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OLGA SETTARI

## **THE THEORY OF MUSIC AND HYMNOGRAPHY IN THE UNITAS FRATRUM IN THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES**

The contribution of the *Unitas Fratrum* for the Czech culture before the Battle of the White Mountain is undoubtable. Judging the significance of the *Unitas Fratrum* in our country in this period no historian can avoid taking two personalities into consideration: Jan Blahoslav and Johann Amos Comenius. Without Jan Blahoslav and Johann Amos Comenius the activity of the *Unitas Fratrum* in Moravia of the latter half of the 16th century would never have reached the level it actually did in that period.

As a long period has passed between Blahoslav's and Comenius' time and the present the contemporary reader might be quite right in asking whether and to what extent their thinking is living and significant today, or if they only were a phenomenon limited to a certain period of history, place and denomination. To answer that question would certainly require investigation of the significance of Blahoslav and Comenius not only for the *Unitas Fratrum*, but also for the whole Czech cultural environment, aimed at showing where they only expressed trends of the period, where they were ahead of their time and where they became unique in the Czech cultural history.

Blahoslav's and Comenius' most original contribution to Czech culture is their hymnographic activities and their role in the development of hymn compositions. Both of them further developed rules of poetics and prosody of the period, rhetoric theories and aesthetics of Protestant church song. Blahoslav's writings on the theory of music (*Musica*) and Comenius' concept of music education (as shown in many of his writings, especially in *The School of Infancy* and *Didactics*) were written for the *Unitas Fratrum* and were to raise the standards of education of its members, even though they also reached a wider cultural milieu. Turning back to Blahoslav and Comenius the author of this paper wants to show her awareness of the fact that it is necessary to emphasize their significance in hymnography, theory of music and music education, an area of their interest for a long time overshadowed by their theological, historiographic, educational, pansophic and other writings.

The both above mentioned personalities of the *Unitas Fratrum* have a lot in common. Both of them were born in Moravia, where they later lived and worked for a long time as bishops of the *Unitas*, and later even as its historians, teachers and organizers of education in Moravian Protestant schools. They not only largely helped to raise the standards of protestant education in Moravia, but also contributed to the development of writing in the Czech language. Both of them were poets and reformators of Czech verse, both of them loved the Czech language, and helped to cultivate and refine it. One of the best examples of these activities is Comenius' attempt to raise Czech poetry to the world standards by the use of quantitative verse. Both of them studied rules of poetics and rhetorics, being naturally most interested in metrics, declamation and syllabic quantity of verse. Starting from the rules of poetry as produced by the Antiquity Comenius developed a principle of Czech musical declamation based on syllabic quantity of the text, using Blahoslav's achievements in this area. Both of them adapted a lot of songs in hymnbooks of the *Unitas Fratrum* to the rules of musical syllabic quantity. Some of their writings deal with the poetics and aesthetics of church song — Blahoslav's *Additions to Musica*, Comenius' introduction to the *Amsterdam Hymnbook*.

Blahoslav was the founder of hymnology, because he for the first time carried out a systematic research into Protestant composers, producing an extensive "Index of Composers of Protestant Songs".<sup>1</sup> As for education in schools of the *Unitas Fratrum* both Blahoslav and, later, Comenius promoted the idea of humane education, stressed moral and aesthetic education and individual approach to each pupil. Religious, moral and rational education were fundamental in Moravian schools of *Unitas* even in Blahoslav's time. Comenius attended the Přerov school of the *Unitas Fratrum* where Blahoslav had taught years before, growing up in a cultural environment Blahoslav had helped to create, an environment filled with deep respect for education. As for special musical training Blahoslav and Comenius had a lot in common in the area of theory of music and music education. Protestant schools laid great emphasis on music education. Blahoslav helped its development by writing "Musica" and two "Additions to Musica", a large part of which was practical questions of solo and group singing, by composing a number of new church songs for the *Unitas Fratrum*, and by editing a new hymnbook. In the last two of the above mentioned activities Blahoslav was a predecessor of Comenius, who completed the long development of Protestant church singing towards the end of his life in the Netherlands by compiling the *Amsterdam Hymnbook* in 1659.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This index is Volume 9 of the *Unitas'* archives, the "Unitas Act". It was newly published by Jan Kouba in "Blahoslav's Index of Authors of Protestant Songs and its Later Revisions." In: *Miscellanea musicologica* XVII, 1962.

The hymnbook was called *Amsterdam Hymnbook* because it was published in Amsterdam. For an account on the hymnbook see Olga Settari's diploma, dissertation and a couple of essays.

Unlike Jan Blahoslav, Comenius wrote neither a theoretical work about music, nor a book on music education, but in a number of his writings he devotes so much space to music education, that his concept of music education and his methods of teaching music in the schools of the *Unitas Fratrum* can easily be seen from his numerous comments on the question. An attentive and patient reader will certainly appreciate the high informative value of this set of instructions for teachers of music, which, although being a summary of the period's methodology, show a lot of Comenius' original approach and were worked out by him into a system very much ahead of his time.

Now I would like to explain some facts about Blahoslav's reaction to the period's teaching of theory of music and singing in schools and his attempts to improve that. The origin of his efforts in this field can be seen in the period of his studies abroad, beginning with the year 1543, in Goldberg and Wittenberg. In Wittenberg he had a chance to learn about the standards of the period's theory of music and to enrich his knowledge by studying German textbooks of the theory of music. Perhaps that was the time when the idea to write "Musica" first occurred to him, being strengthened by his awareness of the need of a textbook for music lessons in Protestant schools in Moravia. After returning home Blahoslav was appointed in 1557 a bishop of Ivančice in Moravia. After that Ivančice soon became one of the main cultural and religious centres of Moravia. The years spent there were for Blahoslav years of hard work, which can even be seen from a mere enumeration of works he finished and published in that period. Those related to hymnography and the theory of music are: "Musica", second edition, 1569, with Additions, and edition of the hymnbook "Písně chval božských" (published in 1561 in Szamotul near Poznań), later carefully revised and published in Ivančice in 1564. The first work completed in Ivančice was "Musica",<sup>3</sup> the first book on music written in Czech (before all similar works had been written in Latin). The book is approached from the practical side, being a textbook of theory of music and singing. The *Unitas Fratrum* was given the Szamotul Hymnbook together with "Musica", a textbook to help them learn the new songs, teach them elementary theory of music and rules of choir singing, and provide them, even though only to a limited extent, with elementary poetics of church song. "Musica" was for many years used as a textbook, its greatest advantage being the fact that it also

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<sup>3</sup> Blahoslav's *Musica* was first published in Olomouc in 1558. One copy is in possession of the National Museum in Prague, sign. 18S7, the title page missing. The second edition of *Musica*, including two „Additions to *Musica*“, was published in Ivančice, and can be found in the National Museum under sign. 27 F 23. A detailed analysis of *Musica* can be found in Otakar Hostinský's *Jan Blahoslav and Jan Josquin*. A Contribution to the History of Czech Music and Theory of 16th Century Art. With New Reprints of both *Musicas*: Blahoslav's (1569) and Josquin's (1561). In: *Rozpravy České akademie císaře Františka Josefa pro vědu, slovesnost a umění v Praze V*, class I, No 1, Prague 1896. Thomas S. V. published both *Musicas* (Blahoslav's and Josquin's) in the USA recently. He translated it into English in edition: *Czech Documents in Translation*, published by the Czech Historical Society 1991, Denton, Texas.

took into consideration less gifted singers and readers with minimum previous music education.

The basic questions of the theory of music necessary for correct reading notes and singing from music sheets were discussed in the chapters in Blahoslav's "Musica". We can find there information on types of notes, their lengths and ways of writing them, on note ties, clefs, solmization, rhythmic values, measure, mensural notation, on eight church modes etc. The language of "Musica" is another interesting feature of the work. Blahoslav took many of the specific music terms from Latin (by translating or adapting them), but he also had to invent a lot of terms himself (creating over 50 Czech terms for the phenomenon of music and its parts). While "Musica" is based on the period's German textbooks, both Additions to "Musica" show much greater independence of foreign materials and a completely practical purpose. The first Addition (titled "Some Useful Comments for Those who Want to Sing well") was written for teachers, i. e. the singers. The introductory chapter on healthy singing and basic techniques of singing is followed by a survey of elementary rules of singing. A couple of shorter chapters show the "leading singer" (the singer showing the others when to start singing) how to begin and end a song, contain a few rules of beating the time and instructions for the choirmaster. The first Addition is closed by "Rules for choir singers", twelve practical rules of Protestant choir singing. Blahoslav formulated them because he was unsatisfied with the general quality of church singing. He wanted the members of the *Unitas Fratrum* to have, besides the newly published hymnbook, a practical instruction telling them how to sing each individual song. The rules were, to a certain extent, a norm which was to guarantee performance up to the period's standards. The introduction to the second Addition (titled "Knowledge Necessary for Those Who Want to Compose Songs") explains Blahoslav's approach to the process of composition and is intended for „composers“ of songs.<sup>4</sup> His considerations on the contents of Protestant church songs included in the Addition show Blahoslav's basic approach to the poetics of church song based on stressing the aesthetic impact of the song, its impressiveness being considered higher than that of written or spoken prose. They also include the educational aspect of the contents. Blahoslav also considered psychological aspects of composition. This is where his second Addition is very important.<sup>5</sup> Considering the history of Protestant church song from the viewpoint of the above mentioned aesthetic norms we can find the same requirement on newly composed church songs in Comenius' writings, which shows that certain musical traditions of Blahoslav's time survived to the following periods. One of Blahoslav's basic requirements, that of musical syllabic quantity (long notes for long syllables and short notes for short syllables), found expression in his adding new lyrics to

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At that time composer of a song meant in the first place the author of the lyrics, often anonymous. Composer was even somebody who only adapted a text or put it in verse. Even an adaptation of a tune was considered a new composition.

<sup>5</sup> Compare Blahoslav's *Musica* (the above mentioned Hostinský's edition), 59.

existing tunes so as to meet this requirement. It should be said that priority to melody, on which Blahoslav based his approach, was then unlike now, something taken for granted: tunes were transferred from one hymnbook to another for years without major changes and provided with either new or adapted lyrics.

Theoretical conclusions to "Musica", and especially to both Additions, were reflected in the Szamotul Hymnbook. The issue of the hymnbook opened a new period in the history of book printing in the Unitas Fratrum. Before 1618 several editions of hymnbooks were issued, the Szamotul and Ivančice ones being the most important examples, especially from the musical point of view. The issue of the Szamotul Hymnbook was initiated by the need of the Unitas for a synthetic song book after the Roh Hymnbook from 1541 was sold out.<sup>6</sup> Jan Blahoslav, who together with Jan Černý and Adam Šturm was commissioned to prepare a new hymnbook, adopted a high- aimed conception: the Szamotul edition includes 735 songs, 430 of them with tunes written in choral notation or black and white mensural notation. The core of the hymnbook is songs from Roh Hymnbook, slightly adapted. Blahoslav added nearly 300 new songs to those. They were mostly new songs by Protestant composers, including Blahoslav, Jan Augusta and Brother Lukáš. Blahoslav's songs are among the best as for the lyrics. They were often borrowed by other hymnbooks, including hymnbooks of other denominations, and survived into the 19th century. They show a coherent form, original images and ideas, lyricism being the core of their message. Typical features of their music are stanzaic form and borrowed tunes, often originating in folk music, frequently used by Blahoslav as setting for his new poems. Only eight of Blahoslav's songs are believed to be provided by his own music.<sup>7</sup>

After finishing the Szamotul Hymnbook Blahoslav started work on yet another edition of a hymnbook, published in 1564 in Ivančice and known as the Ivančice Hymnbook. In this edition Blahoslav concentrated on tune revisions, actually realized in the 1564 edition, and affecting most of the songs. Let us have a look at the kinds of alterations he made in the Ivančice Hymnbook. The analysis is based on songs from both hymnbooks, the Szamotul one and the Ivančice one.<sup>8</sup> It shows that more than one third

<sup>6</sup> Jan Roh *Hymnbook* is the first preserved hymnbook of the Unitas Fratrum including not only texts but also tunes. It consists of over 480 songs, 300 of them with written tunes.

<sup>7</sup> Blahoslav's authorship of books about music was first dealt with by Otakar Hostinský in the above mentioned work, LXIV — LXVII.

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Vlasta Fialová, a Brno historian, enabled me to see microfilms she made during her work in the Unitas' archives in Ochránov (Herrnhut). The microfilms contained individual pages of the *Szamotul Hymnbook* with Jan Blahoslav's own hand-written comments on the tunes and his suggestions concerning their alterations. This is the copy quoted by Hostinský in his book. Now it is stored in the Ochránov archives. Although Hostinský tried to draw attention to the comments none of our musicologists compared them to the *Ivančice Hymnbook*. I was the first to make this comparison. The result was published in: *Hymnographic work of Jan Blahoslav in the light of his Musica and the Hymnbook*. In: Jan Blahoslav — předchůdce Komenského. Sborník studií k 400. výročí úmrtí Jana Blahoslava. Published by Muzeum Jana Amose Komenského, Uherský Brod 1971, pp. 179 — 188.

of the songs from the Szamotul Hymnbook was revised for the Ivančice edition (some 160 songs). Blahoslav tried to adapt the tunes to the existing performance practice and to the new lyrics used. He thus did not use mechanically the existing tunes. His main criterion was a practical one: the songs revised were to become more convenient and easier to sing. By altering tunes for new lyrics he put into practice his theory of music declamation and musical syllabic quantity. The final version of the songs can therefore be supposed to correspond to Blahoslav's idea of what a song should look like. The following editions of the hymnbook did not bring any substantial changes of the music equal to those made in the Ivančice edition. Blahoslav's version was then used for many years without change (till 1618).

Jan Blahoslav's major contributions to the theory and practice of music are "Musica" and the Ivančice Hymnbook. The Ivančice Hymnbook has the central position in the history of the hymnbooks of the Unitas Fratrum. Blahoslav's work of a theorist of music and his practical teaching efforts reflected in his "Musica", his activity of an editor and song collector resulted in the Szamotul (1561) and the Ivančice (1564) Hymnbooks.

A new period in the history of Protestant church song is represented by hymnographic activities of Johann Amos Comenius, even if under different personal and historic conditions. While Blahoslav completed his work in his native environment, Comenius worked on the edition of the Amsterdam Hymnbook towards the end of his life in exile, in poverty and in a situation when the Unitas Fratrum as a whole had to struggle to survive. However, he had long prepared for the work, starting to think about it when still at home, and having done a lot of preparatory work. His hymnographic activities reached a climax only in exile, beginning in 1628. From that year on church songs (translations, paraphrases, adaptations or new compositions) form a self-contained part of his extensive and versatile activities. Comenius' important activities in this area preceding the edition of the Amsterdam Hymnbook include psalm translations based on syllabic quantity, a collection of church songs "Some New Songs" from 1631, and a manuscript collection „Some Religious Songs" from 1645—1649. These are linked with two older works dealing with the theory of church song and quantitative verse: a book "On Czech Poetry" (before 1620), and annotations to the new hymnbook edition "Annotata" from 1633. The first result of Comenius' hymnographic activity is three songs from 1624, added to the book "Pres Boží". They are Comenius' translations of famous songs of German reformation, among which the dominating one is "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott". Comenius even attempted at quantitative paraphrases of psalms, which he turned into poems in 1626 and 1627, and later included in the textbook "Gate Open to Language". His work on this was initiated by the fact that Vavřinec Benedikt Nudožerský's hard work — quantitative paraphrases of the whole Book of Psalms — had been destroyed. Comenius decided to do all the work again, but he never finished the whole book.<sup>9</sup> Comenius' important exile hymnographic works include

the book. "Some New Songs" from 1631, containing both translations and his original contributions.<sup>10</sup> „Some New Songs" is a printed collection of 16 songs. Most of the tunes are adapted German Protestant songs and Strejc's paraphrases of psalms to French tunes. Four of the songs were included in the Amsterdam Hymnbook: besides Luther's famous "Ein feste Burg..." they include the tune of one of the most popular pieces by Jiří Strejc, "Kdož ochrany Nejvyššího v skrejši jeho užívá..." (Strejc's paraphrase of Psalm 91). Comenius used this tune for his own version of the psalm "My Soul, Praise Your Lord". Further history of this song in the Czech lands show that it was not only sung by the Protestants but also included in Catholic hymnbooks, surviving into the early 20th century (for example as the tune of a church song from Vnorovy in Moravia).<sup>11</sup> Finally I would like to mention a manuscript collection of Protestant church songs compiled by Comenius between 1645 and 1649 and titled „Some Religious Songs".<sup>12</sup> This collection, probably meant to be the basis for a hymnbook, included 75 songs, 37 of them original contributions and translations produced by Comenius, the rest being adaptations. There are written tunes to 24 of the songs, mostly in white mensural notation. Some of the tunes were adapted for the Amsterdam Hymnbook. This collection is very likely to be a complete summary of Comenius' hymnographic work over years. "Some Religious Songs" is therefore the largest collection of Comenius' hymn production before the Amsterdam Hymnbook.

The Amsterdam Hymnbook was published in Amsterdam in 1659. Recent research has shown quite clearly that the editor of the anonymous (quite common at that time) hymnbook was Johann Amos Comenius.<sup>13</sup> Besides editing it Comenius included in the hymnbook a number of his own contributions (new lyrics, paraphrases and translations, and most likely even a couple of new melodies). He newly arranged the songs into sections, made a critical revision, added a number of revised written tunes, and supplied a long introduction dealing with poetics and aesthetics of church songs of the Unitas Fratrum. The layout of the book is an evidence of the neatness of Dutch printing. A single, unified notation was used for the whole book: white mensural notation. All the tunes are one-part melodies — there are no songs with tunes in more than one part. Of the total number of 605 psalms and songs 406 have printed tunes, the rest

<sup>9</sup> The preserved collection of Comenius' psalms using the quantitative verse is considered the largest collection of quantitative poetry in early Czech literature. Compare Antonín Škarka, *Slovesné umění J. A. Komenského*. In: *Vybrané spisy J. A. Komenského*, volume 7, Prague 1974, 82.

<sup>10</sup> „Nové písně některé" (Some New Songs) are now kept in the Prague University Library, sign. 54 F 1117.

<sup>11</sup> I found the tune in a manuscript collection of church songs of Vnorovy in Moravia compiled by Hynek Bílm in 1911. The collection is now kept in the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore Studies of the Czech Academy of Science in Brno, sign. A 1084.

<sup>12</sup> The manuscript can be found in the Prague National Museum, sign. IV — E — 18.

<sup>13</sup> Compare Jan Amos Komenský, *Duchovní písně*. Prepared for publication by Antonín Škarka, Prague 1957, 7.

is provided with references to tunes of other songs included in the book. When compared to the older hymnbooks of the *Unitas Fratrum* from 1615 and 1618, which included 644 songs, Comenius' hymnbook with its 430 songs is much smaller. Most of the songs are older songs of the *Unitas* (310 songs, showing different extent of adaptation), 146 songs were added by Comenius. Antonín Škarka says that 135 of these new songs are definitely, or at least most likely, Comenius' original contributions (his own creations, paraphrases or translations).<sup>14</sup> Both the original Czech and adapted foreign songs, both lyrics and tunes, were revised by Comenius. The alterations made show that he wanted the songs to be quite easy even for completely untrained singers. New songs added to the hymnbook differ from the older songs of the *Unitas Fratrum* (published in the 1615 and 1618 hymnbooks) in their attention to correct declamation and harmony between music and word, which were Comenius' main principles of musical syllabic quantity. Comenius also paid attention to putting together songs of similar contents, and to including in each section only songs corresponding to the theme of the section. He therefore did not hesitate to leave out or alter considerably songs which did not meet this requirement.

A general analysis of the Amsterdam Hymnbook tunes has shown that the tunes are very widely in style, including tunes close to the Gregorian chant, those adapted from French psalm paraphrases, those influenced by German and Polish church song style (Martin Luther, Pavel Eber, Justus Jonas, Nikolaus Hermann, Jan Kochanowski), and those adapted from older books of the *Unitas Fratrum* (especially songs by Jan Roh and Jan Blahoslav). Some of the tunes were then known throughout Central Europe, acting sometimes as *cantus firmus* of polyphonic songs and surviving from the early Gothic to the period of Baroque monody. Thus for example the tune of "God Sent an Angel to Virgin Mary" (page 287 of the Amsterdam Hymnbook) is based on the gothic one-part song by Jan of Jenštejn "Mittitur archangelus" included in the manuscript of Vyšší Brod from 1410. In this connection I am naturally interested in the possibility of Comenius being the author of some of the tunes in the Amsterdam Hymnbook. The first question to ask here is whether Comenius is the author of all the 135 melodies to the songs he wrote the lyrics for. In the introduction Comenius claims to be the author of 8 melodies, using them as examples of his reforming activities in the field of metrics. As these songs are published in the hymnbook for the first time together with their melodies, Comenius' authorship is most likely. As for the rest of the tunes we can only assume with certainty that Comenius did some revisions to them.

The four part introduction to the Amsterdam Hymnbook is a valuable source of knowledge about Comenius as a theorist of church song. The reader can follow there the continuity of Protestant church singing from the earliest times to Jan Roh, Jan Blahoslav and the exile authors. Comenius mentions his connection to Blahoslav when talking about musical

<sup>14</sup> Compare Jan Amos Komenský, *Duchovní písně* (above), 387.

syllabic quantity and the rules of metrics he observed when he worked on the adaptations of older and composition of new songs. Like Blahoslav he paid attention to intelligibility of word and harmony between music and word. The style of some of Comenius' texts, written in accordance with these rules, shows a lot of baroque features. Let us mention here at least the well-known Comenius' paraphrase of the Song of Songs „Jesus, Your Sweet Memory . . .“ (page 217 of the hymnbook), which is considered one of the most impressive examples of Czech lyric poetry, and which is one of the songs where Comenius is also supposed to be the author of the tune.<sup>15</sup> Once the baroque character of Comenius' work has been mentioned I should not forget the question of the place of Comenius' hymnbook in the history of European baroque music, although this problem has not been fully solved yet. While the texts are in some cases fully baroque as to the manner of expression, the tunes seem to be much more archaic, showing a lot of older musical thinking influenced by folk and, at least partly, instrumental music. Thus although many of the tunes form a transition from Renaissance to Baroque in their rhythm, metrics and form, the melodies are more conservative and their style is closer to that of late renaissance.

The Amsterdam Hymnbook is Comenius' last achievement in the field of hymnography, and the last hymnbook of the Unitas Fratrum published at home or in exile for their own use. The hymnbook is a source of knowledge about the history and development of protestant church singing in the latter half of the 16th century and the former half of the 17th century, as well as about Comenius' contribution to that development.

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<sup>15</sup> There is a hand-written sketch preserved of the song „Jesus, Your Sweet Memory . . .“ with notation, written and corrected by Comenius himself. The sketch probably dates from before 1656 and Comenius is supposed to be the author of both the lyrics and the tune. The document can now be found in the National Museum in Prague, sign. IBc8.

