

HUMANISTS IN RENAISSANCE BOHEMIA AND MUSIC V

JIŘÍ TŘANOVSKÝ (1592-1637)

*The most significant Central European hymnographer
between the Renaissance and the Baroque*

Jiří Třanovský (1592-1637) was the author of approximately a hundred and eighty spiritual songs, which makes him probably the most significant hymnographer in Central Europe. He is claimed by Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Poland, and, particularly, Slovakia, where his work was put to good use up until the end of the 20th century. He was a typical humanist scholar of his time. The degree to which his work is useful and timeless, however, shows that he was more than a common humanist of the period. Třanovský was truly an exceptional author. A closer look at his oeuvre reveals a hymnographer with a broad range of knowledge and a high degree of sensitivity, capable of accurately capturing an idea in limited space.

During the religious turbulence of the 17th century, many archival records connected to Třanovský's activities in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia were irretrievably lost. Despite many uncertain passages, we can now draw at least a contour of his difficult life. He was born on April 9th 1592 in the small city of Těšín (Cieszyn; Teschen, now on the Czech-Polish border) to a family of wealthy citizens, receiving an education in the Lutheran faith. He was first educated at the local Latin school. Early in his youth, he left to study in the Lusatian city of Guben, later moving further towards the Baltic Sea, specifically to the city of Kolberg (now Kołobrzeg in Poland), home to a significant Latin school that emphasised classical poetry.

The first precise date regarding Třanovský's activities comes from Wittenberg. On the 13th of April 1607, he was matriculated at the university, a bastion of Lutheran orthodoxy. He concluded

his university studies in 1611 at the age of nineteen. The minimal age for entering the priesthood, however, was twenty-four. The young Třanovský therefore became a teacher at the gymnasium of St Nicholas in Prague's Malá Strana (Lesser Town). This was when he wrote his oldest surviving song. It was published in the now lost collection *Applausus cumarum desideratissimi sanctisimique puelluli (Applause for the Cradle of the Most Desired and Sacred Boy, 1611)*. The song was in Latin, its subject was the birth of Christ, and it was to be sung by the school choir. In 1612, he was in Třeboň as a personal tutor to Adam, Count of Schwarzenberg (died 1664) and returned to the school in Malá Strana a year later. The first surviving proof of his poetic activities is found in a collection of laudatory poems, *Nuptiis Reverendi Viri (The Honourable Man's Wedding, 1613)*, dedicated to a friend of Třanovský's on the occasion of his wedding. After a short stint as a teacher

1/ Comenius University in Bratislava, Evangelical Lutheran Theological Faculty



Title page of *Odorum Sacrarum Sive Hymnorum* (Brzeg, 1629)

in Holešov, Třanovský arrived in the Moravian city of Valašské Meziříčí in 1615, remaining there for several years. He first took up the position of rector at the local Latin school and probably also worked as a teacher.

He was ordained the following year and remained in the city as a parish priest. The first years were fruitful and peaceful. He married and started a family. He was employed as a priest and as the secretary of the Evangelical consistory in Olomouc. He was also active as a writer, composing numerous prayers and liturgical texts that he only published decades later. This short careless period in Třanovský's life is concluded by a significant theological work. He prepared for print a Czech translation of the Augsburg Confession with a remarkable introductory study, in which he showed himself to be a passionate defender of the Lutheran faith. The work manifests his theological skills, routine knowledge of scripture, and linguistic dexterity. The study anticipates Třanovský's ability to capture the core of the problem, which is a skill he later used as a hymnographer, when he was asked to present

dense theology in a comprehensible manner, and in verse to boot. His *Konfessý Augsspurská* was published in 1620 in Olomouc. The year 1620, however, also brought war to the region, inaugurating a series of catastrophic events in Třanovský's life. The Battle of White Mountain led to a brutal process of recatholisation. Třanovský and his family fled to Těšín from the imperial army. He later returned to the plundered city. In 1621, Valašské Meziříčí and the adjacent village of Krasno burnt to the ground. The city was invaded by the imperial army once more and Jiří Třanovský, as an Evangelical priest, was imprisoned. There was a plague epidemic in 1624, claiming over two thousand lives, including Třanovský's children. Furthermore, Třanovský developed problems with his eyesight that would stay with him for the rest of his life. In 1625, half blind, he escaped to Těšín once more, never to return to Valašské Meziříčí.

Exile

In the spring of 1626, Třanovský is in the small city of Bielsko (now in Poland). He was a court preacher here, as well as a parish priest in the Church of St. Nicholas. His sovereign – and later also his friend and patron – was Johannes Sunech of Jesenice. During his stay in Bielsko, he published one of his most important works, a collection of four-voice odes titled *Odorum Sacrarum Sive Hymnorum* (*Sacred Odes, or, Hymns*). The work was published in three volumes in 1629. It contained a hundred and fifty Latin odes. The individual volumes are dedicated to three cities and their leaders: Brzeg and Oleśnica in Poland and Levoča in Slovakia. The odes were intended for church services and were to be sung by students at Latin schools.

Třanovský's direct inspiration, however, was a 1611 collection of Latin psalms, *Odae Sacrae* (*Sacred Odes*), by Jan Campanus Vodňanský. This collection alternates between rhythmical – i.e. rhymed – poetry of the Medieval type with ancient metrical poetry. This was also Třanovský's approach to odes, taking the classical odes of Horace as a model. The melodies are found at the very end of the collection: four-voice vocal writing rendered in white mensural notation typical of the period. The odes are set in a homophonic chordal texture. The cantus firmus is included both in the tenor, i.e. in the older form of writing for more voices, or in the descant, which we can consider a more modern style. The rhythm is determined by



An extract of the notation of Genus I of Třanovský's four-voice ode (*Odorum Sacrarum Sive Hymnorum*, Brzeg, 1629)

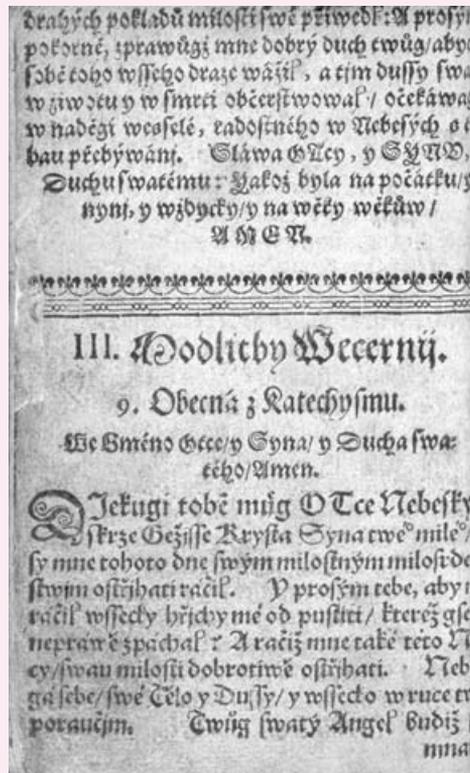
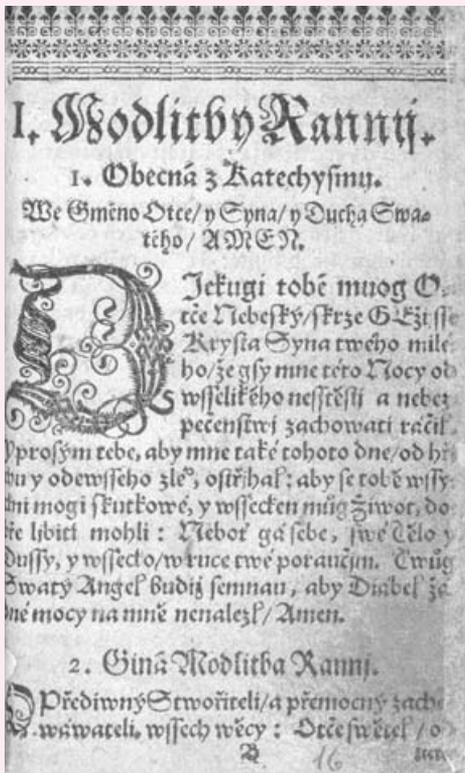
the poetic metre. The aim was to recite the text as precisely and with as much emphasis as possible. Musically, Třanovský's odes were probably influenced by the German teacher Statius Olthoff (1555–1629) who set the psalms of George Buchanan (1506–1582). Also part of the *Odorum Sacrarum* was an extended text titled *Dissertatio brevis et perspicua de Christiano-gentilismo in carminibus...* (*A Short Dissertation and Explanation on Christian-Paganism in Poems...*). In this essay, Třanovský criticises the practice of Christian authors of the time who use metaphors from ancient mythology in their poetry.

The raging Thirty Year' War, however, soon made its way to Silesia and caught up with Třanovský in Bielsko. He was forced to take his family and flee once again, this time to Hungary. In 1629, he left for the Orava Castle, where he was temporarily under the protection of Count Gaspar Ilesházy. He spent a short time as castle preacher and engaged in lively contact with the local Evangelical church structures. This probably played a part in his invitation to become a pastor in Liptov in 1631. He was tasked with managing the church in Svätý Mikuláš (now Liptovský Mikuláš) and the adjacent village of Okoličné. Svätý Mikuláš and the surrounding villages were predominantly Evangelical.

Following the tense situation in the region he grew up in and which he was forced to hastily abandon, Třanovský found peace in Hungary. However, the horrors of the Thirty Years' War, which he was constantly escaping, had weakened his health considerably. During his stay in the Liptov region, he was once again plagued by problems with his eyesight, making his work considerably

more difficult. During his time in Svätý Mikuláš, Třanovský published his most significant work. In 1635, he published a collection of prayers titled *Phiala Odoramentorum* (*A Bowl of Odours*). The prayers are assembled with a view to the needs of pastors. They are relatively extensive. Třanovský recommends reading them in more than one sitting. Several of the prayers are conceived as minute sermons, including instruction, admonition, and delight. Třanovský calls this form thinking through prayer and mentions as a model the church father Augustine of Hippo (354–430) or the later Johann Gerhard (1582–1637). Třanovský's prayers are characteristic in their great emphasis on the entire church – both the individual and the congregation. The book contains prayers that can be used both in private and in public, for pastors as well as laymen. It is clear that the collection was not created all at once – Třanovský wrote and translated the prayers throughout the duration of his career as a pastor, finally publishing them while in Svätý Mikuláš. The only dated prayer bears the inscription 1624: a prayer for the end of the plague that he wrote in Valašské Meziříčí – Třanovský lost two children to the plague. His prayers are remarkably personal and intimate. They project Třanovský's difficult life experience, solutions to which he sought primarily in prayer.

In addition to more extensive works, Třanovský also used his time in Svätý Mikuláš to prepare for print a small volume titled *Formulae Puerilium Colloquiorum Latina, Bohemica et Germanica lingua* (*A List of Boys' Conversations in the Latin, Czech, and German Language*) – a book of trilingual conversations in Latin, Czech, and German. It is proof that Třanovský was active



The *Phiala Odoramentorum* prayer book (Levoča, Vavřínek Brewer, 1635)

as a pedagogue even during his time as a pastor. The book was originally compiled in the 16th century by the music theorist and composer Sebald Heyden (1499–1561) as a Latin-German conversation book for the students at the Latin school in Nuremberg. It then appeared in various language extensions. The Czech translation by Jan Vopatovský is from the end of the 16th century. Třanovský made an updated version, as he considered knowledge of Latin indispensable. Latin, however, was not the only language he considered important – there is also German, and Czech too, “meaning Slovak” (“seu Slavonicum”), which was also making its way through Europe. It is interesting to note that Třanovský equates Slovak and Czech. The dialogues are constructed in such a way that the students like them – they are short, yet useful. It is clear that Třanovský had an excellent feeling for pedagogy. He points out on several occasions that his works are to serve for people’s education. His texts are usually divided into short numbered segments so as to make them easier to remember. That is the essence of his didactic writing system. *Formulae Puerilium* was published in 1635 and was primarily intended for use at the school in Svätý Mikuláš.

Editor and Hymnographer

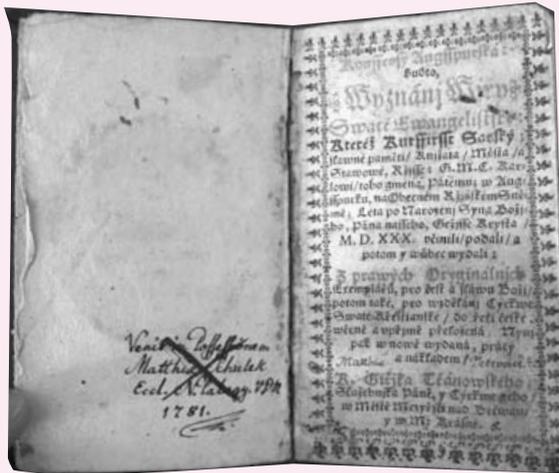
Towards the end of 1635, Třanovský completed and sent to the printers his most significant work, the songbook *Cithara Sanctorum* (*The Saints’ Harp*). At the time, he could have had no idea that his hymnal would dominate Lutheran households in the region for almost four centuries. The songbook was printed in 1636. The songs and other texts are unnumbered. It is difficult to determine the number of songs in the first edition due to the segmentation of some of the texts. Altogether, the songbook portion contains four hundred and seventy text units including antiphons and biblical texts, particularly psalms. There are four hundred and three songs proper, all anonymous. Třanovský lists neither their author nor the source in which he found them. Neither does he sign his own songs. The only exception are two authors whose names he always gives: Martin Luther and Philipp Nicolai. A rarity is a Latin note under the song *Ježíši, dárcu milosti* (*Jesus, Giver of Mercy*): “Omnes Auctoris prima ist haec, praëijt Odas: Qua juvenis Christum, saepe colebat, ovans.” (“Of all the author’s songs, this is the first with which he praised Christ since his youth.”) This suggests it is Třanovský’s oldest song.



Konfessý Augspurská (Olomouc, Kryštof Kutč, 1620)



The title page of Nuptiis Reverendi Viri, a collection of laudatory poems (Praha, Matěj Pardubský, 1613)



Konfessý Augspurská – title page (Olomouc, Kryštof Kutč, 1620)

From a literary perspective, the compiler worked from older Czech translations of the Bible (Melantrich's Bible and the Bible of Kralice), the Jena edition of Luther's works, and period songbooks predominantly of Czech and Moravian origin. A more significant language group is that of songs of Latin origin. Mostly, these were songs known throughout Europe. Třanovský also included in his songbook several songs which he encountered in Hungary. Connecting all these influences (German, Czech, Latin, and Hungarian) into a single whole is what makes the songbook unique. Around a third of the repertoire – an impressive hundred and eighty songs – had never been recorded in earlier sources. They are both original songs and translations from German and Latin, and we ascribe their authorship to Třanovský.

Melodically, the collection is dominated by repertoire of Czech and Moravian origin. Identifying the oldest instances, we find around thirty different Bohemian hymnological sources. In the German-speaking area, we find the names of well-known composers of the 16th and early 17th centuries, including Johann Walter (*Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort – Maintain Us, Lord, In Your Word*), Melchior Vulpius (*Christus der ist mein Leben – Christ is My Life*), Nicolaus Hermann (*Wenn mein Stündlein verhanden ist – When My Hour Comes*), Bartolomäus Gesius (*Du Friedenfürst, Herr Jesu Christ – You Prince of Peace, Lord Jesus Christ*), Nicolaus Decius (*O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig – Oh, Innocent Lamb of God; Allein Gott in der höh sey Ehr – Honour God Alone*), Hans Leo Haßler (*Herzlich thut mich verlangen – I Wish from My Heart*), and others. Most of the German repertoire is from the first half of the 16th century. There is a marked preference for songs from older Lutheran sources such as *Eyn Enchiridion (A Handbook, Erfurt, 1524)* and *Eyn geystlich Gesangk Buchleyn (A Book of Spiritual Songs, Erfurt, 1524)*.

Třanovský enjoyed using Calvinist metrical melodies, and he set his new texts to melodies from French psalms. These melodies are more frequent in the songbook than Třanovský's own



Cithara Sanctorum (Levoča, Vavřinec Brewer, 1636)



A sample of the notation in the Cithara Sanctorum (Levoča, Vavřinec Brewer, 1636)



Cithara Sanctorum. Třanovský's ex libris is on the left, on the right is the beginning of the psalms (Levoča, Vavřinec Brewer, 1636)



Formulae Puerilium Colloquiorum Latina, Bohemica et Germanica lingua (Levoča, Vavřinec Brewer, 1636)

new melodies. Current scholarship suggests that the collection contains twelve of Třanovský's original melodies. He generally avoided using his own earlier works as a foundation for the songbook. He only adapted one melody from his collection *Odarum Sacrarum Sive Hymnorum*. All three works were later published in Levoča by his friend Vavřinec Brewer. In 1636, Třanovský fell seriously ill. We know little of his illness, only that he was confined to his bed for eight months. He died on May 29th 1637. He did not live to see the second edition of his songbook published.

The oeuvre of Jiří Třanovský stands on the borders of the Renaissance and the Baroque. In his education and in formal terms, Třanovský was a typical humanist man of letters with a passion for Latin and the forms of classical poetry. The content, however, belongs to the Baroque. He does not allow anything to enter into his works that is of non-Christian origin, that has no foundation in scripture, or that is theologically untenable. As the editor of his songbook, he tastefully selected a combination of songs of various origins, which he then implanted into the context of the Lutheran orthodoxy. He selected and arranged them so that his work survived and remained up to date for centuries after it was first published.

Prepared in collaboration with the Musica Rudolphina research centre.