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STAGING OF EARLY MODERN BIBLICAL PLAYS FROM THE CZECH LANDS¹

Biblical plays were a very popular genre in the early modern age, which applies to the Czech Lands as well; indeed, they are the most frequent genre to be found among the texts that have been preserved from the second half of the 16th century and the early 17th century.

It is generally assumed that it was students of so called Latin schools or townfolk who performed these plays on stage. However, the question arises whether we have sufficient evidence to claim that the plays were actually staged. And if so, what did the stage look like? This article therefore focuses on the three following basic issues:

- 1) What can be said about staging of these dramas – were they really performed on stage, or were they intended more as plays to read?
- 2) Can stage directions help us to get answers to this question?
- 3) Can information about what a given stage actually looked like be deduced from the respective texts?

Before approaching these questions, I will first clarify the term biblical drama and briefly present the material I have worked with.

Biblical Drama

The term *biblical drama* can be defined in various ways. According to some researchers, it includes only dramas that focus on topics from the Old Testament. Yet if we were to adhere to this definition, there would be many dramas that would not fall under the category of biblical plays – for instance dramas about John the Baptist, the Prodigal Son or about Lazarus and the rich man, which constitute the majority of dramatic production outside of the Czech Lands.

The second possibility is to define the biblical drama as all plays based on biblical themes. In this case, the analysed material would also include dramas that focus on the topics of Christmas, Passion or Easter. Yet then, our research would have to include among others folk plays from the 17th and the first half of the 18th century, which is beyond its scope

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This paper thus stems from the biblical drama definition by Wolfram Washof in his monograph *Die Bibel auf der Bühne*.² His approach is a compromise between the two above-mentioned definitions. Washof never defined the term “biblical drama” explicitly, but it follows from the materials analysed in his book that it includes all dramas dealing with biblical topics with the exception of Passion, Easter, and Christmas plays. This choice is justified by the opinions of Martin Luther who was critical about Passion plays and who generally disagreed with connecting theatrical elements with a liturgy or other religious ceremonies which occurred for instance in Christmas or Twelfth Night plays, during processions on Palm Sunday, etc. Yet, as regards dramatizations of other biblical topics including Christ’s deeds (*gesta Christi*), Luther endorsed them, especially if they had an educational or pedagogical purpose.³

Biblical Drama in the Czech Lands

There is a total of sixteen preserved texts from the Czech Lands that could be, pursuant to the definition presented above, labelled as biblical dramas:

- 1) Mikuláš Konáč of Hodiškov (around 1480/1485–1546): *Hra z historii Judith pilně vybraná* [Play from the Histories of Judith Carefully Selected], printed in 1547. It is a translation of play *Tragedia des Buchs Judith* by Joachim Greff (printed in 1536).
- 2) Mikuláš Vrána of Litomyšl: *Komedia česká o ctné a šlechetné vdově Juidit* [Czech Comedy of Chaste and Noble Widow Judith]. This translation of the play by Hans Sachs was published in print in 1605, but it had been probably written earlier, possibly in the 1560s.
- 3) Pavel Kyrmezer († 1589): *Komedia česká o bohatci a Lazarovi* [Czech Comedy of the Rich Man and Lazarus], published in print in 1566.
- 4) Jan Aquila of Plaveč (around 1520 – around 1573/4): *Toboeus*. The play was written in 1569, but it was published in print only in 1587.
- 5) *Komedia o králi Šalomůnovi* [Comedy of King Solomon]. An anonymous Czech translation of play *Sapientia Salomonis* by Sixt Birck (1501–1554); it was performed in Prague in 1571, where it was probably also published in print for the first time. However, only the second edition from 1604 survived to this day. The translation, which was probably partly done by pupils, came into existence at the School of Saint Stephan the Great in the New Town of Prague.

² WASHOF 2007.

³ For a detailed summary of the views of M. Luther and P. Melanchthon on spiritual drama, ancient plays and theater in general, see METZ 2013, 102–219.

- 6) Pavel Kyrmezer: *Komedia nová o vdově* [New Comedy of a Widow], published in print in 1573. An adaptation of play *Ein schön Teütsch geistlich Spil Von der Witfraw* by Leonhard Culmann (around 1500/1501–1562) from the year 1544.
- 7) Matthaeus Meissner (1543–after 1600): *Ein neu Biblischs Spil, von dem erschrocklichen untergang Sodom und Gomorra. Item: von der oppfferung Isaac*, 1579.
- 8) Pavel Kyrmezer: *Komedie o Tobiašovi* [Comedy of Tobit], published in print in 1581. Kyrmezer wrote the play on the occasion of the wedding of Arkleb of Kunovice and Alžběta of Šternberk.
- 9) Jan Záhrobský of Těšín (around 1523–1590): *Traica historia vo knězi neb knížeti Héli a jeho synech* [Tragic History of the Priest Heli and his Sons], published in print in 1582.
- 10) Daniel Stodolius of Požov: *Nová žalostivá hra z Biblí svaté vybraná o strašlivém podvrácení Sodomy a Gomorry a o obětování Isaáka* [New Rueful Play from the Holy Bible of the Terrible Subversion of Sodom and Gomorrah and the Sacrifice of Isaac], published in print in 1586. Translation of the Meissner's play (n. 7).
- 11) Juraj Tesák Mošovský (around 1547–1617): *Komedie z knihy Zákona božího, jenž slove Ruth, vybraná* [Comedy from a Books of God's Testament Entitled Ruth], published in print in 1604.
- 12) Ondřej Rochotský (around 1583 – after 1622): *Gedeon* [Gideon] (1606).
- 13) Ondřej Rochotský: *Iosephiados comoedia* (1607–8).
- 14) An anonymous author: *Historia duchovní o Samsonovi* [A Sacred History of Samson], published in print in 1608.
- 15) Georgius Dingenauer (1571–1631): *Tobias Junior*. The play was written in 1616 on the occasion of the wedding of Václav Vilém Popel of Lobkowicz and Markéta Františka von Dietrichtstein, the niece of Cardinal Franz von Dietrichtstein (1570–1636).
- 16) John Amos Comenius: *Abrahamus patriarcha* [Abraham the Patriarch] (1641).

Staged dramas or plays to read?

One of the distinctive features of the bohemical production of biblical plays is the low number of plays about which we know for sure that they were staged. Out of the 16 above-mentioned plays, relevant evidence exists only for three or four of them.

From the dedication in Matthias Meissner's play about Abraham it follows that the play was staged in the town of Chomutov during the summer of 1579 twice –

on July, 6 at the town hall and on August, 2 at the castle.⁴ The play *Tobias Junior* by Georgius Dingenauer⁵ was written for the wedding of Markéta Františka von Dietrichtstein – the niece of Cardinal Franz von Dietrichtstein – and Václav Vilém Popel of Lobkowicz. Students of the Jesuit university in Olomouc performed the play in Kroměříž where the wedding took place, which is evidenced by information on the title page of the printed version of the play,⁶ as well as by the list of performers. And finally, the play *Abrahamus patriachra* by John Amos Comenius was performed by students of the gymnasium in Leszno in January 1641 as part of public school examinations (*sub exman scholae publicum*).⁷ In the prolog, Comenius *inter alia* informs that the previous year, the students staged another of his plays, namely *Diogenes Cynicus*, as well as a play about kidnapped sons of Frederick of Saxony and another one about an unfortunate demise of Emperor Mauritius.⁸ Possibly as a compensation for performing this play with a secular motive, they announced an intention to offer in the upcoming year “new [...] performances, but this time with a religious motive, suitable for our Christian faith more than others.”⁹

The fourth play, *Toboeus* by Jan Aquila of Plaveč,¹⁰ was almost certainly staged as well, however, the actual date of staging is not clear. The play was written by Aquila in 1569, but it was published in print only in 1587, after his death. The university annual report *Liber decanorum* states that a certain play entitled *Toboeus* by Jan Aquila of Plaveč was staged on August 8, 1575 as part of a ceremonial welcoming of new university students.¹¹ This date raises many questions, though. The year of the staging does not correspond to the year when the play was written, nor to the year when it was published in print, and it is thus difficult to find a reason why the play was actually staged in that year, especially since its author was already deceased at that time. In addition an inscription on the title page of the printed edition mentions

⁴ „sie [...] jüngst vergangen den 2. Augusti auffm Schloß allhie [...] auch zuvor auffm Rathaus vor einem E. R. Und der Gemeinde, den 6. Julij agirt worden. MEISSNER 1891, 144.

⁵ For more information about the author, see JACKOVÁ 2013.

⁶ „[...] Baroni a Lobkovitz [...] et Margaretæ Franciscæ [...] Cremistij Nuptiales dies agitantibus Ibidem datus ab [...] adolescentibus, Episcopalis Academiae Olomucij Studiosis Societatis IESV. DINGENAUER 1616, A1r.

⁷ KOMENSKÝ 1973, 503.

⁸ [...] vobis anno praeterito Diogenem Cynicum, Friderici Saxonis raptos filios Mauritique Imperatoris tragicum exitum ludis nostris repraesentavimus. KOMENSKÝ 1973, 505.

⁹ Prodimus novo cum anno [...] nova vobis daturi spectacula, sed ea sacra, pietati nostrae Christianae prae aliis congruentia. KOMENSKÝ 1973, s. 505.

¹⁰ For more information about the author, see JACKOVÁ 2020.

¹¹ 8 Augusti examen et proba patientiae, quam vulgo Beaniam seu Depositionem vocant, consensu facultatis celebrata in collegio Reczek, et actum drama comicum ex historia s. Tobiae, quod mag. Joannes Aquilla a Plawcze boh. conscripsit, et Dn. Praeposito, collegioque Carolino dedicaverat. *Liber decanorum*, 418.

a planned performance of the play (*exhibebitur*) that was to take place on August, 19 at Reček's residence hall for students. Since the future tense was used in the original text, it possibly meant August, 19 of the year 1587 when the play was published. Furthermore, the play *Toboeus* could have been identical with another play about Thobias that was staged in 1569 and mentioned by Z. Winter.¹² However, this is mere speculation, just as contemplations about whether the play could have been actually written by other Jan Aquila, possibly the son of Aquila of Plaveč, who was evidenced among the Wittenberg University students in 1560.

In addition to the above-mentioned plays, one more play was possibly staged, namely *The Comedy of King Solomon*. This translation of the play *Sapientia Salomonis* by Sixt Birck was probably done by students of the school by the Church of Saint Stephan the Great in the New Town of Prague. Its printed version includes a dedication to the patron of the school, citizen of the New Town of Prague Adam Myslík (1520–1581). It follows from the dedication that the students not only wrote the play, but also “recited” it: “We then [...] endeavored together to write down this sacred comedy. At the behest of our *preceptor*, we are reciting it now”.¹³ Furthermore, the staging of the *Comedy of Tobit* by Pavel Kyrmezer is also probable, as it was written – just as the play by Dingenauer focusing on the same topic – for the wedding.

As regards the other plays, the situation is more complicated. Since most of the authors also taught at some point, some researchers took it for granted that their plays were intended to be performed at schools. Nevertheless, there is no evidence as to the staging of these dramas. For instance, the play *Comedy from a Books of Ruth* was written by Juraj Tesák Mošovský¹⁴ in 1603, when he served as a dean in a little town of Slané and was getting ready for his transfer to Hradec Králové. He sent the finished play to his son Adam, who was an administrator of a school by the St. Gall Church in the Old Town of Prague. It is not known for what particular occasion or purpose Juraj Tesák wrote the play and why he sent it to his son (for instance whether he supposed that his son would study the play with his pupils). Adam Tesák wrote in the dedication that he had the play published in print at the end of 1604 and then gave it as a New Year's gift to patrons of the school instead of usual calendars that the students painted each year. There is no mention of the actual staging of the play, though, nor does it follow from other sources that the play was ever performed on a stage. The play actually contains numerous stage directions, but as will be seen below, not even these directions are a proof of its staging.

¹² WINTER 1899, 467.

¹³ My pak [...] vo to jsme se společně přičinili, / tuto komedii svatou sepsali. / Z pana preceptora napominání / vzali jsme ji nyní k recitování. *Komedia o králi Šalomúnovi* 1909, 131.

¹⁴ For more information about the author see CESNAKOVÁ 2013b.

Another similar case is *A Sacred History of Samson*.¹⁵ Neither its author nor circumstances under which it was written are known. The only known fact is that it was published in 1608 at the workshop of Daniel Sedlčanský († 1613), who stated that the play was brought to him by a “good fellow” in order to “get it printed”. The only evidence that the author possibly expected his play to be staged, or at least did not rule out its staging, are notes in the list of characters: these notes stated that the character of a Jew could be played by the same actor as the character of a priest who married Samson; similarly, it was – according to the notes – permissible that the character of a reeve (*Praetor*) was played by one of the ten young men who were assigned to Samson at his wedding. Moreover, the author points out that according to the Bible, there were supposed to be thirty of these young men, and it was thus possible to add more characters of the young men in the case of staging. The question of whether these directions were meant for possible future staging or whether the printed version actually followed a particular staging, has not been answered so far; the first option seems much more probable, though.

Stage directions

Another issue discussed in this article are stage directions. How frequently do they occur in the preserved plays? What types of stage directions are included? Does their presence necessarily mean that a given play was actually staged?

As regards translations, translators generally stuck to the original texts that usually included only very few stage directions. In the original plays, stage directions are quite numerous in the following ones: *Czech Comedy of the Rich Man and Lazarus* by Kyrmezer, *Comedy from a Books of Ruth* by Tesák and *Abrahamus Patriarcha* by Comenius. In addition to notes as to when actors were to enter or leave the stage, the notes also clarified other moves by the actors, such as running, walking, dancing, etc. There are quite numerous notes about gestures (the Rich Man is hugging his wife; the priest in *Comedy from a Books of Ruth* is swinging his fist at a young boy who whispers to him to make the wedding ceremony shorter; at other times, characters make warning gestures with their fingers), ways of speaking or emotions that were to be expressed (the Rich Man interrupts his wife; at other times he arrives home “angry”; Ruth talks while crying; Devil Kvasnička whispers something in the Rich Man’s ear) or about other stage actions (servant Parmeno chases Lazarus out of the house; Bóaz winnows barley and then “he is having dinner, servants are serving at the table, trumpeters are playing, wine is being served and poured”). Other type of directions give information about stage props and costumes – the Rich Man wears a fur coat;

¹⁵ *Historia duchovní o Samsonovi* 2021.

devils have chains; Bóaz has a shovel; the Death shoots from a bow; Abraham needs a sword and ropes to tie Isaac up, etc. In *Abrahamus* by Comenius, the directions partly reveal what the stage was supposed to look like: it was divided by curtains. For instance, in scene I,2 Abraham wants to tell Sarah about what God had told him, but he wants to do it at a place where they cannot be overheard. This is why they both “move away from the curtain to the center of the stage where Abraham starts talking”.¹⁶ At other times, Abraham “enters through the back curtain, walks up front and exclaims”.¹⁷

In the other plays, these stage directions are much less frequent; *Toboeus* by Aquila and *A Sacred History of Samson* lack them completely, just as *Tobias Junior* by Dingenaue. However, in this particular play, directions are sometimes included in a description of a given scene. In this manner we find out that devil Asomdeus observes Tobias secretly (III,1), that Tobias takes off his shoes upon his arrival at the river, so that he could wash his feet (III,1), or that the maids coming to the wedding are “carrying torches, running towards the groom and bride and scattering flowers”¹⁸ (IV,3). The description of scene IV,6 informs us that the gate of hell opens at one point and we can see Sarah’s previous husbands who were killed by the devil during the wedding night, dancing with joy that they would be soon joined by another unfortunate fellow. Similarly, some scenic effects are sometimes captured in choirs, for instance when an augur lets out doves that form the coats of arms of the Dietrichstein and Popel Families in the sky.

Thus, we can conclude that the presence of stage directions or their higher number cannot serve in itself as evidence that a given drama was actually staged. Out of the four plays about which we know for sure that they were staged, more detailed stage directions are included only in one (*Abrahamus Patriarcha* by Comenius). In two plays (*Ein Spil von dem untergang Sodom und Gomorra* by Meissner and *Tobias Junior* by Dingenaue) only sporadic or implicit directions in descriptions of scenes reveal staging, while the fourth play includes no stage directions whatsoever (*Toboeus* by Aquila).

On the contrary, there are other dramas with numerous stage directions, in case of which it can be reasonably supposed that they were not staged (*Comedy from a Books of Ruth* by Tesák and *A Sacred History of Samson*), or at least no reliable evidence exists in this respect (*Czech Comedy of the Rich Man and Lazarus* by Kyrmezer). It seems that the authors added stage directions for possible future staging, or simply because they considered it typical of dramas, as a sign of the genre.

¹⁶ Recedant ergo a sipario in medium theatrum: ubi Abraham loqui pergat. KOMENSKÝ 1973, 508.

¹⁷ Egrediens per posticum veli et accedens ad anticum inclamet. Ibid., 524.

¹⁸ Virgines ad nuptias commenant, lampades praeferunt; Sponso occurrunt, sponsaeque: s pargunt flores. DINGENAUER 1616, G2v.

However, regardless of a particular staging, these directions together with a composition of a given play can serve as evidence of what type of the stage the authors at least hypothetically envisaged.

Stage

In addition to outdoor performances plays also started to be performed indoors closed spaces (such as university auditoriums, private premises of schools, town halls, residences of rulers) or at smaller open spaces (such as courtyards of university colleges) in the early modern age. At the same time, the location of the audience changed. While medieval spectators watched actors moving from one *mansion* to another (these were small houses placed on stages representing set pieces) placed at concurrent stages, during the period of humanism, spectators had their fixed places in an auditorium, and the entire play was performed on a single stage. This staging technique was very much influenced by the discovery of treatise *De architectura libri decem* by Roman architect Marcus Vitruvius Pollio. Vitruvius differentiates between three basic types of theater stage sets – tragical, comical, and satirical. The starting point of a humanist stage was a comical stage set representing a street or a square, from which the so-called *Terence-stage* has developed. There was a proscenium on the stage, and behind it there were numerous houses (*mansions*) the entrances of which were covered up with curtains. Usually, the actors entered the stage in at the beginning all at once from the sides, after that they hid in the little houses labeled with names of the individual characters, and then they walked out when it was their turn.

In addition to the *Terence-stage*, other simple stages were used, for instance, a simple stage with neutral, undivided backdrop, covered with a curtain through which the actors entered (*siparium*), or a simple school stage onto which the actors entered using doors on the side. In open spaces, plays were sometimes performed without any stage whatsoever.

If we look at the studied plays from this perspective, we find that the actions mostly took place outdoors although it may not be evident right away in some cases. An example would be the play *Tragic History of the Priest Heli and his Sons* by Záhrobský. For instance, the scene I,6 – in which Channa bids farewell to a young son, the future prophet Samuel – seems to take place indoors at first. Its only Channa's line "We are approaching the pub,"¹⁹ that shows that the parting takes place during their journey. In this particular play, interiors are required in the banquet scene (III,2) or in the court scene (III,8) – yet both of these scenes

¹⁹ ZÁHROBSKÝ 1986, 91.

could just as well take place outdoors that is on the proscenium where the particular surroundings could be marked, for instance, with a table and chairs or with a judge's stool.

*Czech Comedy of the Rich Man and Lazarus*²⁰ by Kyrmezer²¹ takes place mostly outdoors and the individual characters only rarely enter “a house” and exit it again, or somebody knocks on a gate. In the beginning of the second act, Lazarus comes to rich man Cresus, and very likely enters or at least crosses the doorstep, as follows from the rich man's reaction: “Who let this beggar, such a disgraceful damnable person, inside? / Could not such a villain stay outside and leave me alone in my house?”²²

The banquet surely also takes place indoors, while Lazarus is lying outside on a dunghill. Since Cresus' house is the only one needed in *Czech Comedy of the Rich Man and Lazarus*, in this case, the need for an interior setting could have been met by merely drawing apart a curtain separating the stage and street. Other issues arise about the location of heaven and hell where the final scene takes place. Kyrmezer probably envisaged that heaven would be located on some higher floor, possibly using a scaffolding, while hell would be located on the stage, or that each of these settings would be located on one half of the stage.

The parable about the rich man and Lazarus is very brief, involves only a small number of characters; thus enables following the unity of the plot almost fully. However, it seems that the *Terence-stage* could be very well used also for a staging of a story with greater time and space span, such as the book *Tobit*. The first three acts of *Comedy of Tobit*²³ by Kyrmezer could take place in Nineveh, in one “street”, the proscenium, behind which entrances to three houses are indicated – to that of Tobit and his two neighbors. The fourth act starts in the town of Ecbatana by a scene of Tobit's future daughter-in-law Sarah and her maid; the following two scenes show the journey of Tobit's son Tobias to Ecbatana, and the next change of setting comes in the fifth act when the story plot returns to Nineveh. The entire play does not include any interior scene. The engagement probably takes place outdoors in the outskirts of the town, since Tobias refuses to enter Raguel's house before marrying Sarah; spectators are informed about wedding night only through devil Amodeus's monologue.

Time leaps, and fast changing of places where the action takes place actually constitute another typical feature of early modern (not only biblical) dramas. As an example, scene I,4 in Meissner's play about Abraham can be cited. Prior to arriving to Egypt, Abraham asks his wife Sarah to pretend she is his sister, as he fears for his life.

²⁰ KYRMEZER 1956a.

²¹ For more information about the author see CESNAKOVÁ 2013a.

²² Aj, kdo sem pustil toho žebráka, / tak hanebného mrzkého člověka? / Což padouch nemohl vně nyní zůstat / mne v domě mém při pokojí nechat? KYRMEZER 1956a, 79–80.

²³ KYRMEZER 1956b.

In the following excerpt, the text in bold indicates places at which longer time period passes between two lines and the characters obviously have to move to another place:

Abraham: When we come to Egypt,
[...] Tell them that you are just my sister,
so that I could avoid danger and atrocities
that the Egyptians would commit.

Sarah: My lord, I want to do it
and eagerly fulfill your order.

First Prince: **Dear lady, please tell me,**
who is the man standing here with you?

Sarah: Dear sirs, it is my brother.

Second Prince: I hear it with great pleasure, believe me.
Let us go and tell our master about it,
let us tell him about her beauty.
Your Highness pharaoh, our king
[...]
she is worthy to be your wife.

Pharaoh: **Go now and call her to me.**
Listen lady, you found love with me.²⁴

In this respect, the play *Sacred History of Samson* is very interesting. Here, the venue also changes within one replica, yet the situation is even more complicated in this case, since the biblical story includes a storyline with a character called Helluo and also with probable interludes.

Helluo, a relative of parasites from ancient comedies (his name, which means “glutton, guzzler”, corresponds to it) appears for the first time in scene II,3, and his appearance has to do with the main topic of this act, which is the upbringing of children. Helluo continues in a dialogue led in the previous scene by two friends of Samson’s parents, Eubulus and Cleobulus, who praised Samson’s father for not allowing his young son to lie around at home and making him leave home to acquire experience. Helluo strongly disagrees with this idea and maintains that young men

²⁴ Translated according to a period Czech translation by Daniel Stodolius z Požova:

Abram: Když tehdy do Egypta přijdeme, / [...] řci, žeš jedný sestra má, / abych mohl toho nebezpečenství / ujtí, Egyptských ukruťenství. / Sárai: Chciť tak, můj panáčku, učíniti, / rozkaz tvůj s tom pilně vyplniti. / První kníže: Oznám mi, prosím, pani jediná, / kdo jest ten člověk, jenž stojí s váma? / Sárai: Jest můj bratr, moji milí páni. / Druhé kníže: Věřte mi, žeť to rád slyším nyní. / Podme, oznámme to pánu našemu, / o kráse její povězme jemu. / Nejjasnější Farao, náš králi, [...] hodnát by byla býti tvá žena. / Faraon král: Jděte hned, zavolejte jí ke mně. / Slyš pani, nalezlas lásku u mně [...].

JACKOVÁ–LINKA 2021, 341–342.

are best off at home with parents who do not allow their children to suffer from poverty. Presently, he is punished for his words by Virtue (Virtus). She warns against idleness and against confusing parents with such ideas and slaps Helluo as a warning. Helluo appears again in scene III,4 where he expresses his delight at the forthcoming wedding of Samson where he will have a chance to eat his fill. The fact that he genuinely enjoyed himself at the wedding is evidenced by his wailing in scene IV,4. He has a headache and coins in his pouch are scarce. Finally, Helluo meets the Jew and conceives the idea to sell him the beetle in order to get back the money he had previously squandered. The Jew complains about this wrong to the Reeve, but this one decides in favor of Helluo.

Literary historian Milan Kopecký united parts of scenes IV,5 and IV,6, which means the passages with the Jew and published them under the title *Helluo and Judaeus*.²⁵ According to him, these scenes should be considered first interludes in Czech literature. This interpretation is somehow misleading, though. Its illogicality lies mainly in the fact that the interaction with the Jew is only the final part of Helluo's journey in the text of play, as we have seen. The second reason why Helluo's appearances can only hardly be considered interludes, is the fact that by definition, interludes should take place between acts or scenes. Yet in play *Sacred History of Samson*, they form parts of the respective scenes. We can see it in the following brief summary of the contents of the three scenes from the act 4:

IV,4 Samson comes back from Ascalon – **Helluo after wedding I** –The Philistines fear Samson's vengeance– **Helluo after wedding II** –Samson visits his father-in-law – Samson's vengeance.

IV,5 Samson leaves for the cave Ethan – The Philistines call on the army – **Helluo and Jew I** – Achior is plotting revenge against Samson.

IV,6 **Helluo and Jew II** –the capture of Samson and the battle of Lechí.

However, *Sacred History of Samson* undoubtedly included interludes, even if these parts are not directly written in the text. It is evidenced by the note "In between, nice interludes are added for entertainment after each act", which is printed under the list of characters.²⁶ It is possible that the corresponding scenes were simply omitted in the printed edition, but there is also other possible explanation – namely a short, one-act play about marital infidelity that was printed behind the epilogue in the printed version and that was known to the public earlier than the actual play itself. It was published several times under a conventional title *Ensnared Infidelity* [*Polapená nevěra*] and always perceived as an independent piece or an appendix to play HDS, so-called postlude.

²⁵ KOPECKÝ 1986, 273–279.

²⁶ Mezi tím přidány jsou pro kratochvíl pěkná intermedia po každém aktu. JÁCKOVÁ–LINKA 2021, 403.

Yet upon closer examination of this theory, it seems that the thesis of being an “appendix” to play *Sacred History of Samson* does not have to be correct. The appendix bears no title in the printed version, and it is separated from the epilogue only by a graphic motif. Another fact contradicting the thesis of *Ensnared Infidelity* being a postlude is that to our knowledge, such literary work is not found in other biblical plays, and even in any other early modern dramas. It thus seems much more likely that the four scenes of *Ensnared Infidelity* are actually the promised “nice interludes” that follow after the first four acts. The connecting element is the theme of a treacherous, in this case even unfaithful, woman: an old merchant, Jíra leaves for business. His young wife, Dorota uses this opportunity and invites home her lover, Asotus. Yet Jíra suspects something, and he returns home earlier than planned, but Asotus manages to escape, and Dorota also goes unpunished because the merchant is afraid that if he would beat her, she would poison him.

If some of Helluo’s performances are at least loosely connected with the main story, even though he himself is a character from “elsewhere”, the passages with the Jew transfer the plot to a completely different space-time. The Reeve and the Jew do not appear elsewhere in the play, and the Jew says that he met Helluo in the forest called Fidrholec. This forest, a well-known refuge for robbers in the 17th century, is located near Prague (and on the outskirts of today’s Prague). This one line thus shifts the location from ancient Palestine to early modern Bohemia. Except for the motif of a treacherous woman, interludes with Jíra, Dorota, and Asotus have nothing to do with Samson’s story anymore, contributing thereby to the incoherence of the story.

Although it cannot be said with certainty whether most of the surviving plays were actually performed on stage, stage directions, the structure of the dramas, and the texts themselves can suggest what the stage usually looked like at the time. It seems that even such complicated plays as *A Sacred History of Samson* could quite well have taken place on the *Terence-stage* or a simple stage covered by a curtain. Rapid changes of the venue were probably solved in the simplest way; the actor took a few steps and his speech (or costumes, etc.) showed where he was and whom was talking to. This type of stage was perhaps even more suitable for dramas with such rapid changes of time and venue than the later one with stage set and machinery.