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Teachers and preachers – Sorbian women in the 18th century*

Sorbian history is masculine in a twofold way: first, men dominate it as historians and second, they are often the subject of history themselves. In comparison, women are barely the subject of research and academic discussion.¹ Those who are known are the Sorbian wet nurses, whose employment was popular in higher middle-class and aristocratic households², and also the biographies and biographic outlines of various Sorbian women in more recent times.³ However, the dominating role of men is not specific to the Sorbian environment, but should be seen in the overall context of historiography. It is the result of (academic) professionalization in the 19th century.⁴ Its development was promoted through unilateral focus on the national discourse, which often concealed other (cultural-historical) topics.⁵ The opening up of Sorbian historiography to questions and topics of gender history breaks this one-sided national discourse and opens a large number of new topics and questions. Where and when in Sorbian history are women visible? What freedom of action was offered to them and how did they use these opportunities? What was the relation between the two genders and how or rather when does it change? In which way are women portrayed in

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¹ MALINKOWA, L., Wobraz(y) serbskich stawiznow.

² MUSIAT/MIRTSCHIN, Art. “Wendische Ammen”; MIRTSCHIN, Der Blick von außen, and NOACK, “Nach Berlin!”.

³ Despite this list being incomplete, I would like to name the following works: MALINKOWA, T., “Hódne wěčnoh wopomnjeća”; MALINKOWA, T., Marja Kubašec; DAHMSOWA-MĚŠKANKEC, Marja Grólmusec; STEINBERG, Art. “Grólmusec, Marja”; MALINKOWA, T., Darum gehe hin; MALINKOWA, T., Anna Wackwitz; MĚRCINOWA, Naša “krajanka” Mila Höffertowa; VENSKE, Serbowka; WÍČAZ, Mila Imišowa, and WÍČAZ, Hodźijska faraŋka. Adolf Černý called Mila Imišowa the “first Sorbian female national activist” (CYŽ, Adolf Černý – Antologija, p. 123). I would like to mention Mina Witkojc and Liza and Marjana Domaškojc in Lower Lusatia (cf. ATANASOV/ROGGAN, Die Schwestern Liza und Marjana Domaškojc). It should be investigated to which extent the acceptance of their work in society is connected to the phenomenon of “public representation”. Jakub Šajba’s remarks: “A Sorbian woman is primarily presented in public in her national costumes” (ŠAJBA, Zaměr a nadawki serbskeje žony, p. 46) which probably corresponded with the ideas of some Sorbian patriots, as experienced by Mina Witkojc (PINIEK, Nachwort, p. 166). – Further references to Sorbian women, whose work is still commemorated today, are found in: MALINKOWA, T., Serbske pomniki. For a theoretical deepening compare the short historical outline in: TSAI, Gender.

⁴ A short overview and a large amount of further references is offered in OPITZ-BELAKHAL, Geschlechtergeschichte, in the chapter “Das Geschlecht der Geschichte”.

⁵ In view of the total dominance of the national discourse in Sorbian historiography and in the general Sorbian public it would be worthwhile and timely to analyze the Sorbian national discourse in view of the gender aspect. Studies for comparison which are pointing the way, are: GIPPERT, Nation und Geschlecht, as well as PLANERT, Nation, Politik und Geschlecht, and YUVAL-DAVIS, Geschlecht und Nation, with a linguistic emphasis SCHELLER-BOLZ (ed.), New Approaches, as well as first considerations in view of Sorbs in TSAI, Gender, and TSCHERNOKOSHEWA, Fremde Frauen.

relation to Sorbian history or Sorbian art? Which roles or what importance is attributed to her?⁶ These questions are based on a pluralist view of Sorbian history, which takes into account social differences in society (“race, class and gender”) and which endeavours to find an integrative access to Sorbian history. That means that groups, which have so far been only little observed, such as women, children, minorities, or non-Sorbs, should be also included. The above-mentioned questions often demand the discovery of new sources that include the female perspective and allow critical examination. One such source, which so far has been barely taken into consideration by Sorbian historians, are the memoirs of the Moravian Brethren.⁷ It has been a custom for the members of the Moravian Church starting in the mid-1700s to write a personal biography, which is then read at their funeral and later stored in the archive of their congregation. Thanks to this practice, about 500 biographies of Sorbs (males and females alike) are known today, that are largely stored in the archives of Herrnhut, Kleinwelka and Niesky. I would like to demonstrate the potential of the Moravian biographies for Sorbian historiography, using women as an example. These ego documents of Sorbian girls, women, grandmothers, and widows are an invaluable source. Here we explore the female world and the view of Sorbian women on the world.⁸ This results in a multitude of further questions: Who and what was important to Sorbian women? Which educational paths were open to them? Did Sorbian women have access to the general public in their villages or on a supra-regional basis? What was the extent of women`s freedom of action and which limitations needed to be overcome? The first examination already proved that the world of the 18th century provided women with a larger amount of opportunities, which was also more versatile than is stated by general historical studies. Women were not confined to childcare and housework. The Moravian Church provided women with a wider scope of action – in economy, craftsmanship and art, in charitable and social services as well as in religious life and education.

The focus of this study is on the spiritual-religious life in relation to women`s possibilities and their scope of action. Excluded are economic and artisan aspects⁹ as well as endeavours in

⁶ Cf. HOSE, *Frauenräume*; HOZYNA, *Mytos “serbska mać”*; HOSE, *Frauenforschung*, as well as PINIEKOWA, *Frauenbild*.

⁷ A closer examination of the Moravian memoirs as historical sources can be found in MAHLING, *Bibel, Traktat und Handschrift*.

⁸ In terms of Czech historiography cf. STERIK, *Mährische Frauen*, and ŘIČAN, *Ženy Moravských bratří*.

⁹ Women in the Sisters` Houses worked in agriculture, kitchen, wash houses, as well as in various trades, under their own responsibility. It goes without saying that Sorbian women were also among them, e.g. Anna Krohe (1725-1800) from the village Klix. She worked as a master weaver in Gnadenberg, Silesia, “and followed this trade successfully” (UA [The Unity`s Archive [Unitätsarchiv] in Herrnhut] R.22.69.98). It is likely that she learned her trade from her father who was a weaver in Klix.

art¹⁰ and charitable services¹¹, despite the fact that the Moravian sources contain a lot of information on those topics. This essay concentrates mostly on sources originating in the 18th century. Before I turn to the subject of Sorbian women, let me explain some of the specifics in regard to the Moravian Church.

1. Being a woman in the Moravian Church

Contemporaries already observed and commented on the unusual role of women in the Moravian Church.¹² Its founder, Count Zinzendorf (1700-1760), was convinced of the intellectual equality of both genders; moreover, he was of the opinion that women are often more sensitive in relation to religion than men and thus have their own piety. In order to accommodate the different needs of men and women, the congregation in Herrnhut was divided by gender from the start¹³, meaning that the women themselves carried out pastoral responsibilities for women. This resulted in gender-split communities in all settlements of the Unity. This is also visible in the architecture of these settlements, where separate houses existed for the brethren and the sisters, separate educational institutes for both genders, as well as houses for widows. This socio-religious arrangement in the Moravian Church is known as the choir system (the term choir was used as a substitute word for community, and not referring to singing). Thus, there were choirs for girls, sisters, married women, and widows. The largest of these groups was the choir for unmarried sisters, which encompassed about 400 sisters in Herrnhut and between 100 and 120 in Kleinwelka. The majority of sisters lived and worked together in the Sisters' House. The spiritual centre of every Sisters' House was the Saal prayer room, where all sisters met daily to pray and sing. A Choir Helper was responsible for the religious life and all spiritual as well as welfare issues in a choir. She

¹⁰ We can assume that Sorbian women and girls wrote poems, following the example of their fellow sisters. Other areas of their art are songs and music, painting and embroidery. For instance, Maria Hammer, née Papesch, was sent to Niesky when she was young to be educated in music. Later in life she worked as a teacher at the girls' educational institute in Kleinwelka. Cf. UA R.22.86.18.a.b, memoir of Maria Hammer, née Papesch (1756-1834).

¹¹ A large number of women worked as caregivers for children, the elderly, and the sick, not just in their own families but also in the service of others as well as in educational institutes.

¹² Some extraordinary views about women within the Unity of Brethren in the 18th century cf. UTTENDÖRFER, Zinzendorf und die Frauen, as well as WOLLSTADT, Geordnetes Dienen. Current developments and new sources are presented in „Schwestern unter Brüdern: Die Stellung der Frau in der Brüdergemeine“ in the magazine “Unitas Fratrum“ 45/46 from 1999. In this booklet I would like to point out the extended essays VOGT, Herrnhuter Schwestern, and PEUCKER, “Gegen ein Regiment von Schwestern“. Also compare MARTIN, Anna Nitschmann; MARTIN, Möglichkeiten; SCHNEIDER-BÖKLEN, Amtsträgerinnen, as well as ALBRECHT, Frauen, and MOMMERTZ/OPITZ, Das Geschlecht des Glaubens, which reflect on the topic in a wider context.

¹³ Besides spiritual reasons, practical considerations played a part in this decision. The Unity had to defend itself from assertions of immoral behaviour between men and women (VOGT, Herrnhuter Schwestern, p. 38f.).

organized daily prayers and had monthly conversations with each sister about her mental and spiritual development. The Choir Helper was supported by Choir Labourer, who dealt with financial and economic questions of the choir.

Women also shouldered a couple of responsibilities in the Moravian congregation outside the choir system. In the first decades they participated in synods and other leading positions within various committees, thus taking part in managing the community. In addition – and this is a peculiarity in the religious life until the 1760s – Moravian women were also ordained into priestly offices.

There are three levels of ministry within the Unity: deacon, presbyter and bishop. The first two offices were also accessible to women. That means that there were ordained deaconesses and female presbyters; it is also possible that Anna Nitschmann (1715-1760) was ordained as a bishop.¹⁴ Deaconesses and female presbyters were entitled to preach, give blessings and accept new members. They were only subordinate to men in public church services, where giving communion or preaching was not allowed to them. Regarding this practice, the Moravians were in accordance with their time.¹⁵ After Zinzendorf's death in 1760 the atmosphere in the congregation gradually changed, the independence of women in spiritual matters and their participation in leading the church was increasingly restricted.¹⁶ One example is that female presbyters were no longer consecrated, but deaconesses were still appointed until roughly 1790.

Besides the three mentioned offices connected to ordination, there was another office called “acolyte” – candidates were admitted by being blessed in public. An acolyte's tasks were supervision and assistance at prayers and religious ceremonies, e.g. assisting in the serving of communion. At the same time this office represented a close link with the community. A large number of Sorbian women became acolytes, and with this they received ecclesiastical responsibilities within the Unity.

In conclusion, it can be said that the choir system provided access to higher offices and ordination opened up new opportunities for Moravian women. The ordinations were partly connected to a great deal of responsibility and publicity. In addition, ordination to the offices of ministry of deaconess and female presbyters as well as the admission to the acolyte created the possibility to use religion as an opportunity to work in public. Women took on many tasks

¹⁴ MARTIN, Anna Nitschmann, and MARTIN, Möglichkeiten, p. 86, footnote 20.

¹⁵ VOGT, Herrnhuter Schwestern, p. 42.

¹⁶ PEUCKER, “Gegen ein Regiment von Schwestern“.

in spiritual welfare, liturgy in the sense of general religious rites and ceremonies, and teaching.

The same applies to Sorbian girls and women. In the 18th and 19th centuries they worked in Moravian settlements, Sorbian villages and on different mission stations. This I would like to show by using the examples of teaching, pastoral care and preaching. All these three tasks are closely connected to each other. Someone who taught and educated also had pastoral tasks, and vice versa. This fact is reflected in the different biographies: teachers became visitors, ministers, and helpers in choir houses. However, I decided to separate the spiritual affairs of teaching, pastoral care, and preaching in order to give a clearer overview.

2. Teachers

The first Sorbian female teacher found in the sources of Herrnhut is Sister Hubert whose given name is unknown. She was probably from a wealthy Sorbian family and was able to write fluently in German. From 1748 she ran a German-Sorbian school in Teichnitz¹⁷; the village is a former meeting point for devout Sorbs. At the same time, she was responsible for the religious education of girls and women, and she took care of spiritual welfare work and organised visits in Sorbian villages. That means that Sister Hubert selected and accompanied Sorbian girls and women doing pastoral work in Sorbian villages.

The school she ran in Teichnitz was a backwoods school. These were non-licensed private schools of different quality and appearance. These were directed by women more often than (nowadays) expected; in our context by Sorbian women, or by teachers' wives who were included in teaching and supervision.¹⁸ For example, we know of a Sorbian widow who ran a school in Bautzen at the same time as Sister Hubert.¹⁹

Maria Sauer, née Lehman (1715-1788) was probably involved in teaching too. Her husband Martin Sauer was a teacher in Bautzen. When he died, she moved to Kleinwelka where she ran a girls' school in its early days.²⁰ Another teacher in the early stages of the school in Kleinwelka was Anna Lischke (1734-1796) from Seidau.²¹ Together with her mother, she moved in 1757 to the growing Moravian community residing outside of the city gates of

¹⁷ For sister Hubert's work compare MAHLING, *Um der Wenden Seelenheyl hochverdient*, pp. 376–378.

¹⁸ TÖPFER, *Die "Freyheit" der Kinder*, p. 252f.

¹⁹ KUNZE, *Sorbisches Schulwesen*, p. 19.

²⁰ UA R.22.64.60, Maria Sauer's memoir: "At first I schooled the maids. Then I served in families and wherever I was needed."

²¹ AKW [The Unity's archive in Kleinwelka] P.A.II.R.7.4, memoir of Anna Lischke: "Started was with a school for children, which, in the early days of the school, was looked after with great devotion by our late sister."

Bautzen. Anna Lischke was probably a highly gifted pedagogue.²² When still residing in Teichnitz, she visited religious meetings with her brother and mother. While living there, she was chosen to be a pastoral caretaker and supervisor.²³ She had these same responsibilities later on at the Sisters` House of Kleinwelka. In a membership list, Anna Lischke was listed immediately after the Helper and her assistant as “room overseer and assistant to the diaspora sisters”.²⁴ Her years-long service is commemorated in her obituary;²⁵ especially stressed is the following part:

that she ministered to the local sisters residing outside the settlement by visiting them, or when those sisters came here. Another of her tasks was to minister to the sisters belonging to the community in Neukirch, which she was blessed to do until her progressing sickliness prevented it.²⁶

The close connection between educational and ecclesiastical welfare work in Anna Lischke`s biography is paradigmatic. Education has been a pivotal element in the Moravian Church from its inception. That is why the small school for girls in Kleinwelka became a regular educational institute for girls, within a couple of years, designed as a boarding school. The first two teachers there were the siblings Maria and Anna Papesch from the Sorbian village Litten.²⁷ After working as teachers at the small school they also became the first teachers/educators at the educational institute in Kleinwelka. Maria describes it in her memoirs:

The local institution was set up on the 27th October 1779. My youngest sister, now married Pöhler, who was at that time 18, and I, who was 23 years old, started to teach nine children, of whom the oldest was nine and the youngest was four years old. This was a difficult school time for me.²⁸

²² In view of her brother Johann Lischke taking on various leading functions in the Unity, it can be assumed that a certain family heritage played a role. Cf. UA R.22.105.99, memoir of Johann Lischke* (1727-1791). Biographies designated with “*” are accessible in the portal www.sorabicon.de under the project “Serbske wobswěty w Ochranowskich žiwjenjoběhach 18. lětstotka. Zběrka žórlow a dokumentacija” and can be researched there. Lischke worked as a teacher in Kleinwelka and as educator in Moravian school at Uhyst/Spree, in addition he regularly translated Moravian documents into Sorbian.

²³ AKW P.A.II.R.7.4, in the memoir of Anna Lischke: “[...] it was determined that it was necessary to look after the sisters and maids gathered in the societies.”

²⁴ AKW S.A.I.R.3.B.8, lists of sisters who have moved into the new house [1770].

²⁵ “In her many years as room supervisor she worked with motherly care, thereby she had a gift for placing needed warnings in a mixture of love and seriousness, and her words had an energy without causing frustration.” AKW P.A.II.R.7.4, memoir of Anna Lischke.

²⁶ AKW P.A.II.R.7.4, memoir of Anna Lischke.

²⁷ UA R.22.86.18.a.b, memoir of Maria Hammer, née Papesch, and UA R.22.71.78, memoir of Anna Pöhler, mar. Dombrowsky, née Papesch.

²⁸ UA R.22.86.18.a.b, memoir of Maria Hammer, née Papesch.

Maria Papesch became very committed to building up the girls` institution until she married in 1784 to Johann Hammer (1742-1801). Together, they were appointed to perform ecclesiastical services in various Moravian settlements; she functioned as an advisor among married women. Towards the end of her life, already ordained a deaconess, she resided in Sarepta (today incorporated into Wolgograd), where she presided over the widows` choir. However, she did not learn Russian; her daughter translated for her.

Another teacher in Kleinwelka was Maria Frenzel (1768-1845) from Temritz, whose parents made a point of enabling their daughter to receive good education.

In my fourth year my parents sent me to Bautzen, at my wish, where I lived with an acquainted family from Monday to Friday in order to attend a school in a suburb and in which I learned to spell.²⁹

After further education in Kleinwelka, which she secured herself, Maria Frenzel worked as a teacher in the same village. Later, together with her husband, they were tasked to establish an educational institute for girls in Doberlug (Lusatia). After this project failed, they were called to Pennsylvania, where they ministered in different congregations.

Also mentioned should be Anna Salome Grunert, born 1765 in Kleinwelka, who for 12 years “was employed at our girls` educational institute, teaching and nurturing those children. She was much loved due to her good-natured and motherly character”.³⁰ Because of her reliability, she was recommended for missionary work.

The question is justified whether and to what extent these abovementioned Sorbian women taught in the Sorbian language. It can be assumed that Sorbian played a part in Sister Hubert`s “Wendish-German school”.³¹ In the first years of Kleinwelka, Maria Lehmann`s and Anna Lischke`s lessons were very likely conducted in Sorbian too. For other sisters the Sorbian language was probably only used as lingua franca, partly because Sorbian girls had to learn German first. Perhaps Sorbian was also used in a spiritual context.

Besides teachers, a multitude of women were employed as educators and supervisors for the girls` learning institutions, as mentioned the sources. For instance, Maria Hatnick from Guttau (1781-1812) and Anna Schorsche from Blösa (1761-1821) were “overseers of the girls` room”, the former in Kleinwelka³², the latter in Sarepta.³³ Maria Magdalena Kliemand from

²⁹ UA R.22.144.232, memoir of Maria Schaaf, née Frenzel*.

³⁰ UA R.15.A.17.g.2, Testimonials of sisters, who went on mission, Nr. 122, Anna Salome Grunert, compare: UA R.22.83.15, memoir of Anna Salome Görlitz, née Gruner.

³¹ UA R.6.C.a.1.5.a, Diarium Teichnitz 28.12.1747.

³² UA R.22.68.32, memoir of Marie Hatnick.

³³ UA R.22.73.51, memoir of Anna Schorsche.

Särchen (1782-1853) was a “girls` superior” and taught handicrafts.³⁴ Anna Winkler from Seidewinkel (1746-1815) worked as “overseer of the girls and a sickwaitress”.³⁵ As educators and supervisors, they very likely also performed pastoral functions. So let’s turn to other Sorbian female pastoral carers.

3. Pastoral carers

In the *Unitas Fratrum*, great importance was placed on the ecclesiastical needs of all its members, from children to the aged. It is understood that women were responsible for the care of girls, wives, widows, etc. A large number of Sorbian women from Lower and Upper Lusatia were included in this kind of work, since spiritual care was not limited to the Moravian settlements alone, but was also conducted in the diaspora at best, monthly meetings in every village should be held, segregated by gender, and there should be a monthly spiritual conversation with each sister residing within the diaspora. The main topic of these conversations was the mental-spiritual condition of these sisters, but also work, education of children, or marriage. These tasks are the framework of what we would call social work today. The *Herrnhut* “visitors” or “assistants”, as they were called, held great responsibility because their ecclesiastical work was connected to certain control- and supervising functions in the villages of Lusatia. That is why the visitors had to participate in special meetings for further training and exchanging experience.

Sorbian sisters acting as visitors or assistants were e.g. Maria Haschke, née Probst (1723-1808), visitor in Neukirch and other villages³⁶, and Agnes Gruhl, née Noack from Seidau (1738-1786)³⁷. Hanscha Grosch (1708-1761) was “a worker in the woman’s community in Gutttau”³⁸ and the biography of Anna Hortschansky (1753-1817) from Bloischdorf³⁹ only mentions: “She was told to take care of the awakened of her gender.” It is similarly written about Anna Bank from Werben (1708-1779): “Our blessed sister served the Saviour and her nation for 20 and more years”.⁴⁰ In the biography of Anna Kschischank (1731-1764) from Saritsch is stated: “in 1758 she moved to the Brethren Schulze in Baschitz and administered to

³⁴ UA SHAHt 155.8, memoir of Maria Magdalena Kliemand.

³⁵ UA R.22.75.56, memoir of Anna Winkler.

³⁶ UA R.22.68.27, memoir of Maria Haschke, née Probst*: “In my 21st year I moved to Uhyst to work as maid for the Countess of Gersdorf, and as visitor in Neukirch and in other villages.”

³⁷ UA R.22.62.128, Memoir of Agnes Gruhl, née Noack.

³⁸ UA GN 1761.B.XI (I.5.3) Ex.A* S. 53f., memoir of Hanscha Grosch. The memoir of her husband Georg Grosch (died 1761; GN 1761.B.XI (I.5.3) Ex.A*) says: “His blessed wife was his opportunity to meet the Brethren. She returned to the Saviour last autumn, whose grace and influence she legitimized in her district in a way that the people there are still sorry about her loss.”

³⁹ UA R.6.D.II.b.No.2.a, memoir of Anna Hortschansky.

⁴⁰ AKW P.A.II.R.7.1, memoir of Anna Bank*.

the needs of the unmarried sisters and maidens in that area; she was loved by all.” After moving to Kleinwelka, she assumed specific tasks in the sisters` choir: “She was a faithful room overseer and co-worker in her choir, especially when it came to the non-resident sisters.”⁴¹ Also Anna Sommer, née Noak (1736-1789) took on a large amount of ecclesiastical work in the Unity. She took care of visiting sisters from the diaspora, was responsible for the educational institute in Uhyst/ Spree, and cared for married women in Kleinwelka.⁴² Some Sorbian girls and women carried out their pastoral responsibilities in congregations outside the Sorbian-language area. Due to their language skills they were in high demand in Czech congregations.⁴³ Margaretha Lehmann (1745-1816), who grew up in Döhlen, first provided ecclesiastical service in Sorbian villages, and later served among Czech sisters in Berlin-Rixdorf (today Berlin-Neukölln). In her memoir she writes about her work in Lusatia:

Subsequently, I was needed as room overseer and as a visitor for non-residential sisters and children, enjoying quite a few blessings for my own heart. One day when I was on my way to visit others and as I talked to the Saviour, it felt like someone was going with me, so that I had to stop and cry out loud: Who stands by me? Who accompanies me? Oh, it is my best friend!⁴⁴

I would furthermore like to name Dorothea Winkler, née Heinrich (1711-1799)⁴⁵, Magdalena Gruner, née Pötschke (1725-1793)⁴⁶, Anna Elisabeth Messerschmied (1737-1781)⁴⁷ and Salome Schulz, née Gruhl (1770-1833)⁴⁸. All of them worked as visitors or diaspora workers in Lower Lusatia for many years. Their work was a major contribution to the spreading of the Moravian Church in Lower Lusatia in the second half of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. At the beginning, the four mentioned sisters undertook long journeys from Kleinwelka to Lower Lusatia, and from 1781 on they lived in Limberg with their husbands. They worked very independently in Lower Lusatia: the structures of the Unity were built up by organizing meetings and naming further sisters as helpers and overseeing their work. Furthermore, they conducted regular ecclesiastical conversations, recommended girls for Kleinwelka or Herrnhut and led religious meetings for women. To carry out this work, the

⁴¹ UA GN 1765.B.II.a (I.5) Ex.A*, memoir of Anna Kschischank*. Anna Kschischank was a popular pastoral caregiver, a high number of members attended her funeral in 1764.

⁴² UA R.6.C.b.No.1.e.1789, memoir of Anna Sommer, née Noak.

⁴³ Cf. MAHLING, *Verflechtungsraum Lausitz*. In this context I would also like to mention Agnes Cranz, née Lange and Anna Pöhler, mar. Dombrowsky, née Papesch.

⁴⁴ UA SHAHt 151.45, memoir of Margaretha Lehmann.

⁴⁵ UA. R.22.75.57, memoir of Dorothea Winkler, née Heinrich*.

⁴⁶ UA R.22.76.19, memoir of Magdalena Gruner, née Pötschke*.

⁴⁷ UA R.22.63.108, memoir of Anna Elisabeth Messerschmied*.

⁴⁸ UA R.22.93.44, memoir of Salome Schulz, née Gruhl.

Sorbian language was a vital means of communication; as Salome Schulz remembered, who from 1799 to 1822 was a diaspora worker in Limberg: “what was immensely helpful was that I had good command of the Wendish language.”⁴⁹ It cannot be said with certainty whether the sisters in Lower Lusatia also preached in Sorbian.

4. Preachers

Most commonly, the Moravian sisters leading a choir or being in a different leading position would preach in the *Unitas Fratrum*.⁵⁰ Often these sisters were acolytes, or, until the end of the 18th century, were ordained as deaconesses or female presbyters. Those sisters had to conduct a wide range of ecclesiastical and liturgical tasks: they led the morning and evening prayers as well as singing lessons, admitted new sisters into the choir, were responsible for confirmation classes confirmed girls prior to their first communion, held a farewell ceremony for the dying, and had monthly conversations with all sisters – those conversations resembled confessions in character. Sisters who were the supervisors for the choirs of married sisters attended to births, and blessed young mothers and new-borns. At these occasions, women frequently gave short sermons. Sometimes they read parts from sermons given by men, and other times they preached themselves. These sermons did not centre on the exegesis of scripture but concentrated on the current situation. Besides exhortations, the most common topics were professing and testifying one`s faith. The intention behind these sermons was a religious exchange, the strengthening of the sense of community, and the revival of religious experience.

The sermons were mainly delivered in the female choirs. Several Sorbian women were promoted to higher offices and probably preached at different occasions, i.e. they gave public speeches or said short prayers. These Sorbs were Maria Hammer, née Papesch⁵¹, who led the widows` choir in Sarepta, Maria Schaaf, née Frenzel⁵², who directed the married sisters` choir in some American congregations, Salome Schulz, née Gruhl⁵³, who led the widows` choir in Herrnhut after her many years of service in Lower Lusatia, and Agnes Cranz, née Lange⁵⁴, who presided over the young sisters in Niesky and upon whom the office of “choir disciple” was bestowed. The mentioned women are likely to have preached, however not in Sorbian.

⁴⁹ UA R.22.93.44, memoir of Salome Schulz, née Gruhl.

⁵⁰ Cf. VOGT, Herrnhuter Schwestern, as well as SCHNEIDER-BÖKLEN, Amtsträgerinnen, and MARTIN, Anna Nitschmann.

⁵¹ UA R.22.86.18.a.b, memoir of Maria Hammer, née Papesch.

⁵² UA R.22.144.232, memoir of Maria Schaaf, née Frenzel*.

⁵³ UA R.22.93.44, memoir of Salome Schulz, née Gruhl.

⁵⁴ UA R.22.62.52, memoir of Agnes Cranz, née Lange*.

The only place where Sorbian sermons for women were held⁵⁵ was in Kleinwelka, especially in the choir buildings, the Sisters' House and the Widows' House. Among the managers of the Sisters' House in Kleinwelka there was none who was of Sorbian birth. However, Dorothea Biedermann (1718-1792)⁵⁶ and Anna Dorothea Polenz (1716-1785)⁵⁷, who presided over the sisters' choir in its early days, were in good command of the Czech language.⁵⁸ Another sister, Susanna Römer (1722-1768)⁵⁹, operated in the Baltic States for many years where it is likely that she learned Russian. Those three sisters – and perhaps more German Eldresses – partly understood Sorbian and perhaps spoke it a little. But it is difficult to say whether Sorbian was publicly used in liturgies.⁶⁰ The situation was different in the widows' choir which was directed by Magdalena Clemens, née Winzer (1747-1796)⁶¹, Margaretha Mitasch, née Zschornack (1744-1814)⁶², Anna Pöhler, née Papesch (1761-1819)⁶³, and Magdalena Höpner, née Kummritz (1818-1890)⁶⁴ – four Sorbs by birth. The following paragraphs focus on the biographies of these three women, since they enable us to get an insight into the routine and organization of the Unity.

Magdalena Clemens was born in Neida near Hoyerswerda in 1747, where her father worked as a miller and tailor.⁶⁵ Her parents belonged to Moravian circles in the diaspora and regularly visited Kleinwelka. As a young girl, she attended a school founded by the Zschippank family in Neida, which followed Moravian principles.⁶⁶ According to her personal memoirs, she was a gifted student, so she was promoted quickly. In 1772 Magdalena Clemens married Johann Gottlieb Clemens, who worked as preacher in Kleinwelka. As the wife of a preacher she automatically took on pastoral care among the women there.⁶⁷ The couple was called to

⁵⁵ It is imaginable that women led prayers and gave short speeches in private houses at religious meetings or different occasions, e.g. giving the last blessings or blessings for upcoming births.

⁵⁶ UA R.22.76.03, memoir of Dorothea Biedermann.

⁵⁷ UA R.22.64.31, memoir of Anna Dorothea Polenz.

⁵⁸ For Sorbian-Czech contacts in the Unity compare MAHLING, *Verflechtungsraum Lausitz*, pp. 40–50.

⁵⁹ UA R.9.A.b.No.2c, 1768, memoir of Susanna Römer. Römer belonged to the leading sisters of the Unity. She was already ordained a deaconess in July 1738 and worked in the close circle of brothers and sisters around Zinzendorf, the so-called “pilgrim congregation” (“Pilgergemeinde”).

⁶⁰ For the Sorbian character of the Sister's House compare the report about the sisters moving to the new building in 1770. The majority of sisters wore the Sorbian national costume, only the daughters of Matthäus Lange did not, which resulted in discussions in Kleinwelka, since equality was regarded as highly important. BALKE, *Gemeinleben*, p.6.

⁶¹ UA R.22.16.14, memoir of Magdalena Clemens, née Winzer.

⁶² UA R.22.70.100, memoir of Margaretha Mitasch, née Zschornack*.

⁶³ UA R.22.71.78, memoir of Anna Pöhler, mar. Dombrowsky, née Papesch.

⁶⁴ AKW P.A.R.7.15, memoir of Magdalene Höpner, née Kummritz.

⁶⁵ UA R.22.16.14, memoir of Magdalena Clemens, née Winzer.

⁶⁶ More about this school in MAHLING, *Um der Wenden Seelenheyl hochverdient*, p. 409.

⁶⁷ UA R.22.78.08, Agnes Frenzel, née Lucas* (1738-1805), writes in her memoir that she “coincidentally met a couple of sisters from Kleinwelka, among whom was the now late sister Clemens /:wife of the preacher in Kleinwelka at that time:/. Sister Clemens told me about the Saviour and that He is a friend of the sinners who lay

Neusalz in Silesia in 1775, where her husband operated as a preacher and later as a bishop. Magdalena Clemens became the pastoral caretaker of the married women there and was ordained a deaconess on 10th March 1778. When Johann Gottlieb Clemens died in Silesia in 1788, Magdalena Clemens was called to Kleinwelka to run the widows` choir. Besides her welfare work she probably delivered sermons among widows as well, a task included in her position as deaconess. It cannot be clearly established whether she also preached in Sorbian, but it is known that the everyday language was Sorbian among the widows in Kleinwelka in the late 1700s and thus the command of it was a key requirement for being the head of the widows` choir. This fact was recorded in the files that dealt with the calling of Margaretha Mitasch.⁶⁸

In 1803, **Margaretha Mitasch**, née Zschornak, became the head of the widows` choir. She was admitted into the acolytes since deaconesses were not ordained any longer at that time. Margaretha Mitasch came from a larger estate in Baschütz where she was born in 1744. Her parents placed value on the children`s (religious) education, so she attended school and Sundays school lessons where she had already learned German as a child.⁶⁹ She was accepted into the sisters` choir in 1764 and held the high position of housemaid.⁷⁰ In 1777 she married Martin Mitasch (1741-1801) who was also among the leaders in Kleinwelka. He directed the Brothers` House in Kleinwelka – rare for a Sorb at that time – and was thus responsible for other services in the Unity as well.⁷¹ In accordance with her years of experience as pastoral caretaker, Margaretha Mitasch was chosen to lead the widows` choir after her husband`s death, which she did for eleven years.

In 1816, **Anna Pöhler**, née Papesch, became her successor.⁷² Her father was exiled from Bohemia and found his new home among awakened Sorbs. After Anna Pöhler taught at the school in Kleinwelka as a young woman, she did ecclesiastical welfare work in the Czech speaking congregation of Berlin-Rixdorf as the wife of two Czech preachers. When she passed away in 1819, the office of the supervisor of widows in Kleinwelka was not bestowed

down their self-righteousness. This left me with a strong impression, so I begged Him to bestow grace upon me and free me from my self-righteousness and show me a path to His justice.

⁶⁸UA R.15.A.17.g.2, Testimonials of sisters who went on mission, no. 20, Salome Hückel on the Unitätsältestenconferenz, Kleinwelka 12. 11. 1803: „Because she [Margaretha Mitasch] speaks Wendish, the non-residential sisters would be glad. There is a sister in our choir who only understands a couple of words in German, and some sisters, who understand German but cannot speak much of it.”

⁶⁹ UA R.22.70.100, memoir of Margaretha Mitasch, née Zschornack*. “I learned German at school as well as in a nursery in a different village, where my parents sent me”.

⁷⁰ AKW S.A.I.R.3.B.8, lists of sisters who moved into the new house [1770].

⁷¹ UA R.22.23.100, memoir of Martin Mitasch: “Leader of the brothers` choir house, member of the direction board, guardian of the choirs of single sisters and widows, held a couple of guardianships, and did with great care and without tiring some legal work.”

⁷² UA R.22.71.78, memoir of Anna Pöhler, mar. Dombrowsky, née Papesch.

upon a Sorb again. Since in 1857 **Magdalena Höpner**, née Kummritz took on this duty. She was born in the Sorbian village Milkel, where her father presided over the meetings of the brethren, and served as missionary with her husband in Surinam for 10 years. After the death of her husband in 1855, the young widow returned to Kleinwelka, where she led the widows' choir for 23 years.⁷³

During the 19th century, the widows' choir in Kleinwelka was also overrun by the change in language use and the Sorbian character decreased more and more. Unfortunately, the diaries of the widows' choir of Kleinwelka as well as other archival documents (lists of widows, house rules, inventory and correspondence) are not preserved.⁷⁴ These would have provided us with more information on activities of Sorbian Eldresses and some indications as to whether sermons were delivered in Sorbian. So there only remains to be added that it is highly probable that there were prayers in Sorbian led by the Sorbian leaders of the widows' choir and that the Wendish language played apart of everyday conversations a substantial role in certain liturgical ceremonies, such as in the blessing of the dying. The only reference to a Sorbian sermon is from a celebration the widows had in 1772.⁷⁵

At the end of this section I would like to point out that Maria Hammer from Litten and Magdalena Clemens from Neida are the only known Sorbs who were ordained deaconesses in the 18th century. This religious office was connected to different liturgical tasks, for instance administering communion or washing of feet.

5. Missionaries

Spiritual-religious work in relation to teaching, pastoral care and preaching was intertwined to a higher extent in the mission field than it was in the Herrnhut settlements or in the diaspora. In addition, in the mission field women performed writing tasks, medical services, as well as the collection and processing of plants. More than 30 sisters of Sorbian origin embarked on missionary work for the Moravian Church in the 18th and 19th centuries. In accordance with the Unity's principle of equality of women in spiritual matters, the missionary-wives took on pastoral counselling among girls, women, mothers and widows. The only such Sorb known in Sorbian historiography was Maria Hartmann, née Lobach (1798-1853), who operated on her own in Surinam (Dutch colony in South America) after the death of her husband for many years.⁷⁶ Similarly, many other sisters of Sorbian origin worked abroad under strenuous

⁷³ AKW P.A.R.7.15, memoir of Magdalene Höpner, née Kummritz.

⁷⁴ Compare the content of the widows' archive in AKW W.A. 1 – 9.

⁷⁵ BALKE, *Gemeinleben*, p. 49.

⁷⁶ MALINKOWA, T., *Serbske pomniki*, p. 150 f. There is also further literature. I would also like to point out the novel SCHIEL, *Flügel des Charadius*.

circumstances. For instance, Agnes Schuhmann, née Sauer (1752-1806), took care of sisters and children in India.⁷⁷ Maria Magdalena Hasting, née Schneider from Teichnitz (1770-1851), copied Greenlandic hymnals and taught Eskimo women to sing.⁷⁸ Maria Wedemann, née Kieschnick (1805-1891) from Drehna, first did welfare work in the Caribbean where she learned Creole and English, and later worked on Robbin Island in South Africa, where she and her husband nursed lepers.⁷⁹ People in Lusatia became aware of missionary work through missionaries' visits to homes, the dissemination of the Herrnhut memoirs, and through the children of missionaries who were educated in the Kleinwelka institutes.⁸⁰

6. Conclusion: New fields of activity for Sorbian women

- The Unity enabled Sorbian women to discover religion as a legitimate way for being publicly involved. Within the Moravian Church, Sorbian women were visitors, teachers, educators, deaconesses, acolytes, pastoral carers, missionaries, and last but not least, preachers. Sorbian women who remained in their native villages and their familiar social structures could carry out social and ecclesiastical tasks by paying visits and doing pastoral counselling. Their service offered them a respected social function, allowed them to break new ground, helped them to exchange experiences and establish new contacts, encouraged independence and the opportunity to further their personal development, and to impart knowledge. Occasionally, some of their travel costs were covered. This fact should not be overlooked in times when gainful employment for women was rare. Besides religious occupations, the Moravian Church offered women access to other careers.⁸¹ Sorbian women worked (independently) as artisans and as landladies, created art, and were self-employed in the social and health sectors. Therefore, the Moravian movement could be considered as the first Sorbian

⁷⁷ UA R.22.73.72, memoir of Agnes Schuhmann, née Sauer: "Ever since I was young, I wanted to serve the Saviour, best among pagans; and after I received a lot of grace, this wish was even stronger." It is remarked about her service in India: "With faithfulness and devotion she took care of the children and sisters in the brethren's' garden."

⁷⁸ UA R.22.092.07, memoir of Maria Magdalena Hasting, née Schneider*: "My first task besides housework was to copy the yet unprinted hymnal; I taught the women the lyrics and the melody, which I enjoyed very much. The acclimatisation was made easier since I saw that the women enjoyed it as well, and the Saviour added His blessing also."

⁷⁹ UA R.22.88.41, memoir of Maria Wedemann, née Kieschnick*.

⁸⁰ The interconnection between the mission countries and Lusatia as well as the effects of missionary work on the development in Lusatia will be examined more closely in a reasearch project of the author "The Sorbian Mission Movement between Globalization and Nationalism"

⁸¹ It would be interesting to find out to which extent the discontinuation of wearing the Sorbian national costumes meant the entry to new freedoms of action. In the Unity, women abided to the stipulated Moravian dress code and we can wonder if Sorbian women kept their dresses and only changed their cap markings according to the individual choirs, or if they wore the Moravian dress, which represented the entry to a new identity and new area of social interaction.

women`s emancipation movement. At the same time, it could be asserted that Sorbian sisters made an invaluable contribution to the spread of the Unity in Sorbian Lusatia as well as beyond its borders.

- The discovery of new fields of activity through and for Sorbian women should be seen in the context of the general changes happening in society at that time. Industrialization, growing cities, and increasing mobility created ample opportunities for work and social integration outside family structures.⁸² The Unity, which was structured through its many different offices and was based on mobility⁸³, offered women new ways of life which were in accordance with the changes in society. The life in choir houses in particular – which was connected to considerable social prestige – allowed a comparatively independent life outside of family structures and was a step to a life within a profession, i.e. with a fixed income. The communal social and religious life in choirs permitted social integration on one side and care in case of illness or age on the other side.
- In the choir system, the houses were kept collectively, having a positive result on the productivity as well as the specialisation of individuals. This encouraged institutionalization and the distribution of knowledge: the choir buildings were also always places of learning.⁸⁴ Sorbian sisters were included in this process as mentors, teachers and educators. What becomes visible at closer examination is that Sorbian sisters who held higher positions within the Unity had access to higher education when they were children, e.g. if they attended the girls` educational institute in Uhyst an der Spree.⁸⁵
- Women`s choir buildings as well as the sisters` meetings created an exclusively female space with no access for men. These female spheres were primarily shaped by religion, nevertheless other female issues were discussed, such as the changing body and needs in puberty, dealings with one`s body and with diseases, questions of education or the interaction within a marriage.⁸⁶

⁸² SCHLÖGL, *Alter Glaube*, pp. 307–337.

⁸³ METTELE, *Weltbürgertum*.

⁸⁴ Apart from general housework many sisters in the choir buildings took on several tasks like baking, stitching or tailoring, for which specific skills and higher levels of knowledge were needed.

⁸⁵ In this context I would like to point to Maria Schaaf, Magdalena Clemens, Agnes Cranz, Anna Sommer and Margaretha Mitasch.

⁸⁶ FAULL, *Speaking to body and soul*, and FAULL, *Girls Talk*.

- By joining the Unity, numerous Sorbian women became bilingual⁸⁷, or even multilingual if the sisters were sent as missionaries to places like Sarepta in Russia, to various American settlements, or to other countries. Thereby, the sisters of Sorbian origin learned and applied a great deal of languages such as English, Inuit languages, Creole, and various African tongues.
- The function of Sorbian women as pastoral carers in villages, as teachers, choir leaders, educators, or missionaries was well known in Lusatia.⁸⁸ This knowledge was handed down in families and noted by a wider public.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the knowledge of these new ways of life was spread through the Herrnhut memoirs, which were read in the Herrnhut settlements and in the diaspora. A fair amount of these biographies set an example to Sorbian girls and women and showed them how to explore new avenues outside family structures.
- The discovery of new freedoms for and by Sorbian women within the Moravian Church was no exception, and rigorously continued in the 19th century. In this context I would like to mention Sorbian women who were poets and lyricists⁹⁰, entrepreneurs⁹¹, or Sorbian female singers at choir celebrations. Furthermore, I would

⁸⁷ UA R.22.62.52, Memoir of Agnes Cranz, née Lange*, UA SHAHt 158 no. 5, Memoir of Marie Forkel (1827-1906), and UA R.6.D.II.b.No.2.a, Memoir of Anna Hortschansky (1753-1817). For comparison also MALINKOWA, L., Ochranow.

⁸⁸ The memoir of Maria Beck, née Winkler* (1751-1832) from Hoyerswerda states: “One day, when the late [sister] was 12 years old, the school handed out booklets about the brethrens’ mission among pagans; her heart was strangely moved and she wished that one day she could serve the Saviour among the pagans! She showed a special interest in Greenlanders, and even though there was no chance for her to go there one day, she asked the Saviour to fulfill her wish.” (UA R.22.84.06). In 1785 she married the missionary Jacob Beck (1741-1822) and they went to Greenland together where she served until 1823. – Johanna Bartke (1870-1948) from Rauden writes in her memoir: “When they needed workers in the Herrnhut Sisters’ House, I was asked if I wanted to go there. It was not easy to leave my position in Lomske and my home, but I recognized God’s guidance. My sister and my aunt have been in the Sisters’ House for a long time and thus I plucked up my courage to go there.” (UA R.22.188.59). – UA R.22.57.25, Johann Mito* (1800-1877): “I did not wish to stay at home, I asked the Saviour to help me into the Unity and so I wrote to my sister in Herrnhut.” – In this context the phenomenon of missionary families should be examined more closely. We know of families like the Zippel family from Weißkollm, the Starik family from Werben, the Lehmann family from Döhlen or the Jenke family from Drehna, where several family members went on mission. Cf. UA R.22.195.91, Memoir of Marianne Falt, née Schmoger (1884-1956): “An uncle of Marianne Schmoger, brother Starick, was a Moravian missionary in Greenland. Another, brother Anschutz, served in the same position in Nicaragua. Those relatives talked about their experiences on visits at home and of the life in the Unity.”

⁸⁹ JENČ, Selenska, p. 163f.

⁹⁰ It was a Moravian custom to write poems and songs, translate hymns and transform them. In this context we can categorize the beginning of popular Sorbian poets like Hana Šolčić from Ratzen, Madlena Krawcowa, née Pawlikec from Eutrich, Christiana Krawcec from Maltitz, and Hańža Budarjowa from Lohsa (WICAZ, *Wo Serbskim ludowym basnjenju*, p. 10f. and 38f.). Moreover, I would like to mention Herta Wićazec (1819-1885) and Mila Imišowa, née Pfulec (1827-1895). Both of them articulate a religious experience in a way which is very close to the Unity in their poems.

⁹¹ MUSIAT, *Gab es im 19. Jahrhundert ein sorbisches Bürgertum?*, p. 147, and MĚRĆINOWA, *Naša „krajanka“ Mila Höffertowa*.

like to point out that several Sorbian women continued to do social-charitable work, either independently⁹² or as deaconesses⁹³.

- Exploring new fields of activity and the emergence of new social roles for women entailed a new alignment of the role of men and the relationship between both genders. The more new fields of activity for Sorbian women were explored and the more public appearances were made in the 18th and 19th centuries, the more traditional ideals of a Sorbian mother passing on the language, religion, and love to her nation were propagated.⁹⁴ We might hence wonder if the ideal of a Sorbian mother should be perceived as a male reaction to the changes of society? It appears to be paradox – especially in Kleinwelka – when Jakub Bart-Ćišinski, one of the most important Sorbian poets and publicists, posits in 1908, that an exemplary Sorbian woman works at home and that only agriculture and a strict gender segregation guarantees the future of the Sorbs⁹⁵ – either way it is an anachronism. The social and family model outlined by Ćišinski was already outdated at that time and excluded copious Sorbian males and females who were workers in factories, employees, artisans, or laboured in the coal industry. This view on the Sorbs by no means exploits women`s potential. Walter Koschmal speaks of “suppressed female potential”⁹⁶ in relation to Sorbian literature. The same applies to Sorbian historiography: The image of Sorbian women in Sorbian historiography should be examined in the same way as the role of Sorbian women in Sorbian history.

⁹² VENSKE, Serbowka, and WITTNEBEN, Art. “Simon, Marie“.

⁹³ Frida Wjelic is an outstanding example, compare

MALINKOWA, T., Darum gehe hin, and furthermore: MALINKOWA, T., Anna Wackwitz.

⁹⁴ TSAI, Gender, pp. 101–108.

⁹⁵ BART-ĆIŠINSKI, Toast (as well as on p. 338 poem “Serbskim žonam“). For further discussion compare NEDO, Serbske cyłki; ŠAJBA, Zaměr a nadawki serbskeje maćerje, and NOWAK-NJECHORNSKI, Serbska mać, as well as the collection of poems by Jan Skala under the topic “Serbskim maćerjam“ (“To Sorbian mothers”) in: Naša Domowina 1938, p. 41, and the poem “Serbskej maćeri“ by Pawoł Krječmar on p. 46. ČERNÝ, Žony, p. 30, with a remarkable analysis: “It is the national misfortune of Lusatian Sorbs that they do not have any intelligent women – because of their men.” On page 32, Černý warns against “the damage of Sorbian life, if the power of kind female souls is lost in foreign waters or is not developed and fades away unrecognised and unawakened.”

⁹⁶ KOSCHMAL, Perspektiven, pp. 28–30.

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