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## Teaching and Erudition in the Environment of Lowland Slovaks

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**Abstract:** In the presented thesis, we tried to point out selected questions from the history of the Lowland Slovaks. We took a closer look at the level of erudition and the formation of elementary education in the environment of Slovak emigrants in the period from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> to approximately middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Slovak evangelicals put great emphasis on school education and attached essential importance to erudition. In their new homeland they almost immediately after their settlement started building the first public institutions such as the church, parish house and school. In the presented thesis, we also referred to the importance of biblical Czech in the educational process and clarify the basic aspects of elementary education in the Lowland.

**Keywords:** teacher, erudition, school, Lowland, teachers' association

In the contribution, we focused on the basic issues of education and erudition among resettled Slovak subjects in the Low Countries in the period of the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>1</sup> For three centuries, Lowland Slovaks have attributed and continue to attribute

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<sup>1</sup> Lowland is an accepted term in Slovak historiography that refers to the central part of the Danubian-Pannonian plain, which is located on the border of present-day Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Croatia. The core of the Slovak Lowland was formed by the Békés-Csanád region, the Arad-Banatsk region and the Vojvodina region. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, approximately two

adequate importance to the upbringing and education of their children in their mother language. It is widely known that education and training in autochthonous communities of national minorities is the key area for maintaining and development of the community, which is also true in the case of Lowland Slovaks. However, in the beginning of the work, we consider it important to present the basic aspects of the investigated issue, to indicate the main causes and stages of the migration of Slovak subjects to the Lowland.

## The migration of Slovaks to the Lowland

The migration of Slovaks to the Lowland (German: Alföld) from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a long-lasting migration movement within the then Hungary and took place in several stages. At the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, people from Upper Hungary used to move to Lowland for seasonal work, mainly harvesting. Moving and leaving for seasonal work intensified even more after the Peace of Szatmar in 1711.<sup>2</sup> At that time, new opportunities for wage work opened for the Slovak poverty in the wide territory of the Lowland.<sup>3</sup> After the expulsion of the Turks and the suppression of the Rákóczi uprising, large areas of the Békés and Csanád Counties were depopulated and devastated. The inhabitants of the once existing settlements fled from the plundering in the country of the constantly moving army, to find their refuge either in the nearest larger populated settlement (between the Danube and the Tisza, in the Jazyg-Cuman district, in the Szabolcz and Bihorsk Counties, in Transylvania), or far away in the North. This situation was taken advantage of by the Slovak subjects who, after the mentioned Peace of Szatmar, began to move more massively to the depopulated areas of Békes or Csanád Counties. Most of the settlers came from Novohrad, Hont and the Pest Counties. The second route of Slovaks fleeing to the south led through Gemer, Borsod and through Heves-Külső-Szolnok County.

In addition to seasonal agricultural work, Slovak subjects used to move to the Lowland illegally too. Literally by running away, without the consent of their land-

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hundred thousand people moved to this area from Slovak and Upper Hungarian cities. P. Gajdoš, *Človek, spoločnosť, prostredie*, Veda, Bratislava 2002, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> At that time, seasonal agricultural work was a widespread phenomenon not only in southwestern Slovakia, but also in other areas of Hungary. It remains a fact that poor subjects from the northern Slovak counties went to Lowland for seasonal work from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century basically until the end of the First World War in 1918. J. Sirácky et al., *Slováci vo svete*, Matica Slovenská, Martin 1980, pp. 20–21.

<sup>3</sup> The settlement structure, the dispersion of the population and the ethnic image, especially of the southern parts of the Lower Earth, have changed significantly as a result of the Turkish occupation. L. Blazovich, *A Körös – Tisza – Maros köz középkori településrendje*, Dél-alföldi Évszázadok 1, Békéscsaba-Szeged 1985, p. 207.

lord.<sup>4</sup> They left the property of their landlords with their entire families mainly because of the difficult living situation, increased tax oppression, overpopulation of their villages, etc. For example, in Békes County, the escaped subjects were concentrated in three places, in Gyula, Gyoma and Békes Csaba. Another large group of Slovak subjects in the Lowland were those who were moved there by individual landowners. This is a kind of unorganized land colonization, when subjects were resettled directly, without the mediation of locators. The locators later played an important role in moving new settlers to the estates.<sup>5</sup>

The actual settlement and migration of Slovak subjects to the Lowland can be divided into three main stages. The first stage covers the period between 1690–1710, the second 1711–1740 and the third stage between 1745–1790. The third stage subsequently faded until almost the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first stage can be characterized as a stage of spontaneous migration of Slovak subjects. In the second stage, Slovak subjects settled not only in Nograd County, but also in Pest and Tisza region. In the third stage, Slovaks settled in the southernmost regions of Hungary, in Bacska, Srieame and Banat (Vojvodina).<sup>6</sup> Mainly from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Slovak subjects also began to settle in Croatia – Slavonia, where the local landowners invited them, e.g., for clearing forests. The establishment of new settlements had several reasons. It was primarily overpopulation of the original settlements due to the natural population growth, the arrival of other settlers from the northern capitals, depletion of land or difficult living conditions. Free movement or escape from the increased tax burden also contributed to the mobility of subjects.

## Education and the first schools

Up to nowadays, it is not clear what kind of education the Slovak subjects brought with them from their original settlements and impoverished small Esquires who settled in individual areas of the Lowland. The demands for education and at the same time the ethnic self-confidence of the evangelical Slovaks settled down at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were primarily determined by their confessional affiliation.<sup>7</sup> Their educational demands were closely related to their ethnic awareness, which was also significantly reflected in the attitudes of individual groups of settlers.

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<sup>4</sup> J. Gomboš, *Slovenskí osadníci na Dolnej zemi*, [in:] *Slováci v zahraničí* 16, Matica slovenská, Martin 1990, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> J. Sirácky et al., *Slováci vo svete...*, qtd., p. 27; see also: J. Gomboš, *Slováci v južnej časti Dolnej zeme (od konca 17. do konca 18. storočia)*. Výber prameňov, Výskumný ústav Slovákov v Maďarsku, Bekešská Čaba, Békešská Čaba 2008, p. 153.

<sup>6</sup> J. Sirácky et al., *Slováci vo svete...*, qtd., pp. 31–32.

<sup>7</sup> A. Ďivičanová, *Meštianske inštitúcie slovenskej kultúry v Békéšskej Čabe v zrkadle etnokultúrnych zmien*, Národopis Slovákov v Maďarsku 1996, Magyar Néprajzi Társaság, Budapest 1996, p. 45–73.

By most Slovak subjects of the evangelical faith, a strong Protestant self-confidence was formed over time through the constant defensive religious struggle against the attacks of the Counter-Reformation in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. And it was this Protestant self-confidence that was closely related to a certain linguistic awareness. Namely, Slovak evangelicalism in Hungary from the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century used a separate church language – liturgical Czech, and that is what distinguished it even from co-religionists (other Protestants), e.g., German Protestant-Lutherans coexisting with it in many places. Biblical Czech itself was not the mother language of the Slovaks, it can be noted that it became their adopted and acquired liturgical, written and as well as folk ceremonial language. At that time, the relative cultural isolation of the Lowland Slovaks from the mother nation meant that the Bible language was kept, respectively used, in the Lowland much longer than in Slovakia. This was related to the fact that it was used here to a much greater extent not only in religious and church life, but also in profane and common life.<sup>8</sup>

The collective and at the same time the ethnic consciousness of the Slovak subjects gradually grew stronger, and its cohesion was strengthened by the fact that during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Protestant Church in the territory of Central Slovakia, from which Slovak settlers mostly came and formed language islands in other areas of Hungary, built such a school system that was already focused on the education of the lower classes.<sup>9</sup> It is a fact that the evangelical Slovaks immediately after their settlement, although they first of all had to lay the foundations of their existence, built their first public institutions, namely a church and a school, so that even in the conditions of the greatest existential uncertainty, they could provide elementary training for their children. This can be explained by the deep-rooted demands for education inherited from the original settlements in the past. Almost immediately after arriving in the new homeland, the immigrants began to build not only the churches but schools as well.<sup>10</sup>

Slovak evangelicals really emphasized school education and attached fundamental importance to erudition. In accordance with Luther's principle "the church maintains the school, the school maintains the church", the propagators of the Reformation demanded the establishment of schools at every evangelical parish.<sup>11</sup> The Sopron Assembly in 1688 also helped the Evangelical settlers to found their own schools in their new homeland, on the basis of which the Protestant Church acquired a certain

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<sup>8</sup> In the Vojvodina region, the Bible language of Tranoscia and Kralicka Bible was modified not only in terms of lexical and grammatical plan, but also in pronunciation. It started to be softer, taking on the accent of local dialects. P. Bohuš, *Písmená, ktoré napísané nachádzame v listoch prad-edov*, [in:] *Petrovec 1745–1995*, Báčsky, Kultúra, Petrovec 1995, p. 357.

<sup>9</sup> A. Ďivičanová, *Meštianske inštitúcie...*, qtd., p. 50.

<sup>10</sup> J. Botík, *Slovenská Dolná zem*, Publisher Ivan Krasko, Nadlak 2019, p. 100.

<sup>11</sup> B. Petřík, *Evanjelická encyklopédia Slovenska*, BoPo, Modra 2001, p. 364.

autonomy, including the right to establish its own schools.<sup>12</sup> It is a fact that the evangelical church played a really important role in the establishment of schools, but it is also a fact that it pursued primarily the strengthening of its own religious interests.<sup>13</sup>

As we have already indicated, the principles of the spiritual mission and organizational anchoring of the evangelical church community were brought by the Slovak settlers from their native regions. Otherwise, it would hardly be conceivable that immediately after their settlement, in every populous Slovak settlement, they had an organized and well-functioning church self-government according to Lutheran principles. And of course, according to these principles, they also immediately built the corresponding infrastructure – above all, a church, a parish, a school and a cemetery. These objects soon became prominent features of every larger residence. The church, parsonage and school also acted as stimuli for bonding and symbols of identification processes in newly formed communities.<sup>14</sup>

The elementary schools founded by the Evangelical Church and already spreading in the 18<sup>th</sup> century differed in many aspects from the type of evangelical schools in the regions of Upper Hungary in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. School teachers successively abandoned the Latin language, which was previously compulsory for some subjects. On the other hand, we can assume that even biblical Czech was not so strictly required in elementary schools. Even though not very many textbooks, usually published by the local church or church district, were written in Czech, the linguistic and emotional motivations of the children most often “forced” the teacher to speak to the students in their own native language with elements of the local dialect. This brought them closer to the children and the teaching material was in many ways more comprehensible for them. Successively, this native language style used in social communication became fully established in the entire school communication, even though the students had to interpret the lessons from the textbooks in biblical Czech. Several linguistic researches on the Slovak language islands in Hungary led to the conclusion that the Czech biblical language, although Slovak evangelicals could use it as a liturgical and teaching language on a daily basis, nevertheless did not fundamentally influence the local Slovak language used in normal communication.<sup>15</sup> The content of the teaching material and teaching methods in the environment of the Lowland settlers in the

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<sup>12</sup> P. Kónya, *Šopronské články a ich realizácia v hornouhorských kráľovských mestách*, [in:] *Historia Ecclesiastica*, III, 2012, No. 1, p. 33; M. Ondrušková, *Ludovýchovná činnosť slovenských učiteľov – národných buditeľov na Dolnej zemi v 18. a v 19. storočí*, [in:] *Slováci v zahraničí 10*, Vydavateľstvo Matica Slovenská, Martin 1984, p. 111.

<sup>13</sup> J. Botík, *Slováci vo Vojvodine*, Publisher Ústav pre kultúru vojvodinských Slovákov, Nový Sad 2016, p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> J. Botík, *Dolnozemskí Slováci. Tri storočia vystahovaleckých osudov, spôsobu života a identity Slovákov v Maďarsku, Rumunsku, Srbsku a Bulharsku*, Publisher Ivan Krasko, Nadlak 2011, p. 30.

<sup>15</sup> P. Király, *Beiträge zur Frage der Mundartmischung. Ursprung und Ausgestaltung der slowakische Mundarten von Tótkomlós*, [in:] *Studia Slavica*, Budapest 1962, No. 1–4, p. 339–377; see also: A. Divičanová, *Meštianske inštitúcie...*, qtd., p. 52.

18<sup>th</sup> century are only little known to us. However, we have several records from the time that a significant part of Slovak evangelicals – including the population of smaller settlements – knew how to read and write.<sup>16</sup>

## Teachers and their activity

Teachers came to the Lowland either at the same time as the Slovak settlers, or later, at the invitation of the Slovak evangelical church congregations in the Lowland. Often there was even an interesting situation when the Slovak settlers were able to provide more favourable living and working conditions to the teachers coming to the Lowland than where they came from, e.g., from more northern Hungarian counties. For many years, the education of the Lowland Slovaks was influenced by the pedagogical and popular education activities of Samuel Tešedík. Tešedík's personality even attracted teachers with higher qualifications to Lowland. They were mostly teachers returning from studies in Germany. Among them were often graduates of theology who took up the teaching position in the Lowland in the hope of obtaining a better-paid position as a priest in the future.<sup>17</sup> In the first stage of the settlement of the Lowland by Slovaks, before the construction of a proper school building, the learning process took place in the local parish, in the case it had already been built, or in the house of a peasant who provided the teacher with one of his rooms for teaching. Schools used to be established near the church, and if it the conditions and finances allowed, the teacher's apartment was part of the school premises.

After the settlers established themselves in the new home and as well based on demographic growth (birth rate, new immigrants, etc.), either the old school was expanded with additional premises, or another new school was built. In the course of time, there were even two or three schools in more important villages. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was mostly one teacher per school, whereby the salary was relatively low. Over the time, especially in the case of students increase there was usually accepted second teacher too. However, it was interesting that they did not receive the full salary. The salary of the functionally senior teacher was split into half, so that both teachers were essentially receiving half the salary. The “school year” lasted mostly from September to May. As for weekdays, classes were held in the morning and in the afternoon, the students used to go home for lunch. The teaching methodology was theoretically based on an oral, practical and illustrative method of explanation.<sup>18</sup> Teachers

<sup>16</sup> P. Gajdács brings interesting information about the relationship between church and education in his work: P. Gajdács, *Tót-Komlós története*, Nyomatott Kner Izidor, Gyoma 1896, p. 430.

<sup>17</sup> M. Ondrušková, *Ludovýchovná činnost...*, qtd., p. 111.

<sup>18</sup> A valuable document has also been preserved; the list of subjects taught in 1840. Although it is from a younger period, it is still important for illustrating the subjects taught. These were the following: Slovak reading, Hungarian reading, various Slovak prayers, numbers, writing, geography, natural science and ant study. Original in *„A' tanítás tárgyai a' Hiszónok s Dekány bé folyásával*

were trying to profile the subjects in such a way that the pupils acquired knowledge not only in the field of religious education, but also in the area of natural science or local history. Every day, in addition to writing, reading, religious singing and biblical stories, the teachers also taught biology, often focusing on domestic animals. There were taught physics as well, rules about health, or history and geography. At the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, most village schools had one class, but in larger cities children were taught in two or three classes, depending on the number of teachers.<sup>19</sup>

As we have already indicated above, until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the biblical Czech language played an important role in the spiritual life of Evangelicals of Lowland Slovaks, even outside the church, in all basic areas of culture. Priests and church teachers wrote their sermons in this language, and on the orders of wealthier families, they also wrote extensive funeral speeches, rich in content and challenging in style, which the family usually published. The formal and content concept of these funeral speeches, inherited from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, did not change even at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or even in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20</sup> In some regions, the biblical language has penetrated fiction and scientific work as well. It is typical of the 1830s and 40s.

## Educational associations

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, teachers in the Lowland tried to raise the teaching status and profession to a higher level of education, which is evidenced by the founding of various educational associations. They were mainly led by highly erudite teachers in terms of pedagogy and science. Among such educational associations we can list, for example, the Fraternal Association of Folk Education Teachers in Szarvas. The association was founded in 1804 on the initiative of A. Školka and J. Krištoffi. The main goal of the association was to cultivate a “healthy associational spirit” in teachers, but especially to lead teachers to self-education, to efforts to establish a library or to conduct scientific discussions about textbooks. In addition, the interests and everyday problems of teachers should have been discussed and solved in the association. Their social authority was to be ensured, protection against the arbitrariness of the church clergy, and efforts were also aimed to strengthen the sense of belonging among teachers. The members of the association founded a library and tried to develop public education activities or to unify the education in their region. The association also

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*el intézve múlt Esztendőben ezek voltak: tót s magyar olvasás, különféle tót imádságok, szám tan, írás, földleírás, némely természeti jelenetek, s az illendőség szabályai. A' tanítási nivå normalis, Canonica Visitatio 1840, pp. 12–13. C. Lisztmajer, *Dejiny základnej školy v Dunaedháze*, [https://www.sulinet.hu/oroksegtar/data/magyarorszag\\_i\\_nemzetisegek/szlovakok/dunaegyhazi/dejiny\\_zakladnej\\_skoly\\_v\\_dunaedhaze/001\\_dejiny\\_zakladnej\\_skoly\\_v\\_dunaedhaze.htm](https://www.sulinet.hu/oroksegtar/data/magyarorszag_i_nemzetisegek/szlovakok/dunaegyhazi/dejiny_zakladnej_skoly_v_dunaedhaze/001_dejiny_zakladnej_skoly_v_dunaedhaze.htm) [available: 12.11.22].*

<sup>19</sup> J. Botík, *Slováci vo Vojvodine...*, qtd., p. 66.

<sup>20</sup> A. Divičanová, *Meštianske inštitúcie...*, qtd., p. 52.

maintained contacts with members of learned societies in Slovakia. The church clergy did not like the excessive independence of the teachers, and the association came to end in 1811.<sup>21</sup>

However, this association was not the only one that was founded at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the initiative of Lowland teachers. In 1804, the Fraternal Association of Teachers of Békes-Csanád-Czongrád-Arad-Banat and the Békecsaba Seniorate was founded, which was named Alma Fraternitas. The association maintained lively contacts with Slovak and foreign academics, and members of the association, for example, promoted the pedagogical works of foreign authors. They not only promoted these works, but also studied them, reported on them, wrote and read reviews of these works. In addition, they discussed their own prepared textbooks and discussed several educational methods in village schools. The association actively promoted the ideas of self-education of teachers.

In 1846, the Circle of Teachers was founded in Szarvas, whose members also maintained contacts with Slovak educators from the Upper Hungarian regions. The members of the circle focused on improving the educational process, discussed the content of individual textbooks or compiled lesson plans for individual schools in Szarvas and its surroundings. In 1869, the Association of Folk Education Teachers was established in Békes Csaba. From the name itself, it follows that their primary goal was public education, in addition to which they dealt with the teaching of Slovak grammar.<sup>22</sup> The members of the aforementioned associations used to communicate mostly in Slovak language and advocated for the cultivation of the native language.<sup>23</sup>

When mentioning individual clubs and societies, we must not forget important Slovak teachers working in the Lowland during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In addition to the aforementioned Samuel Tešedík, we must mention his predecessor in public education and educational activities, namely Matej Markovic the elder (\*1707 Banská Štiavnica – †1762 Sarvaš). Other important teachers in the monitored period were, for example, Daniel Bocko, Samuel Bredecký, Andrej Školka, Pavol Jozeffy, Juraj Kristoffi, Adam Benka, Pavel Tomášek, Pavol Magda, Štefan Leška, Ján Kollár, Ján Kadavý, Pavol Michalko, Štefan Koreň, Štefan Jančovič, Ján Kutlík the elder, Ján Kutlík the younger, Ján Pravoľub Bella, Pavel Veselský or Daniel Kička. Of course, there were many more. The results of their public education and national awakening activities lived on in many generations of Lowland Slovaks.

<sup>21</sup> Szarvasi evangélikus levéltár, sign. III/3 – 1804. M. Ondrušková, *Ludovýchovná činnosť...*, qtd., p. 112.

<sup>22</sup> *Krátka mluvnica slovenská* is a codification manual from 1852. It represents the basis of the linguistic unification of the Slovaks. This is the first collectively approved manual of the written Slovak language. See: M.M. Hodža, *Krátka mluvnica slovenská*, Publisher: Schmidt, Bratislava 1852, p. 81.

<sup>23</sup> M. Ondrušková, *Ludovýchovná činnosť...*, qtd., pp. 113–114.



In the period of the Austro-Hungarian settlement, and especially after it, a strong wave of Magyarization also affected the education system in the Lowland. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only a few Slovak teachers were teaching in Slovak language in one-classroom schools on farmsteads in the rural areas and villages in the Lowland.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, pp. 114–139.

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