

---

# Comenius as Part of our Historical Memory – An Analysis with the City of Přerov as an Example

17

Helena Kovářová, Přerov

---

## Abstract

The paper deals with how the tradition of Comenius was formed in Přerov, a city associated with Comenius' life. In particular, it analyses the role of the Comenius monument, the museums and the public commemoration that have shaped the city's historical memory since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Teachers have had a big influence in this process, especially František Slaměník, Rudolf Vanýsek, Josef Krumpholc and Rudolf Macháček. These four teachers became the custodians of the Museum, as well as lecturers about Comenius for the public during tours of the Museum and beyond. They participated in the creation of a group identity. Currently, there is a strong tradition underpinned by a new impulse in the form of archaeological excavations of the ruins of the centre of the Brethren Unity from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Přerov.

---

## Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag befasst sich mit der Entstehung der Comenius Tradition in Přerov, einer Stadt, die mit dem Leben des Comenius eng verbunden ist. Analysiert werden die Rolle des Comenius-Denkmals, vor allem aber die Rolle der Museen und die Gestaltung des öffentlichen Gedenkens und damit die Gestaltung des historischen Gedächtnisses der Stadt seit dem Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts. Großen Einfluss in diesem Prozess hatten Lehrer, insbesondere František Slaměník, Rudolf Vanýsek, Josef Krumpholc und Rudolf Macháček. Diese vier wurden die Hüter des Museums, sie hielten Vorträge über Comenius für die Öffentlichkeit während der Besichtigungen des Museums und darüber hinaus. Sie beteiligten sich so an der Schaffung einer an Comenius orientierten Gruppenidentität. Gegenwärtig gibt es für die Stärkung dieser Tradition neue Impulse in Form von archäologischen Entdeckungen. In Přerov zu sehen sind die Ruinen der Brüder Unität von Ende des 16. und Anfang des 17. Jahrhunderts in.

## 1 Introduction

In Přerov, the phrase »Přerov – Comenius' town« is used frequently, and it carries two levels or meanings. The first refers to the time of Comenius' stay in Přerov. In this paper, however, I will deal with the second level or meaning which is related to his second life in historical memory, 200 to 300 years later. I will concentrate on the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the phrase »Přerov – Comenius' town« was first used.

Here then is some brief information about Comenius' stay in Přerov: He was educated at the *Schola Latina* of the *Unitas fratrum* (Brethren Unity). After his university studies in Herborn and Heidelberg, he gained his first teaching experience in Přerov, and decided to become a minister. In Přerov he got married for the first time. Altogether, he spent over 6 years there (Lapáček 1992: 12–37). Due to the events of the Thirty Years' War, no memory of him was left in Přerov. The buildings connected with the Brethren Unity were destroyed over the centuries (Schenk-Mikulík 2013: 5–24), and the historical memory of the city of Přerov was directed at different topics.

However, the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought a huge boom concerning the recovery of the past (Le Goff 2007: 99). In the line with the general trend, Přerov started searching for information about people worth remembering. Three men connected with the Brethren unity captured the interest of intellectuals, teachers and students. Attention concentrated especially around Jan Blahoslav (Pavelková 1972: 6–9), Karel starší ze Žerotína – Charles the elder baron from Zierotin (Lapáček 2012, 58–71), and Jan Amos Komenský (John Amos Comenius). Jan Blahoslav was born in Přerov, became a bishop and started work on a new translation of the Bible, which was finished after his death as the Kralice Bible. Charles the elder baron from Zierotin owned the Přerov estate and was a great protector and patron of the Brethren unity, especially of Comenius.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Comenius and his work had to be rediscovered for the historical memory of the Czech lands. The year 1869 played an important role as it was then that the reform of the school system in the Austro-Hungarian Empire was implemented. After this date, teachers' organisations and unions were established (Němečková 1962: 8–11; Čapková 1979: 8–15). They played an important role in the social life of the local community and had an influence on regional politics. Teachers and their organisations made a major contribution to the promotion and popularisation of Comenius and the knowledge about his life and work. Přerov is the best example of this.

---

## 2 The Comenius monument in Přerov

As already noted, it is not possible to point to any particular building as being directly connected with Comenius in Přerov. But in 1874 the first Comenius monument in Moravia was unveiled, along with a statue by Tomáš Seidan. This was due to the ef-

**Pictures 17.1 and 17.2** The Comenius statue by Tomáš Seidan in Přerov (photo after 1913) and a cut-out from a postcard dated 1895 (© Muzeum Komenského v Přerově)



forts of the Moravian Teachers' Association (Hýbl-Kleckerová 1974: 1–8). The monument with its statue served as some sort of replacement for the lost buildings of the Brethren Unity's centre. They were, so to speak, a materialisation of the importance of the town of Přerov in the life of this world-famous person, Comenius, born in Moravia. The monument also has one world-renowned feature since Comenius was for the first time depicted as a teacher with a pupil (Kleckerová 1979: 5).

In 1874, most of the inhabitants of Přerov had no idea what Comenius looked like. Only statues of saints had previously been placed in the town's public areas. Therefore, the older generation of Přerov women assumed that Comenius' statue belonged to the group of saints. As these women were used to saying a little prayer in the front of the statues, they crossed themselves every time they walked around the Comenius statue (Kostíková 1929/30: 63). But if we look at some of the oldest postcards of Přerov printed 20 years later, we can recognise that the Comenius statue had become one of the town's significant sightseeing monuments. The first one from 1895 displays a ›Gymnasium‹ (secondary school) and the monument. Another postcard from 1899

shows three school buildings (elementary, middle and agricultural school) and the model of Comenius' monument.

We may ask what had happened that changed the common attitude to Comenius among the people of Přerov? In addition to the general acceptance of Comenius, it was the activities of teachers from Přerov that had helped.

---

### 3 Teachers' publishing activities and foundation of the Comenius Museum

In 1886, the teacher and publisher František Bayer moved to Přerov, along with his periodical »Bibliotheca of pedagogical Classics«. His thin and cheap notebooks often contained just a few printed pages to be continued in subsequent issues. They were also available for beginning teachers and other interested members of the public. Bayer started to publish Comenius' books translated into Czech by Josef Šmaha, which had supra-regional significance.

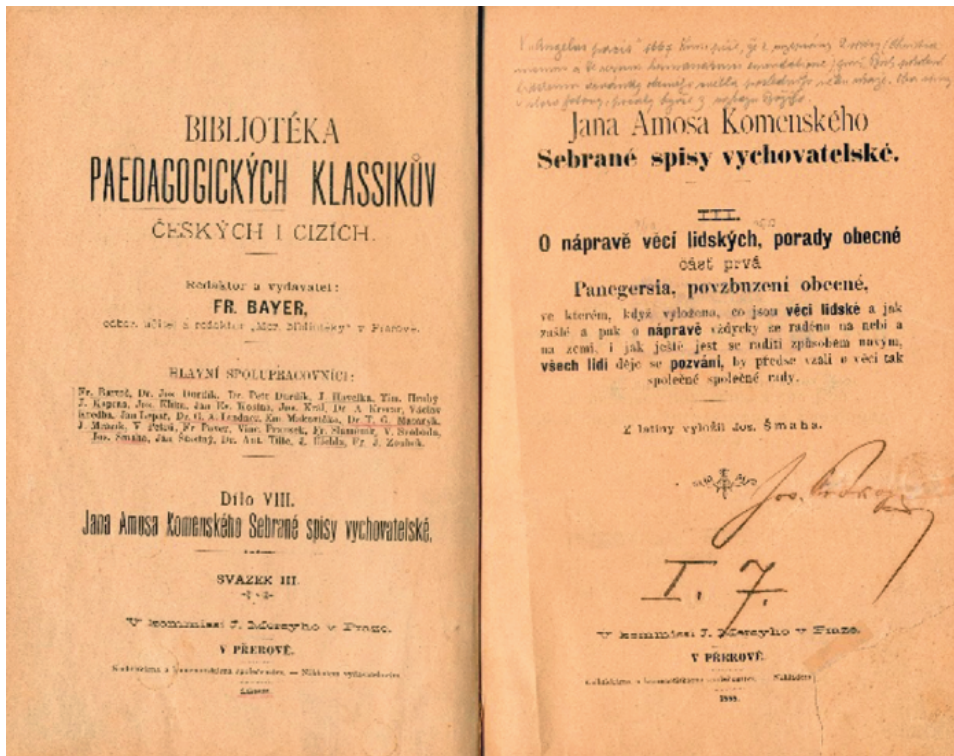
Within the framework of the first edition of 1888, part of Comenius' main work »*De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica*« was published in the Czech language for the first time. Also in 1888, the first Comenius Museum in the world was established in Přerov (Hýbl et al. 2009: 20–28). It was founded by school director František Slaměník as a private institution supported by the teachers' organisations. Slaměník presented his collection for the first time to the public in 1893 at the Regional Ethnographical Exhibition in Přerov. This event aroused great interest.

In 1892 a second ceremony unveiling the Comenius monument with the statue by T. Seidan took place in Přerov. It was connected with celebrations of the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Comenius' birth in 1892 (Hýbl 2009: 8–19). The monument was moved to a small park on Comenius Street, which had borne his name since 1884. Official celebrations were banned in schools in 1892 in the Czech lands, but the local school council in Přerov proclaimed a holiday on 28 March.

Slaměník's museum acquired room for the first permanent exposition in 1904 in a building of the middle school at which Slaměník was the principal. The school chronicle describes the first visit by pupils in 1904 (SOKA Přerov, MŠ Slaměníková Přerov). The Comenius Museum curator, who was also the teacher, evaluated and illuminated the importance of the individual objects on display. From then on, pupils visited the museum regularly. Their signatures are still found in the memorial book as is an essay homework assignment about their visit in 1910 (Muzeum Komenského v Přerově). A group of young boys visited the exposition as part of a Czech language class. The homework about the visit gives us some sort of feedback. The pupils remembered some names of Comenius' books and his map of Moravia. The teacher was then able to work with these basic points and expand on them for additional information.

In 1913 the Comenius monument was moved yet again. It was placed near the Comenius Museum, in a small park between two big school buildings called »School

Reproduction 17.3 Translation of »Panegersia«, published in Přerov in 1888



palaces«. For almost 20 years, the monument and the museum created – so to speak – an alliance of the developing Comenius research and the popularisation of Comenius in Přerov. The monument was the basis for the formation of the historical memory for both school children and grown-ups. The pupils attended to the gardening around the statue and looked after the grass and plants. In the 1920s and 1930s, they decorated the monument with flowers in March and November to celebrate Comenius' birth and death. The town administration covered part of the costs.

Groups of pupils often visited the museum. They came from Přerov, its surroundings as well as distant places, mostly Moravia. Official visitors to Přerov would visit the museum or at least see the monument. One of them was Georg Victor Figulus, a descendant of Comenius. He visited Přerov in 1927 with his daughter Gerta (SOKA Přerov, GJŠ Přerov).





#### 4 Official Comenius festivities after 1918

It is important to note the change brought by 1918. With the establishment of the Czechoslovakian Republic, the official opinion about Comenius changed. He became part of the official explanation of the Czech historical line; this held implications for the development of the Czech historical sense; Comenius became one of the greatest personalities of Czech history. His faithfulness to the Brethren Unity and his resistance to the Habsburg constitution was admired. He was presented as a model to be followed, and not only for teachers.

Comenius' anniversary in 1920 was placed on the list of compulsory school festivities by the new Czechoslovakian Ministry of Education. Most schools had a simple programme for this occasion. Small schools in the countryside frequently opted for a single speech by a single teacher. However, the schools in towns had rehearsed short programmes with recitations, songs and speeches. And the Přerov school had another possibility to celebrate Comenius' anniversary – they could visit the museum, walk to the monument and pay homage to Comenius. The museum curators František Slaměník, Rudolf Vanýsek, Josef Krumphold and Rudolf Macháček, who were teachers from 1888 till 1950, always provided information to visitors. Thanks to their teaching experience, they were able to adapt their interpretations and explanations to the age of the audience. A visit to the Museum was thereby more effective for pupils and for other student visitors – they saw the exhibition objects and also acquired information on the meaning of what was on show and concerning the contemporary context.

As an example of an official Comenius celebration, I have chosen the years 1920 and 1928. In November 1920 the official festivity of the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Comenius' death was held. In Přerov this festivity was divided into 3 days (Komenského 1920, 1; Oslavy 1920, 2; Staněk 1920, 1; Školské 1920, 2) and included speeches, walks to the monument, visits to the museum exhibition and walks to the grave of the museum founder František Slaměník. Children had a day off so they could take part in the celebration. On this occasion, the first guide offering a description of the exhibited Comenius collection was printed.

In 1928, the year of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of founding the Czechoslovakian Republic, part of a film entitled »On the Workshop of Humanity of Comenius' Nation« was produced (Šmerková 2008: 23–24). The film intended to show that the education system of basic schools in the new republic had its roots in the ideas of Comenius. In one scene, an explanation given by the Comenius Museum curator in Přerov for a group of pupils was presented; another scene displays schoolchildren paying homage to Comenius at the monument in Přerov. Unfortunately, the film has been lost.

An ideal homage to Comenius in 1928 was expressed by Emanuel Boháč in the picture »Comenius – the teacher of nations« (see below). The Czech company Schicht, a soap producer, covered the cost of publishing the picture in a collection of national pictures as wallpaper for civic education in schools. It was also printed as a postcard.



**Reproduction 17.6** Postcard with the picture »Comenius – The Teacher of Nations« by E. Boháč, 1928 (Muzeum Komenského v Přerově)

As we can read in the memorial book of the Museum, visitors came from Přerov and its surroundings, but also from more distant places, and abroad. The Museum had become a tourist destination. For the local community in Přerov, the Museum was also an important factor in forming a relationship with the native town of Comenius.

It was in this period that Přerov turned from a small agricultural town into an industrial centre of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For those people who had moved to Přerov because they had found work, the Comenius Museum and monument thus could become the point where regional history met with world history, and it could be very helpful in adapting to their new home. Comenius had become a world famous compatriot, he had become someone the Moravians and the Bohemians (namely, the Czechoslovakians) could be proud of. Historical memory can be divided into two categories (Assmann 2001, 46–53):

- oral history (living people can remember a person or an event); and
- floating gaps (nobody can remember what had been the case, a person or an event is known only from books or other sources).

In Přerov, nobody remembered J. A. Comenius in the period I am discussing. But there were strong memories of one powerful person – František Slaměník (1845–1919), the founder of the Comenius Museum. The teachers, their organisations and the school-



children remembered him (Kovářová 2013, 70–72). They had visited his museum and walked to the monument of his grave in anniversary years. The union of Comenius' celebration and the Slaměník festivity in 1920 is an interesting phenomenon with respect to the importance of historical places for the existence of historical memory. In 1959 Slaměník's anniversary was celebrated together with the opening of an exhibition on Comenius in the fine arts. For the local community of Přerov, Slaměník represented Comenius' legacy!

At the beginning of the 1960s, the Comenius Museum was incorporated – together with other museums of Přerov – into one big institution. In the first years, the co-operation of professional historians with local volunteers continued, but it weakened in the following decades. The sources for historical memory were then enlarged by film and television. The Museum in Přerov today continues to be a guardian of Comenius' legacy, and during Comenius' anniversary years the number of museum visitors increases, although people today already know Comenius from television (via documentaries and mentions of him in shows or films) when they come to the Museum.

---

## 5 Discovery of the ruins of the Brethren Unity centre in Přerov

In 2012, on the 420<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Comenius' birth, the Museum in Přerov successfully attracted the public's attention with a presentation of a new acquisition, the first edition of Comenius' *Schola ludus* (1656). At the Museum, we prepared two different specialised programmes for schoolchildren. Moreover, archaeologists had managed to uncover the ruins of the Brethren Unity centre.

The remains of floor tiling and a large section of a paved path were discovered. Thanks to this happy coincidence, we are able to identify and mark the places where Comenius walked 400 years ago (Schenk-Mikulík 2013, 5–24).

The area had originally been designated for a new parking lot. But the strong position Comenius occupies in the town's historical memory prompted town councillors to listen to archaeologists and historians and, after a couple of months of talks, the town councillors changed their plans completely. The place of the excavations was designated for cultural purposes.

The present-day acceptance of Comenius and his legacy in Přerov benefits from the general trends in Czech lands, but at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century moments can be found when Přerov determined the direction of development.

**Photo 17.7** The ruins of the Brethren Unity centre in Přerov during archaeological excavations in 2012 (© Zdeněk Schenk, Photo: Muzeum Komenského v Přerově)



---

## 6 Conclusion

Přerov may be treated as a concrete example of how the town's historical memory has been shaped by the development of the Czech national historical memory since the second half of the 19th century. The existence of the Comenius monument, Museum and public celebrations have had a significant influence on integrating the personality of Comenius into the reconstructed image of the past, which produced an identity of the locality. There was no continuously shared memory of Comenius' stay in the town, but it was created more recently by a particular social group of teachers. Representative of this process is František Slaměník, the founder and custodian of the Comenius Museum, the speaker at the ceremony unveiling the Comenius monument, teacher and principal of the school, writer and Comenius researcher. The memory process was conducted in a social framework. The interaction and self-reflection of pedagogues together with searches about the great man connected with the history of the place corresponds with the theory on the social context of collective memory (Halbwachs 2009, 133; Ferencová-Nosková 2009, 21). Teachers' ideas and images of Comenius mediated mainly to school children, museum visitors and participants of festivities have become part of the historical memory of Přerov. Repeating the memories has formed a tradition which even today has not lost its strength.

## Sources

- SOkA Přerov (Distrikt archive Přerov), Chronicles of schools: elementary school (NŠCHB Přerov, NŠDBN Přerov, NŠChP Přerov, NŠŽ Přerov, ZŠ Štefánika Přerov ), middle school (MŠ Slaměnickova Přerov, MŠDKS Přerov, MŠDCHM Přerov, MŠChJ Přerov, MŠChH Přerov), »Gymnasium« (GJŠ Přerov)
- Muzeum Komenského v Přerově, The museum's memorial book, the exercise book from 1909/1910

---

## References

- Assmann, Jan, (2001). *Kultura a paměť: písmo, vzpomínka a politická identita v rozvinutých kulturách starověku*. Praha: Prostor.
- Čapková, Dagmar, (1979). Předpoklady ohlasu díla J. A. Komenského v českém učitelstvu. In *Tradice J. A. Komenského mezi moravským učitelstvem*, edited by František Hýbl): 8–15. Přerov: Vlastivědný ústav v Přerově.
- Ferencová, Michaela, and Nosková, Jana, (2009). Kotázce studia tématu paměti a města. In *Paměť města: obraz města, veřejné komemorace a historické zlomy v 19.–21. století*, edited by Michaela Ferencová, and Jana Nosková, 11–40. Brno: Etnologický ústav Akademie věd České republiky, pracoviště Brno.
- Halbwachs, Maurice, (2009). *Kolektivní paměť*. Praha: Slon.
- Hýbl, František, and Kleckerová, Marcela, (1974). *Seidanův pomník Jana Amose Komenského v Přerově*. Přerov: Vlastivědný ústav v Přerově.
- Hýbl, František, (2009). Tradice J. A. Komenského v českých zemích se zvláštním zaměřením na Moravu a Přerov v druhé polovině XIX. století. In *120 let Muzea Komenského v Přerově a oslavy Komenského v roce 1892 ve střední Evropě*, edited by Marta Konířová, 8–19. Přerov: Muzeum Komenského v Přerově.
- Hýbl, František, Chumchal, Milan, Klímová, Jarmila, Kleckerová, Marcela, Sitko, Jiljí, Fiala, Oldřich, Konířová, Marta, and Straková, Markéta, (2009). *Přerovské muzejnictví: Muzeum Komenského v Přerově 1888–2008*. Přerov: Muzeum Komenského v Přerově.
- Kleckerová, Marcela, (1979). *Sochy J. A. Komenského na Moravě*. Přerov: Okresní vlastivědné muzeum J. A. Komenského v Přerově.
- Komenského slavnosti v Přerově. (1920). *Obzor* 11, listopad 14, 1.
- Kostíková, Anna, (1929/30). »Svatý Komenský v Přerově.« *Vlastivědný sborník střední a severní Moravy* 8: 63.
- Kovářová, Helena, (2013). Vzpomínkové slavnosti na zakladatele Muzea Komenského v Přerově. *Krok* 10, no. 2: 70–72. [also available on <http://www.vkol.cz/data/soubory/krok/Krok%202-2013.pdf>]
- Lapáček, Jiří, (2012). *Po stopách Žerotínů*. Přerov: Statutární město Přerov.

- , (1992). *Komenský a Přerov: Jan Amos Komenský o svém pobytu v Přerově*. Přerov: Okresní úřad v Přerově. [also available on [http://www.archives.cz/zao/resources/prerov/komensky\\_a\\_prerov\\_1608-1618.pdf](http://www.archives.cz/zao/resources/prerov/komensky_a_prerov_1608-1618.pdf)]
- , (2013). O bratrském sboru a domě aneb jednota bratrská v Přerově. In *Sborník Státního okresního archivu Přerov*, edited by Jiří Lapáček, and Petr Jiráček, 25–100. Přerov: Zemský archiv Opava – Státní okresní archiv Přerov. [also available on [http://www.archives.cz/zao/resources/prerov/soka\\_prerov\\_sbornik\\_2013.pdf](http://www.archives.cz/zao/resources/prerov/soka_prerov_sbornik_2013.pdf)]
- Legoff, Jacques, (2007). *Paměť a dějiny*. Praha: Argo.
- Němečková, Jaroslava, (1962). *Učitel František Slaměník, zakladatel Muzea Komenského v Přerově*. Přerov: Muzeum J. Á. Komenského v Přerově.
- Oslavy Komenského na školách. (1920). *Obzor* 11, listopad 7, 2.
- Pavelková, Anna, (1972). *Monument v kameni: pamětní tisk k 400. výročí úmrtí přerovského rodáka Jana Blahoslava*. Přerov: Okresní národní výbor v Přerově.
- Schenk, Zdeněk, and Mikulík, Jan. 2013. Přerov – Na Marku. Archeologický odkryv sboru a domu se školou jednoty bratrské. In *Sborník Státního okresního archivu Přerov*, edited by Jiří Lapáček, and Petr Jiráček, 5–24. Přerov: Zemský archiv v Opavě – Státní okresní archiv Přerov. [also available on [http://www.archives.cz/zao/resources/prerov/soka\\_prerov\\_sbornik\\_2013.pdf](http://www.archives.cz/zao/resources/prerov/soka_prerov_sbornik_2013.pdf)]
- Staněk, Josef, (1920). In memoriam J. A. Komenského. *Obzor* 11, březen 28, 1.
- »Školské slavnosti Komenského v Přerově.« (1920). *Obzor* 11, listopad 19, 2.
- Šmerková, Hana, (2008). Výkladní skříň kinematografie v prvním desetiletí samostatného Československa. Bc., Masarykova univerzita Brno, Filozofická fakulta. Accessed on September 12, 2013. [http://is.muni.cz/th/68362/ff\\_b/](http://is.muni.cz/th/68362/ff_b/).