

# Classical Tradition in Czech Renaissance and Baroque Literature<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. The classical scholarship and its role in the course of Czech medieval and early modern history

The first contacts of Czech people with classical culture were established through Irish, Italian and German missionaries, who came to the Czech lands from 8th century AD to spread Christianity among the pagan population, worshipping traditional Slavic gods. In the Early Middle Ages, Central Europe, including the Czech lands, was a crossroads of Western and Eastern culture, influenced both by the Latin West and the Greek, i.e. Byzantine East. Therefore, both Latin and Old Slavonic scholarship (initiated and still supported in Great Moravia, the first medieval state in Central European territory, by the mission of *St. Constantine* and *St. Methodius* from Byzantium) flourished in Bohemia and Moravia.

But after the schism in Christianity in the 11th century and hand in hand with the subsequent isolation of Byzantium, it was Latin culture that became predominant. Almost all literature, including chronicles, Christian legends,

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works in the field of law and theology, were written in Latin. Some of these Latin works, including the Chronicle of *Kosmas Pragensis* from the 12th century, are true masterpieces of Latin style, reflecting the strong influence of Western European schools and – with regard to cultural development in the Early Middle Ages – a very good and deep knowledge of European classical tradition<sup>2</sup>. Step by step the new vernacular languages began to be used in the literature<sup>3</sup>, in law and administration of the Czech kingdom. Practically from this period till the middle of the 20th century a multicultural and multilingual society existed in the Czech lands, and Latin was one of the most important tools linking different nationalities, beliefs and promoting a sense of cultural unity<sup>4</sup>.

The reign of Bohemian king and Roman emperor Charles IV represents the key era of culture development, when Bohemia, namely Prague with its royal court and newly established university, the first in Central Europe, became one of the crucial European political and spiritual centres. In the literature and thinking of this era we can find signs of pre-Humanism<sup>5</sup>, also the first ideas of reformation emerged in the tolerant Bohemian society of that time.

The attempts of reformation resulted in the Hussite uprising and subsequent wars that drove the Czech lands towards isolation, religious intolerance and cutting links with European Western culture. The beginning of the Renaissance and humanism, though adumbrated by the fascinating personality of Charles IV, was delayed until 16th century<sup>6</sup>.

Once again in the 16th century and in the early 17th century Bohemia under the rule of Habsburg kings, who were also Roman emperors, became one of the leading European centres<sup>7</sup>. Science, Czech, German and Latin literature flourished. However, the tragic conflict between Catholics and Protestants during the Thirty Years' War brought religious tolerance to an end. Bohemia was re-

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to his studies in Liège (in the 11th century known as the “Athens of the North”) Cosmas became familiar with the heritage of the Carolingian Renaissance and was probably the first writer in the history of Czech literature, who read and quoted classical authors in the original Latin.

<sup>3</sup> Yet from the early 13th century as well as Latin, literature written in Czech, Hebrew and German began to develop.

<sup>4</sup> The society in the Czech lands was very diverse from the point of view of language, ethnicity and later also religious belief, but educated people and intellectuals belonging to these different groups used Latin as a unique tool of mutual communication and exchange of ideas. As anywhere in Europe, Latin was used as language of instruction and education at Prague university.

<sup>5</sup> The pioneer of humanist ideas in the Czech lands in that era was the emperor's secretary, Bishop John of Neumarkt (Iohannes Noviforensis), who was well familiar with classical Latin authors and also kept up correspondence with Italian humanists Cola di Rienzo and Francesco Petrarca (Rieckenberg 1974: 563-564).

<sup>6</sup> Also in the turmoil of Hussite wars a great part of the literature, including Hussite propaganda, will still be written in Latin as many leading figures of the Hussite movement were well educated university intellectuals.

<sup>7</sup> Prague hosted such personalities as Johannes Kepler and Tycho de Brahe.

Catholicised in a brutal way and many leading intellectuals, including the great European humanist Comenius were forced to leave the country and live in exile. But both the Protestant culture in exile and domestic Catholic Baroque culture were linked through the common heritage of Latin and Greek humanism and a similar perception of classical tradition. The knowledge of Latin and Greek was supported through a well-developed system of education, namely gymnasiums administrated by members of the Piarist and Jesuit order. The annual presentations of Latin drama were an indivisible part of curriculum at these gymnasiums, many of these plays are still waiting in Czech archives to be explored and published. Regardless of the lack of religious freedom the Baroque era represents one of the peaks of Czech culture in terms of science, fine arts and architecture, contributing essentially to the identity of the Czech society.

Our study aims to map the key influences of the culture of classical antiquity in the literature of the Czech Renaissance and Baroque, covering the era from the first decades of the 16th century to the early 18th century. Since the scale of ancient influence is remarkably wide, we will carry out our research in the form of case studies concerning examples of selected works of literature and selected motifs from ancient history.

## 2. The classical tradition in Renaissance and Baroque literature of the Czech lands

The Czech lands are indisputably one of the regions of the transalpine part of Europe, which were most profoundly influenced by Renaissance and Baroque culture. The Baroque, in particular, has become an inseparable feature of Czech architecture, painting, literature, music, landscape, even religiosity and mentality. The pronounced relation to classical tradition, which began in humanism and was further developed in Baroque scholarship and culture<sup>8</sup>, is one of the meaningful attributes of Renaissance and Baroque art throughout Europe including the Czech lands. In our study we aim to answer the question, how motifs from classical Greek and Roman history and the influence of ancient historiography were used in Czech and Latin literature during the Renaissance and Baroque era in the territory of the Czech lands.

In the key study concerning our topic, *Antické prvky v české poezii 17. a 18. století*, Zdeňka Tichá (1974: 11) says: “The ancient elements in Baroque poetry can be divided into three groups: they partly exist in the form of theoretical guidelines in poetry textbooks, in stories of historical ancient figures and partly in the mythological ancient stories (figures). The last two groups are usually not divided: historical and mythological figures (stories) most often exist together”<sup>9</sup>.

This statement can be considered as the methodological base, which we can apply to the whole stream of Renaissance and Baroque literature. Hence we will

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Villari 1991 and Reynolds, Marshall 1983.

<sup>9</sup> Unless explicitly stated, all translations from Czech and Latin sources into English are by the author of the study.

begin our analysis of selected literary texts. The influence of the ancient tradition on the early literature of the Early Modern Period in the Czech lands is essentially more broad and more stratified, since it is connected with more levels of literary works including the areas of literature – philosophy, philosophy of history etc. It is on the basis of these assumptions that we have determined our proper model<sup>10</sup> of classical influences on Renaissance and Baroque literature can be determined:

1. theoretical guidelines in the poetry textbooks of the Renaissance and Baroque era;
2. practical application of these guidelines – the creation according to the principles of ancient and classical poetics – metric forms, poetic formations, rhetorics of the Ciceronian Age, the classical forms and common genres;
3. particular ancient Greek and Roman realia – mythology, history, everyday life;
4. direct quotations from classical works;
5. adoption of ideas and philosophical concepts-philosophy, historiography;
6. adoption of classical metaphors and symbols-it occurs particularly in emblems connected with the theatre and in Renaissance and Baroque festivities;
7. classical topics-pastoral, omina.

3. The adoption of classical historical motifs in Czech Renaissance and Baroque literature

### 3.1. The attitude towards ancient history in the Early Modern Period

In her already quoted study *Antické prvky v české poezii 17. a 18. století* Zdeňka Tichá (1974:102) put the question of principle: “At first sight it would appear that the existence of ancient ‘pagan’ elements in Baroque Catholic poetry is somewhat absurd”. But she contradicts her objection referring to the long tradition of the synthesis of ancient and Christian culture, which already existed in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. This synthesis was continued and developed by Renaissance humanism to such an extent that we could speak of universal European culture built on ancient and Jewish-Christian foundations, which are inseparable within its scope, therefore classical antiquity was not just an obvious part of the inventory of Renaissance but also Baroque culture. We meet it in practically all genres of literature. The same understanding holds true for motifs adopted from ancient history.

In the adoption of ancient tradition in the literature of early modern times in the Czech lands we meet two tendencies, which complement each other. On the one side, this tradition took over in the conservative form, as it was created by Renaissance Humanism and it was absorbed by the Jesuit scholarship and maintained without greater changes. Aside from this, we see a new perception

<sup>10</sup> Kysučan analyses this question in more detail in his study *Antika v latinské barokní literatuře českých zemí* (2011: 178).

of classical antiquity, which was born in the 17th century and is characterized by a certain shift, or as the case may be by the spread of interest to other periods and other regions of the classical world<sup>11</sup>.

The crucial figure initiating and at the same time representing these developments is the Dutch humanist, Justus Lipsius (1547-1606), who began to focus his attention on stoic philosophy in contrast to the still prevalent Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical tradition. He became famous as a careful philologist – editor of Tacitus and Seneca – and also played a principal part in humanist historiography placing emphasis on the critical attitude to history and sources. These cultural changes in the perception of classical antiquity have naturally affected the most important stratum of Latin literature in Czech culture. The mentioned changes of approach to classical antiquity are reflected in the literary work of Czech writers and scholars, such as Comenius (Jan Amos Komenský) and Bohuslav Balbín, who maintained the connection with the cultural development of their time – Comenius through correspondence and personal relations with prominent European humanists, Balbín through the transnational community of the Jesuit order, of which he was a member. Comenius drew lots of ideas from antiquity for his monumental pansophic synthesis, in which he accepted classical antiquity as one of the most important and key cultural periods contributing to the universality and harmony of human culture. So in essence he referred to Hellenistic culture and its ideal of cosmopolitanism. We can say, without exaggeration, that *Diogenes* in his drama *Diogenes Cynicus redivivus*, who calls himself *civis terrarum* (the cosmopolitan citizen of the world), also declares the ideas and conviction of Comenius presenting the Greek society of the Hellenistic era as a positive example deserving to be followed by contemporaries, especially in the turmoil of the Thirty Years' War<sup>12</sup>. Then Balbín, in accordance with the traditions of classical culture, creates his textbooks of rhetoric and poetry as well as his historical-political works, inspired by the philosophy of the

<sup>11</sup> The whole situation is faithfully characterized by the authors of the report from the professional conference *Welche Antike? Konkurrierende Rezeptionen des Altertums im Barock*: “During the stormy events of the 17th century, whether it was politics, religion, nationality or art that was placed on the agenda, classical antiquity increasingly came to the forefront. The intensification, extensification and categoric spread of interest in classical antiquity in the 17th century brought forth the visions of classical antiquity, which were in competition with one another. A growing number and heterogeneity of available classical texts and archaeological evidence were followed by more profound philological and archaeological interpretations. So a more heterogeneous picture of classical antiquity was born. Without regards to the confessional and regional differences the wave of many-sided interest in classical antiquity of all periods and geographical regions sprung up at this time, interest, which went far beyond the limits of canonical Mediterranean antiquity. The interest in the Silver Age, in Latin of the Neronian epoch, the early Christians, the patristics and adoption of Jewish antiquity spread. While early humanism was connected only with Italy, the humanism of the 16th and 17th century also spread to other regions of Northern, Central, Eastern and Southern Europe” (Bierbaum *et al.* 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Such a way of thinking is connected with the worldview and irenic efforts of Comenius, suffering from wars, intolerance and exile also affecting his personal life.

history of Justus Lipsius. Balbín is also considered as one of the last defenders of literary classicism inherited from humanism (Varcl 1978: 232; Hejnic 1974: 233), which he promoted theoretically in his textbooks and practically applied to his own literary work.

While Comenius, Balbín and their followers, who were in touch with European intellectuals and cultural developments, accepted and exploited the recent impulses in the changing perception of classical culture and approach to classical tradition, in other streams of Czech literature only static elements of classical culture and scholar stereotypes were adopted.

### 3.2 The ancient historical motifs in religious literature (homiletic and legends)

The historical motifs coming from the classical world are present practically in all typical genres of Czech literature. The homiletic production, spreading at an extraordinary pace in the Baroque period, was greatly inspired by classical rhetoric. The majority of preachers underwent excellent training obtained at Jesuit, later then also Piarist schools, where they not only became familiar with the principles of ancient rhetoric both on a theoretical and practical level, which they later applied to their own preaching practice, but also studied the ancient culture as a whole, including the history. Studying texts of ancient historians (Herodotus, Thucydides, Sallust, Caesar, Livy, Tacitus) formed an inseparable part of the curriculum of both classical languages at that time. This classical influence then contributed to the adoption of motifs taken from ancient history and realia. On the basis of her detailed analysis of Baroque homiletic production, Horáková (1995: 416) documents references to Plutarch and Pliny the Younger, as well as the use and creative development of different classical symbols, for example a reference to the well-known Latin abbreviation S.P.Q.R. and its 'classical' and 'Baroque' interpretation (Horáková 1993: 25).

We also consider the description of different supernatural omens in legends to be certain evidence of classical influence in the field of historiography. The Baroque legend has obvious links to a long tradition of the legend genre as it developed in early Christian and medieval literature, but in a certain sense we can consider it an "ancient biography in the Christian manner". The Christian legend has many common features of ancient biography, namely topics. The supernatural signs play an important role in these topics. So-called *omina* were very popular in antiquity and were an inseparable part of classical biographies (Suetonius, *Historia Augustina*). They also influenced medieval literature, as we can see in the example of Einhard's biography of Charles the Great, imitating Suetonius' *Life of Augustus*<sup>13</sup>. In

<sup>13</sup> The special interest in these omens came partly from natural belief, partly from a greater pleasure in the occult phenomena in the specific spiritual atmosphere of Late Antiquity. At the same time these omens developed into special literary *topoi*, inevitable decoration of the genre of biography. Christianity strictly rejected any belief in the occult phenomena of course, only with the exception of miracles connected with Jesus Christ, other figures of religious tradition and the saints. We can find expressive examples of such rejection in the works of Augustine and

this context we cannot leave out well-known supernatural signs in connection with the most popular Baroque Czech saint, Jan Nepomucký (John of Nepomuk). The miraculous phenomena connected with him have become a part of the symbolism not only of the Baroque preachers, who addressed the personality of this saint, but also of the sacred architecture dedicated to his memory (Saint John's Church on Zelená hora near Žďár in Moravia – now a UNESCO World Heritage site). Similar signs are mentioned in the Baroque texts connected with Saint Jan Nepomucký – the radiance that appeared over Nepomuk on the day of his birth, and stars, shining over the Vltava River in Prague in the place where he was thrown from Charles Bridge. For example, Eligius of Saint George, a member of the Order of Barefoot Augustinians, in his ceremonial preaching *Vox Christi vicaria*, delivered on 22th May 1729, in the year of his canonization, says in his speech<sup>14</sup>:

Blessed John was brought into the world by parents of Catholic belief, noble in their piety, living in an honest marriage. Their devotion to the Mother of God helped in the childbirth. So it was that the holy source of the Prague diocese, Jan Nepomucký, the brightest light of the Czech lands was born. The lights that were born first lit up the sky. They drove back the dusk from the clear Aurora [...]

But the perpetration of crime disappointed its perpetrators, since the triumphant perseverance did not set the stage of punishment, but the stage of victory, the palm of martyrdom has been made wet with waters, with the laurel<sup>15</sup> of entrusted reticence, the trumpet sounded out glory, the night changed into day and John was flooded with waters and stars<sup>16</sup>.

also Isidor of Seville. Isidor in his *Etymologies* emphatically dismisses astrology (*Etymologiae* VIII, 9), as well as any other occult practices and paranormal phenomena, linked – as he says – to the influence of demons, which have to be avoided by any pious Christian. Taking this into account, it is even more remarkable the way that for example Frankish writer Einhard in his famous biography of Charles the Great *Vita Caroli Magni* mentions the traditional signs of vaticination announcing the death of Charles the Great (eclipse of the Sun and Moon, fall of the emperor from a horse, tremors and mysterious sounds, spoiling letters mentioning the king's name). Although Einhard was a zealous Christian, his desire for the literary imitation of ancient genres including all of their features was strong enough to prevail over the so far unacceptable omens and Einhard without any hesitation incorporated them in his literary work. Typologically accurately, the same kind of *omina* mentioned by Einhard, are present in ancient biographies that in Carolingian times were well-known and read (for example the already mentioned Suetonius). Beginning with Einhard, the use of these supernatural signs became an inseparable part of topics also in Christian literature not only in the Middle Ages, but also later in the period of humanism and Baroque.

<sup>14</sup> Published in the translation of L. Kysučan's in: "Nádoba zapálená" (Horáková 2000: 101-111).

<sup>15</sup> Arena, palm, laurel – the symbols connected with ancient sport and competitions, later became symbols of Christian martyrdom. In Christian tradition ancient military and sport symbols acquired new sense and meaning.

<sup>16</sup> These supernatural signs and events used in Baroque literature do not need to be regarded as part of classical tradition, but could have been taken from medieval literature, where they played an important role from the Early Middle Ages, as mentioned above.

Similar topics, including supernatural signs, can already be found in the literature of Renaissance Humanism<sup>17</sup>. The similarity of all of these signs to the topics of Saint John's biographies and legends is evident and gives us testimony about universal topics, established in ancient historiography, namely in its later period, when consumers of literature enjoyed a growing pleasure in irrationality and supernatural signs became more attractive and sensational to them.

### 3.3 Theatre of World and Theatre of History

The motifs from ancient history to a great extent occurred in Renaissance and Baroque drama. Ancient dramas or dramas dealing with classical topics already appeared on Czech stages in the 16th century. Italian influence in the second half of the 16th century brought strong inspiration to the Czech theatre and court, and town festivities (for example carnival) began to be organized in a festive manner. As well as mythological figures so figures from ancient history appeared at these celebrations that took place in prominent locations, as witnessed in the following description of a festivity at Prague Castle (Varcl 1978: 281):

And also at the scenic masquerade ballet organized at Prague castle in February 1617 for emperor Mathias, the stage, symbolizing Elysium, was occupied by figures from ancient history, starting with Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great and their female counterparts representing Camilla (Queen of Volsci from Virgil's *Aeneid*) and Penthesilea. The entire performance ended with fabulous singers and poets: Linus, Orpheus, Homer, Hesiod, Virgil, Horace, Catullus and Ovid. Finally, the emperor's wife was addressed with Italian verses by gods Mercury and Amor.

The ancient topics in Jesuit theatre appear both in school plays and public performances, for example in connection with royal and imperial coronation ceremonies (so-called *ludi caesarei*). The Latin coronation play *Constantinus victor, hilaris tragoedia acta Pragae... 1627* (Varcl 1978: 281) commemorating the personality of Roman emperor Constantine the Great, was performed in 1627. In the course of the 17th century less well-known ancient topics were also ex-

<sup>17</sup> For example, Gianfrancesco Pico in biography of his uncle Pico della Mirandola (*Ioannis Pici Mirandulae viri omni disciplinam genere consumatissimi vita per Ioannem Franciscum illustri principis Galeotti Pici filium conscripta*, a cura di T. Sorbelli, Modena 1963) mentions a supernatural sign announcing his famous uncle's birth: "Before his birth a small sign appeared. At the moment of the child's birth a round flame appeared above the mother's bedroom, but it soon disappeared. Maybe its circular form announced the excellence of the intellect of a man, who was born at this time among mortals, who would in honour of his name be glorified throughout the Earth. [...] Namely not once can we read that the birth of the most educated and holiest of people is sometimes announced or followed by unusual signs, so that these people already from the cradle can by God's direction be singled out from the crowd of other ordinary people and be predestined to perform famous acts".



ploited. Such a development provides us with a clear testimony of the profound knowledge of ancient culture and history among educated people in Bohemian society. For example, in the year 1677 the drama *Aemilius Paulus Papinianus* was performed in St. Clement College (Clementinum) in Prague. It describes the fate of brave Roman lawyer Papinianus, who was killed by Caracalla in the 3rd century, since he had criticised the murder of the emperor's brother, Geta (Varcl 1978: 283). The Christian and ancient motifs are interconnected in Jesuit theatre. The typical Christian virtues – for example Papinianus' protest and spiritual rebellion against injury and wrong-doing – are demonstrated on ancient figures.

The already mentioned drama of Comenius *Diogenes cynicus redivivus*, performed as a school play in Lešno in 1640 and then published in 1658 in Amsterdam, represented a source of inspiration for Jesuit theatre. This play in certain measure exceeded the usual educational and sometimes naive moral dimension of school plays. Diogenes is depicted as a hero, opposing the cruelty and absurdity of human society with a mature philosophical overview and fresh humour. Comenius makes use of original ancient texts, namely those of Seneca and Diogenes Laertios, so his hero pronounces authentic classical sentences and statements. He works with classical quotations in a very intelligent manner, so his plays contain vivid dialogues and jokes. Together with his second school drama – *Abrahamas patriarcha* – this play delimited the thematic circle of later Baroque plays, exploiting both classical and biblical/Christian motifs. Therefore, we must disagree with the statement of Varcl (1978: 282), that “the development of Czech Baroque era theatre didn't make use of Comenius' genial inspiration and the quantitatively prevailing production of Jesuit and other order schools, and Catholic brotherhoods exploited classical topics in very superficial way”.

On the contrary we can say that Jesuit theatre is fully linked to Comenius' pedagogical ideas placing emphasis on teaching history and Latin through the active participation of students in the theatre play and its dramaturgy. Members of the Jesuit order were quite familiar with the heritage of his creative intellect and just further developed the tradition of humanist schools, which flourished in parallel both in Protestant and Catholic territories. Comenius' works were not only studied, but also published by Jesuit scholars. For example, his famous philological textbook *Janua linguarum reserata* was published in St. Clement's printing house<sup>18</sup> twice, in 1694 and then later 1716 (Čornejová 1995: 155). Jesuit Bohuslav Balbín highly admires and praises Comenius' beautiful style of the Czech language and also the qualities of his character. In his *Miscellanea*<sup>19</sup> he writes:

He published too many works, but nothing that resisted Catholic belief. Reading his works, I find out that he never had any intention of injuring Catholic religion. His brilliant eloquence, remarkable wealth of words, profound thinking and description of secular vanity giving clear testimony of his excellent

<sup>18</sup> This printing house was affiliated to St. Clement College, headquarters of the Prague Jesuit University.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted from *Rozmanitosti* as translated by Helena Businská (in: Čornejová 1995: 155).

character. He deserves the highest praise and a great community of readers for his extraordinary education.

It is evident that just as in the period of humanism, reformation and religious wars, as well in Baroque times the classical tradition represented some kind of bond, which connected people of different faiths and educated them in the spirit of tolerance and respect for each other.

The importance of ancient topics for Baroque theatre is apparent also in the text-book of theatre *De actione scenica*<sup>20</sup> (full title *Dissertatio de actione scenica cum figuris eandem explicantibus, et observationibus quibusdam de arte comica*) published by theatre theorist Jesuit Franciscus Lang<sup>21</sup>. The author was strongly influenced by Aristotle and his concept of theatre. In his review of symbols and emblems, representing an appendix of some kind to his theoretical treatise, the classical, biblical, alchemist and cabalist motifs are presented and highlighted together in a syncretic way. For example, the History is described as:

The History: The Angel turning his face and at the same time without hesitation looks at some book, sits on Saturn's back. Or another angel places his feet on a stone cube. Or he has purple-green clothes and bears a tablet hanging from a lance, where the famous words of Cicero are visible: Witness of times, light of truth, living memory, teacher of life, messenger of old times.

The author of the treatise again reveals his deep knowledge of classical culture in the tiniest details. The detailed quotation of Cicero's sentence concerning history (Cic. *De orat.* 2,36) is truly remarkable, since this sentence is usually used in its abbreviated form of *Historia magistra vitae*.

The school drama *Lacrimae Alexandri Magni*<sup>22</sup>, performed on 18th January 1764, could serve as a typical example of classical influence on Czech theatre of the Baroque period. The text is anonymous as its author still remains unknown. He worked probably as professor of the Piarist gymnasium in the little Moravian town of Lipník nad Bečvou. It is a traditional declamation school drama and plays of such kind are mentioned also by Franciscus Lang<sup>23</sup>. The plot was taken from a small episode mentioned in Plutarch's biography of Alexander the Great. He becomes jealous of his father Philip, who is leading the military campaign in remote Illyria. As a consequence of the prophecy foreseeing danger for Macedonia and his father's army, Alexander decides to build his own army with the help of friends. But before Alexander is ready to launch his own cam-

<sup>20</sup> In our study we quote from Ingolstadt edition published by Andreas de la Hay in the year 1717. The Czech translation of this work was published by Markéta Jacková, but we quote from so far unpublished translation of K. Harvánek, J. Herufek and L. Kysučan.

<sup>21</sup> Franz Lang (1654-1727) was a Jesuit monk, professor at Jesuit gymnasiums and theatre theorist, who came from Bavaria. He also spent some time in North Bohemia.

<sup>22</sup> In our study we work with the edition and translation by L. Kysučan (*Slzy Alexandra Velikého*, Praha 2007).

<sup>23</sup> *De actione scaenica* XIV.

paign, a messenger from Philip arrives with information of a glorious victory. But Alexander falls into a deep depression, since he thinks his father has taken all the laurels of victory from him and he suffers from the thought that there is no other act of glory he can still perform.

The purpose of this drama is purely educational, firstly with the intention to educate and shape the character of young students through classical examples perceived as a positive inspiration, secondly to familiarise them with classical topics and Latin language. Alexander is described as sometimes an unbalanced ambitious young man, but on the other hand as an example of self-sacrificing patriotism. Ancient figures used to be depicted with this educational intention already from the very beginning of humanism and the educational role of classical antiquity was highlighted again and again until the period of German neo-humanism with its conception of a classical gymnasium, where ancient history and literature were perceived as an educational tool contributing to the upbringing and cultivation of decent and honest citizens. At the same time, school theatre was perceived as a tool supporting theoretical knowledge primarily that based upon classical culture. Thanks to active participation in performance, students were trained in the active use of Latin, in classical metrics, poetics and rhetoric and also ancient history.

The personality and adventures of Alexander the Great became a very popular source of inspiration for literary works of different genres since classical antiquity<sup>24</sup>. The figure was very popular in the Middle Ages, when – similarly as Virgil's Aeneas – was perceived as an example of heroic knighthood. This idea of Alexander as a perfect knight, so close to medieval culture, depicted in the figure of Alexander gained even greater popularity in the period of humanism and Baroque, when he became the subject of more than two hundred operas. Some of them were performed also in the Czech lands. Alexander the Great also plays a distinctive part in the literary work of Comenius<sup>25</sup>.

The anonymous author of the drama is proof of the excellent knowledge of the topography of the classical world, the plot of the play is situated in an accurately delimited environment and corresponding geographical reality. At the same time, the author is also an excellent connoisseur of ancient history as his text is rich in countless historical allusions and accurate use of realia. He is able

<sup>24</sup> Alexander's fate is described by various classical historians (Arrianos, Curtius Rufus, Claudius Aelianus, Justinus), as well as by biographers (Cornelius Nepos, Plutarch), in Latin and Greek novels of Late Antiquity and also in Byzantine texts. As a man who transcended the usual human possibilities and limits, he became an impressive source of fascination also for further periods of European culture. The most famous depiction of Alexander's personality is to be found in Latin *Alexandreis* of Gautier de Chatillon, in the German poem of Ulrich von Eschenbach and in other poems of that kind, including the old *Czech Alexandreis*.

<sup>25</sup> Klučka (1957: 91-97) proves that Comenius perceives the personality of Alexander as an example of inspiring character features that could be used for a didactic purpose. His positive features are also highlighted in the already mentioned school drama *Diogenes cynicus redivivus*, where he is portrayed as a wise man interested in philosophy and attempting to establish a friendship with the famous philosopher.

to share with his audience the already cosmopolitan atmosphere of Alexander's transnational and multicultural Hellenistic empire. The supreme ancient deity Zeus/Jupiter is always mentioned with the epithet Ammon<sup>26</sup>.

There are also complete scenes and images directly inspired by classical works present in this drama. For example, the picture of the city of Olynthus, razed to the ground by the Macedonian army compared with winds emitted from an open cave is without any doubt an imitation of the well-known passage from Virgil's *Aeneid* (1, 82-88), where the king of winds asked by the goddess Juno sends a wind storm on the fleet of Aeneas<sup>27</sup>.

Non secus, ac venti, quos antro emisit aperto  
Hippotades, laxisque viam patefecit habenis,  
ut sternant messes, vertantque a culmine tecta,  
et fracta trepidas perturbent arbore silvas.

The figures of soldier Tranio and physician Aristippus reflect certain inspiration by Plautus and his famous comedy *Miles gloriosus*. But the epilogue of the drama takes on a serious tone again. The narrator in form of a panegyric foretells the future glory of Alexander:

[...] in the future only Alexander shall be the hero, who acquires immortal glory, somebody, to whom all of Greeks will be grateful for being their King. Persians and European nations will be afraid of him and the whole world will admire him<sup>28</sup>.

### 3.4. Didactic literature

Not only belles-lettres, but also professional and didactic literature gives us examples of the use of classical topics. One of the most illustrative is the book *Magia posthuma per iuridicum illud pro et contra suspensio nonnullibi iudicio inves-*

<sup>26</sup> Such author's strategy commemorates the fact that after the conquest of Egypt, seen by Egyptians themselves as liberation from Persian rule, Alexander was proclaimed by Egyptian priests as the supreme ruler – pharaoh of Egypt at the Siwa Oasis.

<sup>27</sup> But the author makes creative use of Virgil's text. He did not use his verses literally, but only borrowed a picture and was able to articulate it with his own words and verses. For comparison, here we present the original Virgil's text (*Aeneid* 1, 82-88):

Haec ubi dicta, cavum conversa cuspide montem  
impulit in latus ac venti, velut agmine facto,  
qua data porta ruunt et terras turbine perflunt.  
Incubitere mari, totumque a sedibus imis  
una Eurus Notusque ruunt creberque procellis  
Africus, et vastos volvunt ad litora fluctus.

<sup>28</sup> The vividness of the text is proved by the fact that contemporary Czech music composer Tomáš Hanzlík composed the opera *Slzy Alexandra Velikého* (premiered on 25th January 2007 at the National Theatre in Prague). The performance mixed the elements of Baroque theatre with contemporary concepts.

*tigata*, published by Karl Ferdinand von Schertz, a church lawyer coming from the historical Moravian capital, the city of Olomouc. This treatise has so far in the Czech Republic been underestimated and is almost a forgotten work<sup>29</sup>, but acquired unprecedented popularity abroad, namely in the community of people interested in the history of vampirism, magic and related occult phenomena. The author does his best to address the question of how to deal with cases of vampirism in accordance with law, ethics and Catholic belief. Many cases of vampirism are documented here from older literature and based on alleged personal testimonies of his contemporaries.

Although Schertz's work is remarkably interesting also from the point of view of general cultural history, we must place emphasis especially on the classical motifs. We can divide them into several groups. The first group contains quotations from ancient, mainly Roman authors. Quite common are quotations from Justinian's *Codex Corpus iuris civilis*, which are of a truly professional nature and serve as an argument in controversial and questionable cases<sup>30</sup>. A great number of other quotations from Roman literature also appears in the text (Cicero, Horace, Juvenal, Ovid, Pliny the Elder, Pliny the Younger, Virgil). Some quotations are adapted in accordance with the author's intention and context of the work, for example the form of Ovid's well-known verse from the *Metamorphoses* is adapted as follows: "Adeone terras iam rurales Astraea reliquit?"<sup>31</sup> ("What virgin Astraea herself abandoned the rural districts?") The famous story about the house of ghosts in Athens known from the letter of Pliny the Younger (Plin., *Epist.* VII, 27) is also mentioned.

The author has profound knowledge of ancient history and realia. Some of them are mentioned directly (e.g. the person of the last Roman king Tarquinius Superbus), some through metaphoric references linked to ancient culture (e.g. *ostentaque Thessala* – "Thessalic apparitions"<sup>32</sup> or *testis atticus* "witness of Attica"<sup>33</sup>). This epithet is used to praise the personality of Bohuslav Balbín, whom the author considers to be "the most educated historian in our lands".

The abundance of classical references that is also so apparent in the book, written not by a sophisticated academician and scholar, but a lawyer, i.e. man performing a purely practical job, is testimony for us to the intensity of the classical influence on Czech Baroque culture.

<sup>29</sup> This situation changed for the better in recent years thanks to the key groundbreaking monograph of the Italian researcher G. Maiello, *Vampirismus a Magia posthuma*, Praha 2014.

<sup>30</sup> The author was a lawyer, so Roman law, including *Corpus iuris civilis*, represented the essence of jurisprudence at that time.

<sup>31</sup> *Victa iacet pietas, et virgo caede madentes,  
ultima coelestum, terras Astraea reliquit.*  
(Ovid, *Met.* 1, 149-150)

<sup>32</sup> The Greek region of Thessaly in antiquity was considered the country of origin of the art of magic and witchcraft.

<sup>33</sup> Adjective *attic* – in antiquity a synonym for education, concentrated in Attica and Athens.

## 3.5 The ancient history as a medium of satire

The Latin work of Bohuslav Balbín *Trophaeum sepulchrale in Bernardum Bořitam de Martinic supremum bugravium*, holds a significant position in Baroque literature of the Czech lands. The satirical poem written probably in the early 1670s was considered lost for a long time and eventually the manuscript was found and was edited and translated brilliantly by the excellent Czech classical philologist, Josef Hejnic<sup>34</sup>. The aim of *Trophaeum* is to present a satirical criticism of Supreme Prague Burgrave Bernhard Ignaz Martinitz, whom Balbín accuses of impoverishing the Czech lands, plundered by the army and suffering from common injury and political oppression. The poem is written in the form of four fictional epigraphs, dedicated to the Prague burgrave by four estates – clergy, nobility, town people and intellectuals. The poem bears the features of quite sharp satire going beyond the limits of intellectual political disputation. The classical influence is evident both in the form and content. The ancient motifs could be divided in the following groups:

1. The first group of ancient motifs represents direct quotations from ancient authors – Seneca, Suetonius, Tacitus, Horace etc. In some cases, these quotations are directly and explicitly indicated with the name of their author, but in other cases are incorporated in the text without any mention of the author. Such practice of exploiting classical quotations is usual in Czech literature and goes back to the early Middle Ages, including the first Czech chronicles, e.g. the oldest Czech chronicle *Chronica Boemorum* written by canon Kosmas of Prague.

Sometimes the author even develops these quotations in creative manner to underline the irony of his verses:

Leaving the assembly  
he could say together with Tiberius:  
What a nation of people born to be slaves, even suiciders!  
(III, 119-122)<sup>35</sup>

In this case the sentence originally quoted by Tacitus, ascribed to Tiberius, about the nation of citizens born to be slaves, is upgraded by the word *exitium* (destruction).

2. Balbín's satire itself is written in classical form. The title itself refers to antiquity. The Greek word *tropaion* in Greece and later in Rome (in Latin form *trophaeum*) marked state monuments, mostly built in memory of victory, where the plundered war armour was hanged, later decorated with reliefs.

<sup>34</sup> Hejnic 1988.

<sup>35</sup> O gentem ad servitium (immo exitium) natam,  
ex comitiis  
cum Tiberio dicere posset!

Balbín's text is written in the form of a eulogy<sup>36</sup>, i. e. a commemorative epigraph that in antiquity was placed at the plinth of statues or tombstones of prominent persons. The classical nature of Balbín's poem is underlined with ancient formulas, e.g. invocation *Piis Manibus* (1,1), i.e. to Divine Manes, Roman spirits of deceased. This formula was widely used on Roman tombstones in the form *Dis Manibus*, mostly abbreviated to DM<sup>37</sup>. The text also bears another typical formula of Roman epitaphs, namely addressed to travellers. Since ancient tombstones were placed near roads, their epitaphs were intended to inspire people passing nearby to commemorate the deceased or to stop for a while for some philosophical meditation about the transient nature of life. But Balbín uses this address to travellers in the satirical<sup>38</sup> sense:

Repose, pilgrim, stop here!

Also Bernhard Ignaz, count of Martinitz,

sacrifice of preoccupations, useless to him, but destructive to all people,

will repose here. (II, 1-4)<sup>39</sup>

3. Most classical references in Balbín's poem are connected with ancient history. These references concern not only the character of the text (political satire), but at the same time Balbín's profound interest in history. He not only published his own historical works, but also carefully studied the works of humanist and ancient historians. Thanks to his excellent knowledge of languages he read most of them in the original. As we have already mentioned above, he was an enthusiastic follower of Dutch humanist, classical philologist and historian Justus Lipsius, he mentioned him in his monumental work *Epitome historica rerum Bohemicarum* and also in his poetry – he even dedicated one of his Latin poems to Lipsius. But contrary to Lipsius' favour of historiography of the Silver Age of Roman literature (Tacitus), he gave his literary preference to Livy. Balbín's interest in Livy is explained partly by the development of Livian studies in Europe at that time, partly by a patriotic perception of the historiography by Livy (Kučera, Rak 1983: 118) that was very close to Balbín and his own concept of historiography. But we dare to offer our own hypothesis to explain this choice for stylistic reasons. Livy belongs in the canon of classic authors of the Golden Age of Roman literature and Balbín as dedicated classicist and teacher at Jesuit gymnasiums of course insisted on his stylistic

<sup>36</sup> As a literary genre the eulogy developed in the 16th century in Italy (Balbín 1988: 131).

<sup>37</sup> The translator obviously, with regard to the author's Christian context and his work, decided to use a more general, but adequate translation "To bright memory".

<sup>38</sup> The scientific interest for ancient Latin epigraphy was typical already for the second and third generation of Italian humanists (e.g. Poggio Bracciolini), so it is hardly surprising that such an educated man as Balbín was able to apply his knowledge of epigraphy to his satirical poem.

<sup>39</sup> Quiesce et sta, viator!, nam hic quoque  
BERNARDVS IGNATIVS COMES de Martiniz  
post tot curas, sibi inutiles, omnibus noxias,  
quiescet.

superiority, whereas Tacitus as an author of the Silver Age had not yet been acknowledged as a key school author. On the other hand, regarding the number of ancient quotations, the most quoted ancient authors in Trophaeum are Tacitus and Sallustius. This means that although Balbín did not appreciate the style of Tacitus, he still accepted his philosophy of history and exploited lots of his ideas and historical facts. Hejnic (1992: 182) affirms that the way Tacitus presents the reign of Tiberius<sup>40</sup> directly served Balbín as a model for the description of Martinitz's operation in the Czech lands. Balbín demonstrates a truly excellent knowledge of historical sources and facts not only from classical antiquity. For example, his surprising reference to *praefectus praetorio* Rufinus, operating during the reign of Western Roman Emperors Arcadius (II, 121-124), also provides us – just as in the case of theatre (cf. Chapter 3.3 of our study) – a testimony of detailed knowledge about Late Antiquity, that usually was not a favourite subject of even well-educated classicists in the 17th century. The only historical inaccuracy is the reference to Syracusan tyrant Dionysius, whom he introduces as the ruler of Corinth<sup>41</sup>.

Oh, how cruel a tyrant  
Dionysius was,  
after he lost his rule in Syracuse<sup>42</sup>.  
But Bernard was even worse,  
he treated the kingdom like a school,  
where as a cruel teacher he tortured poor people  
with sweat, tears and blood. (IV, 168-173)<sup>43</sup>

Most of the historical references concerns the emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, mostly Tiberius, Caligula, Nero or cruel *praefectus praetorio* Seianus, operating under the reign of Tiberius. Here Balbín demonstrates blistering irony, but also – to some extent – personal courage, if he compares a top politician of the country with the darkest figures of ancient Rome, who in historical tradition became symbols of despotism, perfidy, cruelty and perversion. Especially Balbín's comparison of Martinitz with Nero, the first and probably the most known persecutor of Christians seems to be really courageous, even more in the context of

<sup>40</sup> But Balbín in his presentation of Martinitz's operation in Bohemia refers not only to Tacitus, but also to other emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, whose oppressive reign and perpetrated atrocities are described in detail by Tacitus in his *Annales* and *Historiae*.

<sup>41</sup> [...] *qualem fuisse amisso iam sceptro Corinthi  
Dionysium tyrannum accepimus.*

<sup>42</sup> The translator here – in contrast with the author's text, but in accordance with historical reality – placed Dionysius in Syracuse.

<sup>43</sup> *Qualem fuisse amisso iam sceptro Corinthi  
Dionysium tyrannum accepimus;  
At Bernardus utrumque coniunxit,  
et regnum habens pro schola,  
in qua velut plagosus Orbilius pauperi populo saepe  
et sudorem et lacrymas excussit et sanguinem.*



Catholic Baroque culture, where Nero, of course, was perceived as an absolutely negative figure. The gallery of ignominious ancient historical figures, who are compared with Martinitz, is concluded with Roman dictator Lucius Cornelius Sulla.

### 3. Conclusion

Regarding our text analysis of selected authors, we can conclude, that classical tradition is not only an accompanying ornament, but also an apparent constitutive element of Czech Renaissance literature, whether written in Czech, Latin or German. Classical influence is surprisingly even more extensive in the Baroque period. Such a statement casts a significantly different light on the Baroque that in Czech historiography is due to the trauma of the Counter-Reformation traditionally perceived in a simplistic manner as “times of darkness”, a period of cultural decline and religious fanaticism and intolerance. The strong influence of classical tradition is a testimony to us not only of the high standard of scholarship and culture, but also the profound education of the middle and higher classes. The plentiful occurrence of motifs taken from ancient history in humanist and Baroque literature is evidence of a highly developed intellectual life. Motifs from ancient history are not only enumerated and mentioned as pure facts by authors, but they are exploited with sophisticated intention as a medium of allegory, satire, irony or, in contrast, with emphasis upon highly praised virtues. Leading authors of that era (Balbín, Comenius) exhibit not only a thorough scholastic knowledge of a factual account of history, but with profound insight they also accept the philosophy of ancient historians, they are strongly influenced by their ideas or the ideas of their later interpreters and commentators, e.g. Justus Lipsius. The acceptance of classical tradition in the Czech cultural milieu, witnessed by the evident use of ancient motifs in all genres of literature is testimony to the Czech Lands being a part of Europe, its common history and national culture, based on the classical and Jewish-Christian tradition, again interpreted by Renaissance Humanism. There are hardly better words to conclude our study than those of Czech historian Josef Pekař: “The autonomy of Czech development is substantially determined by the spiritual influence and tradition of Europe”.

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### Abstract

The study deals with the influence of the classical tradition on Czech literature of the Early Modern Period (Renaissance, Baroque). The article demonstrates this influence through examples of the use of selected motifs from ancient history in all of the main genres of the literature of that era: homily, legend, school drama, poetry and educational literature. The study also analyses the educational background of the authors and readers of the era and their attitude to ancient history; the ways of mediation and making use of ancient motifs in the literature; and the influence of ancient historiography on Renaissance and Baroque culture and interpretation of history.

**Keywords:** Humanism, Renaissance, Baroque, Latin literature, Czech literature.