscript of unfinished *Clamores Eliae* of 1665–70 (?) with numerous folios that are loose or fastened with thread; this title has not been published so far. But it is of particular interest to the Poles as it contains the *Evigila Polonia*¹⁰ elucidating many new points of Comenius' attitude toward Poland¹¹. The archives of the Czech Brethren include also the *Sermo secretus Nathanis ad Davidem* and the *Confessio specialis reformationum* as well as his notes written on the *Liber fundationum et donationum etc. in Bohemia* (fol. 152).

⁹ I wish to thank the management of the State Archives at Poznań, and especially to the custodian Mrs. Janina Bielecka, Ph. D., for consultation and permission to use the collection.

¹⁰ A. Skarka, *Komenského rýzra Evigila Polonia* [w:] *Studia poświęcone stosunkom literackim polsko-czeskim i polsko-słowackim*, Wrocław, 1969, s. 17–29.

¹¹ H. Dünnhaupt, *Lissa in Polen*, Lissa (Leszno), 1908.

Although they constitute a self-dependent unit and have their own inventory, the archives of the Czech Brethren are linked with the acts of the evangelical-reformed church of St. John's church at Leszno,¹¹ where the materials referring to 1715–1939 have been mainly preserved. They include the directives issued by the consistory and the superintendents concerning the questions of the creed, priesthood, the ecclesiastical ceremonies and charitable actions. Moreover, protocols of the sessions of the ecclesiastical authorities, *i.e.*, synods, presbiters, and the financial documents, *i.e.* the cashier's books, bill receipts of the church and its estates, have been preserved. But in view of the diversity of the materials the framework of the classification into: a) ecclesiastical affairs, b) estates, c) foundations, d) the affairs of the dissenting schools, imposes a too narrow scheme, which precludes a more detailed analysis of the materials. Furthermore, the German archivists did not exclude into a separate unit the materials concerning only the Czech Brethren, and thus they are included among the documents of various evangelical communities, which are still being sent from different localities to the province archives. Accordingly it is possible that these materials may also include documents of interest to Comeniologists.

It seems that this necessarily concise presentation of the vicissitudes or the archives of the Czech Brethren may be of help in further researches and explain the curious, occasionally even accidental provenience of the discovered sources.

Comeniological studies have been arousing vivid interest to the present day. On the occasion of the international celebration of the 300th anniversary of the publication of *Opera didactica omnia* in 1957, many scholars undertook work on Comenius and on the history of the Czech Brethren. A number of monographs have been published and synthetic works on the history of educational thought have been published, and besides new editions of the classical works of the Czech teacher with critical commentaries and historical introductions have appeared. Valuable bibliographical works have appeared too.¹² Many of Comenius' works have been published anonymously, there are numerous works by compilers that were later recognized as original. A number of these works have perished, some of them for ever. To check the genuineness of the existing works, it was thought necessary to make a "register" of Comenius' works kept at different centres throughout the world. In response to this common requirement the international organizing Committee J. A. K. appealed to all, especially to the countries in which Comenius had lived or which he vis-

¹¹ *Archiwum Państwowe miasta Poznania i Województwa Poznańskiego oraz jego archiwa terenowe...*, ed. by Czesław Skopowski, Warszawa, 1969.

¹² The most complete bibliography is *Soupis děl J. A. Komenského v Československých knihovnách, archivech a museích*, compiled by a commission for the bibliography of Comenius' works under the supervision of Emma Urbánová, Praha, 1959.

ited—England, Poland, Sweden, Hungary and others—to join this common research undertaking. The 20th-century Comeniological source studies yielded amazing results. Not only letters or manuscripts, including fragments published in different versions or skipped completely, were found but even complete new works that had been previously unknown.¹³ Researches on the archives collections of Hertlib in England, Oxenstijerna in Sweden, or the archives of the Czech Brethren in Poland have not been completed yet.

Unfortunately the materials referring to Comenius are kept not only in different archives but also in the manuscript collections of various libraries and museums as well as in private collections.

In Poland the development of Comeniological studies was, among others, associated with scientific sessions. The first session after the war was organized on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the foundation of the gymnasium at Leszno (where Comenius was rector) at Leszno and at Osieczna on 28th—29th September, 1956;¹⁴ the second and third sessions occasioned by the 300th anniversary of the Czech scholar's death was organized in Warsaw on 21st—22nd October, 1970,¹⁵ both with participation of foreign guests, especially Czechs and Hungarians. The *Great Didactics* was published in Polish translation with an extensive introduction by B. Suchodolski. Besides, a 3-volume edition of Comenius' *Selected Works* and a repertory of his printed works kept in Polish libraries were also published.¹⁶

Recent developments have shown that Comenius became a subject of interest not only to educationists. Contemporary researches pay particular attention to his irenic and pansophist views—problems that are of much interest to our epoch.

¹³ For instance, the research achievements of S. Souček, D. Čyževský, J. Hendrich, R. Ričan, A. Škarka, and of the Polish scholar J. Śliziński. Of course many more names could be mentioned.

¹⁴ *Sesja w Lesznie*, ed. by L. Kurdybacha, Warszawa, 1957.

¹⁵ B. Suchodolski, J. Śliziński, W. Hensel, P. Zwoliński were the Polish scholars to submit reports during the session; among the Czechs there were J. Polišíenský, A. Škarka, J. Hrabák, J. B. Capek, J. Brambora, J. Patočka; and the Hungarian G. Geréb.

¹⁶ The repertory was prepared in connection with the session on Comenius at Leszno, September, 1956; it included the collections of Polish libraries as in 1956.