

The Influence of Prague's Lusatian Seminary on the Sorbian National Revival

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The Catholic Lusatian Sorbs are today the most important element of the Sorbian ethnic group and their national culture. After the Reformation, they found themselves in a minority and in a highly negative situation. For the Catholic Sorbs, the opening of the Lusatian Seminary in Prague in 1728 was a significant source of strength and encouragement. Over the nearly two centuries of its existence, the Lusatian Seminary became a national institution for Catholic Sorbs, and Prague was considered their second capital after Budyšin (Bautzen). The Sorbian seminarians, who usually attended the German grammar school in Prague's Lesser Town before going on to study theology at the city's university, were taught by leading figures of Czech science such as Josef Dobrovský, Václav Hanka, Karel Jaromír Erben, and the Slovak Martin Hattala. The Sorbs thus received their education not only in their native language but also expanded their knowledge of other Slavic tongues. The seminary and the Sorbian youth association Serbowka, founded in Prague in 1846, significantly helped to spread education among the Sorbs, to strengthen their Slavic identity, and to develop their efforts at a national revival. Over its nearly 200-year-existence, the Lusatian Seminary was attended by many leading figures of the Sorbian national revival, including Slavist, magazine editor, and leading figure of the Sorbian national revival Jan Pětr Jordan; priest, editor, linguist, and long-standing chairman of the Mačica Serbska Michał Hórnik; and author and editor Jakub Bart-Čišinski, considered the most important Sorbian poet.

Key words: *Lusatian Seminary; Sorbs; education; national revival*

The Sorbs, who at the start of the 21st century live in the German federal states of Saxony and Brandenburg, are the last living branch of the Polabian Slavs. The fact that they have managed to preserve their distinct cultural and linguistic identity is to a great extent thanks their

conflict-free nature, their loyalty to the ruling German majority, and their regional (Saxon and Brandenburg/Prussian) or local-historical (Lusatian) patriotism, which they share with the local German population. Another important influence on the formation and preservation of the Sorbs' Slavic identity has been their close contact with their Slavic neighbors, in particular the Czechs,¹ Poles, and Russians. In this paper, we will focus on the Czech environment, which helped to create favorable conditions for the creation of a religious and educational institution that significantly influenced the education and national revivalist efforts of the Sorbian Catholics and also contributed to a large degree to the formation of Sorbian ethnic identity in the 19th century.

Since ancient times, religion has been a central element of Sorbian identity. This goes for the period following the Christianization of Lusatia, the post-Reformation era, and the 19th century.² The most important period for the region inhabited by the Sorbs was the 16th-century Reformation, when the Sorbs (like the Germans) split along religious lines into Protestant (Lower Lusatia and most of Upper Lusatia) and Catholic (the rest of Upper Lusatia). Since the last third of the 16th century, Catholicism has been present only in a small number of Sorbian settlements in the area delineated by the Upper Lusatian towns of Budyšin (Bautzen), Kamjenc (Kamenz), and Kulow (Wittichenau).³ Nevertheless, it is this Catholic region that played a key role in preserving Sorbian culture and developing the Sorbs' ethnic identity in the subsequent centuries. In the second half of the 1890s, the region was home to just 13,500 Catholic Sorbs – around 1/13 of the total Sorbian population.⁴ In the intervening years, the number of Sorbs has declined significantly; we can only estimate that there are no more than 20,000

¹ Cf. Kaleta, P. (2006). *Češi o Lužických Srbech. Český vědecký, publicistický a umělecký zájem o Lužické Srby v 19. století a sorabistické dílo Adolfa Černého*. Praha; Páta, J. (1923–1924). Lužickosrbské národní obrození a československá účast v něm. *Slavia. Časopis pro slovanskou filologii* 11, pp. 344–370, and other works.

² A small group of atheists has existed since the postwar period (during the existence of the German Democratic Republic), but they are a minority when compared to the total number of Sorbs.

³ In this paper, we will be primarily using the Sorbian version of Lusatian place names, followed by the German name in parentheses. A similar approach has been used for the names of Sorbian individuals: first in Sorbian and then in German in parentheses (in the case of J. X. Ticin, we give the Latin version of his name in parentheses).

⁴ Cf. Černý, A. (1896–1897). U lužických katolíků. *Světovzor* 31, no. 9, 8. 1., pp. 99.

Sorbs, around 7,800 of whom live in the Catholic part of Lusatia.⁵ However, precisely this group forms the strongest and most compact component of contemporary efforts for the preservation of Sorbian cultural and ethnic identity.⁶

The Lusatian Seminary

During the era when Lusatia was a part of the Bohemian Crown Lands, the Sorbs (and also the region's German population) would travel to Catholic Prague and other Bohemian towns in order to study.⁷ Although the 1635 Peace of Prague made Lusatia a hereditary fief of the Elector of Saxony, the Bohemian monarchs retained their role as protectors of the Catholic Church in Lusatia. This meant that the Lusatian Catholics could continue to practice their religion freely in Protestant Saxony, and that their spiritual needs would be looked after by the Archbishop of Prague. The Lusatian Catholics (to a significant degree Sorbs) also continued to have close contact with monasteries and towns in the Catholic Czech lands. This fact had a positive influence on strengthening the Catholic faith and on the Sorbs' awareness of their linguistic bonds with the more rapidly developing Czech language.

Perhaps the most distinctive representative of Sorbian Catholics in the 17th century was the Jesuit Jacob Xaver Ticin (Jacobus Xaverus Ticinus, 1656–1693), who joined the Society of Jesus in Prague. Ticin studied in Brno and Březnice and completed his education at Prague's theological faculty, after which he was active as a church official in the capital and in Chomutov. His best known publication is a grammar of the Upper Sorbian language, *Principia linguae vendicae* (Prague 1679), in which he codified

⁵ At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, Sorbian researcher Měrćin Wałda (Martin Walde) counted 7,750 Sorbs in 72 villages in the Catholic part of Lusatia (to this, however, we must add the Sorbs living in the town of Budyšin), see Ledźbor, R. (2010). Trjebamy porjadnepřipóznače serbskeje řeče a kultury. Interview z dr. Měrćinom Wałdu wo demografiskim a narodnym wuwicu w katolskich Serbach. *Katolski Posoł*, 17. januara, pp. 19.

⁶ On the history of the Catholic Sorbs until the early 20th century, see Neander [Nowak-Horjanski, J.] ([1920]). *Wobrazy z cyrkwinskih stawiznow katolskich Serbow*. Budyšin. O dějinách katolických Lužických Srbů ve 20. století viz Kowalczyk, T. (1990). *Die katholische Kirche und die Sorben 1919–1990*. Bautzen.

⁷ Cf. e.g., Střihavka, M. (1955). Lužičané na Karlově universitě v Praze do počátku XV. stol. *Lětopis, Reihe/rjad A*, 1955, no. 3, pp. 206–221.

Upper Sorbian on the basis of the dialect from around the town of Kulow while using contemporary Czech orthography.⁸

Catholic Prague in the late 17th and early 18th century, a time when Sorbian clergymen were active in town as well, had the greatest impact on the future of the Sorbs of Catholic Lusatia. As mentioned previously, some Sorbs studied in Bohemia or Moravia, and many of them remained after completing their studies; only very few returned home to Lusatia, where it was much more difficult to make a living. This fact certainly did not contribute to promoting the Sorbs' ethnic, religious, or cultural identity. Change was possible only if a larger number of Sorbian students were concentrated within one college under the direction of the Budyšín chapter, and if a suitable number of these students were to return home and preach in Lusatia after completing their studies.

The Sorbian brothers and clergymen Měrcín Norbert Šimon (Martin Norbert Schimon, 1637–1707) and Jurij Józef Šimon (Georg Josef Schimon, 1646–1729) were well aware of this fact. Since they were active in Bohemia, they realized that this environment, which was culturally and linguistically very similar to that in Lusatia, possessed the proper conditions for founding an institution for the education of Sorbian clergymen. Jurij Šimon had previously fostered Sorbian students in Prague, and in 1693 even decided to purchase a property and building for them. Although he failed to realize this plan, two years later he managed to purchase a building in Prague's Lesser Town that would act as a seminary for Sorbian students. It was called the "Hospice of St. Paul."⁹

Despite the support of both Šimon brothers, the seminary lacked financing, and the building's spaces were not suited to the seminarians' needs. With the help of the Budyšín chapter, Jurij Józef Šimon went looking for a more favorable location,¹⁰ eventually finding a more suitable building, the Dietzler House (later known as the Thun House), in 1704.

⁸ Cf. Bartoň, J. (2016–2017). Učenec z Lužice: Jakub Xaver Ticin. *Doxa. Zpravodaj katolické teologické fakulty Univerzity Karlovy v Praze* 3, No. 1, pp. 19–21. On the life and work of J. X. Ticinus, see, e.g.: Zdichynec, Jan (2006). *Vír clarus verbo et calamo: Jacobus Xaverus Ticinus, pozapomenutá osobnost barokní historiografie*. In: Březina, L. – Konvičná, J. – Zdichynec, J. (eds.). *Ve znamení země koruny české*. Praha, pp. 599–622; Zdichynec, J. (2008). *Z Kulowa přes Prahu do Bělehradu*. In: Černý, M. – Kaleta, P. (eds.). *Stoletý most mezi Prahou a Budyšínem*. Praha, pp. 73–102.

⁹ The building was located on Nová ulice ("New Street"), today U Lužického semináře ("By the Lusatian Seminary").

¹⁰ Cf. Boháč, Z. (1993). *Serbski seminar w Praze*. In: *České země a Lužice*. Tišnov – Budyšín, pp. 41–42.

The two brothers established a foundation for twelve unpropertied young men from Upper Lusatia interested in joining the clergy, which they endowed with an inheritance of 20,000 gulden. In 1716, they purchased another property, and in 1726 construction began on what would later be known as the Lusatian Seminary (Sorbian: Serbski seminar, German: Wendisches Seminar). The building was completed in 1728.¹¹ The Šimon brothers made sure that the official owner would be the Budyšín chapter, which increased the significance of the new seminary building and also emphasized the connection between the Catholics of Lusatia and this educational institution for Sorbian Catholics in Prague. The students who lived at the building were expected to perfect their Sorbian language skills so that they could work as priests in the Catholic part of Upper Lusatia.¹²

From the outset, the seminarians attended the German grammar school in Prague's Lesser Town, and those that went on to study theology attended lectures at the theological faculty in the Old Town. From the records of the number of students at the Lesser Town's grammar school, which go back to the year 1869 and give the students' native language, we can see that, on average, every year the school was attended by ten Sorbian-speaking individuals. The language of instruction was German; as the country's second language, Czech was mandatory as well, although after 1870 it was merely an elective subject.¹³ In 1815, the Lusatian Seminary began to admit Germans as well, and so the number of Sorbian students declined. Nevertheless in the 19th century the seminary still prepared numerous members of the Sorbian intelligentsia for their national revival activities back home.

¹¹ The Lusatian Seminary was built in the baroque style not far from Charles Bridge. It was a two-story single-span building with all its windows facing onto the two adjoining streets. After completion, the building was the dominant feature of this part of the Lesser Town. Today, it is owned by the Ministry of Education of the Czech Republic, and its ground floor houses the offices of the Society of Friends of Lusatia and the Hórník Sorbian Library.

¹² In 1728, the seminary already had 19 students; in 1883, this number was 26 (grammar school students and students of theology – both Sorbs and Germans from the Kingdom of Saxony). Cf. Morávek, A. – Zmeškal, V. (1948). *Lužický dům v Praze 1728–1948*. Praha, pp. 4–5. For more information on the history of the Lusatian Seminary, see Łusčanski, J. (1892). Serbski seminar s. Pětra w Prazy. *Časopis Maćicy Serbskeje* 45, pp. 3–24; Handrik, J. (1930): Stawizny Serbskeho Seminaru w Prazy. *Časopis Maćicy Serbskeje* 83, 1930, no. 1, pp. 3–22.

¹³ Mudra, J. (2005). *Přinošk k stawiznam Malostronskeho gymnazija, na kotrymž so chowancy Serbskeho seminaru kublachu*. In: Kaleta, P. – Martínek, F. – Novosad, L. (eds.). Praha a Lužičti Srbové. Praha, pp. 111–113.

One important factor for developing the seminarians' native language and fostering their acquisition of other Slavic languages was the fact that their teachers included leading representatives of Czech scientific life, in particular Slavic studies. One person who fostered the Sorbian language was Josef Dobrovský (1753–1829),¹⁴ who even created an Upper Sorbian grammar book for the seminary students, although it was destroyed under unclear circumstances.¹⁵ Nevertheless, his Czech grammar formed the model for the later Upper Sorbian grammar elaborated by Handrij Zejler (Andreas Seiler, 1804–1872) and Jan Pětr Jordan.

Also of importance for the Sorbs and their national revival were the activities of linguist and author Václav Hanka (1791–1861) at the Lusatian Seminary, where Hanka began teaching in 1829. In his lectures he focused in particular on the role of the verb in Sorbian, on analogical orthography, and on instilling a knowledge of other Slavic languages. Thanks in great part to Hanka's activities and the training he provided in Slavic languages, two of his most talented students, Jan Pětr Jordan and Michal Hórnik, went on to become leading figures of the Sorbian national revival. Hanka also helped to establish the Prague-based Sorbian association Serbowka at the Lusatian Seminary in 1846, whose activities he continued to influence.¹⁶ A less fortuitous time in the seminary's history was the period from 1861 to 1870, when the school's linguistic training was led by archivist, poet, and author Karel Jaromír Erben (1811–1870). There were fewer linguistic exercises, which was reflected in a decreased knowledge of Sorbian among the seminary's students. The Serbowka association's cultural life was also weaker during this time.¹⁷ After this period of stagnation, life at the Lusatian Seminary and in the Serbowka turned around under the guidance of the Slovak Slavist Martin Hattala (1821–1903), who conscientiously led language instruction and under whose watch the Serbowka significantly expanded its activities. Hattala was active at the seminary in 1872–1896, and although his academic focus was on Czech and Slovak comparative grammar, he also had

¹⁴ Cf. Páta, J. (1929). *Josef Dobrovský a Lužice*. Prague.

¹⁵ Brandl, V. (2003). *Život Josefa Dobrovského*. 2nd amended edition. Praha, pp. 215.

¹⁶ On Hanka's activities within the Lusatian Seminary and his contacts with the Sorbs, see Lorencová, M. (1955). Václav Hanka a Lužičtí Srbové. *Lětopis*, Reihrjad A, no. 3, pp. 155–205.

¹⁷ For more information on Erben's activities within the Lusatian Seminary, see Mudra, J. (1968). K. J. Erbenowe skutkowanje za Serbow. Přinošk k česko-serbskim kulturnym počaham. *Lětopis*, Reihrjad A, no. 15/2, pp. 182–200.

a good knowledge of Sorbian and influenced his Sorbian students' interest in linguistic questions, as reflected in the later work of Michal Róla, Jurij Libš, and Jakub Bart-Čišinski.¹⁸ Closely linked with the Lusatian Seminary was the Sorbian youth association Serbowka, which held regular seminary meetings and was a place for students to practice their Sorbian. The first meeting took place on 21 October 1846, and the group's first chairman was Jakub Buk of Zejicy. Over the subsequent decades, the Serbowka went on to become an important center for Sorbian student life in Prague. An important source for studying the group's founding and its later activities are the hand-written Sorbian-language books titled *Serbowka*. One volume is called *Dženik* and contains regular meeting minutes and notes on exercises; the other volume, *Kwětki*, contains the young seminarians' best literary works.

As indicated earlier, the Czech national revivalists had great influence on the young Sorbians at the Lusatian Seminary and within the Serbowka association. Among the seminary's graduates and the members of the Serbowka were many individuals who would later go on to be important figures in Sorbian cultural life and leading representatives of the Sorbian national revival. These include Slavist and editor Jan Pětr Jordan (1818–1891), who wrote the Upper Sorbian grammar *Grammatik der wendisch-serbischen Sprache in der Oberlausitz: Im Systeme Dobrowskýs abgefaßt* (Prague 1841) and who in 1842 was the editor-in-chief of the weekly magazine *Jutnička*, plus several later chairmen of the Serbowka: the aforementioned clergyman, teacher, and editor Jakub Buk (1825–1895); clergyman, editor, linguist, longtime chairman of Maćica Serbska, and key figure of the Sorbian national revival Michal Hórnik (Michael Hornig, 1833–1894);¹⁹ priest, author, and poet Handrij Dučman (Andreas Deutschmann, 1836–1909); bishop Jurij Łusčanski (Georg Wuschanski, 1839–1905); clergyman and author Michal Róla (Michael Rolle, 1841–1881); editor, social activist, and dean of the Budyšin cathedral chapter of St. Peter Jakub Skala (Jacob Skala, 1851–1925); author, editor, and leading Sorbian poet Jakub Bart-Čišinski (Jacob Barth, 1856–1909); priest, author, and linguist Jurij Libš (Georg Liebsch, 1857–1927); clergyman, writer, and editor Mikławš Andricki (Nicolaus Andritzki, 1871–1908); and many others. The Lusatian Seminary in

¹⁸ For more information on Hattal's activities within the Prague Serbowka, see Mudra, J. (1974). *Praska Serbowka w dobjce dohladowarstwa Měrćina Hattale (1872–1903)*. *Lětopis, Reihe/rjad A*, no. 21/1, pp. 58–93; Mudra, J. (1974). *Ze serbskeho listowanja Měrćina Hattale*. *Lětopis, Reihe/rjad A*, no. 21/1, pp. 94–102.

¹⁹ For more information, see Petr, J. (1974). *Michal Hórnik*. Budyšin.

Prague was headed by a director (Sorbian: *prezes*), a function held by, among others, three Czech followers of Bernard Bolzano: František Příhonský (1788–1859), František Náhlovský (1807–1853), and Antonín Slavíček (1813–1893), who also promoted the activities of the Sorbian students who got together once a week at the regular meetings of the *Serbowka*.

The number of Sorbian students in the seminary declined after 1815, when the Lusatian Seminary also housed German Catholics from Lusatia. The situation worsened further after 1895, when the German Anselm Rotzinger was put in charge of the seminary. In addition, with the death of Martin Hattala in 1903 the young Sorbs of the *Serbowka* lost contact with leading representatives of Czech science, who had introduced them to the fundamentals of the Slavic languages. One ideal candidate was Adolf Černý, the founder of Sorbian studies in the Czech lands and since 1901 lecturer in the Sorbian language at Prague's university, but supposedly the church's German functionaries completely banned him from having any access to the Lusatian Seminary.²⁰ This may have been in part due to Černý's gradual conversion to Protestantism, which at the time was already apparent in his thinking. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the ongoing Sorbian national revival showed the clear influence of Czech thinkers in the fields of science, culture, and politics, which did not please the heads of the Meissen bishopric, of which the *Budyšín* chapter was a part. As a result, support for the seminary continued to weaken, and there were even attempts at finding ways to close it down altogether. The final death knell came with the First World War, which weakened the Sorbian national movement and the *Serbowka* in Prague. The postwar situation is reflected in the ethnic composition of the seminarians sent to Prague, now the capital of an independent Czechoslovakia: in 1920, the figures were twenty Germans and five Sorbs, in 1921 it was thirteen Germans and eight Sorbs, in the 1921/1922 school year the number of Sorbian students at the Lusatian Seminary was eight, and the following year three Germans and two Sorbs came to the seminary – only to be sent home again in November 1922 because the seminary was closed and the building sold.²¹

In fact, after the war Germany and the Vatican had reached an agreement that the Lusatian Seminary would be closed within five years. After reconstitution of the Meissen bishopric (which had been

²⁰ Morávek, A. – Zmeškal, V. (1948). *Lužický seminář v Praze 1728–1948*. Praha, pp. 28.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30.

Lutheranized during the Reformation), Bishop Christian Schreiber (1872–1933) set to this task with great conviction. By 1921, the decision had been made to close the seminary, and in October 1922 the building was sold to the Regional Administrative Committee for the Land of Bohemia.²² Although the building was sold, the foundation for the support of Sorbian students remained (i.e., the scholarships for Lusatian students in Prague were not abolished).²³ However, Sorbian theology students tended to continue their studies in Germany, and in 1924 the building of the Lusatian Seminary became an administrative building for the land of Bohemia. On 18 July 1945, a decree by the regional national committee in Prague gave the building of the Lusatian Seminary to the Society of Friends of Lusatia at no cost, and the building was officially transferred to its new owner on 21 October 1946. Later, the rooms of the former Lusatian Seminary were renovated and the Society of Friends of Lusatia turned the building into the Lusatian House in Prague, which once again provided a home for Sorbian students and also several Czechs.²⁴

Conclusion

Over the nearly two centuries of its existence, the Lusatian Seminary became a national institution for Catholic Sorbs, and Prague was considered their second capital after Budyšin – which it de facto still is today. Slavic Prague had a significant influence on expanding education among Catholic Sorbian theology students, and in the 1840s the Lusatian Seminary and the Serbowka contributed to expanding the ranks of Sorbian national revivalists by producing individuals with excellent knowledge of Slavic languages and close contacts with Czech (but also Russian, Polish, and other) academics, writers, and cultural workers. After

²² For a list of all seminary students who lived at the Lusatian Seminary in 1728–1922, including their hometowns, see Boháč, Z. (1966). Die Matrikel der Zöglinge des „Wendischen Seminars“ in Prag 1728–1922. *Lětopis, Reihe/rjad B*, 13/2, pp. 166–228.

²³ On the activities of the Serbowka after the dissolution of the Lusatian Seminary, see Mlýnk, J. (1963). *Praska „Serbowka“ po zběhnjenju Serbskeho seminara. Přinošk k serbskim kulturnym stawiznam mjez swětowymaj wójnomaj. Lětopis, Reihe/rjad A*, 10/1, pp. 84–114.

²⁴ For more, see Závada, J. (2003). Budova Lužického semináře, sídlo Centra pro studium vysokého školství. *Aula* 11, no. 1, pp. 18. On the history of the Lusatian Seminary building from 1945 to the early 21st century, see Mikula, R. (2005). Konec Lužického domu v Praze. In: Kaleta, P. – Martínek, F. – Novosad, L. (eds.). *Praha a Lužičti Srbové. Praha*, pp. 244–251.

returning to Lusatia, these individuals worked intensively along the model of Czech national revivalists in order to shape Sorbian national identity. Their education at Prague's Lusatian Seminary contributed to making the Catholic Sorbs a decisive factor in preserving Sorbian national and cultural identity. The seminary's closing in the early 20th century had a long-lasting impact on the Sorbs' national revival and on spreading a sense of national consciousness among the Sorbian population. Both during the interwar era and in the period following the Second World War, there was no chance for establishing a religious institution with the same Sorbian educational character as the Lusatian Seminary in Prague.