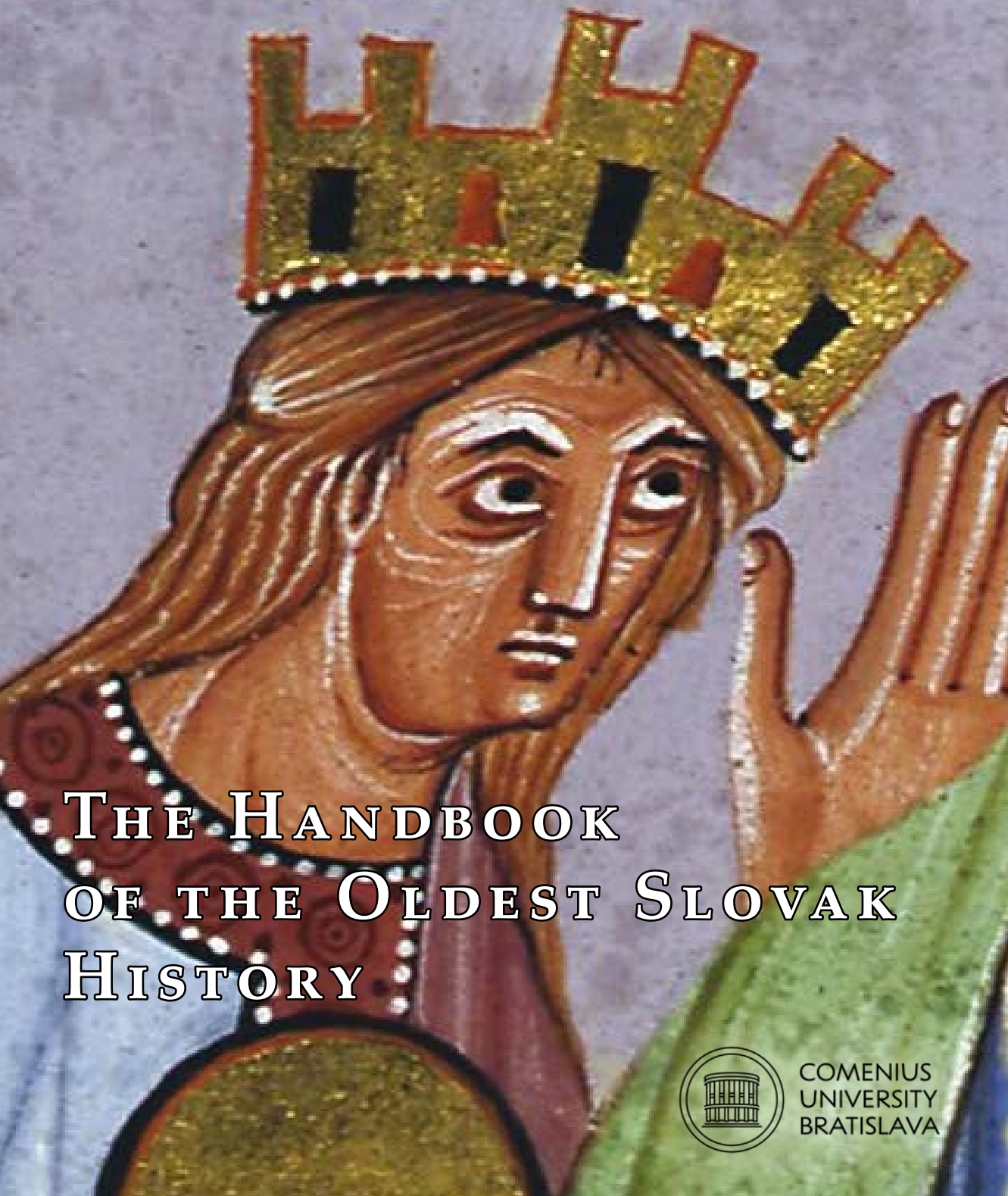


SCLAUTINIA

MARTIN HOMZA



THE HANDBOOK
OF THE OLDEST SLOVAK
HISTORY



COMENIUS
UNIVERSITY
BRATISLAVA

MARTIN HOMZA

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OF THE OLDEST SLOVAK

HISTORY

2024

COMENIUS UNIVERSITY BRATISLAVA

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Book cover forehead: Anonymous, *Four Allegories* (ROMA, GALLIA, GERMANIA and SCLAVINIA) of the restored Roman Empire come to pay tribute to Emperor Otto III, in *Gospel of Otto III*, around a year 1000, p. 19–20, detail of *Sclavinia* (Evangeliar Ottos III. – Munich, Bayer. Staatsbib., Clm. 4453), see: <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb00096593>.

Book cover, spine: Donor portrait in the church of St. Benedict in Mals, South Tyrol, the 9th century, see: https://sk.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%BAbor:Malles,_chiesa_di_san_benedetto,_ritratto_del_fondatore_della_chiesa,_affresco_IX_secolo.jpg.



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Acknowledgements

The idea to write a handbook, which would be a kind of entry into a deeper study of older Slovak history, resulted from the two KEGA Grants (No. 024UK-4/2019 and No. 027UK-4/2022“E-learning as an innovative form of University and lifelong learning in the field of Slovak history“), which we have been working on at the Department of Slovak History of the Faculty of Arts (Comenius University Bratislava) in the years 2019-2024. In a narrower sense, however, it was also a response to the direct reactions of subscribers to the first 20 sequents of the videos that we have been publishing on the <https://fphil.uniba.sk/katedry-a-odborne-pracoviska/katedra-slovenskych-dejin/> website since 2021. For all the suggestions and to all those who did not hesitate to write their comments, I hereby express my gratitude.

However, for seeing the light of day of this work I would like to thank in the first place my colleague Dr. Peter Vanek, with whom we implemented both grants over a long period of five years. It was not only about the preparation of this book, but about a number of other small steps we took to bring Slovak history, not only the oldest ones, closer to the widest variety of those interested in it, across age generations, professional interests and geographic zones. However, my thanks also go to Associate Prof. Daniel Gurňák, who helped me to create the engaging maps that accompany the reader throughout the book. I would also like to express my respect to the graphic designer of this publication, my long-time friend Ing. Matúš Brilla, who created the graphic design of the publication. My gratitude also goes to the translator of my lectures into English, Castor Sánchez, but also to Niel Hlavatovich, who, as a native speaker and a person with Slovak roots, has made this work so comprehensible. I also wish to offer my deep gratitude to professors Denis Aljimov from St. Petersburg and Ľura Hardi from Novi Sad for reading my manuscript and suggesting improvements.

A Note on the Onomastics of this Textbook

Terminology is a key tool in any scientific discipline for grasping the subject under study. It is no different in the historical sciences. It is important to know, however, that compared to other sciences, history is a symptomatic science. This symptomatic nature of historians is manifested in the terminology they prefer. It is typical of Hungarian historians, for example, that they prefer the nomenclature of contemporary Hungarian (Magyar language) when naming historical realities, even in the English historical books. For them, St. Stephen the King is St. István the King, Bratislava – Posony, Nitra – Nyitra, etc. They thus give the impression that the history of the Kingdom of Hungary was Hungarian: better Magyar history. But it is not. It is the history of one Central European monarchy, which has always been multinational.

It is important to know that the Kingdom of Hungary until 1918 was a multinational state in which the official language until 1848 was Latin. Today, the English language has often replaced Latin in its functions in Central Europe. The advantage of English is that it itself contains many words of Latin origin. It is therefore natural that I use terminological Latinisms in my work. In toponymy, I prefer the contemporary names of towns, rivers, mountain ranges, in the form in which they are used today in the territory of a given country. A specific feature of the territory of Central Europe is that one locality has several historical names in addition to its, for centuries, official Latin name. In important cases, such as the Hungarian coronation town of Alba Regia, I give them directly in the first occurrence in the text in the order of the present name Székesfehérvár, the Slovak name Stoličný Belehrad and the German name Stuhlweissenburg. These names are then cross-referenced in the index, which is part of this book.

The situation with English variants of personal proper names is somewhat more complicated, especially when it comes to writing Slavic bithematic ruler names. As an example, I will give here the spelling of the name Boleslav – Boleslas/Boleslaus/Bolesław, etc. It is even more complicated, then, with the name of one of the main heroes of our book, Svätopluk, which has the Latinized form *Suatocopius*. The German-Latin variant taken from the *Fulda Annals* is then *Zwentibald*. The use of the variant *Svatopluk* would then give the illusion of his Czech origin, which does not correspond to the historical reality. I have therefore solved the complex task on a case-by-case basis, but mostly taking into account my addressee, who is a person interested in Slovak history and unfamiliar with the Slovak language.

By preferring Slovak historical terminology in some map sets, such as map no. 20 *Church and Political Structure in the Pannonian (Hungarian) Kingdom in the First Half of the 11th Century*, I wanted to show the continuity of the later organization of the Pannonian (Hungarian) Kingdom with the Kingdom of the Slavs of Svätopluk I.

By using some less common names for established historical terms, such as the aforementioned Kingdom of Pannonian bracketed – Hungary, I wanted to point out the contemporary impermanence of this name. All of the Arpad family up to the time of King Coloman (1195–1116) referred to themselves as rulers (kings or dukes) of *Pannonia(e)*, respectively *Pannoniorum*. This is evident on their coins, seals and in the few written domestic sources from this period. However, the ambiguity of the name for the monarchy between the Carpathians and the Danube during the 11th century is also evident in the contemporary chronicler Thietmar of Merseburg, who calls Stephen I the King – *Rex Ungrorum* and at another time *Rex Pannonici*. Similarly, then, the titular title of the first crowned ruler of Poland was probably *Rex Sclavorum*, i.e. King of the Slavs. Therefore, it occurred to me to resolve the name of Poland at the beginning of the 11th century *Scлавinia* by analogy using parentheses (Poland), see: map no. 16 *Central Europe and the Balkans in the Early 11th Century*.

Introduction

Dedicated to all Homzas living outside Slovakia

In the memorable year 1900 on July 27th – when the transatlantic *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* arrived in Ellis Island in New York Harbour from Bremerhaven in Germany – my great-grandfather Ján (Johann) Homza was assigned Pittsburgh as his new home. Since that time, Viliam/William has been a frequent name with the Homzas, both in the US and Slovakia. I myself am a descendant of the Slovak branch of this family thanks to the fact that Ján's son – my grandfather Simon – decided to return to his native village of Prakovce between 1919 and 1922.

With this brief account about myself, I just want to illustrate my motive for deciding to publish my YouTube lectures (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1Y-GEfVbJGwWSkxWLCxjQ/videos>) in a book: to preserve the heritage of my fathers, just as the inscription on the portal of St. Ludmila's Church in Prakovce – my hometown – tells me to do. This, however, is not the only reason. There is still that eternal question: *Qvo vadis, homo?*, i.e. "Where are you going, Man?" For I firmly believe that not only the Homzas in the United States of America, but other descendants of Slovak emigrants as well have asked themselves this question – in all its complexity – and will continue doing so in the future just like in the present. To answer it, however, you also need to ask "Where do I come from? Where are my roots?" The present publication will certainly not answer all of these questions, but – for anyone who cares to ask – it can become the starting point in their journey to better knowing and understanding themselves and their place in the world.

Yet, the book is not intended just for those descendants of Slovaks trying to learn more about their origins and the earliest history of their nation. It has been conceived for all those who for whatever reason have an interest in Slavic issues, of which Slovak history is the essential beginning and an integral part. This book, therefore, aims at reaching a much wider spectrum of readers than the English-speaking Slovaks abroad.

This objective stands in line with the very point of our project, namely KEGA 027UK-4/2022: *E-learning as an Innovative Form of University and Lifelong Education in Slovak History No. II*. As the name of the project indicates, the issue here is to offer lifelong enlightenment in Slovak history in the broadest sense of the word to any potential recipient. The main long-term goal those behind this project strive to achieve is, actually, making sure reliable information about Slovak history is extensively available not only all

over the planet, but also for all ages and social demographics. Therefore, anyone interested only needs a computer, access to the Internet, and they will be able to read and understand. Although at this point we are offering just a form of enlightenment whose mere tangible result is the feedback we get from our viewers, the plan is to offer a full-fledged bachelor and master's degree in Slovak history in the future. Virtually, obviously, in the form of an e-learning course. This textbook is, thus, the first study material for all those interested in studying Slovak history, especially for those studying it in a language different from Slovak.

The mode of expression of the textbook has been deliberately chosen to suit wider audiences. Since the starting point is the spoken language I use in these lectures, the style of this *Earliest Slovak History Manual* is more casual than it is customary for publications of this kind. For better or worse, I could not help but – here and there – make updating comments on the topic in question. In some cases it was not without the use of irony. These asides and short digressions are meant to highlight how important knowing the past is for the present. Perhaps you could call it a “popular science” work. In fact, besides some “popularizing” elements – the already mentioned colloquial language, asides, etc. – its scientific, academic or scholarly character is given by the numerous references to sources and further scholarly works. At the end of the book you will find the bibliography in alphabetical order. Quotations have been made taking into account – as much as possible – the most recent English translations available as well as the most relevant meta-texts written originally in English.

For my part, I have tried to abridge as precisely as possible the results of my long-term research and reasoning about Slovak history. Hopefully, I have done so without missing the original point. In the end, nothing but the feedback from my readers will show whether I have managed to achieve this goal or not.

As for the structure of the work, I have divided my thoughts according to some logical historical milestones and thematic areas. Unlike the established segmentation of Slovak history that has the Great Moravian period ending with the Battle of Bratislava in 907, I have opted for a minor chronological and semantic shift. In my narrative, thus, this period ends when the monarchy on the Danube is restored and consolidated under the reign of St. King Stephen I. The reason for doing so is my firm belief that the right of kingship is given by God and, therefore, no human power can dissolve it. After all, this is conveyed *expressis verbis* in the letter Pope Stephen V, wrote to Svätopluk I, the “King of the Slavs” (*regi Sclavorum*) in 885.

Lastly, the main happenings and developments of this “restored kingdom” – that up to the end of the 11th century was known as the Kingdom

of the Pannonians or *Pannoniorum* and afterwards as the Kingdom of the Hungarians or *Regnum (H)Ungarorum* – will be looked at in a new series of YouTube lectures I expect to set in motion in the spring of 2025. This new sequel will cover Slovak history up to the year of 1205 and, of course, will translate into yet a continuation of this humble publication.

Budmerice, 10th September 2024

Martin Homza

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Chapter 1

How to Understand Slovak History: What Slovak History is not and What it is

What is and what is not the subject matter of “Slovak” history, what Slovak history is most often mistaken with and how you need to understand it in its historical context and dynamism. To explain this is quite a challenging plan, but hopefully we will manage. Let me start by explaining what the subject matter of Slovak history is.

*Clarification
of the Topic*

The subject of the history of every community is, in fact, their specific cultural content. According to Jan Assmann, a community manifests itself outwards as well as inwards by means of its culture, i.e. by its cultural identity.¹ The basis of every cultural identity is the distinctive proper name of the community. Choosing a personal proper name that shall become their main self-identifier is a complex and often incomprehensible issue as it is very irrational. This is the reason for some old definitions and efforts to define what Slovak – *slovenský* – actually means.

*What the
Subject
Matter
of Slovak
History is*

The first traditional interpretations date back to the Middle Ages. They see the word “Slovak” (in both meanings the Slav and the Slovak) deriving from *slava*, (= glory), or from *slovit'* (= to speak). Those who speak against those who do not (*nemec* => wordless => German). Others derive this name from the masculine proper personal name *Slavomir*, or *Slavo*. Others, again, from certain rivers or territories, for instance from the river Sala.

*Some
Definitions
and Efforts
to Define
what
slovenský
Actually
Means*

I will not deal with this now as it will be the topic of future talks. However, let me say just one simple thing: that the adjective *slovensky* means basically the same as the ancient *slovo* (word), or *sláva* (glory). The same applies for feminine form *Slovenky* (= Slovak women). This leads to the conclusion that *Slovak* is actually a derivative of *Sloven/Slovan* (Slav).²

This name first appears around the mid 6th century in three different literary traditions almost simultaneously, namely in Greek, Latin and in Syrian. So, three different authors, namely Procopius of Caesarea, Jordanes, and John of Ephesus record a very interesting situation at the very same time: that a distinct community bearing this name developed on the other, i.e. northern bank of the middle and lower Danube. It is documented in both Greek and

*First
Mentions of
Slavs on the
Danube*

¹ Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *Cultural History/Cultural Studies* 65 (1995): 125–33.

² Adam Mesiarkin, “The name of the Slavs: etymology and meaning,” *Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana*, no. 1 (2017): 3–20.

Latin forms. However, it is very interesting that in the oldest written or petrified cultural tradition, i.e. in the *Tale of Bygone Years* (*Povest vremennych ljet*), it appears in the form *slovenin*, i.e. the way it was originally pronounced.

In the following lines, in which I will try to explain the meaning of the term *slovenský* in particular historical contexts, I will draw on one of my older articles.³ The adjective *slovenský* (= “Slovak/Slavic”), the proper name *Sloven* (= “Slav”) and the appellative of the country *Scлавinia* (“Slavic country/Land/Slovak Land”) are taken over by several important contemporary authors who wrote them down and, therefore, fixed them for us in writing. From this moment, i.e. from the half of the 6th century, we can speak about the history of this community, i.e. about Slovak history. This brings us to the first traditional mistake, namely to confuse Slovak history with the history of the territory of today’s Slovakia. In this delimited form, Slovakia definitively crystallized only with the establishment of Czecho-Slovakia in 1918. So, the history of the territory of today’s Slovakia cannot be completely equated with what we understand to be *slovenský*, because the territory of today’s Slovakia has been the home of other nations and communities, such as Germans, Hungarians, Jews, Ruthenians, and many others. So, the *slovenský* we are talking about and the *slovenský* as understood today, are not identical in content. The content of that cultural identity keeps changing dynamically throughout history. This is another big mistake those who look at history with today’s eyes often make.⁴ They think that the community we are going to talk about, which appeared in the 6th century on the Danube, is somehow the same we have today. So the meaning of this term changes in the different periods and historical contexts. Therefore I must explain what the adjective “slovenský” means in the particular historical period.

³ Martin Homza, “A Few Words about the Identity of the Slavs, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow,” *Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana* 23 (2018): 3–41. Some ideas of this article were broadly reflected in recent synthesis. In the English literature see: Florin Curta, *Slavs in the Making History, Linguistics, and Archaeology in Eastern Europe (ca. 500–ca. 700)*. (London: Routledge, 2021), 6 and 175, see also German scholar: Eduard Mühle, *Slavs in the Middle Ages between Idea and Reality*. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020), 30, 34, 69 and 401 and in Russian written historical works see chapters by Denis E. Aljimov, in *Мобилизованное Средневековье. Том. 2: Средневековая история на службе национальной и государственной идеологии в России* [The Mobilized Middle Ages. Vol. 2: Medieval History in the Service of National and State Ideology in Russia], ed. A. I. Filjushkin. (Санкт-Петербург: Издательство Санкт-Петербургского Университета, 2022), 26, 31, 33 and 456.

⁴ Another concept “of Slovak particularist nationalism (...) understood as the belief in a “Slovak nation” speaking a “Slovak language”, see Alexander Maxwell, *Choosing Slovakia: Slavic Hungary, the Czechoslovak Language and Accidental Nationalism*. (London and New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2009), 262 pp.

In the 6th century that name designated a well-known and important group of warriors whose successful warfare and name caught the attention of those Greek, Latin and Syrian authors. Neither is this the same community that in the 9th century created what we incorrectly call Great Moravia. We should rather call it the Slavonic Realm or Kingdom of the Slavs, as it is fixed in writing. This was the main success of one of the greatest 9th-century rulers, namely Svätopluk/Zvatoplug/Zwentibald. Svätopluk's concept of *Regnum Sclavorum*, i.e. the "the Kingdom of the Slavs", as part of the Latin universe, is a special topic we will be dealing with. But it is basically the political concept of what we call *slovenský* (Slovak).

*The
Meaning of
slovenský
in the 6th
Century*

On the other hand, there is the cultural and religious concept, also developed in the 9th century by St. Constantine the Philosopher. He significantly overlaid the content of that adjective. He actually created a concept that became very attractive to other communities. By adopting this concept, they took over their writing, literature and official liturgical language, Old-Church Slavonic. So they also began to identify themselves as Slavs.

*The
Meaning of
slovenský
by St.
Constantine
(Cyril) the
Philosopher
in the 9th
Century*

However, this does not mean that this concept came true. That is a kind of eschatological concept, the Slavs as the nation of the "Word" (*Slovo*), that is a concept that has not yet been completely accomplished and might never be, that depends on the further development of the history of this community.

*The Slavs as
the Nation of
the "Word"
(Slovo)*

However, St. Constantine's particular though attractive concept came into conflict with Svätopluk's universal political theory. This conflict resulted in the victory of Svätopluk's universal notion of the east-central part of Europe, i.e. between Byzantium and the restored Roman Empire or later known according to the name Holy Roman Empire. This part of Europe became known in history under different names, for example The Kingdom of Hungary. Eventually also the Habsburgs came to identify with it. So one can also claim that this concept persists as a political notion until modern times. In fact, Slovak writers, the oldest historians, speak of the contemporary Habsburg monarchy as of the Slavic Kingdom.⁵ This is crucial because every now and then someone asks me if these Slavs ceased to exist as an entity after being attacked by the Old Hungarian tribal confederation and if they reappeared sometime in the 14th, 15th centuries, when they appear in the sources. I always answer that such a thing is not possible. Basically, this answers the issue of the continuity of the brand "Slovak".

*The
Meaning of
slovenský
by Svätop-
luk I in the
9th Century*

Let me go back to what I said at the beginning. This is a small though essential digression. Namely that even the ancient Greeks are not the same

⁵ Georgius Papanek, *Historia gentis Slavae. De regno, regibusque Sclavorum.* (Quinqueeclissiae: Typis Joannis Josephi Engel, 1780), 325.

as today's Greeks, although they share the same brand. Likewise, the old Franks are not the same as the French of today, although they share the same brand.

*Basis of the
Constitution
of the
Monarchy
on the
Danube by
King St.
Stephen I*

Let's go back to that universal concept of the Pannonian Kingdom, which eventually became the Kingdom of Hungary. It required all the entities – cultural, religious, etc – that formed part of it, to be fundamentally equal. This is actually summed up in the famous sentence King St. Stephen I writes to his son:

“A country using only one language and having only one custom is weak and frail”.

*When do
the Slavs –
the Slovaks
– Appear in
Historical
Sources*

So, when do the Slavs – the Slovaks – appear in historical sources? When they start claiming their rights as being economically unrecognized, deprived or disadvantaged. And from the 13th century, you can find plenty of such cases. This needs to be said because a 13th century document mentions the Slovaks, the Slavs. In it, regent Elizabeth the Cuman, grants equal rights to the different peoples of Spiš. On the one hand, there are *Slavi et Hungari*. It can only be translated as Slovaks and Hungarians (Magyars). On the other hand, there are *Latini et Saxones*, i.e. the German-speaking (the Germans) and the Romance-speaking population of Spiš, apparently from the Adriatic coast (the Italians). It is also very interesting that even Anonymous Notary P. in his *Gesta Hungarorum* mentions Slovaks as a distinct entity, different from the Bohemians, whom he also mentions and refers to them as Nitrian Slavs, *Slavi Nitrienses*. So, this cannot mean anything but Slovaks. A similar case is when Slovaks are granted equal rights by the King of Hungary Louis the Great, in 1381 by his famous letter *Privilegium pro Slavis*.

*How the
Slovaks
Became
Politically
Emancipated
in the
Towns in
the territory
of Today's
Slovakia*

There were many cases like these from city to city throughout the Kingdom of Hungary. It was similar in Trnava, Levoča, Spišská Sobota, Banská Bystrica, Krupina and other cities. So, at some point the Slovaks try to catch up with the privileged Germans, mainly economically. Equally interesting is that they often seek support also from disadvantaged local Hungarians (Magyars). But this is another topic, which can be discussed elsewhere.⁶

*The
Meaning of
slovenský
during
Reformation*

Another burning phase in the new redefinition meaning of *slovenský* is the Reformation. Those reformers go back to the times of the Great Moravia and to the times of St. Constantine the Philosopher, and a distinct and specific Slovak language becomes a liturgical language – *lingua sacra*, i.e. a sacral language. This language became one of the attributes of “Slovakness”.

⁶ For instance: Ján Tibenský, “Problémy vzniku a vývoja slovenskej feudálnej národnosti,” [Problems of the origin and development of Slovak feudal nationality] *Historický časopis* 9, no. 4 (1961): 397–419.

A language not only for everyday situations and environments, in which Slovak was widespread, but also used vertically, i.e. to communicate with God.

In this respect, language becomes a real attribute of the culture and self-identification of the community that calls itself “Slovak” although this language is known as Kralice Czech or *bibličtina*. Let me just say something about Kralice Czech. This language is called Czech, but the *Bible of Kralice* was translated in Moravia and Slovaks also took part in its translation. It means, this language was prepared in advance to become a language that could be used for liturgical purposes also in territories inhabited by Slovaks.⁷

Recatholicization then followed this very same line. It developed its own concept of what was *slovenský* (Slovak), although it did not adopt Slovak as a liturgical language. But very soon we can find attempts to translate the *Bible* into contemporary Slovak. It is also known as Jesuit or Cultural Western Slovak, after the western city of Trnava, which was the main center from which it spread. So in the end we can say that due to its frequent usage and widespread presence, it had a supra-regional character and was used in the whole territory of today’s Slovakia. But it also stretched over the territory of today’s Hungary and even Transylvania. Even so, this was a period when the “Slovak” element came to the fore within the Habsburg monarchy also in connection with the anti-Habsburg uprisings. We know that the language of the nobility was almost exclusively Hungarian.

This indicates that the establishment of the Slovak element went hand in hand with what Vienna demanded or wanted namely, the centralisation of power, a relevant and ongoing process at the time. And, of course, intensive and good cooperation with the different Catholic orders, especially the Jesuits and the Franciscans. Actually, the Franciscan order itself was long seen as being Slovak. This brings us to Anton Bernolák, Slovak catholic priest, famous linguist and the first codifier of the Slovak language at the end of 18th century. We can say that Bernolák marks the end of one great and long period, which can be delimited as the period of reformation and recatholicization. However, that “Slovakness” and Slovak feeling did not go against the national and patriotic feeling of the Kingdom of Hungary. Neither did they go against the historical feeling of loyalty towards the ruling monarchy, in this case mainly the Habsburgs. Nor did these attributes of “Slovakness” go against the rest of the nations that had an equal-rights status in the Kingdom of Hungary. This exceptional period actually ends around the mid-18th century when the first serious attempts appear to make Hungarian the official language. This, of course, resulted in the Slovaks protesting against these

*The
Meaning of
slovenský
during Re-
catholicization
(Counter-
Reformation)
during
17th–18th
Centuries*

*The
Meaning of
slovenský
in the En-
lightenment
of the 18th
Century*

⁷ Vladimír Čapek, *Historie Bible*, the 3rd ed. (Praha: Vydavatelstvo Advent, 1990), 127 pp.

efforts. As a matter of fact, the discussion over what should be the official language in the Kingdom of Hungary would go on for a long period of time.

New Romantic Meaning of slovenský in the Long 19th Century and its Change in the Century Later

Then comes the famous mid-19th century when under the influence of Herder and Hegel, i.e. under the influence of the French Revolution, the concept *Slovak* gets a new meaning, and the Slovak people are set at the fore as a category, which somehow has not been spoiled by civilization and which represents the future. In the 20th century, the whole concept developed by Ľudovít Velislav Štúr, Jozef Miloslav Hurban and Michal Miloslav Hodža, of a romantic, pure and countryside Slovak nation, suddenly and smoothly becomes a communist proletariat. This is also reflected in the way Slovak history is understood. In fact, elements that had always formed an integral part of Slovak history are suddenly left out, namely, the Slovak burgher class, the Slovak nobility, Slovak clergy and scholars, etc. who had always been there although to some extent veiled under the official language of the Kingdom, which was Latin.

This is a recap of what Slovak history basically could mean. So, how to understand Slovak history today. I think we do not need to make up anything new but rather synthesize what we already know, for Slovak history is all we have been talking about so far. Maybe in the near future we will find other dimensions for this concept as it keeps gathering new dimensions.

What is the Origin of the Suffix -ak in the Masculine Form of the Proper Noun Slovak

Now let's approach those claims that have the Slovaks appearing sometime in the 14th–15th Century. Their main argument is that the suffix *-ak* first appeared in the 15th century, and also appearing is the name *Slováčko*, etc. One quite fundamental thing must be said about this, namely this suffix *-ak* originated by the Slavic speaking "student" *nivoe* at Prague University in the 15th century. At that time there was a large community of Slovaks studying there. One of the characteristics of a group of students is that they create their own language and that special slang and argot often becomes part of the language and eventually gets codified. This suffix *-ak* had – and to some extent still has – a derisive connotation, especially in Czech. A "Brňan" (Brno citizen) becomes a *Brňák*, a *Pražan* (from Prague) becomes a *Pražák*, a *Polan* (from Poland) becomes a *Polák*, and a *Slovan* becomes a *Slovák*.

On the Amusing Consequences of Misunderstanding the Contemporary Text of the Sources

A very unexpected result is that the notions *Slovan* and *Slovak* get mixed up. And even more confusing is when this is codified into the new official Czech and Polish languages, what actually happened in the 15th–16th century. Then Wenceslaus Hajek of Libočany came up with the idea that "the first inhabitants of Bohemia were Slovaks". Of course, if you do not know the context, this is music to your ears, especially if you are a Slovak nationalist. It is just beautiful. Wenceslaus Hajek of Libočany wrote this in his first Czech chronicle. So, gentlemen, have a look at the sources, it is in black and white, you Czechs are Slovaks. This could get you kicked out of Czechia.

In Polish historiography, you can find another amusing confusion. Some chronicles, e.g. Marcin Kromer's or Marcin Bielski's writings which were soon translated into Polish, include some phrases like "*Polaci są z pochodzenia Słowakami*" ("Poles are Slovaks of origin") and the term "*Slavdom*" = *Słowiańczyzna* in modern Polish, is mixed up with *Słowaczyna* = "Slovakia", i.e. *Slovensko*. When you show the PDF of the original 16th century edition to an educated Pole, they will tell you *to jest hyba, Martine, jakaś słowacka propaganda* ("Martin, that is probably some Slovak propaganda"). You need to keep in mind that this is a clear confusion of *Slovak* and *Sloven* ("Slav"). This leads to a simple conclusion: that *Sloven (Slovan)* = *Slovak*, this means that Slavic history is the history of the Slovaks.

However, it is not so simple. Another thing people often have problems with is how to differentiate *Slovak* and "*Slavic*", especially when talking about Latin adjectives in medieval and modern texts. The answer is: it depends on the context. Likewise, the word *Hungari* sometimes needs to be translated as *Uhor* (a citizen of the Kingdom of Hungary) and sometimes as *Magyar* (an ethnic Hungarian), at least in the Slovak language. It is usually clear from the context. If not, it needs to be indicated, e.g. using a footnote.

Slovak and "Slavic", when Talking about Latin Adjectives

Curiously, around the 15th–16th century, some humanists, especially Illyrians, and later in the 19th century in Poland and Slovakia, mainly Slovak thinker, poet and Evangelical priest Ján Kollár, gave origin to a pan-Slavic movement (1830's) aiming to create an artificial unity of all Slavs with a special role of the Slovak language and Slovaks as the oldest and the youngest heirs of this culture. Thanks to "*cultural reciprocity*" developed by Ján Kollár and Slavic studies by Pavol Jozef Šafárik - both originally from the territory of today's Slovakia and nationally aware Slovaks – the Slovaks are no longer just a small nation in the Kingdom of Hungary, but as a part of the Slavic world they suddenly expand from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean, and from the Arctic Ocean to the Adriatic Sea, i.e. the Mediterranean. In this case, these two concepts get purposefully mixed up with the purpose to defend the Slovaks against progressing Magyarization.

The Panславistic Meaning of slovenský

Lastly, there is another point related of the term "*Slavic*". The Latin and Greek *sclavus/sclavoi* developed into a new word for slave in medieval Latin and Greek, which later spread to other modern languages such as German, *der Sklave*, English *the slave*, in Italian *lo Schiavo*, and it is necessary to explain how this came about. We know that Muslims and Jews in particular were active in slave trade. Christians were more reluctant to get involved in this issue. But the early monarchies on the middle Danube were not yet fully Christian, so capturing slaves and selling them into slavery was an economic

Some Confusing Meanings of "Slavic"

practice.⁸ It is necessary to keep in mind that in the eyes of these Arab and Jewish merchants those they called Slavs were basically white people, i.e. Europeans, who had been deprived of their freedom. They did not differentiate between Scandinavians, or Franks or Germans, or Anglo-Saxons. Any white person of the European origin was considered a Slav. Why?

Take, for example, the French. They call the Germans Alemans, after the Alemanni tribes, who were their closest neighbors. Therefore, all other Germanic tribes were Alemanni as well. Following this rule, the Jewish and Arab traders came from the East and the first white people they met were the Slavs. Consequently, all white people were Slavs for them. To conclude, there is one more curious thing. As already mentioned, slave in Italian is *schiavo*. And today's popular greeting Ciao, derives from this word.

⁸ For more detailed explanation see: Daniel G. König, "903–906: Die Raffelstettener Zollordnung und der Export slawischer Sklaven in die islamische Sphäre," *Transmediterrane Geschichte* 4, no. 1 (2022): 1–17.

Chapter 2

The Origin of the Slavs

In this key chapter we are going to talk about where, when, how the Slavs emerged, from what point in time it is possible to speak about them, and why. History calls this question the ethnogenesis or the original Homeland of the Slavs. The popular view is that they appeared around the 6th century and that they first lived in the southeast of Poland, western Ukraine, and from there they gradually spread all over the world. People believe it was a predominantly peasant civilization, a dovish nation who never fought and who occupied a big territory the Germans had just left empty. This popular idea does not match the most likely real situation.

*Clarification
of the Topic*

We are going to talk about how contemporary historiography, as well as linguistics and archeology, look at the question of historical reality. The dominant narrative about the origins of the Slavs today combines the theory of the Slavs parting from the Transcarpathian region with the findings of so-called “Prague-type pottery” can be found or other material artifacts.⁹ However, one needs to bear in mind that without written sources, material culture has a relatively low informative value. Without the testimonies of Jordanes and Procopius it would not be possible to ascribe this type of pottery to its ethnic bearer, i.e. the Slavs.

*Testimony of
Archaeological
Sources*

Now, according to linguistics, there was a Proto-Slavic language, which was common to all Slavs who lived in a shared homeland. From this area they spread to occupy almost two-thirds of Europe.¹⁰ There are also other more traditional or more modern views on how to understand the Slavs according to their use of language.¹¹

*Testimony of
Linguistic*

The most archaic theories on how to understand the beginnings of the Slavs are the medieval biblical ones. These archaic theories derive the Slavs from the confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel. According to them

*Biblical
Theory
concerning
the Origins
of the Slavs*

⁹ See for instance: Florin Curta, *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archeology of the Lower Danube Region, c. 500–700*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), passim.

¹⁰ See older view by Arnošt Lamprecht, “Praslovanština a etnogeneze Slovanů [Proto-Slavic and the ethnogenesis of the Slavs]”, *Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty Brněnské univerzity: Studia minorae Facultatis Philosophice Universitatis Brunensis* 32 (1985): 31–38.

¹¹ Horace Gray Lunt, “Slavs, Common Slavic, and Old Church Slavonic,” in *Litterae Slavicae Medii Aevi: Francisco Venceslao Mareš Sexagenario Oblatae*, ed. Johannes Reinhart (München: Sagner, 1985), 185–209.

the origin of the Slavs should be derived from the land of Shinar. They consider Japheth to be the ancestor of the Slavic tribe (*gens Slavus*). In this regard, then, Slavs are Japhetites who came to Central Europe, settled around the Danube in Pannonia, and from here spread all over the world.

Late Medieval and also a Humanistic-Renaissance Theory

The humanistic-renaissance theory places Slavic ancestors in the Antique time as people who spoke the Slavic language. Although contemporary Greek and Latin texts do not recognize Slavs by their names, they identify them with the old Scythians, their successors, the Sarmatians, and later on with the Illyrians from the south. According to renaissance-humanistic and Slavic writers of Enlightenment, the Slavs have Biblical ancestors and are either Illyrians or Sarmatians.¹² Then Pavol Jozef Šafárik, defining Slavic studies as a historical and linguistic discipline. He mentions both theories: the Slavs coming from the other side of the Carpathians and the more traditional, medieval one, that they settled on the Danube.

The Major Current Discourse about where the Slavs are from

This brings us to the major current discourse in not only this part of the world, but also elsewhere. This is a general question that is being addressed at various universities: How could it happen that after the fall and withdrawal of the Roman Empire, new communities suddenly appear on the scene of history, whose names had so far remained unknown to historians and geographers? All of a sudden one can find Bavarians, Burgundians, Franks and among others also the Slavs. Where did these communities come from and how should we understand them? As it is well known, in Roman times the world was divided into two basic parts. The organized part of Europe consisted of Roman provinces. The unorganized part was called Germania and Scythia by contemporary geographers.

The first, i.e. the Roman part behaved according to Roman law. The other part, outside the Roman borders, was Barbaricum and it had its own legal norms. The dominant law was the law of “who was the stronger”. So, if someone wants to define the origin and extinction of these communities beyond the borders of the Roman Empire, he must say that communities appeared and disappeared in connection with the charismatic leader who plays a key role in the origin of a community. A simple example, which can help to understand this process, is the story of Conan the Barbarian, the famous-fictional charismatic leader who serves as a connection with the super-

¹² See in detail: Naďa Ráčová, “K vývinu slovenskej myšlienky v 17. storočí [On the development of Slovak thought in the 17th century]”, in Martin Homza and Naďa Ráčová, *K vývinu slovenskej myšlienky do polovice 18. storočia: Kapitoly k základom slovenskej historiografie* (Bratislava: Stimul, 2010), 121–88.



Map no. 1.

natural. He guarantees victory to his community. Such a community, however, does not necessarily have to be homogeneous. It can be diverse. When you ponder how this community could and should have been, in line with that barbaric law you need to keep in mind that they were warriors. These are people familiar with weapons and trained in warfare. Exaggerating a bit, one can say they were leaders of soldiers or those whom Romans call *magistri militum* (“masters of the soldiery”). These were men for whom warfare was an art. But this was never done without mastery of the *ars militans* (“military art”), this is one of the “arts” highly valued in an environment where only the law of the victors reigns supreme. Indeed, mastery of the strategies and varied tactics of both battle and war, then as now, is an inherent part of all glorious victories. Even after the most of Roman officers left with their legions the Danube area, Roman tactics of warfare remained and were later enriched with surprising nomadic elements brought here by Attila and his Huns. Similarly, when Huns left after the battle of the Nedao River in 454, they art of warfare developed based on the contributions of all the Goths, Gepids, Herules, Rugians and others who.

*Digression
concerning
Slavic DNA*

Just a short digression. In the past decades, interesting DNA analyses of the Slavic population established that we have been here for several thousand years. With the estimated timespan of around 8,000 years Slavs would be one of the oldest autochthonous populations living in the area which they occupy today. However, no genetic analysis can speak about cultural identity, i.e. people who lived here 8,000 years ago did not identify themselves as Slavs. This takes me back to the core matter, namely that each social identity derives from its name. The name is the fundament and the basic sign of every identity. It is always the name you identify yourselves with.¹³

*What is an
Endonym
and what is
an Exonym*

If someone else identifies you, from the outside, by another name, that is not your name. That is the name they give you. Linguistics has specific terms for both types of names. A name you give yourself is an *endonym* and the name others give you is an *exonym*. For instance, Czechs call themselves Czechs, but other nations call them *Bohemians*. *Bohemian* is an exonym and Czech is an endonym. The name the Slavs give themselves, our endonym, is *Sloveni*. It appears in written sources around the mid 6th century. It means, if you wonder, how long have the Slavs been here?; and how long has Slavic

¹³ Collective of authors, “Genetic Heritage of the Balto-Slavic Speaking Populations: A Synthesis of Autosomal, Mitochondrial and Y-Chromosomal Data.” *PLoS One* 10(9) (September 2, 2015), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4558026/>.

cultural identity existed, the answer is: since this name first appeared. Our contribution to the great European discourse is: Biologically today Slavs have been here for 8 thousand years. But from a nominalistic viewpoint, the Slavs have been here since the name they identify with first appeared.

This name is *Slovēni/Sloven/Slovan* and originated or was adopted in a revolutionary act. The territory of the former Roman provinces of Pannonia and Dacia had been abandoned by the Romans. Then the Goths got here first. The Huns followed right after them. After the defeat of the Huns and the death of Attila in 453 A.D., there was a clash between the Ostrogoths and the Gepids. This battle took place somewhere on the river Ipeľ. In historiography this is known as the battle of the River Bolia and took place in 467. Apparently, at the same time and space a specific community of warriors adopted the name *Slovēni/Slovens* i.e. Slavs.

As we already know, this name, *Sloven*, can differ in meaning and its etymology is unclear. Mostly, however, since the Middle Ages it has referred to *slávny* = famous/glorious. It means, those who win. This seems to be the most likely real situation around the middle Danube in the second half of the 5th century. Important and fundamental is that these *Slovens* appear as kind of the shadow of a group that seceded from the Goths, called the Gepids. Around the year 450, the Gepids' culture became dominant in the ancient Roman provinces of Dacia and Pannonia. Officially they were confederates of the Eastern Roman Empire. However, being a confederate does not always mean a static condition, a state of clear friendship. You can also be a threat to some extent. So, the Romans solved this situation on their northern border by inviting another force to counterbalance the very clear predominance of the Gepids in this area.

For this purpose, they invite the Lombards, who would settle in Pannonia. The natural border between Pannonia and Dacia is the left bank of the Danube River and the right bank of the Tisa River. This was basically no one's territory. Let us go back to what the oldest authors write about the Slavs (*Sloveni*) in history and in the sources. Whether it is Procopius or Jordanes, but especially Procopius, they always have the *Slavs* inhabiting the northern bank of the Danube. This is the place you should search when trying to find out where this group of warriors, this male community, or *Männerbund/družina* took shape and started to interact with the Gepids.

When linguistic archeology looks for the oldest layers of the Slavic languages, it can clearly identify two very structural layers. One will clearly identify two very structural layers. The first one is the Latin layer, which is a very fundamental element of the Slovak language. It is both very old, archaic, as well as modern. This historic vocabulary includes words like etc.

*Latin
Language as
Evidence of
Intercultural
Exchange
between
Slavs and
Late Romans*



Map no. 2: The Pannonian Basin in the 5th–6th century according to the contemporary ideas of Slovak geographer and historian Ján Tomka Šászky (Bratislava/Posonium, 1751).¹⁴

¹⁴ Iohannes Tomka Szászky, *Introductio in geographiam Hungariae antiqui et medii aevi et VI. tabulis illustrata* (Posonii: Typis Francisci Augustini Patzko, 1781).

These words came to Slovak when the genetic ancestors of today's Slovaks were not yet called Slavs, but lived close to the ancient Roman Empire.

Then came the aforementioned symbiosis with the Goths and the Gepids who brought into the Slovak language words like prince (*kuningaz* = *kniež*a), helmet (*hilms* = *helma*), sword (*makeis* = *meč*), bread (*hlaif* = *chlieb*), room (*stuba* = *izba*), etc., etc. These archaic words constitute a sign that our elites were once connected with those who spoke a Germanic language, i.e. Gothic. We know this language quite well thanks to Wulfila or Ulfilas, an Arian bishop who translated the Bible into Gothic. Luckily some fragments of this Bible has been preserved and is now in Uppsala (Sweden). Now let us go back to the moment at which this male community of warriors who were serving the Gepids began to go by the name "Slavs".

The Language of the Goths as Evidence of Intercultural Exchange between Slavs and the Goths/Gepids

We can imagine what that moment, that revolutionary act, might have looked like. As already said, there was a community that subsisted as professional reavers, that is, taking from their neighbors. However, sometimes this community was bound to be unsuccessful and then they needed someone to provide them with sustenance to be able to survive the sometimes harsh and long winters. It means, they had to interact with the population that produced, with those who were settled and were able to get some yield from the land, namely farmers and shepherds. I call this particular act in which a social contract is established between the settled population and the warriors, in this case the Slavs "The Bread-and-Sword Theory". It is a purely working title, but perhaps it will catch on in historical discourse. The rationale for why it is a legitimate name is simple. *Makeis* (*meč*) is a Gothic word for "sword" and it has a mysterious, taboo character. It is reserved for those who own a bladed melee weapon. Contemporary German and other Germanic languages do not use the word *meč* = sword. Even Wulfila, or Ulfilas only uses this word to refer to Archangel Michael's sacred sword. In short, only those who have proper arms, dress differently and are at first glance different from the rest, have a sword. It is an exclusive element. And the population is ready to identify with this victorious troop just as today's Slovak population is ready to identify with the Slovak national team when it is victorious.

The Bread-and-Sword Theory

Now let us focus on the other word, *chlieb* = *hlaif* = bread, which is common in other Slavic dialects and languages, but is of Gothic origin. It means, at some point the population accepts the protection of those sword bearers and, in exchange, they are willing to pay those "racketeers" their "pay-off" voluntarily. This is called *tributum pacis*, i.e. "peace fee".

A troop of warriors in interaction with the population on the north of the Danube. It is a legal bonding in which the warriors provide protection in

Now we Have the Full Picture

barbaric, i.e. turbulent times. At the same time, the population provides them with boarding, i.e. pay taxes in the form of their sustenance (*strava*). But we will speak about it some other time. This takes us to a historical moment, sometime at the beginning of the 6th century when this community appears on the scene of history. For the first time they appear under their own name. A name the group sees as its own and is willing to identify itself with.

How did it come to pass that these Greek, Latin and Syrian writers remember this name? Because the Slavs were successful in their warfare. At the end of the 6th century, for example, John of Ephesus († 588) gave eloquent testimony to this in his *Ecclesiastical History*:¹⁵

Why did
these Greek,
Latin and
Syrian
Writers
Remember
the Name of
the Slavs

“That same year, being the third after the death of King Justin, was famous also for the invasion of an accursed people, called Slavonians [the Slavs], who overran the whole of Greece, and the country of the Thessalonians, and all Thrace, and captured the cities, and took numerous forts, and devastated and burnt, and reduced the people to slavery, and made themselves masters of the whole country, and settled in it by main force, and dwelt in it as though it had been their own without fear. And four years have now elapsed, and still, because the king is engaged in the war with the Persians, and has sent all his forces to the East, they live at their ease in the land, and dwell in it, and spread themselves far and wide as far as God permits them, and ravage and burn and take captive. And to such an extent do they carry their ravages, that they have even ridden up to the outer wall of the city, and driven away all the king’s herds of horses, many thousands in number, and whatever else they could find. And even to this day, being the year 895 [A. D. 584], they [the Slavs] still encamp and dwell there, and live in peace in the Roman territories, free from anxiety and fear, and lead captive and slay and burn: and they have grown rich in gold and silver, and herds of horses, and arms, and have learnt to fight better than the Romans...”

John of Ephesus: *Ecclesiastical History*, part 3, book VI, 24–25.

If you want to be successful in warfare, you need to be organized militarily. Anyone who has served in the army knows very well what that means. It is pure subordination. There must be a leader, there must be officers, and there must be troops to carry out the orders of higher superiors. War cannot be waged democratically although Procopius writes that the Slavs lived democratically:

¹⁵ John of Ephesus, *The Third part of Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Robert Payne Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1860), 432–33.

“For these nations, the Sclaveni and the Antae, are not ruled by one man, but they have lived from of old under a democracy, and consequently everything which involves their welfare, whether for good or for ill, is referred to the people.”

Procopius, *History of the Wars*, book VII, part 3, chapter XIV.

Just that war cannot be waged in a democratic way. There must always be a leader. Procopius also writes that the Slavs had no rulers. To what extent do Latin and Greek writers traditionally understand barbarism?

To what extent does this view match the real situation? As already said, war cannot be waged without leaders. And it is at this historical point that these leaders appear. If we know that there must have been leaders, we need to try to find out who these leaders were. Once again it is necessary to refer to the oldest tradition. This tradition was preserved by some South Slavic chroniclers, namely the *Cronicles* by the Priest of Duklja and Thomas of Split. They say that Slavs are Goths and Goths are Slavs.

*About
the Most
Archaic
Dynasty
of the first
Slavs*

The Priest of Duklja even presents, the first Slavic Gothic dynasty, from their earliest ancestor, Svevlad (Senudslav/Sfiholad) whom he originally considered to be a Goth. Interestingly, one of Svevlad's sons is Ostroil, and Ostroil is Totila/Baduila's brother. And we know Totila to be a historical figure, just like Ostroil. He comes from Pannonia, from the Amal dynasty, who bear names. Many of us know them thanks to Tolkien's account of the *Lord of the Rings*. These are names like Faramir, Boromir, Tugimir, Valamir/Valdemar/Vladimir. These are composite princely bi-thematic names.

These names appear at the beginning of Slavic history not in one, but in two dynasties. One of them is the Trpimirović dynasty, a Croatian lineage. The other is the Moimirid/Moymirid dynasty.

The very name Moimir is significant because it preserves the theme *-mir* and its meaning of “world”. A look into the list of members of the Amal dynasty shows that this theme is typical of the ruling dynasty of the Goths. The bearers of the tradition of a community's heroic deeds, the *Tradition-kern* are those who are close to the dynasty itself. Equally important is the fact that a dynasty ensures perpetuity to the community. In France they shouted “The king is dead, long live the king” meaning that the issue is not the king, but it is the dynasty that is important and the dynasty is the symbol of the ever-lasting character of the community. Dynasty clearly identifies itself as a group of people defined by blood through specially selected names. And those whose names bear the theme *-mir* must also have the blood of the Amal dynasty. So, let us sum all this up.

It all begins near the river Ipeľ in the year 450 with a battle between Ostrogoths and Gepids.

Summari-
zation

Then and there a community appears, which calls itself Sloveni (*Slavs*) to distinguish themselves from those who do not know the word, the *slovo*, i.e. the *nemci* = the wordless, the Germans. At the same time, this community of special rulers of Gothic blood went by their traditional, archaic, bi-thematic names typically ending in – *mir*. And now, perhaps, we are right at the beginning of our lecture about Slovak history.

Chapter 3

The First Years of the Slavs on Europe's Political Scene

In this chapter we are going to talk about what Slovak history looked like in its first decades as it was recorded by the historical reporters we have at our disposal. It will prove wrong the traditional notions concerning the dovish nature of the Slavs, so widespread among scholars and the public in general, which were introduced by 19th century Slovak and Slavic romantics under the influence of Johann Gottfried von Herder († 1803). The then Slavdom consisted of a few hundred or thousands of well-armed and well-trained men, a community of warriors with their own distinct name, who came to interact, i.e. entered into an agreement with the settled population, which would allow them to survive times when they were not successful. When does this community first appear in the sources and under what circumstances?

*Clarification
of the Topic*

Since Pavol Jozef Šafárik († 1861) and Lubor Niederle († 1944), the general view has been that it was the time Emperor Justinian I accessed the throne, i.e. around the year 527.¹⁶ However, it is more exact to say that the Slavs first appear under their own name in the work *The Gothic War* by Procopius of Caesarea, which describes the last phase of the Gothic Wars that took place at the end of the former Roman Empire. It was a war between the Ostrogoths and Justinian's Roman troops, mostly under the command of the famous commander Belisarius. This is the very birth certificate of the Slavs, who appear around the year 530 together with the Antes and the Huns as horsemen. They go to northern Italy to help the Roman troops fight against Totila, the King of the Ostrogoths. Notice that the Slavs are described as horsemen, i.e. as military cavalry:

*The First
mentions of
the Slavs*

“But twenty days after the city and harbor of Portus were captured, Martinus and Valerian arrived, bringing with them sixteen hundred horsemen, the most of whom were Huns and Sclaveni and Antae, who are settled above the Ister River not far from its banks. And Belisarius was pleased by their

¹⁶ Procopius. *History of the Wars*, vol. 6–7, trans. and ed. Henry B. Dewing. (Cambridge [Mass.] and London: William Heineman and Harvard University Press, 1962), passim.

coming and thought that thenceforth his army ought to carry the war against the enemy.”

Procopius, *History of the Wars*, book V, part 1, chapter XXVII.

It is also cardinal that this work says there were 1600 of them. One needs to realize the size and potential 1600 horsemen had at that time in this part of the world. Notice that the Slavs appear as allies of the Romans, i.e. Byzantium. That shall change soon, though. But how did all this happen? For the Romans the Slavs already constitute a done and respected force. Something that is already available.

We know that after they took, or failed to take, part in those operations in northern Italy, the Slavs, the Huns and the Antes returned to the north bank of the Danube, i.e. their home. This is very determining information as it tells us that this was the seat of the Slavs at the beginning of the 6th century. But do not forget that it also was the territory of the Gepid Kingdom.

*Centuries
of Gepids'
Dominance
in the
Pannonian
Basin*

The Gepids are actually the dominant force north of the middle and lower Danube, from the last third of the 5th to the last third of the 6th century. These Gepids formally act as confederates or allies of the Eastern Roman Empire, i.e. Byzantine Empire. The policy the Romans led towards its confederates beyond the Danube is the traditional and well-known policy from earlier Roman times. This type of policy is still widely valid today, but we will not elaborate on this now. The antique Roman Empire keeps its distance from these confederates and prefers if there is a latent or open conflict between them. This is the well-known old Roman policy of *divide et impera*, i.e. “divide and rule”. We have allies but we want them to leave us alone. And it is best when they do not get along.

*The
Lombards in
Pannonia*

You need to look at the other confederates present to the territories west of the Gepids and the Slavs, i.e. the Herules. In Justinian’s time, the Herules were defeated by the Lombards, whom Justinian had invited to this territory. Why did Justinian invite the Lombards?

In order to create some tension between the Gepids – inhabiting the territory of today’s Dacia together with the Slavs – and the Lombards living further west, in today’s western Hungary (Pannonia), South Moravia and Southwestern Slovakia. This tension was very useful to Justinian.

*The Gothic
Wars*

The Gothic Wars (535–554) took place in the context of Justinian’s well-known policy against the New Persian Empire, which is Rome’s real adversary. Justinian starts to withdraw Rome’s forces on the northern lower Danube and builds a very demanding system of defensive fortresses, which he believes can guard the northern border of the Empire. But he focuses all his energy into the dispute with the Persian Empire. It is under these



Map no. 3.

circumstances that the Slavs served the Gepids to deal with the Justinian's move, i.e. inviting the Lombards to the territory of Pannonia.

In short, the Gepids, as confederates, cannot fight an open war with their official allies, but the Slavs — who to some extents are allies of the Gepids — can do so. It means, they constitute a different political entity. So when this unforeseen but predictable situation arises, the Gepids use a substitute or “hybrid” war, to put it in modern terms, and they send these Slavs along traditional Roman roads to penetrate and militarily threaten old Roman provinces, especially Thrace.

*Beauty and
Brutality of
the Gothic
Wars*

This brings us to the heart of the matter. In this first phase of penetration into the Balkan Peninsula the Slavs proved very successful. The question that bears asking is whether at this moment they are allies of the Ostrogoths or not. Historiography has not been able to answer this question unequivocally. All we know is that between 540 and 550, in a series of successful raids, the Slavs were able to penetrate deep into the Byzantine Empire. Using partly partisan, partly open warfare, they manage to seize a stunning loot and kill the enemy's commanders. In fact, they become famous for the atrocities they commit. Procopius testifies that they used to cut belts out of the skin of enemy commanders. He also mentions a Roman road lined with hundreds of captive prisoners impaled on stakes. And, of course, they eventually return home as *vitazi* (“victors”).

*A Few
Words
about vitazi
("victors")*

Here I would like to elaborate some more on the word “victors”. Today we know this word from hockey, football, or sports jargon. The winner is the one standing on the podium. Originally, however, this word referred to those who had a share of the loot. It means, it is not everyone in that group of warriors, not every soldier. A “victor” is one who has the right to take part in the division of the loot. Here, Procopius' report on democracy among the Slavs — as well as his report on military campaigns successfully conducted by the Slavs with the silent support of the Gepids against the Romans, i.e. the Byzantines, the Eastern Romans — is in stark contradiction with the democratic way they are said to live in their home beyond the Danube. For every military organization is, as already mentioned, hierarchical. A military body, from unites to armies, cannot exist without its commander.

*Back to the
Rulers of the
Slavs*

However, the commander must be coordinated by a higher central power, an authority, there must always be an order coming from above. This brings us back to the military structure of the Slavs. The idea that the Slavs did not have kings goes against their military achievements. They must have had a central rule. Let us talk about it. In the case of Samo we know that the Slavs chose him as their king by a common decision of their elite. So we also have the procedure; how it was done among them.

On the one hand, yes, it can be an *ad hoc* situation, e.g. Samo. On the other hand – of which I am convinced – is that they have a dynasty, which really guarantees the duration and perpetuity of the community. Meaning, it ensures not only the community's past but also its continuity and perpetuity. Another notable example of the chosen Slavic ruler is Hildigis. Historiography speaks a lot about Hildigis or Ildiges/Ildigis who was the legitimate successor to the Lombard Throne. After his father's death, Hildigis is the legitimate heir to the throne of the Kingdom of the Lombards in Pannonia until Wacho usurps it from him. He is forced to flee and decides to seek a refuge with the Gepids who, however, do not want to fight the Lombards. So, what do they do? They put Hildigis at the head of their substitute army, i.e. the Slavs. And Hildigis enters the scene of history in a really famous way. For Slavic and particularly for Slovak history it is really special that he fights in the Gothic war again, this time on the side of the Ostrogoths, as we know thanks to Procopius, arriving with an army of 6,000 horsemen.

"And departing from there, he went to join Totila and the Goths, having with him an army of not less than six thousand men. Upon his arrival in Venetia, he encountered some Romans commanded by Lazarus, and engaging with them he routed the force and killed many. He did not, however, unite with the Goths, but recrossed the Ister River and withdrew once more to the Sclaveni."

Procopius, *History of the Wars*, book VII, part 3, chapter XXXV.

This is information of special value, for such an army would suffice to conquer even the city of Rome itself. Even Odoacer did not have a larger army at that time. Besides, one needs to realize that 6,000 well-organized men imply many more men working for them in the background, taking care of the logistics and catering machinery. This is something really unusual for non-Roman forces in Pannonia.

Hildigis approaches northern Italy cities of Aquileia, Grado and Venice along old Roman roads through today's Ljubljana/Labacum, Ptuj/Poetavio, Friulia. The fate of this *ad hoc* chosen hero from the dynasty of the Lombards is sealed when the Gepids and the Lombards reach a peace agreement. He is forced to seek refuge in Byzantium, i.e. the Eastern Roman Empire, which proves successful. At this point he disappears from history without a trace. I have said all this to emphasize the role of a charismatic leader, of the head of a community.

We have supposed that the Slavs most probably had their own dynasty, which most probably derived from the Amal, i.e. from the Gothic ruling dynasty. This is a textbook example of how a leader can be placed at the head

of a community, in this case even before Samo. That is even before Samo. Hildigis was not just any man, he was no weak man, he was a great commander, indeed. In fact, he managed to lead 6,000 warriors. That is a great accomplishment in his time. This is the story of Hildigis I wanted to tell you.

*Why were
the Avars
Invited*

And now we see that around the years 540–550 in a series of military expeditions, the Slavs appear to this world in all their beauty and brutality as a barbarian tribe, as a continuation of the Gothic threat to the Romans, e.g. the Eastern Roman world. This is no good news for Justinian. Now he has to do something about it. Not only for Justinian but also for his successors. One of them, Emperor Justin II decides to follow the good old rule: “Where two are fighting, a third one wins”. It means, that in the situation when the Lombards and the Gepids are fighting, he invites a third force, the Avars (even though some sources ascribe this act to Tiberius II, his co-emperor and successor).

Byzantium controlled the Black Sea and worked closely with the mostly nomadic communities guarding the Silk Road. As early as in 558, Byzantium allied with a nomad community known as Avars against four tribes in Eastern Europe (the Onogurs, the Zaloi (of Hunnic origin), the Sabirs, and the Antes. This interconnection with nomadic political entities over the Black Sea means that Byzantium was familiar with the distribution of political forces in the area. Already in 558 Byzantium allied with a nomad community known as Avars against four peoples in Eastern Europe – the Onogurs, the Zaloi (of Hunnic origin), the Sabirs, and the Antes. After that they invited the Avars, against the threat of the Slavs and their silent allies, the Gepids, and against their political intervention in the northern Byzantine Empire in the late 560’s. The Avars were also called Huns by the contemporary source. Simply because in the ancient and medieval world scholars would regularly use old good names – *bona et antiqua nomina*. The Avars were then seen as the new Huns. And as these Avars approach the Byzantine orbit, the lower middle Danube, they have to fight the Antes along their way.

*About the
Antes*

There was not much said about the Antes yet. Thanks to Procopius we know that the Antes used the same language as the Slavs. Allegedly, once they even shared the name with the Slavs.

*“And both the two peoples have also the same language, an utterly barbarous tongue. Nay further, they do not differ at all from one another in appearance.”
(...) In fact, the Sclaveni and Antae actually had a single name in the remote past; for they were both called Spori in olden times, because, I suppose, living apart one man from another, they inhabit their country in a sporadic fashion.”*

Procopius, *History of the Wars*, book VII, part 3, chapter XIV.

Also Jordanes points that out. But in the time of Procopius they already had different names. You need to understand what it means to speak the same language and to have a similar culture, but to have different names. It is their name that makes two communities different from each other. Take today's Serbs and Croats.¹⁷ They speak almost the same language but besides other important cultural differences – like the Serbs using Cyrillic and the Croats using Latin letters, the Serbs being Orthodox and the Croats being Catholic – their key feature is their name. It is the name that really differentiates one from the other. It is the flag under which they group. A flag under which they even wage wars. Like the Serbs and Croats in the 20th century, the Slavs and the Antes fought against each other in the 6th century. So the name matters. On the other hand, the Antes and the Slavs fought next to each other in the Ostrogothic front in Italy.

The Name Matters

In addition to the wars with the Slavs, the Antes fought other wars. For instance, the Antes had been defeated by Ermanaric, the Gothic King in the second third of the 4th century. However, he did not destroy them completely. Unlike other tribes, they did not disappear, but re-appeared around the lower Dniester River and further east to the Don. The Dniester is also the border between the Slavs and the Antes as well as it is at the times when the Avars arrive, led by their supreme Khagan Bayan. Before the Avars arrived in the area of the Lower Danube, the first ones they needed to fight on the way were the Antes. The situation got so bad for the Antes that they vanished completely after this attack. History no longer writes about them.

The Wars by Antes

At the same time (AD 567) a parallel war was going on between the Gepids and the Lombards eventually won by the later. To make a long story short, the central force of the world at that time – Emperors Justin II and after him Tiberius II Constantine – provoked a local conflict between their confederates (the Lombards and the Gepids) and they invited a third party, the Avars. The Avars first overthrew the Antes, then the Gepids, and subjugated the Slavs.

The Lombards have Entered Italy

At the same time, i.e. about 40 years after they occupied Pannonia, the Lombards – to make sure – leave for Italy, torn by the Gothic Wars, and establish there their Lombardian Kingdom, which lasted several centuries and was only defeated by Charlemagne, in the last third of the 8th century.

Now, let me go back to the lower-middle Danube. Khagan Bayan around 567 together with Alboin, King of the Lombards, defeated the Gepid Kingdom. Later Lombard chronicler Paul the Diacon¹⁸ describes this as follow:

About the Lombard-Avars' Victories and the Disappearance of the Gepids

¹⁷ For more details see: Georgios Kardaras, "Slaveni and Antes: Some Notes on the Peculiarities Between," *Slavia Orientalis* 67, no. 3 (2018): 377–93.

¹⁸ Paul the Diacon, *History of the Lombards*, trans. William Dudley Foulke. (Philadelphia [Pa]: University of Pennsylvania, 1907).

“But Alboin entered into a perpetual treaty with the Avars, who were first called Huns, and afterwards Avars, from the name of their own king. Then he set out for the war prepared by the Gepids. (...) The Lombards become the victors, raging against the Gepids in such wrath that they reduce them to utter destruction, and out of an abundant multitude scarcely the messenger survives. In this battle Alboin killed Cunimund, and made out of his head, which he carried off, a drinking goblet.”

Paul the Diacon, *History of the Lombards*, book 1, chap. XXVII.

Speaking about the fate of the Gepids, the same chronicler also says:

“Then the Lombards secured such great booty that they now attained the most ample riches, but the race of the Gepidae were so diminished that from that time on they had no king. But all who were able to survive the war were either subjected to the Lombards or groan even up to the present time in bondage to a grievous mastery, since the Huns possess their country.”

Paul the Diacon, *History of the Lombards*, book 1, chap. XXVII.

In other words, after the death of their last king, many of the Gepids were conquered by the Avars, many fled, and eventually disappeared. After that, the name of the Gepids faded away deliberately from history. The proper name of those who dominated the middle lower Danube simply disappears after a hundred years. The quoted anecdote, too, underscores the basal importance of a community's distinctive name in its self-identification and the creation of its cultural identity.¹⁹ All of a sudden, the memory of that community ceases to exist. This happens when the last carrier of that memory, the last *vifazi* – “victors”, the last privileged member of this community disappears. The name of the particular *gens* = nation suddenly disappears when its holders are defeated. In other words, “representative distant memory” lasts as long as its last mediator is physically present (*The Last of the Mohicans* by James Fenimore Cooper). That was the fate of the Gepids.

They did not leave a fixed or petrified, written memory. But Roman reporters wrote about them. They are not biologically extinct, they transformed into the new community, which originated when the Slavs and the Avars met and began to interact.

¹⁹ Sebastian Brather, *Ethnische Interpretationen in der frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie: Geschichte, Grundlagen und Alternativen*. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004). See especially chapter: “Ethnische Identitäten und kulturelles Gedächtnis”, or look at the particular case of Gepids: Walter Pohl, *Archaeology of Identity: Introduction*, in *Archaeology of Identity – Archäologie der Identität*, ed. Walter Pohl and Mathias Mehofer (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), 9–23.

Unlike the Antes, the Gepids, and even the Lombards – all of whom we have mentioned here – the brand Slav persisted and survived through the defeat of the Gepids and the Slavs by the Avars. How did that happen? Why did it happen?

*How is it
Possible
that the
Designation
“Slavs” has
survived all
of that*

Chapter 4

The Role of the Nomads in Slovak History

*Clarification
of the Topic*

In this chapter we will talk about how the Avars came, how they began to interact with the Slavs, what those Avars and nomads in general looked like, and about their contribution to our history and everything around that.²⁰ To begin with, let me go back to what we talked about in the in the previous chapter.

*First a Few
Words about
the Sources*

The Avars arrived in our territory after being invited by the Lombards and the Byzantines. In historiography, the invitation is associated with Emperor Tiberius II. However, it corresponds to the times of Justinian's successor, Justin II. In any case, the contemporary authors who inform us about this dramatic arrival, whether it is Menander Protector or John of Ephesus, say that it did not happen just like that, for no reason. They came under very special circumstances, namely when the Byzantine Empire or Eastern Roman Empire was no longer able to defend its northern border, which seems to have been the main reason to invite them.

*The Course
of the Avar
Conquest of
Pannonia*

How it actually came about, in order. The first to fall were the Antes. Then a spectacular situation followed, which is described by Menander Protector. He tells us how one of the leaders of the Slavs, whom he calls Daurentius (Dobřenta)²¹ meets in person, the khagan Bayan. On this occasion the Duke of the Slavs was to utter the memorable words to Bayan. Menander Protector puts it:

"Was he born among people and warmed by the rays of the sun the one who subordinates our strength? For we are accustomed to dominate the alien (land), and not others of ours. And this is unshakable for us as long as wars and swords exist."

Menander Protector, *History of Menander The Guardsman*, fragm. 21.

Why did I just need to emphasize this? Because in all our previous parts we talked about the military element that was the source of the Slavs's identity in the first decades and centuries of their existence. The report of Menander Protector confirms that the community clearly had a warrior class, similar to other tribes, by highlighting their skill in warfare.

²⁰ Walter Pohl, *The Avars: A Steppe Empire in Central Europe, 567–822* (Ithaca [NY] and London: Cornell University Press, 2018), look at the chapter nr. 4: Avars and Slavs.

²¹ Menander Protector, *History of Menander The Guardsman*, trans. Roger C. Blokley (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1985), 195.

But what is really important when talking about the following confrontation, when about 60,000 Avar warriors, as these Byzantine sources have it, move beyond the Danube, is that the Gepids were scattered. And this is where we finished our previous session, i.e. what actually happened to the Slavs. We have compared the disappearance of the Gepids with that of the Avars. And with the disappearance of other barbaric *gentes*, male tribal communities. We finished the previous session with the question: Why did not the Slavs disappear?

*Numbers of
Nomads*

Contemporary sources do not give the direct answer. They do not tell exactly what happened within the Carpathian Basin. However, we know that 20 years after the Avars defeated the Slavs, the Avars possibly already with the Slavs first conquered Sirmium. Later, the Avars used the Slavs for their raids, just like the Gepids had done before them. Curiously, these raids target the Frankish Empire, Italy and, of course, Byzantium itself. But we will talk about this in more detail in the future.

*Why
Disappear*

Now let us go back to the question: how was it possible that the Slavs survived the attack by the Avars? The answer can be found in the simple old rule of how a stranger can become one of us, how another community can be accepted within the original one. How they manage to cope with this situation.

The Middle Ages and the ancient times recognized a very simple formula: the marriage of a representative of the incoming power, with a bride symbolizing the subject to become subordinated and eventually integrated into the new community. This was what Alexander of Macedon did when he conquered Persia. He had no choice but to marry Roxana one or some of those Persian Princesses in order for him, as a foreigner, to become a local. And this is how Ovid says the Latins established themselves in ancient Italy. Lavinia had to marry Aeneas one of their representatives. They did the same in England: the grandgranddaughter of the last King of the Anglo-Saxon dynasty Mathilda/Edith married Henry I the son of William the Conqueror. Proposed model might tell us that the Slavic dynasty offered its cooperation to the coming Avars, to secure their further existence and expansion, and this led to the dynastic connection of these two forces. But what did it look like in practice?

*Answer
Number one:
Matrimonial
Alliances*

For one thing is a legal relationship, and a different one is practice. Let us start from what is characteristic of a nomadic community as such. The essence of a nomadic community is its basic form of production. That is basically cattle keeping. Their herds move from winter to summer pastures and vice-versa. This is possible in the vast Eurasian lowland, where summer and winter make it possible for huge herds to move several hundred kilometers from north to south, forth and back. This is not quite possible

*Grounds for
Marriages
between
Avars and
Slavs*

in the area delimited by the Carpathian Massif. Although there is the large Danube plain, it is limited by the existing mountains. For example, the Bihor or Apuseni Mountains in the Tisa valley. In the course of history, many nomadic communities established themselves here, but they were always limited by that geographical feature. To some extent, the Great Danube Plain is a continuation of the Great Eurasian lowland, but it is limited and, thus, it limits the main production method of any nomadic group. Now, the moment the number of farmed cattle is limited, the number of that nomadic population gets also limited. It means that here those nomads did not have the natural conditions that would allow them to survive without interacting with the indigenous population, i.e. with the settled population that produces agricultural products. In this respect, a nomadic community, their fighting part, is just the same as any other group of warriors you can find among barbarian communities. Someone has to feed them. And those incoming groups of nomads find this out very quickly. The very first winters force them to interact with the local population.

Their herds are rapidly growing smaller for natural reasons, so they need to look for a different way of livelihood. What does this interaction look like in practice? Those who do not produce anything simply need to survive the winter somewhere. That is the period from, let us say, November to March or April. And this is when the local settlements come in handy, for in these villages there is relatively enough even for those who do not work. This means that these fighters, these privileged guys, go to the yet non-existent barracks for the winter, and since there are no barracks yet, villages with the settled inhabitants serve this purpose. When Fredegar²² writes about this, he states, terror-struck, that the Avars go to the Slavs for the winter and sleep there with their families and wives:

“Every year the Huns wintered with the Slavs, sleeping with their wives and daughters, and in addition the Slavs paid tribute and endured many other burdens.”

The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar and its Continuations, book IV, chapter 48.

This has a practical dimension. It does not happen in a violent way. If it did happen violently, there would logically be uprisings. So it all happens peacefully.

In fact, the Slavs get a reward, namely protection, from this nomadic community for the service they provide them, the wintering. This takes us from

²² Fredegarius, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar and its Continuations*, trans. John Michael Wallace-Hadrill (London: Nelson, 1960), 39–40.

the first interaction to what we call symbiosis. The symbiosis of two different production communities is legally settled. Now let me focus on the practical aspect. So, what did it look like in practice? We know that the nomads and the settled population live together on a day-to-day basis.

And, necessarily, the newcomers become acculturated. A nomadic society has many advantages, but also some disadvantages. One disadvantage is that the political entities it creates are relatively short-lived. Leaders like Khagan Bayan, or Genghis Khan or Khan Asparuh or Attila before them are able to give origin to huge political subjects. However, they are bound to fall apart or disintegrate after a short time, usually after the death of their leader or during the second generation. At that moment, this community faces two options. Their first option is to go back to where they came from, i.e. the Euro-Asian steppes. That is exactly what the Huns did after Attila died. And, curiously, that is what a fundamental subject of our history did as well. At least to some extent. I mean the Cumans. We will be dealing with them, too.

The second option is to go into that symbiosis with the local population. This implies structurally changing their essence in order to survive in their new home. In this case it means to acculturate up to some extent. This is another level. From interaction to acculturation. This is clearly visible in our language. Linguistic archeology has found plenty of archaic Latin and Gothic words. It has also established that there are practically no old Turkic terms in Slovak. This means that those Avars who came here, in really big numbers, not only got acculturated, i.e. took over the cultural patterns of the population they came to and lived with, but a substantial part of them assimilated. I really like this Slovak pun: they *asimilovali* (“assimilated”), so they *asi-milovali* (“probably loved each other”).

This takes us back to the initial interaction point at which the Avars sleep with the Slavic women. This means, their blood gets mixed. What were the political consequences? We will talk about this when we talk about the King of the Slavs, Samo. But for now let us focus on another practical consequence of this assimilation. It is not just me, but a whole group of world scholars, linguists and archaeologists think that Slavic became the koiné-language in the Avar Khaganate (Avar Khanate).²³

This common language, which was the communication language in the Avar Khaganate and adjacent areas, has sometimes different names. Sometimes it is called Proto-Slavic, sometimes Common-Slavic, some others Danube Slavic. In any case, however, it is the most archaic language whose influence can

*Some
Advantages
and Disad-
vantages of
Nomadic
Civilization*

*Did
Pannonian
Slavic
Become
a koiné of
the Avar
Khaganate*

²³ Among others Florin Curta. “The Slavic *lingua franca*: Linguistic Notes of an Archeologist Turned Historian” *East Central Europe* 31, no. 1 (2004): 125–48.

be seen in all the Slavic countries and nations that somehow formed part of this great political conglomerate called the Avar Khaganate. Alongside this, the process of Slavization of the Avar Khaganate began to take place mainly on its western and northern peripheries (Austria, Moravia and Slovakia). This is one side of the coin. On the other side, the elite that actually formed its core, i.e. those who formed the “Traditionkern”, i.e. “the bearers of tradition”, most probably kept their name, appearance, clothing and, partially, their language, too. They remained an elite, which did not mix with the local population. It is the elite, a privileged group, which actually guarantees the duration of the name of the community, in this case the name Avar.

*The Case of
Slavization
of the
Nomadic
Bulgarians
and
Hungarians*

One can find a very similar situation with other nomads, namely the Bulgarians, whose elite actually persisted among the Slavs until the 9th century, when Tsar Boris I decided to deal with it. A very similar situation is that of our southern neighbors, the Onogurs/Ugrians/Ungarians, called generally today Hungarians. We will be talking about them. They kept that tradition and preserved a part of the community that calls itself “Magyars”. We could go on with more examples but we need to go back and find out the structure of the nomadic community that established itself between the Carpathian Mountains and the Middle or Lower Danube.

*On the
Social
Structure
of Nomads
– Khagan*

We know that at their head is the Khagan, the first Khagan was called Bayan and he is well-known all over the world. What we do not know so well is who these Khagans actually are. Where did they come from? These Khagans or Khans. Most possibly it is a Chinese expression: *ke* – great, *kuan* – ruler. They are the individuals in charge of communicating with the supernatural, i.e. with heaven, as they perceive it. In this respect they are sometimes more sacred than practical rulers. When a Khagan confines himself in a forbidden quarter, this quarter has different names. When the Franks came into conflict with the Avars, they called this sacral place *Hring*, i.e. “The Ring”. Also the Khazars had such a circle called Sarkel “The White Tower”. And the secret, inaccessible city in China is also the seat of the emperor, who was originally a Kekuan or Khagan. Supposedly, it was not any different in our territory.

Jugurus

To ensure the continuity of military operations, you need to have a skilled military commander. This commander is possibly the one the sources call *Jugurus* (Jugur). He is actually the sovereign commander over the privileged part of the Avar army. And not only of the Avar one. In general this duality can be found in the division of power into practical and sacral also in other nomadic communities.

*Tuduns,
Kapkans and
Tarchans*

Then there are those called *Tuduns*. The Tuduns are actually the “chosen ones”, sometimes by kinship of blood. In Slovak we would say a “class of

princes“. They are the highest ones who rule over the different parts of the country. Then there are the *Kapkans*. You could call them local tax collectors. However, this is just one of the explanations. And then there is a very wide layer of the privileged military population, the *Tarchans*. The privileged *tarchans* are people who get part of the loot. We could translate this term into Slovak as “victors” (*víťazi*).

As a snowball rolling down from point A to point B, a nomadic community attracts or devour more and more communities during its successful military operations. To put it as simply as possible, at the beginning there are a few really close, related people. As in the example of Genghis Khan, where this is well documented. Then more and more join them forming a traditional nomadic group, consisting of seven tribes (communities). They do not need to be homogeneous, or even speak one language. Important is that they have a common goal. That might be a common enemy or the place they are going to plunder. For some reason, as long as they expand, more and more warriors join them. That is the inflating balloon effect. However, each expansion is possible until the balloon explodes. At one point, when one realizes that it is going to explode, there would be a need to either deflate the balloon, or it will really burst and destroy everything we have created. That is how a nomadic community also gets to the place of the Pannonian Basin, and how it works here. Because this area is limited by the massif of the Carpathian Mountains, the number of privileged fighters must be also limited.

*Homogeneity
or Hetero-
geneity of
Nomadic
Communities*

It is limited because those successful operations Europe keeps forgetting about, but then finally learns how to fight them, that type of operations can be successful one, maximum two critical generations. Then Europe gets used to that way of fighting and starts responding in a slightly different way. This is exactly what happened here. The number of privileged ones could not grow any further. So it begins to grow smaller. However, that cooperation and symbiosis with the locals, helped that political nomadic community to become stable in this territory. Thus, the period of the Avar Khaganate’s expansionist policy lasted from the year 567 to the year 630.

But after 627, after the battle of Constantinople, let’s round it up to 630, up to 811 is the period when the Khaganate lives in symbiosis with the local population. In order for such a political community to last, there must be, as we said at the outset, some kind of mutual agreement. And that is precisely the agreement we talked about at the beginning. The agreement between the privileged group of Slavs, represented by a dynastic princess, and the newly arrived lineage, most probably a male member of the Bayan’s family, who enter into marriage, ensures the existence and continuation of this community in this area.

Chapter 5

Slavs and Avars – Avars and Slavs Or how the Slavs Dispersed from the Danube

*Clarification
of the Topic*

In the following chapter we will talk about the Avars and their armaments. Then we will move on to the political history of the Slavs in the late 6th and early 7th Century and we will finish with how the Slavs left the Danube and the way the author of the oldest East Slavic chronicle, monk Nestor, describes it.

*The Manner
of Warfare of
Avars, their
Arms and
Organization*

The success of the Avars resulted from the way they waged war. This manner of warfare was primarily determined by their arms and organization. The basis of their military success was the light cavalry. This light cavalry moved back and forth, indicating an attack and retreating again but its strongest point was what we call *sector firing*, using recurve bows.

*The Recurve
Bows*

This is that first terrible weapon. One can say that if Western Europe were a little drier, if it were not so wet, then the whole of Europe would have fallen under nomadic rule. Why am I saying this? Well, because the basic murderous tool of such a nomadic light brigade is the so-called composite or recurve bow. It would take years to make such a bow. It consists of several components, mainly wood, tendons and animal bones. However, it is very unstable in humid environments. This is the reason why I can say that thanks to its marine humid climate Western Europe was never conquered. This bow allowed light cavalry riders to shoot forwards, backwards and sideways. So, if several thousand riders agreed on the target and sector they were to fire at, at a range of up to 600 meters and at a frequency of up to 30 shots per minute they were able to destroy any adversary, without ever coming into contact with them. That is a very important thing. But decisive in the nomadic tactics of warfare was something else.

*The Heavy
Cavalry*

It is the Avar's heavy cavalry. Heavy cavalry originated in Central Asia. A heavy cavalry is based mainly on specially equipped riders, who are armored. This armor is a traditional chainmail or a kind of composite protection we know from the Last Samurai and other films. This heavy cavalry consisted of several hundred men who were able to completely defeat what was left of the enemy. Besides being well protected, these shielded men also had excellent weapons i.e. a spear as well as a sword of Damascus steel. The secret of Damascus steel production was also known in Europe but it was most developed in the Euro-Asian steppe. These two basic military elements determined the success of nomadic civilization until firearms, i.e. hot weapons, were developed.

Now let us look at how the Slavs might have contributed to the Avar expansion. Based on what we have said, we can date it from 580 to 627, until the siege of Constantinople. The Slavs also had their cavalry, there is no doubting this. That was the elite we have talked about. They also had a relatively large infantry, a traditional numerous army. However, the Avars could not conquer cities because neither a light or heavy nomadic brigade could break through walls. Therefore, an engineering army is required. These are people who are able to build range weapons and different ladders and bastions out of wood. Of course, they can also tear down walls and drill corridors below them.

*On the
Complementarity of the
Slav and
Avar Armies*

We also know that the Slavs had a fleet of *monoxyla* (a type of canoe, dugout canoe). These are canoes carved out of one piece of wood. They can move easily. And, of course, they had excellent scouts. The Slavs could carry out fast and surprising raids in small groups, mainly in covered terrain as the late ancient and early medieval Byzantine writers tell us. It means that the Slavs were part of a composite army, which was used by the Avars in line with the combat requirements and objectives of the moment.

Before defining these objectives, it must be said that just as it had been in the past the objectives of that nomadic-Slavic expansion did not change in this period. Above all, it is the territory of the Byzantine Empire. The Slav-Avar attacks can be divided into two main streams. One stream went East to Moesia and Thrace, and the western one went to Dalmatia. Besides that there is Italy. In the north, the Lombards had created a kind of shield against Slavic-Avar expansion. Another objective was, of course, the Frankish Empire. It could be reached through the territory in which the Bavarians appeared in the 6th century. These are the three or four main objectives of the Slavs. But, what did it really look like in practice?

*Directions of
Avar-Slavic
Expansion
and its New
Quality*

We know that in 581/582 the Avars conquered the ancient Roman city of Sirmium. Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica) is considered to be the gateway to the Eastern Roman Empire, i.e. the Byzantine Empire. It was only the beginning of a more than four-decade-long military²⁴ assault on the Roman Empire. The Slavs also took part in these expeditions. The Romans themselves comment on this through Theophylact Simocatta:²⁵

²⁴ From the spring of 592, Emperor Maurice attempted counter-attacks to recapture lost Byzantine positions south of the Danube. However, with the death of the emperor in 602 they came to an end. See Georgios Kardaras, *Byzantium and the Avars, 6th–9th Century AD: Political, Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018): 48–69.

²⁵ *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, trans. Michael and Mary Whitby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

"After a brief moment of time the wellbeing of the peace was adulterated, and once again the tribe of the Avars attacked the Romans, not openly, however, but in a rather knavish and crafty manner. For the Avars let loose the nation of the Slavenes [Slavs], who ravaged very many areas of the Roman territory suddenly invaded like lightning as far as the Walls named Long, and wrought great slaughter on their captives."

The History of Theophylact Simocatta, book 1, chapter VI–VII.

Theophylact Simocatta is not the only author who emphasizes that the Avars use the Slavs for their expansion just like they had done in the past the Gepids. As already mentioned, these Slavic/Avar expansive attacks reach very interesting goals. There will be a talk about the siege of Thessaloniki (Salonica/Solún) as well as about the siege of Constantinople.

In fact, the conquest of *Illyricum* beautifully illustrates how the Slavs fought with the Avars. The Slavs and the Avars also destroyed cities like the old Salona near today's Split. This opened the way for them to go further into the Balkans and as far as the Peloponnese Peninsula. An excellent illustration of the contemporary situation is when Pope St. Gregory the Great writes about this. He notes to Maximus, the bishop of Salona, in July 600:²⁶

"I was in unable to find the strength to answer Your letter. Nevertheless, I suffer much and fear [too] by reason of the pending threat to you from the tribe of the Slavs; I suffer for I am personally affected by what befalls you, and I fear, for by way of Istria they are beginning to make their way to Italy."

The letters of Gregory the Great, book X, letter 15.

We know that no stone of Salona was left unturned. Split (Diocletian's palace) became the medieval successor (continuation) of Salona after its inhabitants abandoned it. Nevertheless, those of you who have traveled to Split can still see the ruins of a city of almost thirty thousand. The same quotation also proves that through Istria, along ancient Roman roads, the Slavs came into direct contact with Roman civilization and the Kingdom of the Lombards became a shield for the rest of Rome's power represented by the Papacy.

Only 3 years later, on the other hand, the Slavs and the Lombards with permission of the khagan of the Avars managed to conquer from Byzantium the city Cremona, one of the future centers of the Lombardian Kingdom in Italy.

²⁶ The letters of Gregory the Great, translated, with introduction and notes, by John R.C. Martyn, vol. 3 (Rome: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2004), book X, letter 15, in *Nomine Jassa*, accessed February, 11, 2024, <https://www.jassa.org/?p=8343>).

“For this reason King Agilulf departed from Mediolanum [Milan] in the month of July, besieged the city of Cremona with the Slavs whom the Cagan, King of the Avars, had sent to his assistance and took it on the twelfth day before the calends of September [August 21st] and razed it to the ground.”

Paul the Diacon, *History of the Lombards*, book 4, chapter XXVIII

The Slavs fought alongside the Lombards in northern Italy for another month or so and then returned across the Danube. By means of their attack-escape tactic, they managed to get back home relatively quickly again. In the following years and decades, however, something has changed in this original tactic. The form of expansionist forays has changed radically. Unlike their previous expansion towards the Balkans and Italy something new happens now: The Slavs come and bring their families with them. This is no longer a simple quest for booty and a return to the north bank of the Danube. It is a new quality. After a victorious campaign, the Slavs no longer go back to the middle and lower Danube. The Slavic and later in the Slavic-Avar attacks on the city of Thessaloniki (from the years 615–617)²⁷ testifies the second book of *The Miracles of St. Demetrius*²⁸ to this more than eloquently:

“And so this happened, as they say, during the bishopric of John [John II], may he rest in peace. The nation of the Sklavenes [Slavs] gathered in a large multitude comprised of the peoples of the Drugoviti [Δρο[υ]γο[υ]βίται/Δραγοβίται], Sagudati [Σαγουδάται], Velegeziti [Βελεγεζίται], Vaiuniti [Βαϊουνίται], Verziti [Βερζήται] and others. They were the first to discover a way to build a boat hollowed out of a single trunk. Having so prepared themselves to sail on the seas, they plundered all of Thessally, and the Greek islands of the Cyclades, the entire Achaja and the mainland, a large portion of Illyricum and part of Asia. Most of the towns and provinces they made uninhabited and they desired to attack the by us afore-mentioned city [Thessaloniki], beloved of Christ and to plunder it much as they [plundered] the others. On this matter they were of a single mind and having constructed a great number of boats made of a single trunk, they set up camp near the sea; the rest of the swarm besieged the city guarded by God from all sides: the East, the North and the West. They had with them their families as well as their belongings for they planned to settle in the city after its taking...”

The Miracles of St. Demetrius, book II, chapter 1, 179.

²⁷ The above dating is according to: John Van Antwerp Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century* (Michigan [MI]: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 42.

²⁸ “The Miracles of Saint Demetrius, book II, chapter 1, 179, in *Nomine Jassa*, accessed February, 11, 2024, <https://www.jassa.org/?p=11361>.

As the cited example of the Slavs around Thessaloniki shows, instead of returning with the plundered booty, as was the case of Slavic expansions in the 6th century, by the beginning of the 7th century the Slavs were already staying in the conquered territory. This is a novelty as far as the quality of the hitherto mentioned expansion refers. Suddenly the greatest part of the Balkan Peninsula starts to Slavicize. The Slavs mix there with the local population. In the later period, however, we observe the opposite trend – the efforts of the Byzantine Emperors to make weaker the *Sclaviniai*, resulted in many cases to the integration and later the assimilation of the Slavs.

This situation is strikingly reminiscent of that in Western Europe where new political entities, such as the Franks, became dominant in former Roman provinces, such as Gallia. Just like the Goths established their barbarian Visigothic Kingdom in Spain. It is very much like or at least similar to the Slavs on the territories of former Roman provinces in Eastern Europe. However, the Slavs do not form a single central political power, the kind we know from Western Europe. This means, they do not yet create what we call a barbarian kingdom.

*A Few
Words about
Sclavinias
on the
Balkan
Peninsula*

A special case could be when we talk about Samo's realm, we will see what he did personally and his Slavs did to try to establish something similar to a barbaric kingdom. But Samo's example is rather exemption than the rule. What, then, originates in the Balkan Peninsula instead of a centrally ruled kingdom? Basically, a very innovative or hybrid political organization appears, which Greek authors called *Sclavinias*.²⁹ These *Sclavinias* constitute a very remarkable entity because a local power controls a specific territory. Not a big one. And the Slavs mix there with the local population and this territory gradually also slavicizes.

You need to understand where the attractiveness of that slavicization lies. For example, Walter Pohl, supposes that the magic lies in the fact that these Slavs bring a new lifestyle. Different from the old Roman urban, city life. In fact, they intensively rusticise or ruralise the late Roman structures. There is something charming about this. Among other things, we must realize that the end of the Roman civilization also resulted because the locals did not want to share the former Roman culture. To them it seemed just too politically, economically and culturally demanding. So they welcomed the more simple ways the Slavs brought from beyond the Danube. To say it boldly, you did not have to pay taxes to that central power, for example. But the

²⁹ Concerning *Sclavinias* see: Florin Curta, "Theophylact Simocatta revisited. A response to Andreas Gkoutzioukostas," *Byzantion nea Hellás* 35, no. 35 (2016): 195–209 and Stoyko Stoykov, "From 'Nations' to 'Archontias' (I) 'Sclavinia' and 'Sclavoarchontia': Terms and Chronology," *Slověne* 9, no. 1 (2020): 7–28.

central power can use your services, say as a mercenary army. So it is a kind of colonization under certain, more primitive but still legal conditions.³⁰

On the other hand, this also meant decentralization and defragmentation of the Byzantine Empire. Look at it from the point of view of our later history. The Byzantine Empire had to develop tremendous energy to gradually incorporate, reintegrate these Slavs into its political system. For instance, *The Life of St. Methodius*³¹ reads – Then Emperor Michael III said to Constantine the Philosopher:

“Do you hear this matter, Philosopher? None other than you can do this. Here then are many gifts. Take your brother, the Hegumen Methodius, and go. For you are both Thessalonians and all Thessalonians speak pure Slavic.”

The Life of St. Methodius, chapter 5.

This is what we know for sure about how the Slavs entered the developed Roman civilisation. However, we do not know so much about how the Slavs and the Avars gradually moved along the Danube higher towards the Alps.

In fact, they pushed the border of the Avar-Slavic world up to the river Enns. From that moment on one can say that the Enns is the westernmost point of East Central or, if you prefer, Eastern Europe. At the same time, the Enns became the border of two cultures: *Occident* and *Orient*, West and East, for almost 250 years. The Slavs/Avars undertake various raids to the traditional centers of Noricum and Raetia, contemporary the Bavarian world, such as Salzburg or Regensburg and others.³² That is how they make their living. They improve their economy by carrying out expansive raids on their neighbors.

But we know very little, almost nothing, about how the Slavs went further into *Barbaricum*, i.e. to places Roman or late Roman authors knew very little about or nothing at all. We are talking about the expansion of the Slavs towards the north and northeast. This expansion was just the same as towards the Roman Empire, Bavaria, the Franks and Italy. Well organized groups of several hundred Slavs skilled in fighting and power organization get on the move. This is a small digression, but it can shed light on how it all happened. When the Herules, as we said in one of our first chapters, defeated by the Lombards, Procopius writes the following:

*The
Expansion
of the Slavs
towards the
North and
Northeast*

³⁰ Pohl, *The Avars*, p. 152: “Many provincials who had worked the land under unfavorable conditions may have “forgotten” their Roman identity to become free Slavs, without obligation to pay taxes or rents.”

³¹ “The Life of Methodius,” in *Medieval Slavic Lives of Saints and Princes*, ed. and trans. Marvin Kantor (Michigan [MI]: Michigan University Press, 1983), 111.

³² Alexis Peter Vlasto, *The Entry of the Slavs into Christendom: An Introduction to the Medieval History of the Slavs* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), 14.

“When the Eruli [Heruli/Herules], being defeated by the Lombards in the above-mentioned battle, migrated from their ancestral homes, some of them, as has been told by me above, made their home in the country of Illyricum, but the rest were averse to crossing the Ister River, but settled at the very extremity of the world; at any rate, these men, led by many of the royal blood, traversed all the nations of the Sclaveni one after the other, and after next crossing a large tract of barren country, they came to the Varni, as they are called.”

Procopius, *History of the Wars*, book 6, chapter XV.

This example illustrates how that male community (*männerbund/družina*), that nucleus of early medieval gens, worked. Theoretically also men of Slavic royal blood (bearers of bitematic personal names with the *-mir* component) could lead *svojich* “their own” from point A to point B. From the middle and lower Danube deeper into the *Barbaricum*, in a northerly, north-easterly and north-westerly direction. Not anywhere, but to places with strategic locations. To the mouth of the Vistula, or to the Ilmen Lake, or to central Bohemia. Mostly they then kept their distinctive names – Ilmen Slavs/Novgorod Slavs and Slovincians/Łeba Kashubians, or Bohemian Slavs. The folk tradition of coming from the south, especially from Pannonia, was later recorded in writing by medieval Russian, Polish or Czech chroniclers.

In Bohemia, *The Chronicle of Dalimil* preserved the tradition of how their great grandfather whose name was “Czech”, came from the land of Charvat, i.e. Pannonia. The Polish chronicles have it that the Poles came from the Danube, from Pannonia. And the *Tale of Bygone Years*, i.e. the oldest chronicle of the Slavs we know, which comes from the 11th and beginning of the 12th century in Old Rus’ also emphasizes the tradition that the Slavs got there from the Danube. *Sclavinias* might have been registered in the Balkans and also in two specific northern cases.³³

One of those hypothetical *Sclavinias* could be around Gdańsk where the local Slovines lived until 1945, when they retreated before the Soviet and Polish troops towards Germany. Another one could be created by the Slovĕni (the Slavs) lived around Novgorod. This is logical because where the Vistula flows into the Baltic Sea, and the Volchov into Lake Ilmen. At these points are Gdańsk and Novgorod, strategic points that eventually become active trade centers.

I am aware, it is not easy to prove this hypothesis. The report of Theophylact Simocatta about three Slavs captured during the Byzantine-Slavic

³³ Recently: Adam Mesiarkin, “Examining the Slavic identity in Middle Ages,” in *Studia Ceranea*, vol. 3. (Łódź: Ceraneum, 2013): 83–100.

(Avar) wars at the end of the 6th century may be a certain clue. It shows the influence of the khagan, which reached as far as the Baltic Sea. More than that, however, it reveals the identity of the inhabitants somewhere at the mouth of the Vistula, who refer to themselves as *Sclavenes*, i.e. Slavs. The narrative is interesting also from an ethnological point of view, as it is the first time we learn about the music and musical instruments of the Slavs.

“On the following day three men, Sclavenes [Slavs] by race, who were not wearing any iron or military equipment, were captured by the Emperor’s [Maurice] bodyguards. Lyres were their baggage, and they were not carrying anything else at all. And so the emperor enquired what was their nation, where was their allotted abode, and the cause of their presence in the Roman lands. They replied that they were Sclavenes by nation and that they lived at the boundary of the western ocean...”

The History of Theophylact Simocatta, book 6, chapter X.

What to add to this? Later on, the famous Vikings will show up here with some periodicity. But the Slavs got there before the Vikings. We do not know when it happened. But we can suppose. Some *Sclavinias* also appeared at these points, although no author writes about it. But these Slavs *in sensu stricto* from the Danube area stayed there. There is a doubt: How is it possible that the Slavic identities that appeared in the 6th century in the areas of Gdańsk and Novgorod managed to persist over the following centuries?

To understand this, there is a need to apply the theory of the so-called diasporas.³⁴ The term “diaspora” usually applies to the Jewish population which arrives at a foreign environment where they create their community life in line with certain rules and customs based primarily on the Jewish religion.

*Theory
of Slavic
Diasporas*

In this case, these Slavic diasporas are not necessarily connected with religion. In fact, most Indo-European religious systems are similar to each other. Therefore, they are rather connected with their identity. And that identity is basically the identity of the elite we have talked about. There are famous stories about their victorious wars. And, of course, the Slavs also speak a special language. But, most importantly, they have their own name for themselves: Slavs.

This is best formulated by so called Nestor³⁵ in that literary, fixed, historical and cultural tradition, which says that at the beginning the Slavs were at the Danube:

³⁴ Lesley Abrams, “Diaspora and Identity in the Viking Age,” *Early Medieval Europe* 20 (2012): 17–38.

³⁵ *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, eds. and trans. Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor. (Cambridge, Massachusetts [Mass]: [Medieval Academy of America], 1953), 53.

“There was at the time one Slavic race [nation] (...) the Slavs who settled along the Danube...”*

The Russian Primary Chronicle, chapter 25.

But then they moved away. We know that the reason they moved had to do with the Avar expansion. They penetrated the Balkans and also parts of northern Italy. They went into the territory of today's Austria, into the Czech Republic, arrived as far as Gdańsk and Novgorod and, most importantly, Nestor tells us a beautiful story about it.

“Over a long period the Slavs settled beside the Danube, where the Hungarian and Bulgarian lands now lie. From among these Slavs, parties scattered throughout the country and were known by appropriate names, according to the places where they settled. Thus some came and settled by the river Morava, and were named Moravians, while others were called Czechs... (...) ...the latter came and made their homes by the Vistula, and were then called Lyakhs.”

The Russian Primary Chronicle, chapter 6.

And so the Slavic nation parted. Not in one direction. Not in thousands. Just in hundreds. But with a firmly fixed military, fighting and victorious identity. And, of course, with their own distinctive name.

* In the original Old Slavonic text in this place is the word *jazyk/языкъ/ѣзыкъ*. Literally *jazyk* can only be translated as “nation”.

Chapter 6

Samo's Slavic Kingdom

We will be talking about something even small children learn at primary and secondary school in the Slavic parts of today Central Europe, namely about Samo's Empire. First of all, there is a need to focus on the terminology. Samo's Empire is a widely used but, again, inaccurate expression. More than about Samo's Empire, in this chapter we are going to talk about Samo's Slavic Kingdom. However, it will also be necessary to put the whole issue into a wider European historical context and, in general, what a barbarian kingdom means in that historical slot between the end of antiquity and the beginning of the Middle Ages. That means we will talk about the period after the fall of Rome in 476.

*Clarification
of the Topic*

Before we delve into Samo, let me go back to the period when the relationship between Avars and Slavs began to take shape. We have talked about the raids against Constantinople and Thessaloniki. We have also mentioned those against Salona, i.e. the east coast of the Adriatic. We also talked about attacks on Italy. But we have not yet mentioned the fact that already in 595 the Avar/Slavic or Slavic/Avar forces managed to defeat Tassilo I, Duke of Bavaria. Thus, the Slavs, covered by the Avars, gradually reached the upper Drava and Mura and, interestingly, also the Danube. The Slavs even reached the Enns river and it became the border with the Avar Khaganate, which was guarded by the Slavs. Beyond the Enns you would find those who in the Middle Ages were called Bavarians. This force represents the Eastern part of another great political power of the world at that time namely the Frankish Empire.

*Western
Expansion of
the Slavs*

Now let me quote one fairly important passage from Frankish chronicler commonly but inaccurately called Fredegar in historiography. He writes:

"In the fortieth year of Chlothar's reign, the Frankish king, a man named Samo a Frank by birth from the region of Senonago, took many merchants with him and went to trade with the Slavs, known as the Wends. (...) When now the Wendish army went against the Huns [meaning the Avars] the merchant Samo accompanied the same. And so Samo's bravery proved itself in wonderful ways and a huge mass of Huns fell to the sword of the Wends. The Wends, realising Samo's usefulness, chose him king over themselves and he happily ruled over them for 35 years. During his reign, the Wends led many battles against the Huns. With his prudence and ability, the Wends

*Testimony
of So-called
Fredegar,
part I*



Map no. 4.

always defeated the Huns. Samo had 12 women from the Wendish tribe of whom he fathered 22 sons and 15 daughters."

The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar and its Continuations, book IV, chapter 48.

This quote is the only contemporary testimony of something we would not know otherwise. This is the first time in history we can speak more precisely of some kind of political organization of the Slavs. Before characterizing it, we need to take a look at the international political scene of the world at that time. So, on the one hand, there is the Frankish Empire, of course. On the other hand you have the Avar Khaganate and south of it is the Byzantine Empire. The Frankish merchant Samo must have arrived here along the old Danube trade route according to Fredegar, to trade with the Slavs, i.e. the Wends.

What are these commercial caravans? What does Samo actually trade with? Where do these trade routes come from and where do they go? What do we know for certain based on what other sources say? Above all, we know that this Danube route is just one part of a greater route which is also called "Trade Road". This Trade Road leads to several destinations. Speaking in the broadest sense, we could also speak about distant China. That is the reason why it is also called the Silk Road. A closer place where these roads met was, of course, Baghdad. Around this time, extensive reserves of silver were found near the Caspian Sea. So you need to assume that silver was a very strategic commodity that served as a kind of currency all over the world at that time. And the most sought-after commodity from East-Central Europe territory for the south and the Mediterranean were furs. There is still amber from Roman times. Besides that, slaves are becoming more and more common. The Slaves we spoke about in our first chapter. That their name in the new vernacular languages derives from the word *Sloveni* – "Slavs". So these are the goods Samo is most likely to have bought. And what did he sell? He sold – and that is – what the West had to offer. That means equipment, especially military armament. What did such a caravan look like?

What was Traded in 7th Century Europe

If you want to get an idea of what a caravan actually was you should read the *Thousand and One Nights*. They would consist of several tens, sometimes hundreds men, and sometimes women and families who set out to get rich on this journey. These people would often sell all their property hoping to multiply it when they get back home. These are the ones who trade. However, alongside those traders – and this is the core of the matter – there are a few dozen, sometimes hundreds of excellent warriors. Men skilled in the art of killing. We have talked about them several times. These are the men who make up Samo's retinue. Now we get to a dramatic, almost fairy-tale situation.

What are Commercial Caravans in the Early Middle Ages

Around 623 Samo arrives at the middle Danube. Fredegar writes about circumstances of his arrival more properly:

Testimony
of So-called
Fredegar,
part II

“But the sons of the Huns [Avars], who were [then] raised with the wives and daughters of these Wends [Slavs] could not finally endure this oppression anymore and refused obedience to the Huns and began, as already mentioned, a rebellion.”

The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar and its Continuations, book IV, chapter 48.

Textbooks and relevant historians interpret that it was the Slavs who began to revolt. Here Fredegar clearly tells us that it was not the Slavs but their mixed-race children who have taken up arms. And these mixed-race sons rebelled precisely because they were not satisfied with the rights they had. They had the same duties as their fathers. They had to fight. But they had no share of the loot. That is, an economic reason, a real reason to revolt against their fathers. It is quintessential that this does not happen at a random moment. This happens just when the Avar Khagan and the bulk of his army is deployed in Thessally when he is negotiating new peace conditions with Constantinople. That is, new taxes.

Casus
belli –
Mixed-Race
Children

It means that the army is away from the area of the Middle Danube where supposedly the uprising originates. Uprising comes very handy to the Byzantines. This is the current geopolitical constellation. Very interesting, indeed. It is worthy of an American movie. Samo is somehow involved in an uprising. This causes a chain reaction. More and more Slavs join Samo, and in a series of battles, they defeat the Avar army. Chronology is very supreme here. Events happen not only in space, but also in time. So, this happened in 623. But in 626 the Slavs were already fighting alongside the Avars in the greatest battle of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, namely in the battle of Constantinople.³⁶ This could mean that between 623 and 626 they must have reached a peace agreement. We will get back to this. For now, let us focus on some other information from the text.

Reasons for
Concluding
Peace

First of all we see here that the Slavs have a method, a way, a ritual to choose their leader. Their leader was, according to Fredegar, designed as *rex* and titled *Rex Sclavorum/Rex Vinidorum* – “King of the Slavs”. And he was elected. We see that besides heredity, sacral blood (legal authority) and of dynasty (traditional authority) we have talked about this principle, there is another way to put a person of extraordinary abilities, a charismatic leader,

Samo Elected
as Rex
Sclavorum/
Vinidorum

³⁶ Martin Hurbanič, *The Avar Siege of Constantinople in 626: History and Legend*. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 361 pp.

on the throne. That means, the foremost men chose this man from among themselves and recognized him as worthy of that leading royal rank. For the Slavs, too, we have to reckon with the traditional technology of community organization, in the words of Max Weber, in which authority derives from the charisma of the leader.³⁷

Now let us think about who actually made up that group of leaders around Samo. You often hear that Samo's Empire was a tribal union. Yet, no matter how I look at it, the only tribe I see here are the Slavs. What I do see around Samo is an international retinue, i.e. people who can carry weapons and use them skillfully. There are also mixed Avars, probably also proper Avars, and then mostly the Slavs. And we are back where we started. This community wants, or even better needs to develop some common collective identity. It has to be done. But it is a heavy task, since – let us say it in modern terms – the retinue is “international”. It is heterogeneous. It does not have a common language, it does not have a common identification symbol. But it does have one charismatic leader and those around him believe in the usefulness of that alliance. The story about Samo does not end here, though. Soon enough, Samo gets into conflict with the Franks.

*The
Composition
of King
Samo's Inner
Retinue*

The next king to step on the Frankish throne, Dagobert does not agree with Samo collecting taxes, whatsoever, on this Danube route which is, as already mentioned, another branch of the great ancient Silk Road. So, Dagobert sends an envoy, Sicharius, to see Samo. One should read this part of our informer again and again. It is extraordinary. The information it contains is key for us to understand what was going on here. Samo did not want to see Sicharius because Dagobert was accusing him of attacking caravans and robbing them and killing their members. As you know, killing traders, peaceful people, is usually a good enough reason to go to war. But wars do not happen in such a way that both sides want it. Usually one side wants war more than the other. So, the party that wants it more tries to get the other party to start it themselves. In this case, Samo does not want to receive Sicharius. So what does Sicharius have to do to get to Samo's court? Fredegar writes that Samo did not want to see Sicharius. He would not allow him to step before him:

*The war
against
Dagobert*

“Sicharius, clothed in the manner of the Slavs, appeared with his men before Samo and rendered him the whole message he had been given.”

The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar and its Continuations, book IV, chapter 68.

³⁷ Max Weber, *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. and ed. Alexander Morell Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), see chapter: “The Nature of Charismatic Authority and its Routinization”.

“Dressed in
the Manner
of the
Slavs”

The given description would not be that engaging if it did not say that Sicharius “*appeared with his men before Samo*”. It was possible just when he (and his men) were “*dressed in the manner of the Slavs*”. In fact, both statements imply that Samo and his entourage practiced a kind of courtly culture. This shows us that Samo ritualises reality in his own private space and by doing so, he actually raises it over the level of reality. Besides that, there is the mention of a specific Slavic fashion. That means requisite garments. This proves that the royal court of the Slavs, Samo’s court, not only determined the traditional issues we know from archaic leaders and communities, for instance loyalty oaths, but also a type of requisite fashion. And this is a higher level in the shaping of a community which is characterized not only by allegiance to a military or political program but there is also a conscious effort to form a community with a specific identity.

If you want to see what this fashion looks like, there is something that can give you an idea. There is a bowl that was found in northern Italy and depicts contemporary Lombards and other people with swords and shields, wearing traditional Slavic robes and trousers but well armed, with Avar belts, on which they have typical ornaments, etc, etc. It would be interesting to see and we will definitely see it.

*The Second
Casus Belli
– the Slavs
as “Biting
Dogs”*

The point is that the aforementioned conflict actually breaks out because Sicharius calls Samo and his people “*dogs*”. To this Samo replies “*if we are dogs, then we have the right to bite you*”. And you have a conflict.

*The Course
of the
Conflict with
Dagobert*

This conflict helps us to identify, roughly, where Samo’s Kingdom was located. Based on what has been said, it can be assumed to have been somewhere near the Danube and, of course, north of the core of the Avar Khaganate. Therefore, it must be somewhere, where archaeologists can find both Slavs and Avars. This means in a territory with a mixed population. Probably the most important and most famous of them is the burial ground. Czech archaeologist Jan Eisner dug out in Devínska Nová Ves near Bratislava. Of course, there are other sites as well, but so magnificent and numerous with equestrian graves and other items of the domestic population and in such a strategic place, you will hardly find anywhere else. But let us go back to telling the political story:

“Dagobert arrogantly ordered the army from the entire Austrasian realm to march against Samo and the Wends. When the army with three divisions attacked the Wends at once, the Lombards, bribed by Dagobert, also attacked the Slavs in a hostile way. The Slavs, in this and other places, were preparing militarily against this. However, wherever the army of the Alemans and Duke Chrodobert arrived, they won. The Lombards won, too. Both Alemans and

Lombards took with them a large number of prisoners from among the Slavs. When the Austrasians sieged Wogastisburg where very large detachments of valiant Wends had sought refuge many of Dagobert's troops and others were killed by sword in a three-day battle, leaving all the tents and luggage they had and cowardly went back to their seats."

The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar and its Continuations, book IV, chapter 68.

I think this is a substantial part of Samo's story, because once again one needs to get back to the chronology of all these events. And first of all, and to the political power lines. Above all, on the one hand, we know that Dagobert attacks on three fronts. From the north, the center, and the south. The north goes against Samo's allies, the Lusatian Serbs. The center, made up of Austrasians, goes along the Danube and arrives in Wogastisburg, where it meets an infamous end. And to the south, from the area of Friuli, the Duchy of Friuli heads north into the area of today's Carinthia, where they are just as successful. What is of great consequence about this constellation of forces is that based on what Fredegar says, you would expect the Avars to rise against Samo. But this did not happen.

And this takes us back to 626 when the Slavs/Avars, the Avars/Slavs go and attack Constantinople. This means that at one point the Slavs and the Avars must have agreed peace. And as it is customary in the Middle Ages, but also in recent times peace was concluded by marriage. One of the twelve women Samo married must have been, logically, of Avar origin. This way he achieved peace on his eastern or southeastern border. This allows Samo to give all his attention to the dispute against his Western adversary. As we have seen, the result was obvious. Things turned out that the main army was defeated but the other armies, the northern and southern ones, were successful.

Many nations and their historiographies, the Czechs, the Poles, the Slovenes, the Slovaks – curiously not the Hungarians – would like to have Wogastisburg in their territory. I am far from being able to say where Wogastisburg was.

Where can one locate Wogastisburg

What I know for sure is that it was not where the Czechs would like to have it. For one simple reason: Fredegar does not mention the Czechs at all. He does not know them at all. That is, as history can speak about the Slavs/Wends is that the Slavs and the Avars have mixed. They are where archaeologists can actually find them. The third indicator is the archaic Germanic word *burg*. *Burges* are located where there are old Roman *Limes*. Therefore, you can not go looking for Wogastisburg outside the old Roman border fortifications. You can go looking for Wogastisburg anywhere between the Enns and Bratislava. Where exactly it was is really hard to say. However,

I support the assumption of my teacher, Professor Matúš Kučera who logically expects it to be where it would be best to collect taxes from those caravans. For instance where the Danube reaches the narrow pass we call today Bratislava Gate/*Porta Hungariæ* earlier known also by the description *Porta Hungariæ*.

In short: The place we are talking about clearly had a strategic position at the border between the Lombards, the Frankish Empire, the Bavarians and, of course, the Avar Khaganate.

*What can
be Deduced
with King
Samo's
Polygamy*

As already mentioned, Samo was their fortune-bearer. He was the man who secured victory. He was a man with a nimbus, a charismatic ruler. The man who formed the connection between heaven and earth and brought victory to his soldiers. And how should we look at his 12 women? We can approach this issue from different perspectives. For example, his bond with these 12 women means alliance with 12 political subjects. Samo is not trying to prove his fertility. Of course, you also expect this of a charismatic ruler. He should have not just physical and magical strength, but be fertile as well. However, the issue here is nothing but pure political alliance. So, leaving out one woman he had to marry from among the Avars you get 11 political entities Samo has politically united with by means of these marriages. Theoretically you can assume that the original tribe or the male community of Slavs (the Slavs *in sensu stricto*) we spoke about, has already become differentiated into at least 11 entities. Samo could make an alliance by marrying one of their women. It may prove that Samo was really capable and tried to create a political umbrella political organization that would integrate all those political fragments that appeared in the previous period. This takes us to the very beginning of this chapter, namely how to characterize this political entity. As already said, it was certainly not a tribal or supra-tribal community. Closer to being a "barbarian kingdom".

*A Few
Words about
"Barbarian
Kingdoms"
within
Post-Roman
World*

Why did we dare use the expression "barbarian kingdom"? For a simple reason. Because here in Europe there were many similar barbarian kingdoms from the end of the Western Roman Empire to the beginning of the earliest medieval monarchies. Whether it is the Kingdom of Burgundy in present-day France or the Ostrogothic Kingdom of Theodoric in Italy or the Visigothic Kingdom in Spain or the Kingdom of the Gepids in Pannonia and Dacia. In other words, there are a relatively large number of barbarian kingdoms similar to that of Samo. They all have something in common. Above all, they are ruled by a dynasty or a charismatic leader. There is a community of men willing to serve the ruler of this dynasty. And, of course, there is another thing: these men territorially – let me underline this – territorially, i.e. in a determined area exploit a population willing to share this political

structure. Thus, it is not merely a group of warriors capable of moving in various directions, whose diasporas influence other local populations. This is a deliberate political entity, a thoughtful political entity which already knows how to proceed in a specific environment. But there is another problem. It has not yet built any local “administrative branches” that would ensure its continuity. For another characteristic of barbarian kingdoms is their temporal nature. Temporality means that such might disappear with the second or third generation, to be replaced by a new political entity. Look at the examples of Gepid Kingdom, or Vandal Kingdom in Africa. We have arrived at the end of Samo’s Kingdom, the Slavic Kingdom.

Now, the question that bears asking is what came afterwards or why Samo failed to ensure its continuity if he was so capable. The answer may be simple. There were 11 other subjects, which based on the principle of legitimacy or tradition claimed to be the bearers of that historical continuity in our territory. And thus Samo became an example of how it actually worked here in history.

*For
a Conclusion*

Chapter 7

The Origin of the First Slavic Principalities as an Example of the Carantanian Slavs

*Clarification
of the Topic*

Here we are going to focus on an intermediate period delimited in time between the end of Samo's Kingdom and the Avar Frankish Wars. Tentatively, it will be between 653 and 796. Against our last chapter, in which we had one source, Fredegar. Here, we will need to use a little more deduction and work a bit further with more than one source that only marginally mentions the processes going on in the Pannonian Basin and its extension towards the Upper Danube and the Upper Drava and Carinthian-Styrian Alps. As we already know, at one point a certain number of well-armed men chose, in a rather revolutionary way, the name Slavs. But this *Männerbund* was still far from being a regular political structure. It was still just a bond, an agreement between a charismatic leader (respectively a representative of the distinct Slavic dynasty assumed) and those willing to share his fortune or misfortune. The fact that the Slav brand did not eventually disappear but, on the contrary, became better and more well known and permanent has to do with their ability to wage wars and conclude different political ties with other incoming subjects like the already known Avars or people of merchant Samo.

In this chapter, we will be talking about issues that are a little bit more complicated. Namely, how these communities – men, women and their families around men and women of “royal blood” – deliberately transformed themselves and began to create the first lasting proto-political entities we know as “Slavic principalities”. This process can also be characterized as another differentiation of the original single subject – *язык/языкѣ/ѣзыкѣ* (nation) of the Slavs living around the Danube. As we can once more read in the *Primary Chronicle*:

“There was at the time one Slavic race [nation] including the Slavs who settled along the Danube...”

The Russian Primary Chronicle, chapter 25.

*First of all
a Short Re-
capitulation*

Of course, Nestor speaks about it in his chronicle in his annalistic literary abbreviation. Once the Avar Khaganate ran out of the expansive energy it had in its first forty years of existence when it became dependent on the extra income from loot, the different fronts we have already mentioned namely, the Byzantine, Adriatic, Italian, and Franco-Bavarian fronts necessarily had to become stable. Let us outline what we have already formulated, just to fix it in our minds. Those nomads really had no choice but to either go

back, disappear, dissolve or interact and merge with the local population. That is the example we are going to be talking about today: the Avars.

Once they had established some form of symbiosis with the local population and concluded political agreements with the Slavic elites the Avars stabilized their Khaganate, their political project in this area for the next nearly one hundred or more years, which is remarkable. They arrived around 567 and factoring in those imaginary 40 years, when we can read about the Avars a lot. We already have the 7th century. And in the second half of the same century, you do not hear much about the Avar Khaganate anymore. However, before they fade away a key political event must have taken place. During the reign of Emperor Heracles, that is, after 610; moved into two new nations: Serbs and Croats between the Slavic/Avar Khaganate and the Byzantine Empire.

Today we traditionally consider the Serbs and the Croats to be Slavs.³⁸ Just that Serbs and Croats came here most probably from the north. They are nations with their own specific identification brand, with their old good names. Northern Serbs, i.e. the Lusatian Serbs, are still in the north today. And Southern Serbs are still in today's Serbia. They did not change their brand. Just added a new dimension to it: their Slavic identity. Another issue is: when did that happen? The Croats constitute a slightly more complicated issue. Different sources speak about the Croats in the 9th and 10th century locating them in eastern Bohemia, the territory of today's Slovakia, Silesia, Lesser Poland and up to the territory of today's western Ukraine. All this is relatively possible. The original Croats might have lived somewhere there. And eventually moved south. But how is it possible that today there are no Croats in the north? This is, indeed, a very difficult question. And the answer to it is even more complicated. But we can see that they really moved south.

And there is something else that will mix up the layout of the peoples in the Pannonian Basin i.e. between the Danube and the Carpathians. Namely the arrival of Khan Asparuh who kind of broke apart from the Bulgarian tribal union. He is the son of the famous Khan Kubrat who took the Bulgarians and occupied the old northern Thrace or Moesia. And from there he creates the Bulgarian Khanate that will become a neighbor of the Avar Khaganate.

What processes are going on in the Avar Khaganate in the meantime? As already mentioned, once the military alliance of Avars and Slavs burns out in those expansive raids they need to turn inwards and live from the currently available resources. That implies creating a system of administration. And when you want to create an administration system you need an adequate language for it. This is a major issue that has kept scholars busy for

About the Beginnings of the Serbs and the Croats

How the Bulgarian Reached the Eastern Balkan Peninsula

About inner Processes within the Avar Khaganate

³⁸ Danijel Dzino, *Becoming Slav: Becoming Croat* (Leiden : Brill, 2010), see: chapter 3–4.

some time. Not just historians, but also linguists. They think there must have been a Proto-Slavic or Common Slavic language. A language people used to speak, to communicate in a supra-territorial context. A sufficiently developed language to serve as the language of that administration. When we spoke about the Kingdom of the Gepids, that language was Gothic. In the time of the Avar Khaganate, one can suppose, it was Pannonian Slavic. This Pannonian Slavic was the most developed language. It also has extensions, some reaching deep into the west. Some others reach north, to today's Poland. And mainly to the territory of today's Belarus and western Ukraine. We will address this topic again when we talk about the Kingdom of Hungary. Now, I mentioned it because we need to get an idea of how it actually worked. At its core there is a Khagan and an elite that keeps the traditions the original nomads had. However, the rest is becoming more and more slavized although there is still some kind of requisite Avar fashion. That is why archaeologists keep digging out Avar finds.

*The first Slavs with the Attribute "Carantanian"*³⁹

Now, imagine that different local rule centers or nuclei which have a centrifugal tendency from that Avar Khaganate begin to crystallize around this Avar Khaganate. Consequently that courts of Slavic princes suddenly start to appear around the Avar Khaganate. They are most likely members of the old lineage of the *-mir/mar*, that is, the Amal. Now we have a very specific example to demonstrate this whole theory. I mean the Carantanian Slavs.

About the Sources

The first Slavs known from the written material with some kind of distinction: "Carantanian". Curiously, they are known or identified by relatively later sources but always in connection with some older tradition. In this case, it is Paul the Diacon, who tells the history of the Lombards. However, coming from Friuli, Deacon remembers very well the mutual ties, both friendly and military, between the Principality of the Lombards and the Carantanian Slavs. Just imagine northern Italy and what lies beyond. Keep in mind that at one point the Carantanian Slavs got even further all the way to the Po Valley. So, Paul the Diacon and, of course, other sources know the Carantanian Slavs.⁴⁰

The most important of them is *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians (Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum)*.⁴¹

³⁹ Patrick J. Geary, "Slovenian Gentile Identity: From Samo to the Fürstenstein", in *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs: Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Ildar H. Garipzanov, Patrick J. Geary and Przemysław Urbańczyk (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 243–56.

⁴⁰ Florin Curta "Slavs in Fredegar and Paul the Deacon: Medieval Gens or 'Scourge of God'?" *Early Medieval Europe* 6, 2 (1997): 141–67.

⁴¹ "The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians," trans. John Eldevik. Accessed: November 9, 2023. https://www.academia.edu/37973825/The_Conversion_of_the_Bavarians_and_Carinthians.docx..



Map no. 5.

This work, written after 870, is a document of the Archbishopric of Salzburg which accurately describes how the originally Bavarian and later Frankish power and with it also the Salzburg archbishops established first their political and then their ecclesiastical and administrative power, in Pannonia. They clearly know the Carantanian Slavs as the first Slavs with a distinctive feature.

*The Model of
Carantanian
Slavs
Principality
The
Installation
Ritual of
Carantanian
Rulers*

On the example of better documented Carantanian Slavs we are going to explain what might have happened in the surrounding centers, i.e. in the other ten supposed entities that formed an alliance with Slavic King Samo.

The Carantanian Slavs have rulers of their own blood. These rulers were ritually installed to the throne of ruling princes. The seat of the ruling princes of the Carantanian Slavs was old *Virunum* close to today's Klagenfurt/Celovec. This is actually Maria Saal today, or in Slavic Gospa Sveta. This is a clear place with a strong Roman tradition. The legitimacy through the Romans will eventually prove significant for other Slavic rulers as well, including the Moravian rulers, as we will see. A very crucial ritual took place at Gospa Sveta [Slovene for Maria Saal]. The local *Kosezi*, who are actually the distinguished, let us say the *vifazi* – “victors”, i.e. winners, descendant of the best soldiers, those closer to the dynasty, carry out that ritual to install their monarch to the throne, to hand power over to him. The throne is actually the reversed base of an ancient Roman Ionic column. The new ruler, dressed as a peasant, first needs to take the throne from another peasant who is sitting on it. To do so, the peasant must acknowledge the new monarch suitable. When he finally sits down on the Prince's Stone the *Kosezi* would acclaim him as their new leader. It bears asking: Were they from a distinguished Slavic dynasty, supposedly the Amal – already there?

*Struggle
between
Legitimacy
and Idoneity
(Suitability)*

In the words of Max Weber, their authority stemmed from legitimacy, tradition, or charisma. Should we adopt here a different model of idoneity (suitability)? We have talked about legitimacy several times. Looking back on a legacy of blood it was materialized in a famous theme – *mir/mar* of a personal proper name. *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians* actually mentions Chotimir/Hotimir to be the legitimate prince of Carantania. But what is also remarkable is that at such a crucial time, i.e. in the second half of the 8th century there is also a Borut, Cacatio and Valtunk. These names do not sound confidential at first sight, though. But probably their meaning got veiled because they were written by people who were not familiar with the Slavic language. Looking out for some similarities, Borut might mean Borec (Belter). Cacatio (Gorazd?) might be “skilled man”. And Valtunk could be Vladan (Ruler). It is actually a regular name, especially in Serbia. So these are character-like names that derive from specific fighting

(war) skills. We can already see here something that will come in handy when trying to understand some future lectures. That is the dispute between idoneity and legitimacy. This means the dispute of someone who is chosen by some conditions and that of someone who is predestined by blood.

Let me illustrate it by the dispute of Agamemnon, who was the legitimate ruler leading the expedition against Troy and imagine Achilles, who was designated by Gods. Concerning the peasant dress of the future ruler. This might remind you of how legendary Premysl the Ploughman was called to rule the Czechs. This is similar to when the people install the ruler of the Carantanian Slavs. There is a leader, whether dynastic or charismatic and there is a group of privileged men skilled in arms who are able and willing to stand up for his goals. So far, there is already a kind of spatial definition of their specific rule. Besides that there are also people willing to support or share this model. And all of this is happening outside, extraterritorially, of the Avar Khaganate. It is located at the border with the Duchy of Friuli (Principality of the Lombards) and right at the border with Bavaria. Bear in mind that the ties the Bavarians and the Carantanian Slavs develop will prove to be crucial to later history.

Bavaria, as a peripheral area to the Frankish Empire, has its own geopolitical interests and these copy the flow of the Danube. Professor Herwig Wolfram, traditionally and very fondly speaks how the Bavarians perhaps under the guise of the Frankish power but with their own dynasty, the Agilolfings have been trying to create a kind of Bavarian commonwealth in the Danube area. We will get to that later on, though. Right now, it is important to understand that there are some Carantanian Slavs here.

The Beginnings of Bavarian Danube in the Last third of the 8th Century

Transferring this Carantanian-Slavic model to the north and northeast we get something that seems to be in full connection with the Avar-Frankish wars. Suddenly, at the end of the 8th and in the 9th century, new political subjects appeared. These are new tribes of Slavs, new Slavs with a distinctive feature Moravian Slavs, Bohemian Slavs...

New Slavs with a Distinctive Feature

No Nitrian Slavs appear strictly following this definition, but we can find Nitra with Pribina. However, somewhere in the Tisa Valley, we can find the so-called Praedenecenti, we can find the Dulebes, and the Timochans around the river Timok in today's Serbia, etc. They all are new political entities. We could say they are the supposed 11 Slavic political subjects that appear in the peripheral areas of the Avar Khaganate. And not only do they already have their own centers. From the second half of the 8th century, they have begun to fortify them.

About New Slavic Gords (Strongholds)

This is new in the Slavic history. We know that such fortifications were built in this area of ours during the Púchov culture and before that during

the Bronze Age. But over the period of relative peace of the Avar Khaganate, i.e. after its power stabilized in the second half of the 7th century and in the first half of the 8th century, there was no need to build fortifications of a similar nature. Suddenly, however, they begin to pop up like mushrooms after a rain. These structures begin to spread from the Danube. And reach as far as the border of the German-Slavic world. The question is, what actually caused the building of the Slavic gords (Strongholds)?⁴² There are several answers. The first one is: times change. Something is about to change.

With the change from the Merovingians to the Carolingians the Frankish Empire kind of gets new energy. And suddenly these local princes start to define themselves. Two: when you enclose yourself, you define yourself. Thirdly: they need to show off, it is a matter of prestige. In fact, many times these structures spread over many hectares. Four: new elites also need to concentrate the economy into their centers. They need to develop a local cult, they need to create their own courts. They need to surround themselves with the likes of them. But above all, this is a period when people are free. No one can force anyone to build these structures. And yet, these people build them voluntarily and they are monumental constructions. Later on, Notker of Saint Gall in his *Vita Caroli – The Life of Charlemagne*⁴³ describes these structures as follows:

“One ring (gord) was as wide, that is, it contained as much within it, as all the country between Tours and Constance. It was fashioned with logs of oak and ash and yew and was twenty feet (this is about 6 m.) wide and the same in height (this means 6 m thick times 6 m high). All the space within was filled with hard stones and binding clay; and the surface of these great ramparts was covered with sods and grass.”

The Life of Charlemagne by the Monk of St. Gall, book II, chapter 1.

In a word, these buildings were really monumental. There was something in the air. And that something in the air was the Frankish Empire. A gradual reversal of power is taking place. Changes in power. They can feel that the West is gaining ground. And this also results in a gradual change in fashion. In other words, these Slavs change sides again and instead of Avar garments they start dressing according to the Bavarian or Frankish fashion.

⁴² Sebastian Brather, “The Western Slavs of the Seventh to the Eleventh Century – An Archaeological Perspective,” *History Compass* 9, no. 6 (2011): 454–73.

⁴³ “The Life of Charlemagne by the Monk of St. Gall”, in *Two Lives of Charlemagne by Einhard and the Monk of St. Gall*, ed. A. J. Grant (Digreads.com Publishing, 2012), 89–90, accessed November 11, 2023, https://www.everand.com/read/351502777/Two-Lives-of-Charlemagne#_search-menu_672528.

Chapter 8

The Collapse of the Avar Khaganate

In this chapter I will try to describe Charlemagne's expeditions to the former Pannonia following the fall of the Avar Khaganate and what happened next and what issues the Occident had to face when it got the farthest east in its hitherto existence. The farthest east the Frankish Empire had got so far was the Principality of Bavaria, which was more or less freely annexed to the Frankish Empire and to some extent cooperated with this power. The Bavarians were Catholics and they also had their own dynasty, the Agilolfings.

*Clarification
of the Topic*

This dynasty worked intensively on expanding towards the middle Danube. Professor Herwig Wolfram once called it the "Bavarian Commonwealth". This means that the Bavarian leaders worked closely with the local Slavs whether they were Alpine, Carantanian or Danube Slavs. In the next chapter we will deal with the results of these consequences. But for now, let us go back to what was happening west of the Bavarian border i.e. in the Frankish Empire in the second half of the 8th century.

We know that the Frankish Kingdom or the Kingdom of the Franks had seen a serious change in the 9th Century. The old Merovingian dynasty had been replaced by a new one. This new dynasty would go down into history as the Carolingians, a name they got after its first most outstanding member Charles Martel. However, the decisive representative of the Carolingians was Charles I also known as Charles the Great and, mostly, as Charlemagne.⁴⁴ By the way he was given this attribute also because he was a really big man.

*Some
Serious
Changes in
the Frankish
Kingdom
and the
Beginnings
of Feudalism
in the West*

As it is usually the case in classical lecture topics Charlemagne first made order at home i.e. dealt with the main domestic affairs, settled all issues connected with his relatives and united the entire Frankish Empire under his power.⁴⁵ Then he carried out reforms that would strengthen his position both at home and among his neighbors. In fact, the economic reforms he carried out were of such significance that they mark the beginning of

*Inner
Policy of
Charlemagne*

⁴⁴ Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), xviii + 460 pp.

⁴⁵ Marios Costambeys; Matthew Innes and Simon MacLean, *The Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 505 pp.

feudalism in the West.⁴⁶ He handed over the task to create and keep troops down to the hands of his subjects. For that, he gave them the basic means of production: land. As owners of land, they were then able to build a number of soldiers themselves. Something that had been the exclusive privilege – and duty – of the monarch. These are the beginnings of feudalism in the West. One could not deny the negative consequences this had. In the first and second generation, however, the results were remarkable. It significantly improved the position of the army.

His far-reaching reforms also concerned the Catholic Church. He organized regular archbishoprics, dioceses, royal chapters and supported the Benedictines, one of his major tools to exercise power without using force or military means. These reforms are reflected in Charlemagne's expansionary policy. Now, Charlemagne had extraordinary ambitions.

*The Foreign
Policy of
Charlemagne*

What stood in the way of those ambitions? The greatest potential danger was a coalition of the Duchy of Bavaria, the Kingdom of the Lombards and their potential ally Avar Khaganate, respectively Saxons. Therefore, it was necessary to paralyze them separately. The first was invaded the Kingdom of the Lombards in 773/774. Indeed, Charlemagne sent its last ruler, Desiderius to a Monastery (Abbey of Corbie). Later on (788) he did the same with the last duke of Bavaria Tassilo III, who also ended up in a monastery (Abbey of Jumièges) in the second half of 790s.

Charlemagne also pursued a very intense pro-Roman policy. This papal policy had some consequences, too. Rome recognized him as Emperor in 800. New emperor on the contrary offered to successors of St. Peter political protection. The Papacy gave Charlemagne the right to spread Christianity to areas that were not Christian until then. These are the famous expeditions to the Saxons. They were very bloody and went on for a very long time but eventually managed to pacify the Saxon elite. By hook or by crook, Saxony was annexed to the Frankish Empire. This got Charlemagne into the immediate vicinity of the Elbe Slavs, as well as of the Czechs. The last obstacle between him and the Eastern Roman Empire, i.e. The Byzantine Empire was the Avar Khaganate.

*Situation on
the Periphery
and Inside
the Avar
Khaganate*

In the late 8th century, the Avar Khaganate faced a political and economic crisis. Newly established Slavic principalities in its orbit no longer concealed their desire to break free from the Avar Khaganate. The Khaganate

⁴⁶ François Louis Ganshof, *Feudalism*, trans. Philip Grierson. (London; New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green, 1952), 188 pp. Recently to "Feudal revolution" see: Charles West, *Reframing the Feudal Revolution: Political and Social Transformation between Marne and Moselle c. 800–c. 1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), chapter: "The place of the Carolingians in the Feudal Revolution debate".

could be a third member of that potential coalition of the Lombards and the Bavarians. Had these three great entities concluded such an alliance I think the Frankish king would not have been able to expand to the east. In his efforts, Charlemagne sought not only allies in the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire. In fact, he also saw a potential ally in Krum, the Khan of Bulgaria and the Bulgarians. And Krum was interested in weakening the Avar Khaganate, his northern neighbor. However, that expansion is not a matter of days or months.

It takes meticulous and long-term preparation. For this purpose, there were two military strongholds from which the Avar Khaganate could be attacked: The first was the former Duchy of Friuli. It was aptly called the March of Friuli. Remember that this March of Friuli basically copied the old Roman strategic area and was the starting point for Rome's expansion into Pannonia during the rule of Gaius Julius Caesar and his successor Gaius Octavius Julius Caesar Augustus. This is where the name of the city, Forum Iulii, (today's Cividale del Friuli) comes from. The other stronghold was Bavaria itself after its occupation. It also included the Principality of Carantania, which was about to be annexed to Bavaria. At this point, Charles has gotten far beyond the upper Danube. In fact, he has already made it to the Avar Khaganate itself. And the Avar Khaganate is far from being as united as it used to be. Its subjects, the different Slavic princes, had been trying to split off for some time.

Preparations and Organization of the War with the Avars

Let us mention a certain Vojnomir – we see a composite bi-thematic name. Vojnomir first forms part of the Avar Khaganate. However, later on, in 796, we find him helping to overthrow the Hring of the Avars. We will get back to this later on. Military conflicts are usually preceded by diplomatic negotiations. These negotiations do not aim at resolving anything. On the contrary, they just prepare the ground to legitimize the conflict. This time, the excuse Charlemagne uses to wage war against the Avars is the oppression of Christians within the Khaganate.

The case of Vojnomir

Thus, in 791, the Frankish Empire launched its attack against the Avar Khaganate. Charlemagne leads the main column along the Danube. It aims at disrupting the system of fortresses that defend the upper and middle Danube. The Avars are not expecting this and are taken by surprise. Charlemagne does not meet any significant resistance. The other, a southern, column sets off from the March of Friuli. Just as it had been the case during Samo's kingdom. From the onset, it is clear the Avar Khaganate is not prepared for this war. Despite the fact that the war goes on for almost ten years. The decisive blow came in 795/796 from the south, e.i. from the March of Friuli. Eric, count of Friuli, and Pippin son of Charlemagne,

The Surprising Start of the War with the Avars

CENTRAL EUROPE AND THE BALKANS IN FIRST HALF OF THE 9TH CENTURY



Map no. 6.

together with Vojnomir lead a decisive attack towards the Hring of the Avars and destroy it.⁴⁷

“Duke Eric of Friuli dispatched his men under the command of the Slav Wonomir [Vojnomir] into Pannonia and had them plunder the [H] ring of the Avars, which had not been entered for ages. At that time the princes of the Avars were exhausted by internecine conflict; the khagan and the jugur had fought each other in a civil war and had been killed by their own people. The duke sent the treasure of the ancient kings, which had been piled up over many centuries, to the Lord King Charles at the palace of Aachen.”

The Royal Frankish Annals, year 796.

This was the first time in the history of the West, the *Occident*, that the border between east and west moved to the Tisa river in the east and the ridges of the Carpathians in the north. This is a key moment in the history of the West. It had never been this far east before. And it would never go that far east again. Not until 2004 when the European Union managed to outdo what Charlemagne accomplished back in 796. However, this was far from being the end of the war, since certain structures of the Avar Khaganate had survived. Wanting to protect them, Charlemagne moved them to the Vienna Forest area, very close to the borders of the future Moravia.

Several times, Charlemagne received various representatives of this power whether kapkhans or khagans. They go by eloquent names, such as Theodor, Abraham, or Isaac, which shows that these Avars eventually accepted Christianity because they understood that Christianity could save their hitherto identity.

*New
Frontiers of
Occident*

*The Con-
sequences
of the First
Part of the
War*

“Not long after the capcan prince of the Huns, approached the emperor because of the predicament of his people and asked him to give them a place to settle between Szombathely [Sabaria] and Petronell [Carnuntum]. The Huns could not stay in their previous dwelling places on account of the attacks of the Slavs. The Emperor [Charlemagne] received him graciously – for the capcan was a Christian by the name of Theodore – agreed to his request, and permitted him to return home with presents. The capcan died a short while after returning to his people. And the khagan sent one of his magnates asking for the ancient dignity which the khagan used to have among the Huns.

⁴⁷ *Carolingian Chronicles: Royal Frankish Annals and Nithard's Histories*, trans. Bernhard Walter Scholtz with Barbara Rogers, (Ann Arbor [MI]: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 74.

The Emperor agreed to his request and ordered that the khagan, according to the ancient custom of the Huns, was to be lord over the whole kingdom."

The Royal Frankish Annals, year 805.

In the meantime, the surrounding Slavic principalities took matters into their own hands and against the remnants of Avar power in their Pannonia. And so, the Avars have disappeared from the political scene of the world. This gave origin to a saying that can still be found in Greek and Old Slavonic. Indeed, in the *Tale of Bygone Years/Primary Chronicle*, the character we know as Nestor says that *"it disappeared just as the Avars did"*.

Scholar Magister Einhard Charlemagne's biographer,⁴⁸ describes this war as follows:

"The greatest of all his wars, next to the Saxon war, followed this one –that, namely, which he undertook against the Huns and the Avars. He [Charlemagne] prosecuted this with more vigour than the rest and with a far greater military preparation. However, he conducted in person only one expedition into Pannonia, the province then occupied by the Avars; the management of the rest he left to his son Pippin, and the governors of the provinces, and in some cases to his counts and lieutenants. These carried on the war with the greatest energy, and finished it after eight years of fighting. How many battles were fought there and how much blood was shed is still shown by the deserted and uninhabited condition of Pannonia, and the district in which stood the palace of the Kagan is so desolate that there is not so much as a trace of human habitation. All the nobles of the Huns were killed in this war, all their glory passed away; their money and all the treasures that they had collected for so long were carried away. Nor can the memory of man recall any war waged against the Franks by which they were so much enriched and their wealth so increased. Up to this time they were regarded almost as a poor people, but now so much gold and silver were found in the palace, such precious spoils were seized by them in their battles, that it might fairly be held that the Franks had righteously taken from the Huns what they unrighteously had taken from other nations."

The Life of the Emperor Charles written by Eginhard, part I, chapter 13.

This information deals with several things. Let me focus on one of them and discuss it briefly: The Avar treasure. However fairy-tale the word "treasure"

⁴⁸ "The Life of Charlemagne by Eginhard," in *Two Lives of Charlemagne by Einhard and the Monk of St. Gall*, 15–56, accessed December 2, 2023, https://www.everand.com/read/351502777/Two-Lives-of-Charlemagne#__search-menu_672528.

sure” might sound is momentous as it tells us how the Avar Khaganate actually worked. Think of the Treasure of the Nibelungs, Gepids one, or that Treasure of the Moravians, we can also talk about other early medieval treasures.⁴⁹ However, not the accumulation of the seized wealth itself but the distribution of those treasures among the loyal members of the retinue. Regardless of whether it was a barbarian retinue major charismatic leaders, like the Merovingians or like the Avars, in this specific case. Important is that a piece of that treasure, a ring, a precious vessel or a pearl necklace can guarantee you loyalty. And this loyalty has been paid for in blood. The ruler, the dynasty, needs this motivating accumulated treasure for the executors of its power. This treasure accumulated by the Khans for centuries then passed over to the Franks, who became extremely rich or – as we would say today – significantly increased their GDP.

However, although Charlemagne wanted to defeat the Avars he did not want to turn this area into a political vacuum. He could not imagine very well what his eastern borders would look like. He established the Avar March⁵⁰ – a crucial political entity in the following years. It was also called Pannonian March, or Eastern March and its aim was to control the central Danube. However, all along the perimeter of this March and along the eastern border of the Frankish Empire Slavic principalities quickly increased in numbers. They were annexed to the Frankish power by means of different oaths. Charlemagne is basically copying the model of the ancient Roman Empire and begins to build a system of tributaries along its eastern borders.

However, seizing a territory does not yet mean integrating it. Conquest is a matter of a few brief moments. Keeping a territory is a matter of long-term strategic work. It was, then, necessary to develop ways to integrate the new territories. Regardless of whether they are inhabited by the Slavs or whether they are inhabited by German-speaking Saxons. The mechanisms are basically identical. There are several levels at which a foreign power can penetrate and get gradually established in a new territory.

The simplest and smoothest way was to move the Catholic Church eastwards as well as northwards, as far as the Saxons were concerned. This means building first monasteries and churches. The local population does

Establishment of the Avar March

About some Strategies to Integrate the new Territories

Implementation of the Basic Church Structures

⁴⁹ Pohl, *The Avars*, see chapter: “Avar Gold: Prestige, Gifts, Representation”.

⁵⁰ More detailed on the division of the conquered territories, see: Matej Klika, “Pannonia as a Space and the Importance of Pribina in the Integration Process of the Pannonian Area into the Frankish Empire”, in *Slovakia and Croatia*, vol. I: *Historical Parallels and Connections until 1780*, ed. Martin Homza, Ján Lukačka and Neven Budak (Bratislava and Zagreb: Department of Slovak History, 2013), 49–59.

not really perceive a new church as something alien. In fact, those who come to spread faith also bring the “light of civilization”. The Benedictines guarded all the technical conveniences we know from antiquity. Charlemagne himself would like to restore the ancient times. That is why his coronation as emperor took place in Rome in 800. He wanted to be part and restorer of the Roman power. So, first you build a church in the territory you have just conquered. This has the advantage that if those monks do not take root if they get killed, they become martyrs. They earn the Kingdom of heaven. So nobody loses anything.

*The Ways of
Creating of
New Elite*

Another way to integrate this territory is by creating a new elite. It means a mixed elite. This can be achieved in a straightforward manner. For instance, the Empire would take the sons and nephews of the local princes hostage. They are taken to the different centers of the empire and there, the elites of the Frankish Empire educate them in one common Latin and universal spirit. And then, after the death of their uncles and fathers these “scholarship recipients” as I call them, return home, to those vacant thrones and there they will apply the policy of their educators. You can see it in some Great Moravian princes. But a textbook example of this is St. Vojtech-Adalbert. He studied in Magdeburg and we know his story very well. Besides that, if you want to create that common, mixed elite, i.e. an elite of Franks, Bavarians, Saxons, and Slavs you give the most important Slavs good offices. Good offices work miracles when you want to turn an alien into one of your own. Because they will defend the interests of the empire. Pribina constitutes a textbook example to illustrate this technique. Yet another way to create a common elite is marriage. Matrimonial ties have proven to be a very successful and effective way to get those who would like to leave you, to actually join you. Charlemagne uses all these highly effective ways right on the onset, to get hold of the new territories. Historical sources bear witness of the fact that he is copying strategies of earlier Bavarian policy in the Middle Danube territories.

*Use of
Economic
and Legal
Instruments*

One more way to integrate the area you have just conquered is to make it economically dependent on you. That means integrating it, as much as possible into your internal market and into the market for your goods. As an illustrative and all-speaking example, I will mention here only *The Raffelstetten Customs Regulation*, the contents of which regulated the price of slaves exported from “Slavic” countries.⁵¹ It is also necessary to ensure that your legal system extends to all the peripheral areas you aim to absorb.

⁵¹ König, “903–906: Die Raffelstettener Zollordnung und der Export slawischer Sklaven, 1–17.

Charlemagne never tried to hid his admiration for the *Frankish codes*. They were an integral part of Frankish ancient history. On the other hand, they were too particularistic. It needed a more general legal instrument to achieve its global objectives. As the declared heir of the Western Roman Empire, he therefore had to resort to tried and tested Roman strategies. That means he needed to implement the universal Roman law that formed the framework of the former Empire.

Now comes the cherry on the cake. It is essential to appoint a member of your own dynasty to govern territories that could potentially rebel. The Carolingians were well aware of this since the experiences from the times of the Merovingians. When Louis I the Pious, installs his son Louis II the German, in Regensburg he knows very well what he is doing. These family ties will firmly integrate a hitherto uncertain land into the Frankish Empire. When Louis II the German appointed his son Carloman as prefect of Carantania, he fully understood the implications of his actions. The presence of a Carolingian member of the family is the best guarantee that this territory will become part of the Empire. Any resemblance to the situation after 2004 when the new countries east of the Oder River and on the middle Danube were admitted into the European Union is no coincidence. In fact, history is just repeating.

*A New
Dynasty
on the Old
Thrones*

Chapter 9

Some Disputes around the Origin of Great Moravia

Clarification
of the Topic

In this chapter, we will be talking about the Frankish Peace (*Pax Francica*) the geopolitical arrangement of the Danube or Pannonian Basin in the 9th century. This will take us to that chapter, which usually introduces the study of Great Moravia. We will focus on Moimir's long-term opponent Pribina, prince of Nitria rather than on Moimir himself.

What the
Frankish
Peace
Actually is

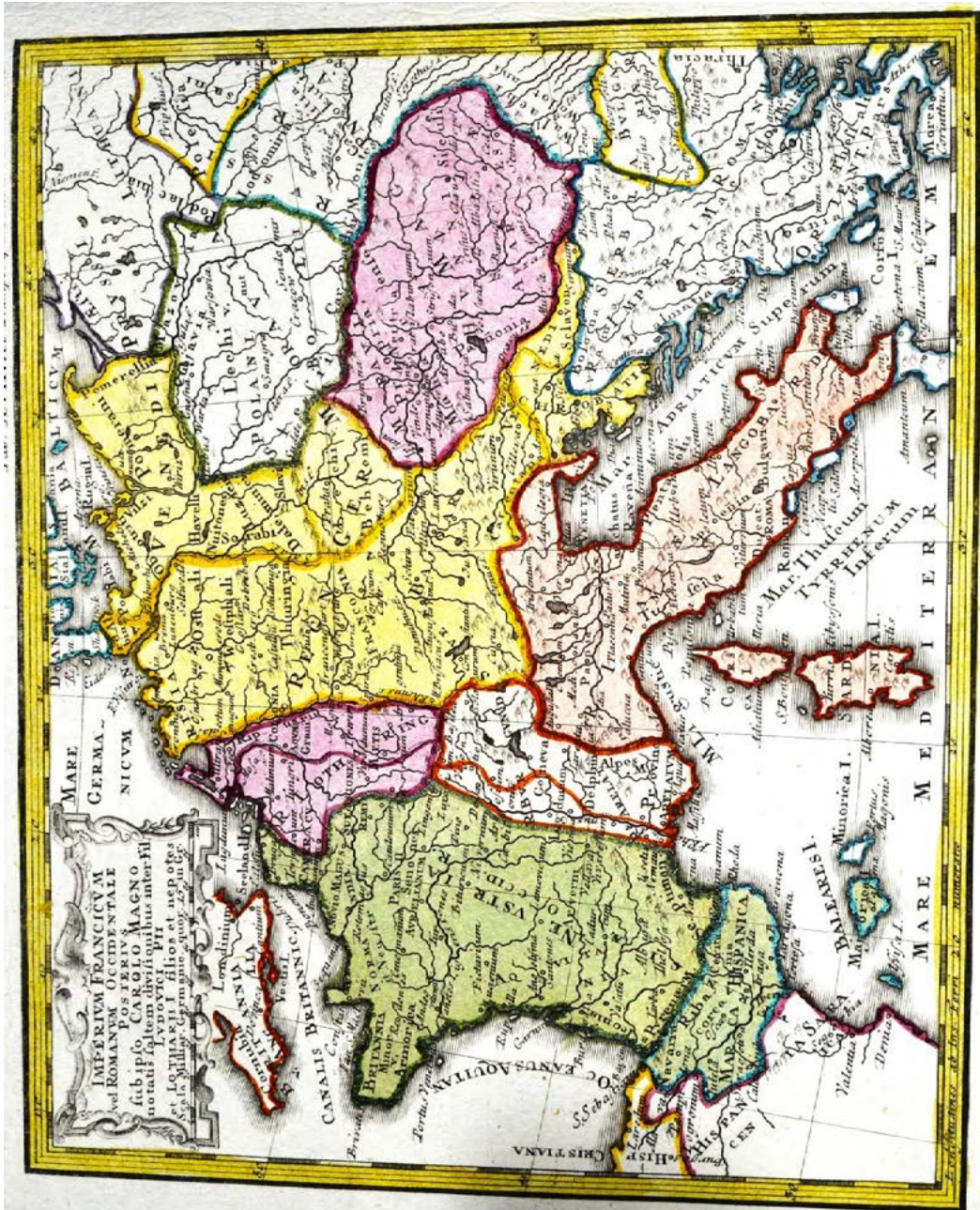
Before we start, it is necessary to define what the Frankish Peace actually is, how it developed, and how it affected Middle Danube territories. The Frankish Peace, or *Pax Francica* is a political condition established by Charlemagne and his successors after he defeated the Avars around 796 or 811. It is part and continuation of the policy of Western European understanding of *Orbis Romanus*, the universal concept of the Roman World.⁵² It lasted until 907, i.e. after the famous battle by Bratislava.⁵³ It is practically one whole century of our history. Right at first look, we can say that 9th century history was very generous and preserved about itself an immense amount of information in different contemporary as well as later, retrospective, sources. These sources keep getting back to this formative time of Central Europe as the starting point of the history of this territory.

Periodization
of the Frankish
Peace

Of course, the Frankish Peace consisted of different sub-stages which copy the different rules of the different monarchs. As we know, Charlemagne died in 814, i.e. shortly after achieving this peace. He was succeeded by Louis I the Pious, who ruled until his death around 840. After Louis I the Pious, his sons ascended the throne in 843 and divided according to the Treaty of Verdun the Frankish Empire among themselves. This is generally considered as a qualitative turning point of the Carolingian Empire. The Danubian part of Europe comes under the sovereign rule of Louis II the German. Louis II the German is then in the year 876 replaced by his sons Carloman and Louis the Younger/the Saxon. Later on, from 886 by Arnulf. However, there is a principal in-between period (882–886) under the rule of Charles III the Fat; Charles III tried to restore the original greatness of his

⁵² See recently Laury Sarti, *Orbis Romanus: Byzantium and the Legacy of Rome in the Carolingian World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), chapter: "A Frankish *orbis Romanus*" and "The Franks and Roman World", 313–19.

⁵³ For some general idea of the Carolingian world order, see Costambeys; Innes and MacLean, *The Carolingian World*, 505 pp.



Map no. 7: *The imagination of a restored Western Roman Empire in the form of the Frankish Empire in the 9th century with Great Moravia.* (Johann Matthias Haas, 1743).⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Johann Matthias Haas, "Imperium Francicum vel Romanum Occidentale Posterius sub ipso Carolo Magno," in Johann Matthias Haas [Johann Matthias Hasius/Johann Matthias Homanns Arvinger], *Europa in partes suas X methodicas a primariis regnis dominata secundum fidem recentissimarum observationum Mathematicarum et Historicarum...* (Nürnberg: Homanniani Heredes, 1743), no. XVII.

namesake, Charlemagne. Towards the end of the Frankish Peace one can also see the gradual extinction of the Carolingians. Interestingly, this seems to go hand in hand with the extinction of the main topic we are going to talk about, the Moimirids.

So, now we will see how Charlemagne, and Louis I the Pious after him organized the territories on their eastern border. It has been indicated how valid was the establishment of what was at first very widely understood as the Avar March. The Avar or Eastern March, eventually begins to split into different sub-areas and this is when the Eastern March itself splits off. Here we can talk about Carantania, which is part of it. But we can also talk about the Upper Pannonia and the Lower Pannonia. Pannonia is defined in the east by the city of Ráb – today's Győr – and, of course, by the Rába river. Lower Pannonia copies the traditional Roman spirit.⁵⁵

Here, it is necessary to say that when establishing this system Frankish neighbors of the Slavs reexamined the earlier Roman tradition.⁵⁶ Therefore, the Lower Pannonia is defined by the upper and middle course of the Drava and Sava rivers. South of this area is Croatian Principality. And Croatia, together with the adjacent territories of Serbia and Dalmatia up to the town of Omiš and the Cetina river, were also considered to be part of what is called the Frankish Empire. For those who cannot quite imagine that, it is necessary to keep in mind that when you come to Omiš in today's Croatia the place where the river Cetina flows into the Adriatic Sea was the border between the Byzantine Empire and the Frankish Empire. From there, it went eastwards, then northwards and back towards the Danube. At the same time, it must be said that the Fruška Gora, or Franconian Mountains was the border between the Frankish Empire and what was then Bulgarian Khanate. Thus, the border between Bulgaria and the Frankish Empire stretched roughly at the level of today's Serbian capital, Belgrade. From there, the border went northwards and included, as already said, Pannonia. Nitrian principality also belonged to the Empire at that time. Then Empire continues northwestwards and includes The Czech lands/The Bohemian lands and Lusatia with its Serbs, as well as the Polabian (Slavic) tribes of the Lutici or Liutizi and the Obodrites or Abodrites along the Elbe river. It can be said that all of the listed political subjects showed some degree of dependence on the Frankish

⁵⁵ Matej Klika, "Pannonia as a Space," *passim* and Charles R. Bowlus, "The Military Organisation of Carinthia and Pannonia (818–846)," in *Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Festschrift für Karl Bosl zum 80. Geburtstag*, vol. 1, ed. Ferdinand Seibt (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1988), 168–78.

⁵⁶ See volume: *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdom*, ed. Thomas F. X. Noble. (London/New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 430 pp.

Empire. However, the influence of the Frankish Empire on the Middle Danube gradually weakened as the Slavic principalities to the east of their own Frankish borders emancipated and established themselves. The key task of integrating them into one higher entity fell here to the Moravian Principality. Going to the foundations of this political constellation, we must keep in mind that *Pax Francica* was alive optimally and strong just and precisely during the very time of Charlemagne i.e. when it originated.

A crucial fact is that it began to be doubted already during the reign of Louis I the Pious, his son. Curiously, it was questioned by the ancestors of the Southern Slavs, namely by the Slavic prince with Carolingian name Louis – Ljudevit Posavski (*Liudewitus, dux Pannoniae inferioris*). Ljudevit together with other counts, margraves, prefects, and variety of officials became the “notability” or the “executive” of the Empire. As already mentioned, besides being under the influence of the Avar March the Southern Slavs had always been strongly influenced by the March of Friuli. It was there that a local conflict arose between Margrave Cadolah of Friuli and Ljudevit, who defeated Cadolah twice.

The Uprising of Ljudevit Posavski and its Consequences

The surrounding tribes of Slavs joined Ljudevit and, in a very short period, i.e. from 819 to 820/821, in a series of successful operations they formed a coalition of Southern Slavs against the Frankish Empire. At the same time, it should be emphasized that Ljudevit had repeatedly asked Emperor Louis I the Pious to secure a fairer rule on the eastern borders of his empire but Louis I the Pious would not listen to his requests. In the end, however, the Frankish Empire managed to defeat Ljudevit and restore peace in this part of his empire.⁵⁷

The result of this peace is addressed, among other things, at the assembly that was summoned to Frankfurt. This is noteworthy, so I will read directly from *The Royal Frankish Annals* because the purpose of summoning these councils, Tags or assemblies was to define or redefine for the following decades or years of Louis I the Pious’ rule. So *The Royal Frankish Annals* inform us:

The General Assembly in Frankfurt in the Year 822

“At Frankfurt he [Louis I the Pious] convoked a general assembly, and with the magnates whom he had ordered to appear there he took care, as usual, of all that pertained to the welfare of the eastern parts of his kingdom. At this assembly he received embassies and presents from all the East Slavs that is, Obodrites [Abodriti], Serbs, Wilzi, Bohemians, Moravians and Praedene-centi, and from the Avars living in Pannonia.”

The Royal Frankish Annals, year 822.

⁵⁷ For details of Ljudevit’s revolt and its consequences see: Charles R. Bowlus, *Franks, Moravians, and Magyars: The Struggle for the Middle Danube, 788–907* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 60–71.

This quote is fundamental for many reasons. In this document the Moravians are mentioned – in writing – for the first time in history. This is also the last time the Avars are mentioned as being present. However, of note is that between the Moravians and the Avars there is mysterious tribe of the Praedenecenti. In this context, these Praedenecenti could be the Nitrava Slavs, but also Slavs of Pannonia or Slavs from the Tisa region or all together. Romanian archaeologist Silviu Oța identified this tribe in 2014 with the Marehani,⁵⁸ about who wrote the Bavarian Geographer. But more about Marehani later.

First Time
for the
Question
of Nitrian
(Nitrava)
Slavs

This raises the question of the historicity of the direct ancestors of today's Slovaks. The Nitrava Slavs or Nitrians are not listed here, *expressis verbis*. This makes some of our colleagues think that the Nitrava Slavs did not exist as a political subject.⁵⁹ However, we need to approach this question in a broader context. Although it is true that they are not mentioned here they are introduced in *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantianians*.⁶⁰ This source refers not only their ruler, Pribina/Priwina but also his most important officers, soldiers, and closest people. Moreover, the Nitrava Slavs are also referred to in another later source namely the "*Gesta Hungarorum*" or the "*The Deeds of the Hungarians*", which was written by Anonymous Notary P.⁶¹ Although it comes from as late as the 13th century, its testimony is all the more lasting. Anyway, we know of the existence of a political structure, which copies what we have just mentioned, i.e. all the eastern fringe of the empire. Here it is necessary to underline that, on the one hand this structure consists of people close to the court of Charlemagne and his son Louis the II but also by the local dynasties, which are recognized by the emperor himself.

Louis the
German,
King of
Bavaria

This assembly in Frankfurt met five years after Louis I the Pious divided his kingdom among his sons. And his youngest son, Louis II, who will eventually be known as "the German" was proclaimed King of Bavaria. Back in 817, however, Bavaria most probably still wanted to split off so the presence of one of the sons of Louis I the Pious in this area was of key strategic significance. This political structure lasted for quite a long time. Extending this

⁵⁸ Silviu Oța, *The Mortuary Archaeology of Medieval Banat* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), 18.

⁵⁹ On the Nitra Slavs problematic, see: Ján Steinhübel, *The Nitrian Principality: The Beginnings of Medieval Slovakia*, trans. David McLean (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020), 111–14, 335, 338, 502.

⁶⁰ "The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantianians," trans. Eldevik, *passim*. Accessed: November 9, 2023. https://www.academia.edu/37973825/The_Conversion_of_the_Bavarians_and_Carinthians.docx.

⁶¹ See *Nytrienses Sclavi* in: *Gesta Hungarorum: Anonymus Deeds of the Hungarians*, ed., trans. and comment. Martyn Rady and László Veszprémy (Budapest/New York: CEU Press, 2010), 78 and 79.

structure a bit to the south, beyond what is written here it must be said that from the March of Friuli to the east and south you can find the Croatia and Dalmatia of that time which also fell within the competences of the empire. In this constellation of forces, two subjects will be essential for us. Namely Moravian and Nitrian Principalities.

Before we get there, however, let me summarize the political situation east of the borders of the Frankish Empire as described in *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians*. Often when quoting this text, especially the sixth chapter, I think that no one has and no one will ever be able to summarize and recapitulate in a few words the previous development in the former Pannonia before 870 better than the anonymous author of *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians*. He writes:

*The Short
Sum-
marization
of Political
Situation*

“In ancient times, the Romans possessed Lower Pannonia and the surrounding regions south of the Danube and established cities and fortresses there to defend it [the old Limes] as well as many other buildings which can still be seen to this day. [that is around 870] They [the Romans] also subjected the Goths and Gepids to their authority. [we know this was not quite so, but yes, they got under their influence] However, beginning in the Year of the Lord 377 the Huns, who dwelled in the waste lands north of the Danube emerged from their abodes and crossed the Danube expelling the Romans, along with the Goths and Gepids. A few of the Gepids still live there today. [this complements what Paul the Diacon sais about the Gepids] After the Huns [i.e. Avars] were expelled, then came the Slavs, who began to settle throughout those areas along the Danube.”

The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians, chapter 6.

This is the situation around 796–811 when the Avars were defeated. Interestingly, the Anonymous author also adds:

“...then came the Slavs, who began to settle...”.

*About How
the Slavs and
Bavarians
Settled in
Pannonia*

After that part of Pannonia then became part of the diocese of Salzburg. However, this is quite essential information and complements the following: the new Slavs arrived in Pannonia and a few Avars and Gepids remain there. To conclude – this area of the old Roman Pannonia was a conglomeration of different languages and cultures. Let us emphasize that also according to the testimony by this anonymous narration in the 9th century, Pannonia becomes predominantly Slavic. This fits the later terminology used in the writings of the Frankish Empire nad the Holy Seat which indistinctly replaced the words Hunia, Avaria, for Sclavinia and Pannonia to refer to this area.

*Some new
Synonymous
for Roman
Pannonia*

In the already quoted *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians* one can read:

“Bishop Arn, Virgil’s successor in the see of Salzburg, carried out his pastoral duties in a similar manner, ordaining priests and sending them into the Slavic lands, particularly into Carinthia and Lower Pannonia, to their duke and princes...”

The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians, chapter 6.

It can be assumed in the written sources of the 9th century the ancient Roman Pannonia became predominantly the land of Slavs.

A Controversy about the Proper Personal Names within the New Established Slavic Dynasties

We needed to mention this in order to get the same idea the scholars of the time had who to some extent dictated the ways how to control this territory. They had them, as we said, from Rome. And now let us get back to our starting point i.e. the distribution of the political forces in this part of the world. Now you see that there are two essential forces north of the Danube. One force is Moravia itself, which together with the Moravians appears around the year 822. Around the same time, Pribina appears as well, east of the Morava River. This is all pre-eminent because it is the Moimirids who rule Moravian Principality. The personal proper name *Moi-mir* tells us that this dynasty most probably derives from the very archaic Slavic dynasty that seems to be genetically or at least the internal logic of the composition of personal names connected to the Amal dynasty, i.e. the dynasty of the Goths. That is a dynasty that up to a certain degree has the legitimacy to rule.

However, Pribina and his son Kocel, or his other son Unzat do not have any “bi-thematic”; that means princely composite names. On the other hand “bi-thematical” names are typical also for other parts of later Slavic Europe for instance from the Trpimirović dynasty, i.e. the Croatian dynasty. A certain link between Moravia proper and Croatia was the historical territory of today’s Slavonia, from which the aforementioned Vojnomir came.

This could indicate that during those struggles that took place after 796 new centers of power took shape. Those centers of power seem to have had their own new dynasties. This was also distinctive for the Carantanian, i.e. Slovenian dynasty. This might have led also to the Moimirids, as an archaic dynasty to claim for themselves rights over the Avar Khaganate itself at some point.

Inner Heterogeneity of the Slavic Principalities around the Danube River

It can supposed that in the last period of its existence, the Avar Khaganate was already considered to be at least partially a Slavic monarchy. So, the question that bears asking here is to what extent the Moravian institutions and the Moravian principality were the successors of the institutions that were typical of the Avar Khaganate. As you know, contemporary historiography still makes a traditional mistake to consider all what we call Great Moravia to be something rather homogeneous. They think that those who

are in Moravian are also in Nitrian principality and those who are in Nitra are also in the *ultra Danuvium* region. This is a traditional mistake. This, indeed, does not correspond to historical reality. Take the Nitrian principality of Pribina, for example. It is, in fact, the successor of the Bavarian-Frankish marchlands systems rather than of the Avar Khaganate itself. We can claim it thanks to the fact that we know exactly what Pribina and his son Kocel were doing in the *ultra Danuvium* region – we know this from *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians*. Due to this knowledge we can deduce what Pribina probably did within his [Nitrian] principality. Here it is necessary to say that, unlike Moravia, which could be somehow based on the residual structures of the former Avar Khaganate. That means on the principles of blood and retinue which managed the area controlled by the Moravians.

However, Pribina acted quite differently. We can assume he begins to build up his own “castle system” according to the contemporary Frankish models. This castle system shall become a key category throughout the history of Central or East-Central Europe in the following centuries. In other words, Pribina starts to build up the political institutional organization of his country based not on a system of blood ties, but on a system of specialized officials. His *comites* were most likely mostly professional soldiers but conscientiously put at the head of some castle districts. These castle districts will eventually overlap with the ecclesiastical districts. But this is, of course, a different chapter we will approach when we talk about Pribina and Kocel’s *ultra Danuvium* Pannonian principality in more detail. At this point, it is enough to repeat that Pribina is the result of earlier Bavarian impact. For, the influence of Bavaria did not fit the borders of the former Duchy of Bavaria, but expanded far beyond them to the east. Proof of this is that Pribina’s wife is very likely to have been a high-ranking lady from the Bavarian family,⁶² most possible of the Agilolfings. Unfortunately, we do not know her name. We know that it is not by chance that the name of Pribina’s eldest son is Kocel. In the Frankish sources, it appears as “Kotzil” or “Chozil” a derivation of “Kotzilo” or “Chozilo” and this suffix “lo” is typical of the Agilolfings. When you compare it with the names of the Agilolfings i.e. Odilo or Tassilo, then Pribina’s son Chozilo must have been related to the ruling dynasty in Bavaria.⁶³ This would mean that Pribina can be

*The
Character
of Nitrian
principality*

⁶² Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 348.

⁶³ For more details see: Hans Dieter Tönsmeier, “[...] *in castro Chezilonis noviter Mosapurc vocato* [...]”: Die Beziehungen des pannonischen Fürsten Kocel zu Bayern und der Beginn der Ethnogenese der Slowaken,” *Zeitschrift für Bayerische Kirchengeschichte* 76 (2007): 37–77.

considered to be the result of what has already been said, i.e. the Bavarian influence that preceded the influence of the Franks in the Middle Danube region. Reading the sources and interpreting the names in this way is supported by the event that happened in 828 when the Archbishop of Salzburg, Adalram visited one of Pribina's properties in *Nitrava*:

"Archbishop Adalram once consecrated a church for him [Pribina] beyond the Danube on one of his properties known as Nitrava [Nitra]."

The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantians, chapter 11.

We know this thanks to *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantians*.

An Attempt of Explanation of Adalram's Visit in Nitrava in the Year 828

Adalram went to Pribina's property to consecrate a church. The year 828 is of great importance from many different points of view. Ljudevit's uprising was not the only warning the Frankish rule faced in Pannonia. The Bulgarians constituted a similar threat. In 827, the Bulgarians did not resist the temptation to occupy the Frankish Pannonia.

"The Bulgar[ian]s sent an army on ships up the Drave and harassed the Slavs living in Pannonia with fire and sword. They expelled the Slavic chieftains and appointed Bulgar governors instead."

Royal Frankish Annals, year 827.

Consequently a very significant military contingent was organized against this development which was led by Archbishop Adalram. However, instead of going directly to confront the Bulgarians in Pannonia, Adalram most possibly turns north of the Danube and went to *Nitrava*. The author of *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantians* describes this visit as having a formal character and gives as the formal reason the consecration of a church on Pribina's property in *Nitrava*. However, we need to understand this visit as a diplomatic issue. Its diplomatic aspect lies in the fact that in the case of warfare on the Middle Danube, the Frankish army needs the northern wing to be covered. Therefore, this visit is not only a formal and polite but, mainly, a delicate move.

Pribina is asked to join this military operation. By doing so, he could gain blood affiliation with the Bavarian elites. To create bonds of kinship could have been a deeper reason why Adalram visited Pribina in *Nitrava*. We also know what followed.

Armed Neutrality of Prince Pribina

Pribina did not join Adalram's Frankish troops which, in the end were successful in Pannonia. But neither did he take any action against him. He might have been ready to help Adalram if necessary. This is called armed neutrality. Although he was on the side of the Franks and the Bavarians, for reasons unknown Pribina took a neutral stance. Why can we be so sure

about this? Among other things, because we know how Pribina ended up – again from *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians*. He is forced to seek asylum and finds it with the Bulgarians. If Pribina had waged war against the Bulgarians previously they would have never granted him asylum. The fact that he did get it proves that he did not actively join Adalram's operation in 828.

This takes us to the core of the political events that led to the origin of what we – incorrectly but commonly – call Great Moravia. Just imagine young Louis the German in Regensburg amid the old Bavarian nobility and the Franks who had come with him and the local Slavic elites, all advocating for their partial interests. And then he learns that Pribina is not reliable, that he is not loyal. Because he failed to take part in that 828 expedition. And now, in the confrontation between Pribina's Nitrians and Moimir's Moravians, Louis the German decides to support Moimir.

The attack by the Moravians against Pribina's Nitrian principality in 833 must have had the blessing of the central power in Regensburg. By supporting Moimir, however, Louis II the German made a strategic mistake. As a matter of fact, Louis the German unconsciously disrupted the balance that existed among the different Slavic principalities along the fringes of the Frankish Empire – which had been shaped by Charlemagne and Louis I the Pious, his father – in favor of Moravia. In the following decades, after many vicissitudes and political problems in the final stage of the Frankish Peace under the reign of Svätopluk and Arnulf the Moravians would become the central confrontational force in the region. When he did so, however, Louis the German gave approval to the Moravians, either openly, or tacitly. In any case he was not yet aware of this. How did Pribina react to this whole matter?

He was not surprised by this attack. Pribina must have expected it. This was the reason why he started to build a system of fortifications around the Urban agglomeration of old Nitra and along the Váh River Valley itself up to the Moravian border. This fortification system was intended to hold back any potential Moravian troops.

As it turned out, nothing like this happened. Except for some minor skirmishes and confrontations that gave origin to some names of localities such as Pobodím, i.e. the place where victory was reached or Bojná, the place where a battle occurred; right next to Nitra. This Moravian-Frankish operation forced Pribina to leave with his closer retinue and court first to the Margrave of the Eastern March, Ratbod. He was then received by Louis the German who had Pribina formally baptized in Traismauer in the Church of St. Martin.

Misunderstanding as a Reason for Creation of Great Moravia

Did the Moravians Act with the Tacit Approval of Louis the German in the Annexation of Nitrian principality

“It was at this time that a certain Priwina [Pribina], who had been exiled by Moimar [Moimir], the duke of the Moravians, came to Ratbod. Ratbod right way presented him to our lord King Louis, by whose order he was instructed in the faith and baptized in the Church of St. Martin in a place called Traismauer, which was an estate (curtis) belonging to the see of Salzburg. After he had been commended to Ratbod, he stayed with him for a time. There then arose a quarrel between them, however. Priwina fled out of fear [of Ratbod] and entered the land of the Bulgarians with his [followers], including this son, Chozil [Kocel].”

The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians, chapter 10.

*A Small
Digression
or Some
Historical
Parallels*

In this context I cannot fail to draw some parallels with recent history. Descriptive historical moment reminds me for instance of the events of March 1939 when the Nazi Germany – The Empire (*The Third Reich*) supported the centralization tendencies of Czech elites in the 2nd Czecho-Slovak Republic, on the one hand and promised independence to Slovaks, on the other. In the end, the *The Third Reich* occupies The Czech lands/The Bohemian lands and declares the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and Slovakia becomes independent. To some extent, it also reminds us of the year 1992/1993 when two independent Czech and Slovak Republics appeared following the ancient imperial model called *divide et impera*.

In the meantime, Louis II the German soon realized he had made a mistake concerning Pribina. However, it took almost one whole decade for him to acknowledge this.

*Pribina’s
Anabasis*

After Pribina’s baptism – which may or may not have happened – perhaps the author just needed his conversion to legitimize Louis II the German’s previous ill steps, Pribina fled for the land of the Bulgarians who accepted him. Just imagine that 200–300 people come to visit you and you have to feed them, of course, and not just one year, but several. At the beginning this might be accepted with understanding but after some time it is just too long for the Bulgarians. Later on, Pribina goes to Ratimir, the prince of Savia, which was the territory between the rivers Drava and Sava, former Roman province Pannonia Savia:

“At that time, Louis, the King of the Bavarians, sent Ratbod along with a large army to destroy duke Ratimar. Doubting that he could defend himself, [Ratimar] turned to flight along with his men, and thereby escaped defeat. Priwina, however, did not submit and crossed the river Sava with his men, and was received there by count Salacho and [subsequently] reconciled with Ratbod.

The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians, chapter 10.

Afterwards Pribina goes to the count of Carniola Salacho, who is even further away to the South-West. Salacho is a high-ranking Frankish officer [Count of Carniola]. And Salacho arranges a meeting between Ratbod and Pribina

“When a convenient time presented itself, and at the request of a number of the king’s vassals, he [Louis the German] presented Priwina [Pribina] with a portion of Lower Pannonia as a benefice, near the river called Sala. He went and settled there, building a fortification in a forest in some marshland on the Sala River and gathering there people from the surrounding area, was much increased in that land.”

The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians, chapter 11.

After that, as we can read in *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians* Ratbod persuades Louis the German to have mercy on Pribina again.

In 840, seven years after Pribina’s anabasis began, the King gives Pribina the region of Lower Pannonia as benefice. There he begins his new economic, political, Christian and cultural activities we will be speaking about and which is basically a repetition of what Pribina and his ancestors had done in the Nitrian principality.

*The King
Louis II the
German
Gives
Pribina
the Region
of Lower
Pannonia as
Benefice*

Chapter 10

Pribina and the Origin of the Danube Type of Monarchy

Clarification
of the Topic

Some
Outline of
the General
Political
Conditions

To start this chapter we will be paying special attention to the political, economic and ecclesiastical structure of Pribina's Principality.

Let us begin by outlining the general political conditions that predominated in the area in that period. We need to understand that when Charlemagne fought his way to the Carpathians, another phase of the Frankish Peace started. For the Frankish presence in our territory becomes very intense and strong. The document known as the *Ordinatio Imperii* tells us that young Louis who would eventually become known as "the German", is given the eastern part of the Frankish Empire. So, Louis the German gets this originally Bavarian environment in which several influences combine.

On the one hand, there are the Franks who arrived with Charlemagne. At that time, the Franks were kind of the heirs of Rome. At the same time, there are the Bavarians, who also feel somewhat descendants of the Roman world, mainly due to their Catholic religion. But also – and this is of particular importance – there are the Slavs. The idea that prevailed in the 19th century, according to which there was a clear dividing line between a homogeneous German and a homogeneous Slavic world, is far from being the case. This territory, which will go down into history as the East Frankish Empire/East-Frankish Kingdom, also served as a buffer zone for other political forces located to the southeast and, especially, to the south. One of these forces has been discussed here several times. It is the Bulgarian Khanate. Its importance resides in the fact that not only Byzantium but also the Roman Papacy itself, are competing against each other to get the favor of the Bulgarian Khanate. Rome was intensely striving to persuade Bulgarian rulers to restore its sovereignty over ancient Illyria which was considered an integral part of the Roman Patriarchate.⁶⁴

The Treaty
of Verdun

The term, *Illyria* or *Illyricum*, is of key importance and is crucial for us to understand what is about to happen in the upcoming period, when the term *Sclavinia* starts to be used instead of *Illyria*. But now we need to get back to our geopolitical space. Another document or, rather, another political act,

⁶⁴ Francis Dvornik, *The Photian Schism: History and Legend* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), chapter IV: Nicholas, Photius and Boris, 91–131.

which determined the development east of the East Frankish border is The Treaty of Verdun, that divided the Carolingian Empire among the sons of Louis I the Pious. It leaves the eastern part – as a kingdom of its own – to Louis the German. This already constitutes a formal-legal shift by itself. Louis II the German starts to get acquainted with that new environment. He will not always take the “right” side – as in the case of Pribina and Moimir I. But back in 843 the situation was still completely different.

Louis II the German and his people take matters into their own hands. And this is key, as they begin to organize the territory to their east, to fit their own needs. A milestone in this respect is January 845 when 14 Czech princes are baptized. The ruler of the Obodrites, Gostimil had already lost his life when Louis II the German, raided against his lands. Therefore, it was just a matter of time before Louis would replace some key figures with his own people. The *Annals of Fulda*⁶⁵ inform us that this happened in 846:

*Impact of
The Treaty
of Verdun*

“He [Louis the German] set off around the middle of August with an army against the Moravian Slavs who were planning to defect. There he arranged and settled matters as he wished, and set Rastiz, a nephew of Moimar, as dux over them. From there he returned through the lands of the Bohemians with great difficulty and serious loss to his army.”

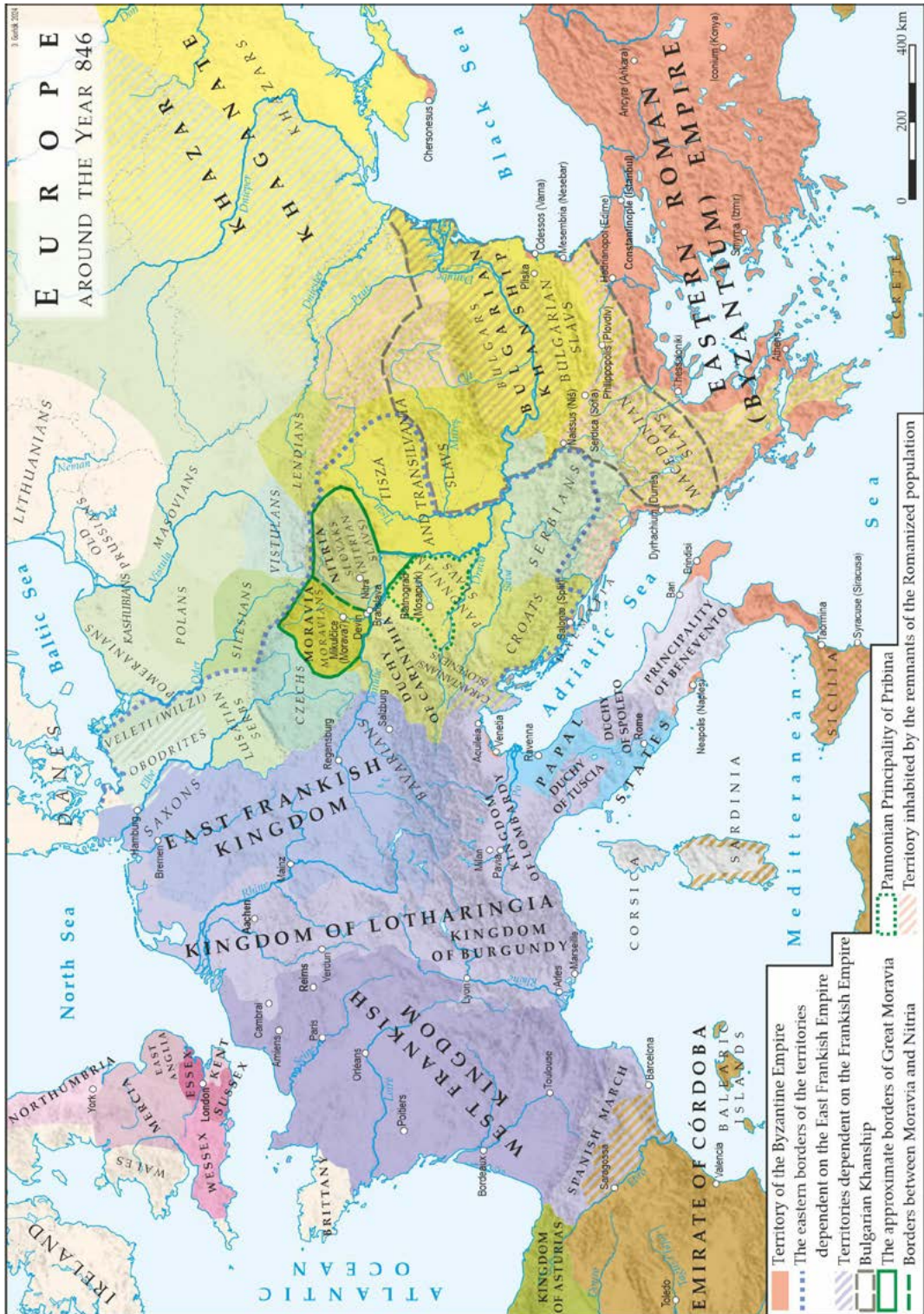
The Annals of Fulda, year 846.

This document describes in detail how Louis the German organized the territories to his east. He did so by assigning people loyal to him and willing to exercise his power. Surprisingly, we can see that Rastislav is one of them. This document clearly proves that Rastislav is, indeed, Louis the German’s man. We will elaborate on this topic when we deal with Rastislav. For now, though, we need to move south from what we know as Great Moravia, which basically is the former Moravian and Nitrian principality principalities.

This finally brings us to Pribina. Pribina cannot stay out of all these processes we have just mentioned. What Louis II the German will do with Pribina has to do with what he will do with Pribina’s loyal relatives in Salzburg, Regensburg and Bavaria. After the historically, culturally and religiously burdened Pannonia became his benefice Pribina’s position obviously improved significantly. In 848, in the presence of Louis the German, i.e. the king himself, of his older sons Carloman and Louis the Younger in the presence of the archbishop of Bavaria Liupram and his other suffragans in the presence of the most prominent prefects of the East Frankish Empire

*Pribina
Receives
Pannonia
into
Hereditary
Possession*

⁶⁵ *The Annals of Fulda: Ninth-Century History*, vol. II, trans and ed. Timothy Reuter (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1992), 25.



Map no. 8.

administrators, Comes and Counts of the different parts of the East Frankish Empire Pribina receive Pannonia into hereditary property. The anonymous author of the *Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians* described this extraordinary act as follows:

“It came to the notice of the most pious King Louis [II German] that Priwina [Pribina] had been well disposed towards him and the service of God. After a number of his fideles had frequently advised him to do so, he granted [to Pribina] as property everything that he had previously held in benefice, with the exception of those things which were seen to pertain to the episcopate of the church of Salzburg, namely to Peter, the prince of the Apostles, and to the Blessed Rupert, where his body rests, and where then and up to the present time the venerable rector archbishop Liupram is known to preside. In this way, our lord king established the status of the properties which the bishop had acquired in those places, and which in the future might increase with God’s favor, so that they might be perpetually preserved for that place of those saints [viz. Salzburg] free of contradiction by any man and undiminished by any legal judgment. The following [people] were present: archbishop Liupram, bishop Erchanbert, bishop Erchanfrid, bishop Hartwig, Carloman, Louis, Earnust, Ratpot [Ratpod], Werinher, Pabo, Fritilo, Tacholf, Deotrih, Waninc, Gerolt, Liutolt, Deotheri, Wolfregi, Iezi, Egilolf, Puopo, Adalperht, Megingoz, the other Adalberht, Odalrih, Pernger, and Managolt. Enacted publically in Regensburg in the Year of the Lord 848, in the 11th indiction, on the 12th of October (III Ides October).”

The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians, chapter 12.

This is something we really need to finally understand, something we need to engrave in our system of knowledge. For the Babenbergs, for example, i.e. the holders of the Austrian lands only got a similar privilege from the Holy Roman Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa in the 12th century! Of course, such a privilege was not for free. We have already indicated why Pribina got it. Because Louis the German, the sovereign ruler of the East Frankish Empire wanted to neutralize the potential opposition from the Bavarians and Slavs around him. This is the key issue we need to understand. Louis the German was building his external system. However, we need to understand – and this has to be underlined again and again – that Pribina turned against his deeply hated opponent Rastislav. How do we know that? *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians* clearly speaks of the animosity and intolerance between these two figures to the extent that it reports the death of Pribina around 860 from the hands of the Moravians. This in itself does not indicate just some random relationships. It clearly

shows that the essential role of Pribina and his people was to prevent any further potential expansion of the Moimirids. Another argument in favor of the cited donation was Pribina's good relations with the Bulgarians and other Slavic and non-Slavic elites south of the Danube river and north of the Adriatic Sea.

I almost forgot to underline that when Pribina took possession of Pannonia in the presence of the king and his sons, the entire Bavarian episcopate and the different prefects, Ratbod, the Count of the Eastern March, was also present.

Organiza-
tion of the
Frankish
Plaga
orientalis

Of course, Louis the German is clearly pursuing his own interests. By getting the Pribinas and the Moimirids against each other, an animosity that had been obvious from 830–833 the elites of the East Frankish Empire are actually behaving like the Romans: The Romans formed a system of *foederati* at their borders. These *foederati* provided protection from the outside against potential external enemies such as the Bulgarians in the case of Pribina and his dynasty. On the other hand, continuous disputes between these *foederati* prevented them from turning against the East Frankish Empire itself. In fact, Louis the German and his people did the same the Roman rulers had done before them, and the same power in the world still does today. This is why Pribina was promoted so unexpectedly. We should not forget that by receiving Pannonia, Pribina became the most important of all the Danube Slavs.⁶⁶

Once more
Back to
the Slavic-
Bavarian
Matrimonial
Relations

Pribina married an unknown lady, probably from the Agilolfing dynasty. Only the historical figure of Svätopluk would eventually reach a comparable status among the the Danubian Slavs. Svätopluk married a Carolingian. We have already outlined this model in a previous and more theoretical lecture. Indeed, marriage, matrimony, linking up dynasties, is one of the best ways how to integrate a territory you want to dominate.

Let us not forget that the Principality of Lower Pannonia, had split from the original Carantania. We have already indicated the techniques the East Frankish Empire used to incorporate the newly acquired Carantania into the conquered countries and make it an integral part of this area. The techniques used in Pribina's Principality of Lower Pannonia are similar, if not analogous. We have discussed several times the instruments of mental incorporation of new territories.

⁶⁶ For a deeper insight into this issue, see: Herwig Wolfram, *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum: Das Weißbuch der Salzburger Kirche über die erfolgreiche Mission in Karantänien und Pannonien mit Zusätzen und Ergänzungen*, ed., trans. and comment. Herwig Wolfram, the 2nd ed. (Ljubljana: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, 2012), 76 and 77, also the commentary on p. 194.

It is the former Roman Empire itself and its communication nodes, its power structure – of which Keszthely or Kostolec is a textbook example – which still remains functional after centuries. As *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantians* writes: “...when the Avars began to disappear and the Slavs began to arrive...” ...and also the Bavarians appeared, this Roman heritage was still very much alive. So, we have Roman culture on the one hand and the remains of the Avar Khaganate or its structures on the other, and we also have the customary Slavic and Bavarian laws and the Frankish law. A combination of different tribes and different legal systems makes the Principality of Lower Pannonia itself a kind of laboratory. And I need to underline this again and again: It was not in Moravia, but most probably in Nitrian principality especially in the new Nitra, i.e. in Transdanubian or Pannonian principality of Pribina and Kocel that the new, original political, economic and religious structure emerged. This structure is not what we know from the Frankish Empire or from its Western part – feudalism. Neither is it a structure alien to feudalism as such.

*The
Principality
of Lower
Pannonia
as a Type of
Laboratory*

In the middle of this whole system stands Pribina and his dynasty. At this point, we should also speak about the people around Pribina. We know that very well thanks to *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantians*:

*Characteristic
Feature
of the
Structure of the
Pribina's
Principality in
Lower
Pannonia*

“Immediately after he [Pribina] had built the fortification, he constructed within it a church, which archbishop Liupram (...) consecrated in honor of the holy mother of God, Mary [in the year 850]. Those present were: Chozil [Kocel], Unzat Chotemir, Liutemir, Zcurben, Siliz, Wlkina, Witemir, Trebiz, Brisnuz, Zuemin, Zeska, Crimisin, Goimer, Zistilo, Amalrich, Altwart, Wellehelm, Frideperht, Scrot, Gunther, another Gunther, Arfrid, Nidrih, Isanpero, Rato, Diotrih, Madalperht, Engilhast, Waltker, and Deotpald.”

The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantians, chapter 11.

As you can see, there are have West Slavic, South Slavic and Bavarian names. But we also have here the names of the different nobles and bi-tematic Slavic princely names. As you remember in the Carantanian principality, was a similar situation. It will be the leitmotif of future political disputes in this area. Namely the dispute between legitimacy and idoneity (suitability), between those who are the legitimate heirs and those who are best suited. Pribina seems to have gained sovereign power over the original dynasty. This original dynasty somehow degraded, as it happened other times. Take the Carolingians and the Merovingians, for example. The Carolingians replaced the Merovingians and no one dwells on that today.

*About the
Retinue that
Surrounded
Pribina*

Now let us concern the people around Pribina. We know who they were and what their structure looked like in real life. We know that Blatnograd itself, Mosapurc, was located in today's *Varsiget* near Zalavár. Today it is near Lake Balaton, but at that time it was in the lake. *Varsiget* means "Castle Island". At that time the level of Lake Balaton was slightly higher than today. It must have been at least two meters deeper. So, what today is part of the mainland in the south of the lake at that time was actually an island in the middle of the lake. That is why we also call this place Castle Island. And a power center was established there. It was several hectares big and had its own inner logic. The first church that was consecrated here, the very first one after Pribina took possession of Transdanubia, the church consecrated to St. John the Baptist. John the Baptist can usually be found where intense missionary activity takes place.

*The
Meaning of
the Building
of the
Church of
St. Hadrian:
Interpretive
Possibilities*

The second church, from 850, is the one we have already mentioned which the Archbishop of Salzburg consecrated to the Virgin Mary. That church is located on the acropolis of this island. This church is actually the second proprietary church of the Pribinas. It is the place where Pribina built his palace and where the Pribinas would be buried and where they would be introduced into their hereditary rank. There is yet another church built in the castle grounds. It is dedicated to the holy martyr Hadrian. For most of us, St. Hadrian has no special meaning at all. So, let's start by describing what the church actually looked like. It is approximately 53 meters long and 25 meters wide. The shrine is surrounded by the so-called ambulatory, i.e. a space where you can walk freely around the sanctuary. It also had premises for pilgrims as it is a pilgrimage church. It is also the largest structure we know from that time. In fact, they had nothing that big in Saxony or Bavaria itself. But as our Hungarian colleague Béla Zsolt Sakács points out, you can find some analogies far away in the Western Frankish Empire.⁶⁷ Now, who was that martyr St. Hadrian?

Besides being a popular name – we have Popes going by this name – e.g. Hadrian II – of whom we will certainly be talking here – this martyr was a soldier, an officer of the VIth Roman Legion, which was named by Hercules. This clearly and precisely shows us the connection and the intense or deliberate ecclesiastical policy of those people who are beginning to shape the Bavarians in this territory, the Slavs, those former or remaining Romans, and probably any remaining Avars into a new community. The form this community will take depends mainly on the will of Pribina himself and his

⁶⁷ Béla Zsolt Szakács, "Ambulatory at Zalavár," *Hortus Artium Medievalium* 15 (2009): 161–70.

son Kocel, but also – and this must be underlined again – on the archbishops of Salzburg, who were in charge of this territory.

To sum it up. Within a few hectares, we have the family church of the Pribinas consecrated to the Virgin Mary. Churches would be consecrated to Virgin Mary from the times of Byzantium through other central dynasties in Central Europe. Then we have the Church of St. Hadrian as well as the Church of John the Baptist. But this is far from being everything. In the immediate vicinity of Blatnograd, there are other fortified power centers with their own religious buildings. Neither must we forget that in nearby Keszthely there still remain some Roman buildings.

The old churches have been adapted to the new cultural conditions of the Salzburg-Pribina mission. *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians* speaks of 31 churches that were either rebuilt or completely newly built and were consecrated by the Archbishop of Salzburg – the competent authority for this territory.

Another important fact is that the Church of St. Hadrian was also what we would later eventually call a Chapter. A Chapter is a place where pupils are trained to carry out further missionary work. Most probably they were future priests ordained by the Archbishop of Salzburg. This is pre-eminent, because this same structure can be found in later medieval cities such as Bratislava, Olomouc, Prague, Cracow and, of course, Spiš (*Scepus/Zips/Szépes*). So we have a Castle Hill, we also have ecclesiastical center of power, a Chapter, and we have a town of craftsmen with surrounding supporting villages and with its own churches. We need to understand the network of churches we are talking about whose number is 31–31 known ones – some of which we can exactly determine: Pécs (Päfkostolie), Ptuj, Veszprém (Vesprím), etc. Each of those churches corresponds to 31 centers.

31 centers – at least – with soldiers directly subject to Pribina’s power. Just try to picture that. The closer the ruler was, the more notorious people would be around him. So that any moment a serious political situation would appear, i.e. war, he needed to be able to rely on the people around him and in those castles. This is the beginning of what will eventually be known as the *Castle System*.⁶⁸ And we see that this Castle System does not originate in Moravia. In fact, Moravia still shows elements more typical of the previous traditional development based on kinship and blood which is perhaps much closer to the original Avar Khaganate, than to this relatively modern system of managing things by means of your own people, namely, soldiers, loyal

*The Church
Consecrated
to the Virgin
Mary*

*Evaluation
of the Sig-
nificance of
the Pribina’s
Religious
Activities*

*Blatnograd
(Mosapurc)
as a Model
of Future
Power
Centers of
East-Central
Europe*

⁶⁸ See in this context the still unsurpassed work: Erik Fügedi, *Castle and Society in Medieval Hungary (1000–1437)*, trans. János M. Bak. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986), chapter 1 “At the Beginning of the Kingdom”: 15–49.

heroes, and victors – all those people who could be deployed at those castles by Pribina, and Kocel after him. These castles are connected by roads, many of which were built by the Romans, through which he could carry out all administration. These are not the blood ties we can suppose from Moravia.⁶⁹

And this new system emerges, as it has already been suggested, as the result of different cultural influences. Clearly, it is not a matter of the Frankish Empire, as it would seem at first glance, although some Frankish administration elements can be seen here whether in building of the ecclesiastical or in the political structure. There are also some elements of the ancient Roman Empire, which have remained here and which can still be seen. And mentally we are still in the Avar-Slavic, or rather Slavic-Avar world. That is why the leaders of the different castle districts are called *župani* or *špáni*. The etymology of this word is still disputable, though. Many say it has an Avar origin. In any case, it was the Slavs who brought over this term to the new political structures, i.e. into the new century. And this system was applied to the so-called *Gau* System known from the eastern part of Frankish Empire or in the equivalent terminology of the Western Frankish Empire *pagus* or “Carolingian shire”.⁷⁰ In short, a completely new economical, political and cultural model, originated on this Castle Island for the very first time. There is indisputable evidence in contemporary sources, archaeology and linguistics to prove this beyond doubt. This model will have different names and will be the foundation on which the Czech domain was created, or rather the domain of the Premyslids – but also that of the Piasts and that of the Rurikids. This model will prove to be very viable and effective.⁷¹ And this is one last thing I want to state clearly here: We are used to hearing that Moravia or Bohemia saw the beginning of what is now called the Central European type of state, the Danube monarchy or the patrimonial type of state, etc. I am not very inclined to call it a state form. But I am inclined to say that it is an economical, political, administrative, cultural, and religious model that originated right within Pribina and Kocel’s court i.e. on the island we have been talking about, which today is called *Varsiget* although it is now located on the mainland.

⁶⁹ See controversial article: Jiří Macháček, “Disputes over Great Moravia: Chiefdom or State? the Morava or the Tisza River?” *Early Medieval Europe* 17, no. 3 (2009): 248–67.

⁷⁰ See: Charles West, *Reframing the Feudal Revolution*, chapter: “From Pagus to Comitatus”.

⁷¹ Macháček, “Disputes over Great Moravia: Chiefdom or State?”, 248–67.

Chapter 11

Prince Rastislav – Saint or Traitor?

At this point we will focus our attention on Prince Rastislav, a monarch of the Moimirids lineage. This monarch ascended the throne in 846 thanks to the will of Louis the German. He replaced his uncle, Moimir, at the central Moravian princely throne. The very fact that he was appointed to this office is significant in itself for it contains two political legal lines: First, he was a member of the Moimirid lineage, i.e. chosen by the Moravians themselves. Secondly, he was chosen and accepted by the East Frankish monarch. This model of the people's own choice and acceptance by an external power is essential for the election of other Great Moravian rulers and subsequently, for example, of the Czech princes.

*Clarification
of the Topic*

The very name Rastislav speaks for everything. It includes two themes "Rasti = Growth" and "Slav = Glory", i.e. "growing glory." We also find a similar semantic form in the names of later members of the Premyslids. The most famous one is Boleslas, in Slavic Boleslav, composed from "Bole (je) = More" and "Slav", i.e. "more glory" ("growing glory"). Or take another dynastic name of Premyslids – Vaclav (Wenceslas) which is composed of parts "Vac (Viac) = more" and "Slav", i.e. the same, again more glory, "growing glory". As one can see, these names are semantically very close in their content. We will later discuss the implications this might have.

*About the
Proper
Personal
Name
Rastislav*

Now, however, let us return to Rastislav himself and his rule. We know practically nothing about him before 846. Given the following developments of the political formation, which is often – though incorrectly – called Great Moravia, we know that there was a kind of dual principle. This means that there was the Moravian Principality and also the Nitrian principality. A similar situation can be found later between Bohemia itself and Moravian principality, but also in our country, e.g. *Cisdanubia* (Principality of Nitria) and *Transdanubia* (Pannonian principality). In Old Rus' we find Kiev Principality and Novgorod Principality. That is a dual form of an early monarchy. Usually, the future successor is kept hidden or being prepared to rule in the seemingly lesser part of the country. Therefore, Rastislav might have been Prince of Nitria until Louis the German appointed him to the central Moravian princely throne.

*About the
Prince
Rastislav
himself*

But why did Louis II the German actually choose Rastislav rather than someone else? Choosing a ruler in a politically critical area cannot be a matter of chance. So, we need to look into the reasons why the East Frankish

ruler took that decision. In my opinion, Rastislav was one of those we used to call “scholarship recipients” in one of the previous chapters. This means that he grew up or was kept “hostage” at a school, say in Regensburg, where he could grow up among the local elite. This would also explain the later relatively extensive contacts Rastislav had – we have no idea where from. Including very close ties with the sons of Louis the German himself.

*What is the
Meaningful
Value of
Names like
Moravce and
Moravany*

Returning to Rastislav’s work on the Nitrian throne, a number of interesting questions also arise. These questions usually revolve around what we know. We do not know this from written sources, though, but rather thanks to toponymy. Toponymy tells us that the central strongholds of local power were somewhere there. In terms of development, these preceded the rule of Rastislav and Svätopluk in Nitra. Not far from Nitra, let us say about 30 km away, you can find settlements whose names bear the word “Moravia”. Take Moravany nad Váhom, near Piešťany, but also near Nitra, on the other side of the hill. Beyond Nitra there is Zlaté Moravce. You also have Hon-tianske Moravce.

Assuming that the Pilis Mountains were part of Nitrian principality you also have Pilišské Moravany (today’s Pilismarót), as well as Nagymaros, i.e. Veľké (Great) Moravany. Interestingly, there is a Moravany in Zemplín, too. Localities motivated by words “Moravia” and/or “Moravians” can be found on the territory of Transylvania (today’s Romania), in Transdanubia (today’s Hungary), but also in Lesser Poland.

*The
Information
of the
Bavarian
Geographer,
about the
Double
Moravians*

This could also be confirmed by the information from *The Description of Cities and Lands on the North Bank of the Danube* by the Bavarian Geographer,⁷² about the double Moravians:

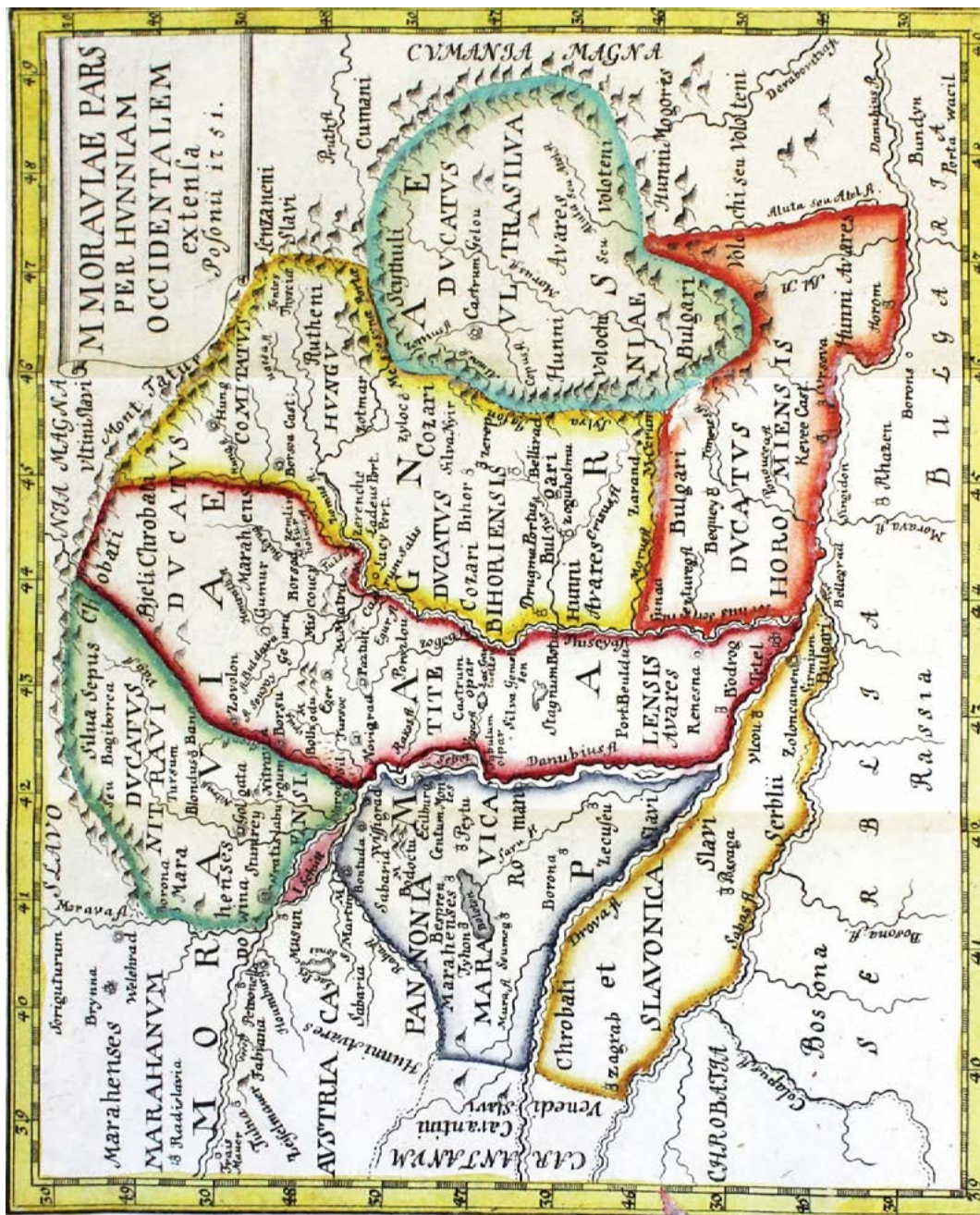
“The Bohemians [Becheimare] have 15 cities. The Moravians [Marharii] have 11 cities. The country of the Bulgars [Uulgarii] is immeasurably large and has 5 cities, because for the vast majority of them it is not the custom to have cities. There is a people called Moravians [Merehani] who have 30 cities.”

Bavarian Geographer: *Description of Cities and Lands on the North Bank of the Danube*, part 1.

There are many conflicting explanations of this composite text. I will favor the one that attributes the difference between the number of Marehari and Marehani castles to a later redaction of the original text. The original

⁷² English translation: Bavarian Geographer, “Description of Cities and Lands on the North Bank of the Danube,” ed. Erwin Herrmann, in *Slawisch-germanische Beziehungen im südostdeutschen Raum* (Munich: R. Lerche, 1965): 220–21, December 14, 2023, <https://salutemundo.wordpress.com/2021/07/06/the-bavarian-geographer-and-the-cities-of-the-east>.

Mareharia, or Moravia itself who were supposed to have 11 castles, and the second Marehania, who were already supposed to have 30 castles. The second information is explained by a later update of the original and older one from the time when the nascent East Franconian Empire needed to know



Map no. 9: *The Pannonian Basin in the middle of the 9th century according to the contemporary ideas of Slovak geographer and historian Ján Tomka Sásky (Bratislava/Posonium, 1751).*

the strength and number of fortifications of its immediate neighbors. That means it reflects a later situation that arose after the eastward expansion of the Moravians into the Nitrian principality and may be related to the aforementioned activities of Rastislav, but also of his nephew Svätopluk. It is not easy to understand contemporary reports. That is why I will offer above a map, which was made already in 1751 by the historian and geographer Ján Tomka Sásky (Johannes Tomka Szászky). Although it is in Latin, it can serve for longer reflection and inspiration in the interpretation of other historical contexts.

All this reminds us that Rastislav, whether as the Grand Prince of Moravia or as the Prince of Nitria, was not inactive at all, but was also building his political-administrative organization following a very carefully considered and planned policy. And the troops deployed there say that the Moravians, this military elite, actually controlled all former strategic points that were important for the management of the local structure of the Moravians. If you want to picture it as in a movie, imagine that famous scene from *Braveheart*. The English built a garrison in Scotland in order to control it. A strategic point somewhere faraway in Scotland. And the revolt against the English actually begins with a revolt against that local garrison. This is perhaps all one can say about Rastislav's earlier activity.

Prince Rastislav's Activity on the Central Throne of the Moravians in Moravia Proper. Moving on to his later work in Moravia, which shows a slightly different settlement, political, and religious arrangement to Nitrian principality; it must be said that Rastislav took a step backwards in terms of development. He returned to that traditional, kinship-based way of managing public affairs. Rastislav, however, was not inactive in Moravia either. Starting at Devín Castle to the north, he began – or continued – building large fortresses whose purpose was not only to fend (defend) against the surrounding power but also to create some kind of suburban settlement. These settlements are, of course, the today very well-known Mikulčice, Pohansko, Uherské Hradiště to some extent, Olomouc and on the river Dyje Znojmo as well as. These strongholds proved to be useful at the very moment he who originally introduced Rastislav to his office, i.e. Louis the German, realized that Rastislav – just like Moimir I before him – was getting out of control. Between 846 and 855 there were nine quiet and calm years, during which Rastislav lived in peace. This was what was expected of him.

Rastislav's Foreign Alliances in Disputes with the East Franconian Empire. But he was also preparing for war. Now, the fact that he was preparing for war means that Rastislav wanted to elevate the power of his dynasty, and the power of his elite, the Moravians, over the surrounding powers. He wanted to upgrade his local regional political force into a supra-regional power. To achieve this, Rastislav was willing to associate with virtually

anyone who would weaken the power of his “benefactor”, Louis the German. First of all and quite logically, these were the close dynasties of the surrounding Slavic tribes. We know that in 855, Louis the German pulled out against him. But he bumped into a great fortress – perhaps Mikulčice or Devín – and had to retreat, although plundering. This showed that Rastislav and his Moravians were not only capable of stopping such an attack by the East Frankish Empire, but to hit back as well. This meant plundering the territories from which the expansion had come. This is the first phase of Rastislav’s foreign policy. It is relatively well known thanks to *The Royal Frankish Annals*. In the second half of the 850s, Rastislav was building an alliance with the surrounding dynasties of Slavic princes. Starting with the Obodrites, through the Lusatian Serbs and Czechs, to Moravia itself. Of course, Louis the German did not like this. So he needed to pacify these coalitions, led by Rastislav, from the very beginning. As the sources tell us in detail, in 857 Rastislav was subjugated. Actually, not Rastislav, but rather his allies were suppressed.

A certain prince Slavitech was defeated. Slavitech is the son of Prince Vis-trach, who was the ruler in Bohemia at that time. Slavitech actually saved himself by getting asylum from Rastislav. And his brother, who was then the Lusatian-Serbian prince Čestibor was appointed ruler of the Czechs. Why have I stopped at this point? Because in this moment our Czech colleagues see the first signs of the Czech-Moravian alliance. Some of them even claim that Slavitech was a Premyslid. I am not so sure about that hypothesis, though. Among other things due to that the bi-thematic name Slavitech contains that part “tech”, which we know from the name “Vojtech” and Vojtech was the son of Slavnik. So, we do not know whether he was a member of the Premyslid or of the Slavnik dynasty. We know that the dispute between the Slavniks and the Premyslids eventually ended up with the extermination of the Slavniks in 995. But we are a little ahead of our whole story.

Let us go back to the Czech-Moravian alliance. This takes us to that story of a wedding caravan led by the Czechs to Moravia, which was attacked by the Franks, who made a huge profit from it. In the end, however, the bride and the caravan were saved and arrived in Moravia. From this, František Palacký deduced – and it is not clear how he came to that conclusion – that in that caravan was Svätožizna, whom we know from the *Gospel of Cividale*. This *Gospel* lists her as being with Svätopluk.⁷³ Based on this, Palacký

*Once more
about the
Proper
Personal
Names of
the Slavic
Dynasties*

*Back to
the Czech-
Moravian
Alliance*

⁷³ See fol. 4’ in the form: szuentiepulc. szuentezizna predezlaus.

deduced that Czech Svätožizna and Moravian Svätopluk united in marriage and since then the Czechs and the Moravians are side by side to this day. Of course, there is no such thing in the sources. However, Palacký's wish is still actively supported after many decades, especially at present.

*Southern
Coalition
Formed by
Rastislav*

Let me now return to another coalition formed by Rastislav. It is probably the most dangerous one Rastislav ever created or at least participated in. I have given this coalition the working name of "Southern Coalition", because he is not working with the northern wing of his acquaintances and friends, but with the southern one. So, he formed this coalition with the Duke of Carinthia, Carloman, the eldest son and successor of Louis the German who had replaced Ratbod as the administrator of the Eastern March. We also know that Ratbod was in a good connection with Rastislav. But strangely enough, the third member of that coalition were the Bulgarians. Imagine that in the upper Tisa valley, Rastislav's Empire comes into direct contact with Bulgaria. Bulgaria also had a border with the East Frankish Empire in present-day Slavonia (Croatia). So, this whole coalition was more than dangerous for Louis the German. And Louis the German decided to solve it as follows:

"Meanwhile the King [Louis the German] had collected an army, ostensibly to subdue Rastiz, the dux of the Moravian Slavs, with the help of the Bulgarians who were said to be coming from the east. In fact he moved against the Carinthians to overcome his son Carloman indeed would have defended himself up to now if he had not been taken unawares by the treachery of Gudanchar his count."

The Annals of Fulda, year 863.

And in this way Gudanchar earned the dignity of a prefect. the result is clear: Louis II the German maintained his sovereign government, pacified his son and in this way he was free to fight Rastislav. This fight took place and is well known because of its famous location. It is not far from modern Bratislava, just a few kilometers away, at Devín (*Dowina*) castle. There, in 863, Louis the German besieged Rastislav with all his power at that unspeakable fortress. the siege took longer than expected, so both sides were interested in a peaceful settlement. And, once again, something unusual happened.

"King Louis crossed the Danube in the month of August with a great army and besieged Rastiz in a certain city, which in the language of that people is called Dowina [Devín]. Rastiz did not dare to meet the armies of the king in battle, and saw that there was nowhere to which he could flee; of necessity he

was forced to give hostages, as many and as high-ranking as the king ordered. Moreover, he swore an oath with all his leading men that he would keep fealty to the king for the rest of his life, although he did not observe the oath at all."

The Annals of Fulda, year 864.

The traitor Rastislav swears allegiance to Louis II the German and, surprisingly, East-Frankish king forgives him one more time. In the future Louis would regret this decision; for this was not the last time that his opponent or perhaps even friend – depending on how Louis II the German saw him – rose against him. The next time Rastislav revolted against Louis the German, he allied with Louis the Youngers' second son, who, coincidentally, is also called Louis. But Louis the German manages to suppress this revolt again. And, that was enough, in the late 860's, Louis II decided to definitively put an end to Rastislav. He attacks him from three traditional fronts. The first one is from the side of the Lusatian Serbs – Bohemians. The second one from the Danube to Moravia. And the third is even further south, from the Duchy of Carantania, i.e. from Pannonia to Nitria, which he entrusted to his closer aides.

Curiously, Louis II the German put Carloman in charge of this southern front. And this is where Svätopluk enters the scene. Svätopluk and his *regnum*. The literal translation of this Latin word is *kingdom*. But a semantically closer meaning is probably *benefice* or *principality*. In 869, Svätopluk concluded a separate peace with Carloman. This proves that Moravia really had a dual character. Because, if Svätopluk had not had these competencies, probably he would not have been able to use them. He had them. Even more, Svätopluk could rely on a different and more effective type of country administration than Rastislav.

The first Mention concerning Svätopluk

Prince Rastislav was not very happy about this. So, although both sides had reached peace, Rastislav decided to deal with Svätopluk. And this is – I would say – a nice story *The Royal Frankish Annals* have preserved for us. Again, it can be described as being a delightful piece of screenplay. Namely, Rastislav invites Svätopluk over to his place for a feast:

The Controversy between Prince Rastislav and his Nephew – Prince Svätopluk

"Zwentibald, Rastiz's nephew, took thought for his own interests, and commended himself and the kingdom he held to Carloman. Rastiz [Rastislav] was furious at this and laid ambushes in secret for his nephew; he plotted to strangle him at a banquet (...) But by the grace of God he [Svätopluk] was freed from the peril of death. For before those who were to kill him had entered the house, he was warned by one who knew of the plot, and set out as if to go hawking, and so evaded the ambush laid for him. Rastiz saw that his plot was

revealed and followed after his nephew with soldiers to capture him. But by the just judgement of God he was caught in the snare he had set, for he was captured by his nephew, bound and brought to Carloman."

The Annals of Fulda, year 870.

Continuation of the Rastislav's Story

This anecdote would deserve to be adapted into a book or a film. It is, indeed, almost a knightly story, of a later age. But let us look away from it now. Rastislav ended up in prison in Regensburg where Louis II German had taken him to be judged. The *Annals of Fulda* refers to this event:

"Shortly afterwards he [Louis II German] left there and set out around November 1 for Bavaria, where he held a meeting with his men. He ordered Rastiz [Rastislav] to be brought before him bound with a heavy chain. Rastiz was condemned, by the judgement of the Franks and Bavarians and Slavs who had come there from various places to bring gifts to the king, to death; but the king only ordered his eyes to be put out."

The Annals of Fulda, year 870.

Interestingly – and this dual aspect of our history is often forgotten – namely the Germans vs. the Slavs. Not only the Bavarians and the Franks judged him. The Slavs themselves also did it. Those faithful to Louis II the German sentenced Rastislav to the death penalty. And for the third time, Louis the German actually spares Rastislav's life and has him blinded and imprisoned – I suppose – in a monastery instead. Strange enough, Svätopluk is also imprisoned. So, Rastislav finds himself in the same situation Tasilo and Desiderius had been before. Thus, this Carolingian, Louis II, copied the plan of his great predecessor, Charlemagne, who seemed to have been afraid to send to death any anointed heads and would rather let them die in peace in a monastery. Svätopluk eventually got out of prison. But we will deal with this topic in the next chapter.

Rastislav Made Great Efforts to Get a Bishopric

At this point, let us return to one issue we have avoided so far – on purpose – because we will be talking about it in later parts. In his foreign policy, Rastislav made great efforts to get a bishopric for himself. Having your own bishopric was a sign of independent domestic and foreign policy. Something you would call "sovereignty over your own country" today. So, he sends a messenger to Pope Nicholas asking him to send him a bishop. And although Nicholas had begun a very hard and vigorous policy to secure the Papacy's sovereignty over all secular power, he did not grant Rastislav this wish. Subsequently, Rastislav sends a messengers to Byzantium, to Constantinople, and the Emperor Michael III sends him two missionaries: St. Constantine the Philosopher and St. Methodius. Rastislav, thus, did not get

a bishop, he got missionaries and teachers. Nothing more and nothing less. However, history gives him the – indisputable – merit for the initiative of what we call the cultural heritage of St. Constantine (Cyril) and St. Methodius. Whether Rastislav actually wanted this or not, we will never know for sure. The fact is that even *The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher* compares Rastislav to Constantine the Great (Equal-to-apostles).

“Convince all not to be idle, but to take the true path, so that, having led them to divine understanding through your struggles, you [Rastislav] too shall



Figure 1: *Modern Icon of Prince Rastislav as an Orthodox saint in the Slovak National Museum in Bratislava, see: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prince_Rastislav.JPG.*

receive your reward – both in this age and the next – for the souls of all who wish to believe in Christ our God now and evermore. Thus shall you leave your memory to future generations like the great Emperor Constantine.”

The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher, chapter 14.

Byzantine writing eventually makes a similar analogy in relation to Boris I. Just like St. Vladimir the Great of Rus’.

Both have similar apostolic merits. However, we cannot say whether Rastislav was really interested in the novelties that St. Constantine the Philosopher brought to Moravia, or not. In any case, the Church, and especially church historians, and the Czechoslovak Orthodox Church, declared Rastislav a Saint in 1993. They also gave him the title of “Equal-to-apostles and martyr tsar of Moravia”.

The fact that Rastislav was no martyr is a different issue. He was more of a traitor who did not keep the vassal pledge he swore to his sovereign Louis the German.

Chapter 12

The Beginning of Christianity in Slovak History

In order to understand the rules of Pribina and Kocela, as well as Rastislav and Svätopluk, and the subject we will deal with in the following chapters, we must go back to the moment when Christianity appeared on our territory. This is understandable, since the rise of a new political power on the middle Danube was closely linked to the adoption of Christianity and the emergence of new ecclesiastical structures of the Danubian Slavs.

To get an idea of how it happened, we need to go back to the days of the ancient Roman Empire. In the days of the famous Emperor Diocletian († 313, AD) the former united Roman Empire was divided into two parts and then those two parts into other two, creating a tetrarchy.

This reform had a huge impact in our territory as well. In the 4th century, the dominant political and administrative unit of the territory from the Alps to Rhodope and from the upper Danube to the Adriatic, Black and Aegean Seas was *Illyria*, i.e. old *Illyricum*, whose capital was today Sremska Mitrovica – old Sirmium.⁷⁴ It was also the seat of the ruler who, titularly, was both Caesar and Hercules. Coincidentally, Christian tradition already has old Sirmium as the place where the Apostle Andronicus himself once preached the Word of God. Andronicus was one of those Seventy apostles the original the twelve apostles “recruited” to help them sow the seed of the gospels throughout Europe. Therefore, Sirmium was very high in the apostolic hierarchy. In the late Roman period, there were up to four bishoprics in the Pannonian Basin. See the map no. 19.

Why have I started talking about this? Because even after the Roman power, its political representatives, and the Roman army retreated beyond the middle and lower Danube, we still cannot say that this area had lost its Christian heritage. Structures can disappear. We all know that. But ideas cannot. The human mind is a market of ideas and ideas are eternal in this market. Once the Scriptures and the Gospels have been preached in a territory, they remain there somehow. I also need to note that even those who arrived after the Roman power moved further south were part of the

*Clarification
of the Topic*

*Once more
Back to the
Ancient
Roman
Times*

*About
Eternal
Character
of Ideas and
Arianism
among Goths
and Gepids*

⁷⁴ The term *Illyria* had different extent in different periods of time. See: Hrvoje Gračanin, “The Role of *Illyricum* in the Tetrarchic Wars”, in *Diocletian, Tetrarchy and Diocletian’s Palace on the 1700th Anniversary of Existence*, eds. Nenad Cambi; Josko Belamarić and Tomislav Marasović (Split: Književni krug Split, 2009): 597–608.



Figure 2: Allegorical figures personifying the three Roman provinces (from left to right): ITALIA, ILLYRICUM, AFRICA, see: Anonymous author: *Notitia Dignitatum*, turn of the 4th and 5th centuries (Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford Misc. 378, f. 132^r, see: <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/3eb32a9c-616b-4ce6-ae15-411881ee1625/surfaces/1bc9b09a-38ad-4f26-901b-da30d08594b5/>). Photography by Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

Christian civilization. The Goths and the Gepids, as well as the Lombards were all Christians, although Arian ones. As a matter of fact, in the 4th century Bishop Wulfila translated the Holy Scripture into Gothic for the Goths. It denotes Christianity was already here, although in its Arian form. And since the Slavs were in close contact with the Goths and the Gepids, they must have been familiar with Christianity.

This takes us to that ancient dispute over the Slavs being pagans. We have one period report on this subject by Procopius of Caesarea, our constant informant. Procopius says that the Slavs recognized one god, but also many others who derive from this god. Moreover, just like other Indo-Europeans, they also acknowledged different watercourses, i.e. natural forces and elements. According to Mircea Eliade, a well-known and famous religionist, this monotheism of the Slavs is probably the starting point that would eventually help the Slavs to accept Christianity.

A good example is the fact that the Son of God [*Boží Syn*] is *Božič*, i.e. Christ himself is *Božič*. This has remained in today's Serbian and Croatian languages. But interesting enough also in the oldest Western Slavic Gregorian Chant called *Bogurodzica* sometimes ascribed to St. Vojtech-Adalbert. Going back to the Roman Empire as the formal-legal-ecclesiastical basis for the structure that will eventually be restored in our territory, we must not forget that there is a logical heir to this structure. This heir is, most probably, the second Latin Patriarchate of Aquileia. Aquileia is located in the northernmost part of the Adriatic Sea, and whether it be Aquileia, or Grado, Cividale or Venice itself, all these cities had a tremendous impact on how Christianity actually persisted in this part of the world. This means in ancient Roman *Illyricum*, in Pannonia and in the adjacent areas. This might be the reason why we are not so really surprised by the current archeological findings from Bojná, which clearly point towards this Adriatic-Latin area.

Going back to what the sources have preserved, *The Life of St. Methodius* clearly says:

"Many Christian teachers have come to us from among the Italians, Greeks and Germans, teaching us in various ways."

The Life of St. Methodius, chapter 5.

Obviously, this territory was exposed to different forms of Christianity constantly penetrating from different directions. These forms were sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker. When talking about the Avar Khaganate, which was not Christian, once more we need to mention the Keszthely culture, i.e. Keszthely, or *Kostolec* in Slovak, located just a few kilometers away from Blatnograd (Zalavár). The Keszthely culture, which was openly Christian,

*A Few
Words
about Slavic
Paganism*

*"Many
Christian
Teachers
Have Come
to Us"*

survived throughout the whole Avar Khaganate. It can even be said that when Pribina and Kocel began to build their domain around Lake Balaton, they could still work closely with this Keszthely culture and its representatives.

All this concerns the introduction of Christianity from the Mediterranean. At one point, however, we know that Christianity also arrived in Europe from a place you would not expect, namely from Ireland. In Ireland, Christianity persisted and the Irish monks were not only able to survive the cataclysm that occurred after the Romans left the British Isles, but they were also able to continue to spread their Christianity, which was Catholic, but a little different from regular Catholicism. As already said, this Irish-Scottish influence in our territory followed that of the Roman Empire. Let us mention yet another brief and important issue.

*The
Tradition of
St. Martin*

Something I would even say had a “formative” character for the future of our territory. It is the fact that in the 4th century, in Pannonia, in the city of Sabaria/Savaria, today Szombathely – or Kamenec in Slovak, under the Pannonian hill, Martin of Tours was born. St. Martin – the Bishop of Tours and one of the greatest European saints in the early Middle Ages. Interestingly, in the late 6th century another Martin, St. Martin of Braga, dedicated to him the poem known as *In Basilica*.⁷⁵ I will not quote the whole of it. It claims:

“O Martin, (...) You reconcile various brutish peoples under Christ’s holy alliance. The Alaman, the Saxon, the Thuringian, the Pannonian, the Rugian, the Slav, the Nara, the Sarmatian, the Datus, the Ostrogoth, the Frank, the Burgundian, the Dacian, the Alan – these all rejoice at knowing God.”

St. Martin of Braga, *In Basilica*, verses 5, 11–16.

The poem mixes names from different periods with those from the late 6th century when it originated. This is common practice because texts are updated according to the time they are created. Therefore, among those old *gentes*, like the Pannonians and the Norics, the St. Martin of Braga added the Slavs because at that time the Slavs already inhabited Pannonia. This way earlier St. Martin of Tours became not only the patron saint of Christianity in Pannonia, but also the patron of the Slavs. I will talk about how St. Vojtech/Adalbert and his pupils updated St. Martin’s cult at the turn of the 10th/11th century. Now let us go back to the topic.

*The Irish-
Scottish
Mission*

The Irish-Scottish Christian mission was really significant for Western Europe and had a tremendous impact on the fact that those barbaric, those

⁷⁵ To the dispute over this poem see recently Florin Curta, “Pseudo-Martin of Braga and the Slavs: A Re-examination of the Poem *In Basilica*,” in *Omnium magistra virtutum: Studies in Honour of Danuta R. Shanzer*, eds. Andrew Cain and Gregory Hays (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022), 115–39.

Germanic tribes were then ready to accept Roman Catholicism. But they did not stop on the border of Frankish Kingdom. Irish-Scottish missionaries came to our territory at one point.⁷⁶ These missionaries, however, do not have any political power yet. They came here as apostles, literally, without any political support. In the Middle Danube territory, thus, the local population was Christianized from below. One of the first and best known missionaries here was St. Amand or Amandus, the man who brought the Word of the Gospel to the Slavs. In the *Life of St. Amand*⁷⁷ from the 8th century one can read:

“When the holy man [St. Amand] saw that his preaching had already converted some, he still burnt with a great desire to convert others and when he heard that the Slavs, horribly misled by the lies of the devil who’d bound and oppressed them, [and] especially convinced that he could win the prize of martyrdom, he crossed the Danube in the same places to free them by preaching the Gospel of Christ. [Yet] only a few of those turned to Christ and seeing himself not increasing the fruit and not able to obtain martyrdom which he’d always sought, he returned again to his own sheep, to care for their needs and induce them, by preaching, to turn to the heavenly kingdom.”

Life of St. Amand, chapter 16.

There is also a hill named after him not far from the Pannonian hill (Pannonhalma/Panónsky chlm/Pannonian Hill). It is called Amandsberg or Amand’s hill (*Omuntesperch*), today Amandhegy. These Irish-Scottish, missionary monks might not have built a structure, but they did come here. They did not build up churches and brick monasteries, but brought – or rather – returned Christianity to Pannonia. This takes us to another stage in the process of Christianization.

We know that the Slavs spread very high along the rivers Sava, Drava, and the Danube, practically to areas almost unimaginable for our self-reflection today, namely near the border between today’s Austria, Italy and Switzerland. However, neither the local, the Lombardian or the Bavarian powers were able to deal with the non-Christian Slavs. Therefore, they needed to develop a missionary program to Christianize them. To make sure that the Slavs, already as Christians, would accept the new political power from the West more easily. The long-term political power of the Avars, which supported the Slavs, had made it possible for them to keep their undefined pagan

*The Christianisation
z Nemiec*

⁷⁶ Tatiana Štefanovičová, “Íroškotská misia a Slovensko”, [Irish-Scottish mission and Slovakia] *Zborník Slovenského národného múzea: Archeológia Supplementum* 4, 105 (2011): 117–22.

⁷⁷ “Saint Amand’s Fail Among the Danubian Slavs,” in *Nomine Jassa*, accessed February, 11, 2024, <https://www.jassa.org/?p=7557>.

religion, which probably contained some Christian elements. So, on the one hand there are the Christian powers: the Eastern Roman Empire, Italy and the Frankish Empire. On the other hand, there is the Avar Khaganate, which does not hide the fact that it is not Christian although it tolerates them. This takes us to another great topic, which is relatively less known in our history. Namely the way Christianity was spread, and which *The Life of St. Methodius* describes with the words *Z Nemiec* (“from Germany”). Well, this process went along the Drava and the Danube, i.e. the natural ways connecting Bavaria and our geopolitical territory. That is why such old archaic dioceses as Salzburg, Passau, Regensburg, Würzburg and – perhaps surprisingly for some – Freising as well, became the main starting points from which, at that time already, the Duchy of Bavaria organized its Christianizing mission. This task, which was initially carried out by the Irish-Scottish missions, but gradually became the competence of the Bavarians themselves.⁷⁸ Symbolically, an Irish-Scottish missionary, St. Virgil, Bishop of Salzburg, became the first patron and organizer of the mission towards the Slavs. Logically, the first historical-political territory where this activity can be seen is Carantania, as *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantians* tells us.

We have already mentioned the origin of the Carantanian Slavs and the Carantanian principality. We said that the constitution of this political organism, which was first under the administration of the local princes, later under Bavarian administration, and then under the Frankish rule, went hand in hand with Christianity becoming a certain spiritual force that helped integrate this area, first into Bavaria and later into the Frankish Empire. In this respect, it must be said that Bishop Virgil was the one who took the whole thing into his hands and moved the so-called chorbishop, or missionary bishop, to Carantania. The chorbishop could educate and ordain priests and consecrate churches, etc.

Indeed, these Christian centers largely determined the development that would affect our countries in the immediate future. So, when the first church is consecrated to the Virgin Mary in Gospa Sveta, i.e. in Maria Saal, we are talking about the very first church among the Slavs at all. Sticking to the very sources, the *Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantians* says:

“After a little time had passed, the above mentioned duke [Chotimir] of the Carinthians [Carantians] asked bishop Virgil to visit the people of that nation and encourage them in the faith. Virgil was unable to fulfill this request, but sent in his place a bishop named Modestus to teach the common folk, along with his priests Watto, Reginbert, Cozharius, and Latinus, as well as

⁷⁸ Vlasto. *The Entry of the Slavs into Christendom*, 14.

the deacon Ekkehard and other clerics, giving him license to consecrate churches, and ordain clerics according to canonical prescription without usurping anything for himself that would contradict the decrees of the holy fathers. Arriving in Carinthia, they dedicated a church to Mary [Maria Saal/Gospa Sveta], and another in the town of Liburnia [Tiburnia/Teurnia], as well as at Undrimas, and in many other places. He [Modestus] remained there until the end of his life."

The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians, chapter 5.

This event took place in 752. For those who claim that it was Adalram who consecrated the first church among the Slavs for Pribina in Nitra in 828, we can see they are about 70 years late. The first church was the one we have just mentioned in Gospa Sveta, in Carantania. Now, the fall of Bavaria in 788 takes us to a new phase when the Franks take their place in full force. They start a new stage of missions and arrangement of this ecclesiastical-legal space. The Franks smoothly continued what the Bavarians had done before them. And Charlemagne was a man whose talent for organization was legendary. It was he who made permanent dioceses of those places. It was he who reformed the Benedictines to a large extent and prepared them to move southwards, towards the middle and lower Danube. This is the reason why those established institutions that appeared in Salzburg, like the Benedictine monastery of St. Peter or the Cathedral of St. Emmeram, became a spiritual weapon in the hands of the new Franks. They became kind of their banner, which they would hoist wherever they would go. It is no coincidence that there is a Church of St. Emmeram in Regensburg, as well as in Nitra. Likewise, there is a monastery consecrated to St. Hippolytus in St. Polten. You can also find one in Znojmo as well as in Zobor, here in Nitra. Although these are just minor details, they do have explanatory value.

Another major turning point in the creation of church structures in the Middle Danube territory is the Synod that took place on the banks of the Danube in the summer of 796. It was initiated by Alcuin of York. Alcuin of York was the spiritual advisor and creator of the Carolingian Renaissance. At his synod, the Bavarian bishops, with Paulinus the Patriarch of Aquileia, divided the spheres of influence of the different dioceses and the patriarchate.

The Synod that Took Place on the Banks of the Danube in the Summer of 796

The patriarchate got everything south of the Drava River. The Archbishop of Salzburg was given the territory north of the Drava, up to the west bank of the Rába and the southern side of the Danube. Interestingly, the Bishop of Passau was assigned the territory north of the Danube. This outlined the ecclesiastical-legal sphere of influence. On the other hand, this was not the only outcome of this meeting. Equally serious was that Charlemagne

and his people had already learned a lot from the not very wise way in which Christianity was spread among the Saxons. The Saxons were given to choose between the sword or baptism. It signifies, they could choose between losing their head or accepting Christianity. In the case of the Slavs, this was a voluntary decision. Moreover, the basic prayers, such as the *Apostles' Creed/Credo*, the *Lord's Prayer/Pater noster*, the confessional and the baptismal formulas, were to be said in the local language. Thus, it was not St. Constantine and St. Methodius, but this Synod on the banks of the Danube, which actually decided that the vernacular language would be used to spread the Christian faith among the Slavs on the middle Danube. And it would not be just any faith, but the Orthodox Catholic Faith.⁷⁹ It is no coincidence that the oldest Slavic written monuments were found in Freising, known as *The Freising Manuscripts* or *Fragments*, which contain very archaic prayers though already in the Slavic language. This Slavic language was probably the language spoken by the Slavs from the Alps and around the middle Danube. Today it is very difficult to determine what exactly that language looked like. For us, the starting point is the one we know from the later "Pannonian Slavonic".

Now, let us talk about the Slavic translation of the *Lord's Prayer/Pater noster*. Since the Slavs did not have this prayer translated into their language and did not know the concept of *regnum*, i.e. "kingdom", some local intellectual translated the passage that says "let your kingdom come" as "let your abundance come" = "*pridi khnam twoye Bogastwo*" (*Starogorski rukopis*). This also gives us some insight into the mental world of our ancestors at the turn of the 8th and 9th centuries. A lot of what happened in Pannonia, Nitria as well as in Moravia, is well known thanks to *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians*. Thanks to the fact that in 840 Pribina acquired Pannonia, first in benefice and later in property in 848, the Salzburg mission gained a new quality. This document tells us how the Archbishops of Salzburg, namely Arn (Arno) and Leutram, and in the meantime Adalram, and later Adalwin, carried out all this intense missionary work. This document also reveals what they actually did, how they planned it, and how they built churches.

It has already been mentioned that during the life of Pribina and Kocel, we know of 31 churches that were consecrated and how unique St. Hadrian's church in Blatnograd was. All that implies a lot of work. The church featured beautiful stained glass windows for its time. It had painted walls and

The Pannonian Lord's Prayer

The Christianisation z Grécka

⁷⁹ Vlasto. *The Entry of the Slavs into Christendom*, 18.

decorations, which were unparalleled in the Slavic world of the time.⁸⁰ We also know how intensively the Frankish or Frankish-Bavarian party was trying to integrate the territory east of their borders. We know how much energy they put into it in order to integrate that population into their political-ecclesiastical structures. As already said, it was Pribina and his son Kocel who, beyond any doubt, played the most important role in this respect. That all changed around 869–870 when, as *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians* tells us, z *Grécka* “the Greek” came and stole it from them.

“...a certain Greek named Methodios, with his newly invented Slavic letters, supplanted the Latin tongue and Roman doctrine and the authority of Latin letters with his philosophic trickery, and made those who celebrated the mass, and Gospel, and their ecclesiastical offices in Latin appear less worthy.”

The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians, chapter 12.

We will talk about this in more detail.

*Origins of
Christianity
among the
Moravian
and Nitrian
Slavs*

Before that, there is still a need to get back to the Moravian affairs. We know that in 828, a church on the Nitra hill was consecrated for Pribina. As our contemporary archaeologists point out, that is St. Emmeram’s Church, which still stands to this day. Another one – the circular building of the Rotunda dedicated to St. George in Nitrianska Blatnica from the first third of the 9th century is also still standing today.

We also know that the Moravians accepted Christianity from Reginhar, Bishop of Passau, around 831. But archaeological research shows that there were churches there before. Namely in an archaeological layer known by the rather unfortunate, but already established name of *Blatnica-Mikulčice horizon*. To sum it up again, St. Constantine and St. Methodius did come here. But they were far from being the first to spread Christianity in this territory. They had to continue the line and even in some cases go into intensive confrontation with the already established ecclesiastical structures, religious terminology, and the way the local people professed their faith. Among other things, this had a huge impact on Rastislav, as well as on Svätopluk and the people around them, e.g. on priest Slavomir (*Sclagamar*) and, undoubtedly, St. Gorazd who had originally been educated and enlightened at Frankish schools. Thus, the Latin layer predetermines the acceptance of the new and original form of Christianity as defined by St. Constantine and St. Methodius.

⁸⁰ Béla Miklós Szóke, *The Carolingian Age in the Carpathian Basin: Permanent Exhibition of the Hungarian National Museum*, trans. Judit Pokoly, Lara Strong, and Christopher Sullivan (Budapest: Hungarian National Museum, 2014), passim.

Chapter 13

The Slavic Mission of St. Constantine Philosopher-Cyril and his Brother St. Methodius.

At this point, we will address a topic that many believe they know well: the mission of Saints Constantine-Cyril and Methodius to the Slavs and its consequences. However, it is very often either misunderstood or misinterpreted. Let us start with something we mentioned in the previous sessions, i.e. the “nominalist interpretation” of Slovak history. It is clear that we are Slovaks and, as such, also Slavs. But the cultural content of being Slavic and Slovak keeps changing in history. Among those who brought about some of the most dramatic changes in the content of the term “Slavdom”, were Saints Constantine-Cyril and his brother, Methodius. They are also known as the Saint Thessaloniki Brothers and are co-patrons of Europe today. How they actually managed to redefine the meaning of the word and concept of “Slavdom” is a subject that requires extensive reflection and far more space than is given here.

*Clarification
of the Topic*

Instead, we will focus on the actual historical and political course of their mission, and the formal and legal aspects it introduced into environment. So we are going to talk about how this mission got into this living space. But we should start with the question, how it was actually possible that it happened in our territory. Before proceeding, let us revisit earlier missions from Aquileia, from the Frankish Kingdom, and even from the British Isles, i.e. the Irish-Scottish mission, as well as from Byzantium, which penetrated into our geopolitical and historical sphere very intensively.

Let me open this issue with the really strong Europe-wide and world-wide conjunction of interests that result from the Roman perception of the ancient province of *Illyricum*. This topic will, to some extent, form the core of this chapter. It is well known that, at that time, this part of the world was divided into several opposing units. On the one hand there was Rome and Byzantium.

*New
Conceptualization of
the Term
Illyricum*

There also was, of course, Bulgaria vs. the Eastern Roman Empire. Then there was the East Frankish Empire vs. what we – mistakenly – call the Great Moravia. As the ancient saying goes: “The enemy of my enemy is my friend.” Likewise, the ally of my friend is my ally too. These factors define the geo-strategic context that determined the starting point of the Cyrillo-Methodian mission.

But before we get there, we still need to say a few sentences about Rastislav, the undisputed initiator of this whole project. What exactly did he intend to achieve by inviting St. Constantine the Philosopher and his brother St. Methodius? This is clearly stated in the most important source that will guide us throughout this narration, namely *The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher*, a contemporary source.

“For Rastislav, the Prince of Moravia, through God’s admonition, took counsel with his Moravian princes and appealed to Emperor Michael, saying: ‘Though our people have rejected paganism and observe Christian law, we do not have a teacher who can explain to us in our language the true Christian faith, so that other countries which look to us might emulate us. Therefore, O lord, send us such a bishop and teacher; for from you good law issues to all countries’.”

The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher, chapter 14.

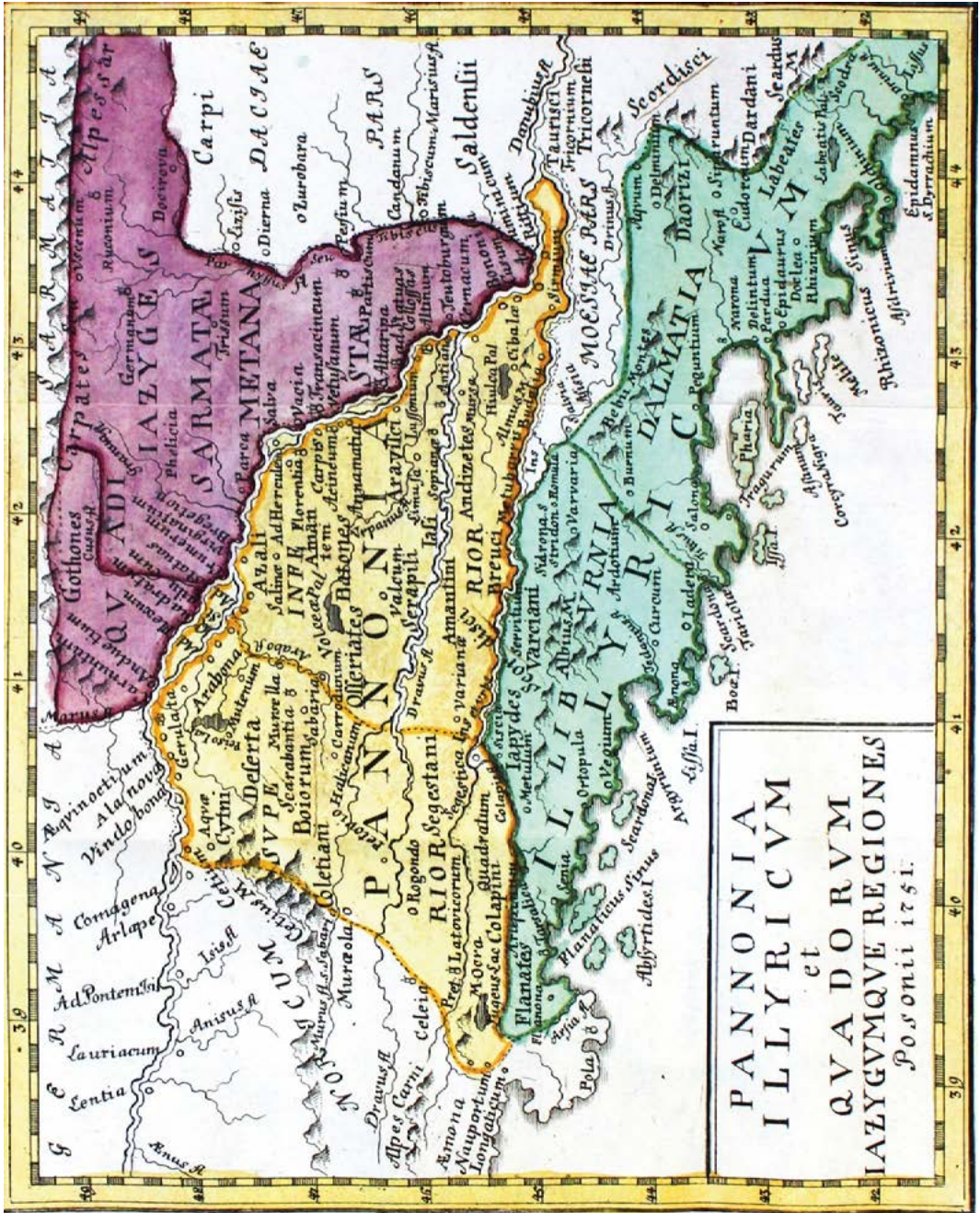
It clearly says that Rastislav wanted to get a bishop. He sought a bishop in order to strengthen his position within the Frankish Empire. By getting a bishop, he wanted to become more independent from it. This was a common feature among all the elements that formed the Frankish Empire. Rastislav actually did what everybody else was doing in this rather heterogeneous, though still Frankish Empire. Of course, he addresses Rome, the authority that can grant him his request.

Who actually
Invited
Saints
Constantine-
Cyril and
Methodius
to Great
Moravia and
why

These are the days of the first powerful Popes who began to proclaim the supremacy of ecclesiastical power over secular power, and of the Papacy over the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Popes who became the forerunners of the Gregorian Reform in the Church of the 11th century. The Pope at this very moment is Nicholas I. Nicholas I, however, is well aware of the power the Frankish Empire has at this time. He knows very well he cannot afford to grant Rastislav his request and send him a bishop. At the same time – and this needs to be pointed out – Nicholas and his successor Hadrian II are pursuing a very intense policy towards Bulgaria and its Khan Boris. Boris is not only willing to accept Christianity, but also its Roman form. This aligned perfectly with the Papacy’s efforts to reassert supremacy over the ancient Roman province of *Illyricum*.

After Rome fails to grant him his request, Rastislav turns towards the other power that can satisfy his demands, i.e. towards the new Rome: Constantinople.

Our sources, *The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher* and *The Life of St. Methodius*, tell us that Byzantine Emperor Michael III does grant him this request, though only partially. He does not send him a bishop, but



Map no. 11: Roman Pannonia and Illyricum and the neighboring Quadi and Iazyges peoples, turn of the 4th and 5th centuries according to the contemporary ideas of Slovak geographer and historian Ján Tomka Sásky (Bratislava/Posonium, 1751).

a teacher. The very fact that he sends him a teacher instead of a bishop derives from the current political situation we have already outlined. Byzantium and Michael III had already in 864 succeeded in conquering Bulgaria

and its ruler Boris I was baptized and accepted the name after his sponsor Mihail. Therefore, re-establishing the old province of *Illyria* was out of the question for Rome. Michael III has no need or reason to grant Rastislav his request.⁸¹ At the same time, however, he does not want to lose him as a potential future ally. Finally he decides to give him at least something and sends him this diplomatic mission. By doing so, he does not need to fear the East Frankish Empire getting mad at him. For the East Frankish Empire, creating such a diocese would mean that Constantinople is interfering in its historical ecclesiastical competences. This is the objective explanation of why this happened the way it did. But we know very well that the problem is always somewhere else. The description of how all this happened is slightly different in our sources, i.e. *The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher* and *The Life of St. Methodius*.

The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher says: Rastislav took counsel with his Moravian princes and appealed to Emperor Michael III asking him to send him a bishop and teacher. *The Life of St. Methodius*, on the other hand, has it as follows:

“Prince Rostislav [Rastislav], together with Svätopluk, sent emissaries from Moravia to Emperor Michael asking saying thus: ‘We have prospered through God’s grace, and many Christian teachers have come to us from among the Italians, Greeks and Germans, teaching us in various ways. But we Slavs are a simple people, and have no one to instruct us in the truth, and explain wisely. Therefore, O kind lord, send the type of man who will direct us to the whole truth’.”

The Life of St. Methodius, chapter 5.

So, according to *The Life of St. Methodius*, Rastislav and Svätopluk ask to send to Moravia a teacher only. Not a bishop. This difference is rather relevant, though. We will be getting back to it. Now, take the Pannonian tradition as preserved in *The Tale of Bygone Years*, attributed to Nestor. According to it, the initiators of this whole mission were already Rastislav, Svätopluk and Kocel.

“When the Moravian Slavs and their princes were living in baptism, the Princes Rostislav [Rastislav], Svyatopolk [Svätopluk], and Kotsel [Kocel] sent messengers to the Emperor Michael, saying, ‘Our nation is baptized, and yet we have no teacher to direct and instruct us and interpret the sacred scriptures. We understand neither Greek nor Latin. Some teach us one thing and some another. Furthermore, we do not understand written characters

⁸¹ Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, 118–19.

nor their meaning. Therefore send us teachers who can make known to us the words of the scriptures and their sense'."

The Russian Primary Chronicle, chapter 25.

This discrepancy in the sources indicates that there is an issue here.

The reason why Constantine the Philosopher decides to accept this mission to the Slavs is not really clear. Nor why he decided to make it as magnificent as he did. Now, just to indicate where we are heading we need to repeat the famous words of Alexander Avenarius – the greatest Byzantologist Slovakia has ever had:

*Motives
Constantine
the
Philosopher
Accepted
the Mission
to the Slavs*

"The temporally long-lasting and geographically widespread influence of Cyril and Methodius culture was made possible by that part of it which was most obviously outside the Byzantine (and, of course, Western) cultural concept: the linguistic-national character of cultural influence, the recognition of the Old Church Slavonic language as a missionary language as well as a liturgical and literary language..."⁸²

In other words, never before and never after did Constantinople do anything like the mission of St. Constantine the Philosopher. In the same breath he equally emphasized that by accepting Old Church Slavonic as a liturgical language, Rome made an exception it would never make again. Indeed, it was not until the 2nd Vatican Council that the Catholic Church made it possible for vernacular languages to be used in the liturgy. Right at the beginning of this whole issue there is one big question we will address in our next chapter. This takes us to the part where we talk about the mission itself and its course.

As we know, this famous diplomatic-cultural procession came in 863 from Byzantium to the territory of what we call Great Moravia. There are disputes about the way they took, but we will not talk about that now. Important is that they stayed here for 40 months. Surprisingly, *The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher* compares Rastislav to Constantine the Great. However, it does not say how glad Rastislav was personally to receive this mission after all. What it does say is how glad the people were to hear the gospels in their own language and were ready to embrace them. Apparently Constantine got a special place where he could teach his disciples all the novelties he

*Prince
Rastislav
– „Equal to
Constantine
the Great“*

⁸² Alexander Avenarius, *Byzantská kultúra v slovanskom prostredí v VI.–XII. storočí: K problematike recepcie a transformácie* [Byzantine culture in the Slavic habitat in the VI–XII centuries: On the problem of reception and transformation] (Bratislava: Veda, 1992): 197.

brought with him, from a brand new alphabet to a whole new language, namely “Old Church Slavonic”.

*The Stay
of Saints
Constantine-
Cyril and
Methodius
at Kocel in
Blatnograd*

So they stayed in Moravia for 40 months before leaving to go and see Kocel, on the grounds that they wanted to consecrate their disciples. They stay here for 40 months. That is more than three years. However, they have no competences at all. They came here like some intellectuals, we might say. The Archbishop of Salzburg, the Bishops of Passau and Regensburg, etc. are the competent ones here. As a matter of fact, this is their territory. Formally, ecclesiastically and legally. This means that they cannot even consecrate their disciples. There is no mention of Rastislav being sorry to see them leaving, either. Or that he sent them to consecrate those disciples. It is Constantine the Philosopher and his brother Methodius who want to ordain them as priests. What is strange and indicates how Rastislav felt about that mission is the fact that they go and visit Kocel, who is an enemy of Rastislav.

In reality, they cannot be friends, for the Moravians killed his father Pribina as we can read in *The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantianians*. In Pannonia we can see a very big difference between the way the mission is received in Moravia and in Blatnograd, the seat of Kocel. Kocel is not only pleased, but he also learns how to read their books:

“Constantine spent forty months in Moravia, and then left to ordain his disciples. On the way Kocel, prince of Pannonia, received him and took a great liking to the Slavic letters. He learned them himself, and gave him about fifty students to be taught them. He rendered him great honor, and accompanied him.”

The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher, chapter 15.

It says, Kocel learned the Glagolitic type of writing developed by St. Constantine. That is a diametrically different approach towards the novelties that Constantine and Methodius brought with them. And not only did he, Kocel, learn it himself, but he also had fifty disciples learn the new writing system in Blatnograd and had them learn how to use the language.

*The Stay
of Sts.
Constantine-
Cyril and
Methodius
in Venice*

Later on, St. Constantine the Philosopher accompanied these disciples to Venice. This is very intriguing, both historically and politically. We can see that Constantine and Methodius take the old Roman road from Blatnograd through Ptuj and then to Aquileia to arrive in Venice. And there they wait. Meanwhile, there they have the famous discussion with the representatives of the “trilingual heresy,” according to whom there were only three languages in which God can be praised: Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Some say he is waiting to be invited to Constantinople to consecrate his disciples there. However, *The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher*, our main source, says nothing like that. On the contrary, we know very well that shortly after

the “trilingual” discussion, they do receive an invitation from Hadrian II, the successor of late Pope Nicholas I.

This invitation, however, does not come just “out of the blue.” We know that before going onto the mission to the Slavs, St. Constantine had been to a Mission to the Khazars. On his way, in Crimea, he found the relics of Pope St. Clement of Rome. St. Clement of Rome is none less than the Pope who is said to have written a letter to all Asian churches from the position of Pope of Rome instructing them how to proceed. He is the Pope whose relics prove the supremacy of Rome over all other Christian dignitaries. His relics demonstrate the superiority of the Bishop of Rome, the successor of St. Peter, and his sovereignty over the whole Catholic universal church. Let me translate this into plain and intelligible words. Sts. Constantine Philosopher and Methodius, they actually give Rome the greatest evidence that the Pope is the highest Christian authority. Now, we need to keep in mind that these brothers come from Byzantium, they are members of the Eastern Roman Empire. And they take this invaluable evidence to Rome, the old center of the empire. This is something that could not remain without a response in the Roman circles. That is the reason why they welcome St. Constantine and St. Methodius at the very gates of Rome, and accompany them to the city in a solemn procession.

What happened next can be seen in the frescoes from the Basilica of St. Clement in Rome. These frescoes depict St. Clement of Rome being carried by St. Constantine’s pupils on their shoulders. Clement seems to be trying to get up and is full of joy to be back in Rome. And something of great consequence happens here and you can see it well in the fresco: Constantine the Philosopher and Methodius are carrying a book whose contents have been carved out. And Pope Adrian II is consecrating their translations into Old Church Slavonic.

And while the Latin words remain intact, the Glagolitic words have been removed. This fresco is eloquent and its content can be found in *The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher*. It reads:

“Accepting the Slavic Scriptures, the Pope placed them in the Church of St. Mary called Phatne. [that is the church of Saint Mary Major today] And the holy liturgy was celebrated over them. Then the Pope [Hadrian II] commanded two bishops, Formosus and Gauderich to consecrate the Slavic disciples. And when they were consecrated they at once celebrated the liturgy in the Slavic language in the Church of the Apostle Peter. And the next day they celebrated in the Church of St. Petronilla and on the following day in the Church of St. Andrew. And then they celebrated the entire night, glori-

The Invitation to Rome and the Role of St. Clement’s Relics in this Invitation

Arrival of the Apostles of the Slavs to Rome and Recognition of Old Church Slavonic as a Liturgical Language



Figure 3: *The solemn arrival of the Slavic mission in Rome, Basilica of St. Clement in Rome, 11th century. The men with halos from left to right: St. Methodius, St. Constantine the Philosopher, St. Clement (relics) and Pope Hadrian II (Photography by Peter Ivanič).*



Figure 4: *St. Constantine-Cyril Philosopher, Basilica of St. Clement, Rome), 9th century* (Photography by Peter Ivanič).

fying God in Slavic once again in the Church of the Apostle Paul, the great universal teacher. And in the morning they again celebrated the liturgy over his blessed grave with the help of Bishop Arsenius, one of the seven bishops, and of Anastasius the Librarian."

The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher, chapter 17.

This quote accurately maps the political distribution of forces in contemporary Rome. But you also need to keep in mind that a consecration has taken place – Old Church Slavonic has been raised to the level of a liturgical language. This is a fantastic event in the history of the Holy Church. Of course this had far-reaching consequences for the understanding of the word “Slav” and new definition of the Slavdom as “the Nation of the Word”. Up to this day and further into the future.

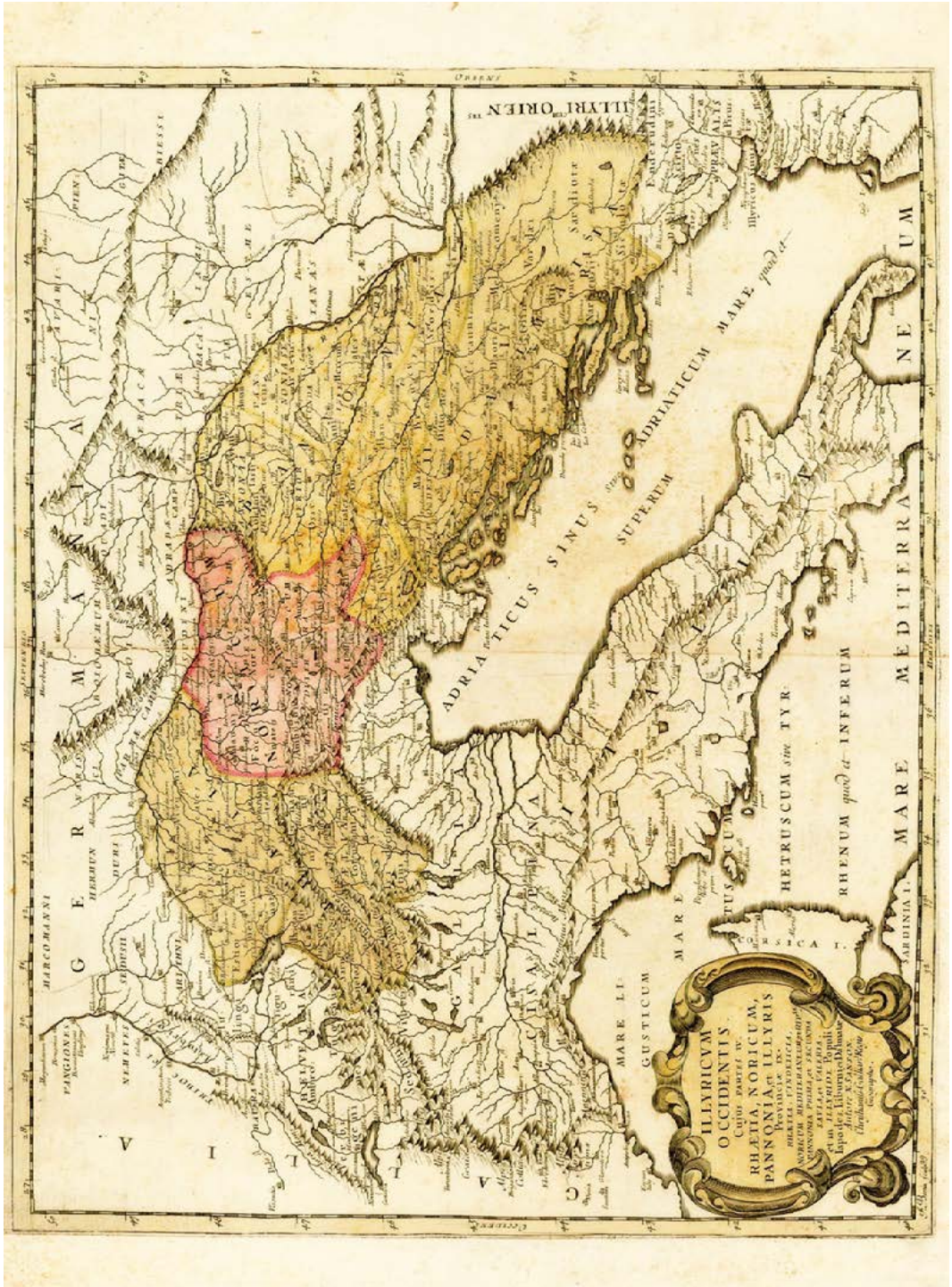
*The Death
of St.
Constantine/
Cyril in
Rome and
his Solemn
Burial*

We also learn that afterwards Constantine feels kind of tired and retires to the Monastery of St. Praxedes in Rome, where he stays until his death. Then he is buried as a Bishop of Rome, like a Pope, i.e. with papal honors. And glorious miracles start to take place over his grave in the Basilica of St. Clement, Rome. And, in theory, we could end our story at this point. The whole mission got the official recognition it deserved and so on.

*St.
Methodius
Assigned by
Rome as the
Archbishop
of Pannonia
on the
Seat of St.
Andronicus*

The problem is, however, that neither Kocel, Rastislav or Svätopluk have got a bishop yet. When St. Constantine has his brother promise he will continue his work, St. Methodius goes back to Kocel, and Kocel sends him once more back to Rome. In Rome they finally understand what is at stake and decide to consecrate him not a bishop but an archbishop! To understand the logic of it, one needs to understand the fact that Rome had lost Bulgarian Boris I to Constantinople. Therefore, its plan to re-establish *Illyricum* is also now completely lost. Just that *Illyricum* – people tend to forget this – Western *Illyricum* is both Pannonia and Noricum, i.e. territories considered to be Slavic. Thus, the Roman lawyers make Methodius an archbishop and choose the old Sirmium to be his seat. That is today’s Sremska Mitrovica. They chose it on the grounds that it was the place where St. Andronicus had lived and worked. St. Andronicus was one of the Seventy Apostles the original Twelve Apostles taught when they needed help spreading Christianity. This is a very strong historical, ecclesiastical, and legal argument and it can help St. Methodius to create a missionary Slavic diocese to replace the former project of *Illyricum*. That is why he is first called Archbishop of Pannonia.

Kocel’s initiative thus met with lively interest in Rome. However, the project of reviving the Illyrian (Slavic) ecclesiastical province, at least in its western variant, also needed secular patronage. The Papacy undertook an extensive diplomatic mission in this regard in the seventies and eighties of the 9th



Map no. 12: Western Illyricum (ILLYRICUM OCCIDENTIS) envisioned by the French royal geographer Nicolas Sanson in 1665, which consisted of 4 parts Rhaetia, Noricum, Pannonia, and Dalmatia proper (small) Illyris.

century. In addition to the Pannonian Kocel, they approached the Serbian prince Mutimir, the Croatian prince Branimir⁸³ and Svätopluk I of Moravia.

Reaction of
the Bavarian
Bishops and
King Louis
the German
of East
Frankish
Empire

However, he is bound to come into conflict with the Bavarian Episcopate, which has been working in Pannonia intensively for seven decades. The result is that both Methodius and Kocel are summoned to Regensburg. There they are judged by East Frankish King Louis II the German and his bishops. St. Methodius is interned or placed in a monastery, most probably in Reichenau and he stays there for two and a half years. The Rome plan seems to have failed. But the situation improves a bit when the internal conflict between Rastislav and Svätopluk is solved after the intervention of the East Frankish Empire.

Svätopluk consolidated his power around 873, helped by Rome. Rome appointed St. Methodius as archbishop in Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica), in the capital of ancient *Illyricum*, in 869. Then, around the year 873, Svätopluk hands over all the churches of Moravia to Methodius and expels the Frankish clerics from them.⁸⁴

The Second
Twelve-year
Stay of St.
Methodius
in Great
Moravia

This is actually the second phase of Cyrillo-Methodian Mission in our territory, which is going to last for the following twelve years. During these twelve years, Archbishop Methodius faces different confrontations.

On the
Significance
of Pope John
VIII's Letter
Known as
Industriae
tuae

One of the most serious is the confrontation with Bishop Wiching. Wiching was originally a Benedictine monk from Swabia. Apparently Wiching was a counselor for Svätopluk I. He is first mentioned in the famous letter *Industriae Tuae*,⁸⁵ which was issued by Pope John VIII. In this letter which was sent to Svätopluk, Pope greenlighted the liturgy in Old Church Slavonic and allowed Svätopluk to use Latin, but also creates the first diocese in present-day Slovakia, in Nitra *Sancta Ecclesia Nitrensis*, and appointed Wiching to it. However in this letter, *Industriae Tuae*, also contains two other things that are not mentioned very often.

⁸³ Tibor Žifkovič, *De Conversione Croatorum et Serborum: A Lost Source: Institute of History: Monographs*. Vol. 62 (Beograd: Institute of History, 2012): 141–42.

⁸⁴ For more details see: Madalena Betti, *The Making Christian Moravia (858–882): Papal Power and Political Reality* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2023), chapter II: 41–108.

⁸⁵ As for the original texting see *Codex diplomaticus et epistolaris Slovaciae* (thereafter CDSL), vol. 1, ed. Richard Marsina (Bratislava: Veda, 1974), 23–24, No. 30: "... didicimuse [John VIII] tuae [Svatopluk I] devocionis sinceritatem et tocius populi tui desiderium, quod circa sedem apostolicam et nostram paternitatem habetis. Nam divina gracia inspirante, contemptis aliis saeculi huius principibus, beatum Petrum, apostolici ordinis principem vicariumque illius, habere patronum et in omnibus adiutorem ac defensorem pariter cum nobilebus viris fidelibus tuis et cum omni populo terrae tuae amore fidelissimo elegisti et usque ad finem sub ipsius et vicarii eius defensione colla summittens, pio affectu cupis, auxiliante Domino, utpote filius devotissimus permanere. Pro qua scilicet tanta fide ac devocione tua et populi tui apostolatus nostri ulnis extensis te quasi unicum filium amore ingenti amplectimur et cum omnibus fidelibus tuis paternitatis nostrae gremio veluti oves domini nobis commissas recipimus vitaeque pabulo clementer nutrire optamus..."

It emphasizes sending others, like Wiching, and we will consecrate them (as bishops). This means that the Pope grants Svätopluk the Apostolic right that St. Stephen I enjoyed later, and which will be known as the Apostolic right of the kings of Hungary. The same right of investment the Papacy denied to western rulers, but which Svätopluk, and his followers, formally had.

On the Legal Foundations of the Apostolic Rights of the Later Hungarian Kings

The second important thing is that the Pope John VIII declares Great Moravia a fief of the Holy See. This way it made this realm equal to the East Frankish Empire in terms of ecclesiastical law. From that time the Slovaks were under the patronage of Rome, not of the Empire. The Czech lands/The Bohemian lands, including Moravia, were included into the Holy Roman Empire, but today Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Croatia, etc. were subject to the patronage of the Holy See in Rome. Regardless of whether it was Pannonian Stephen I, or Polish Mescio I/Mysko/Mieszko or any other ruler, our territory's sovereignty has been constantly emphasized throughout our history. This can help us understand the circumstances and interests that shaped Central Europe. The dominant force of this territory is the work of the successors of St. Peter in Rome. Svätopluk can accept this as long as he gets along well with Methodius.

The Kingdom of Svätopluk within the Patrimonium sancti Petri: Fief of St. Peter

In spite of the fact that Svätopluk supports the liturgy in Latin, he also respects Methodius' dimension, his intellect and, above all, the influence he enjoys in Rome. And Methodius gained this influence when he was in Rome, with his brother St. Constantine. While St. Methodius was still alive, the Moravian Church grew, the number of churches grew, the missionary area grew, and the tension with Wiching was resolved. *The Life of St. Methodius* emphasizes this in these words:

"And the Apostolic Father [Pope John VIII] sent him [St. Methodius] at once. And Prince Svatopluk and all the Moravians received him. They entrusted to him all the churches and clergy in all the towns. And from that day forth, God's teachings grew greatly and the clergy multiplied in all the towns. And for that reason the Moravians began to grow and multiply, and the pagans to believe in the true God, casting aside their lies. And the Province of Moravia began to expand much more into all lands and to defeat its enemies successfully, as they themselves are always relating."

The Life of St. Methodius, chapter 10.

Of course, the text gives information in literary abbreviation, simplifying a lot, but we get the basic idea of how it happened.

The situation changed diametrically when St. Methodius died on April, the 6th, 885. Before that he had traveled to Rome and to Constantinople (to Emperor Basil I the Macedonian). Apparently, he also negotiated with the

The Death of St. Methodius and its Consequences

Frankish king and Emperor Charles III the Fat, trying to make liturgy in Slavonic and the Slavic form of Catholicism legitimate and permanent in the area of Great Moravia.

However, all this proves to be in vain when Stephen V becomes Pope and begins to harshly react against what his predecessors had done in connection with the use of Old Church Slavonic as a liturgical language.⁸⁶ Here, Svätopluk has to face a very difficult situation he needs to deal with. We will deal with it later on. But the most urgent thing for him was to solve the problem his kingdom faces, namely that its church is internally divided. And he resolves it by taking the official Catholic, the Franco-Roman side, which is also called the German side. And so, St. Gorazd, who was supposed to continue the work of St. Methodius, is no longer allowed to do so. This takes us to the third phase of the Great Moravian Mission, which concerns our territory.

*Theological
Controversy
between the
Disciples
of St.
Methodius
and the
Followers of
Wiching on
the Question
of the
Filioque*

It lasts from April to October or November 886 and is characterized by the internal ecclesiastical conflict between those who support Wiching and those who support Gorazd. Final outcome is pretty well known. Svätopluk decides to settle the problem, the questions of the *Filioque*, from a theological point of view. This question concerns whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son or just from the Father. Methodius' disciples claim it proceeds from the Father because they support the traditional ecclesial line that has never been doubted by a general council. On the other side are the Western novelties that come by the Latin Church and Stephen V, who supports it. And in their opinion, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son as well. These are things you, as a ruler, cannot afford not to pay attention to if you want to keep your country united. And so Svätopluk takes the decision he takes.

As the later *Long Life of St. Clement of Ohrid*,⁸⁷ a disciples of St. Constantine and St. Methodius has it, the result was that:

“Even though the prince [Svätopluk] was not present, the Germans did the dirty work, i.e. they expelled their disciples and these had to wade through the snow.”

Long Life of St. Clement of Ohrid, chapter 40–41.

⁸⁶ Betti, *The Making Christian Moravia (858–882)*, 43–53.

⁸⁷ See: Iliya G. Iliev, “The Long Life of Saint Clement of Ohrid: A Critical Edition,” *Byzantinobulgarica* 9 (1995): 62–120. The English translation see: Teophylactus of Ohrid, “Life of St. Clement of Ohrid,” in Kiril Petkov, *The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria, Seventh-Fifteenth Century: The Records of a Bygone Culture* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008), 143–60. The crucial translations of chapters 4–33 on the history of Great Moravia are missing in the edition.

That is how we know it could not have been earlier than November. We also know that they crossed the Danube – a very important piece of information. Some of them went to Bulgaria, to *Alba Bulgarica*, i.e. to today's Belgrade. They were received by the local lords, who then took them to Boris I, the Bulgarian ruler. There they could start anew. It is also necessary to say that Boris also bought out those disciples the Germans had sold into slavery in Venice. At his point we need to say and emphasize one important thing: Although the mission ended as it did, i.e. formally a failure, it perseveres in the created political and ecclesiastical structure, in the creation of an archbishopric, which was restored around the year 900. Another thing is that by moving to Bulgaria, they – *de facto* – did not leave the Great Danube plain completely.

Therefore, when talking about the continuity of Cyrillo-Methodian Mission in Slovak history – not in the borders of today's Slovakia – we can talk about continuity in this respect. Because the southern territories, i.e. former Lower Pannonia and the Tisa Valley still remained under the direct influence of the disciples of St. Constantine and Methodius. This is a needed message for those who speak of discontinuity and claim that the Cyril and Methodius ideal only gets to the Slovaks in the 17th and 18th centuries.

*The
Question
of the
continuity
of Cyrillo-
Methodian
Mission
in Slovak
history*

Chapter 14

The Significance of the Cyrillo-Methodian Mission

Clarification
of the Topic

In this chapter we will deal not so much about political history, nor about the history as it ran, but rather about the meaning and legacy of the Cyrillo-Methodian Mission in Slovak, Slavic and Universal history of human beings.

On some
Stereotypes
Associated
with the
Cyrillo-
Methodian
Mission

First of all, we need to get rid of those classic stereotypes in interpreting what happened here. Many say that if St. Constantine/Cyril and his brother St. Methodius, as well as their pupils, had stayed in Great Moravia, today we would be part of the “Eastern World”. I would like to remind these people that the legacy of St. Constantine-Cyril and Methodius lasted the longest in its prime splendor in Dalmatia and Croatia. And we know very well that Dalmatia and Croatia are now part of the Mediterranean Roman civilization, i.e. of the Latin Papal West. This fact clearly cuts the ground from under their feet.

Another misunderstanding is to regard the Cyrillo-Methodian Mission as a simple thing of the past. Rather, on the basis of my present knowledge, I believe that it is an actual matter of the present, a work whose potential will be appreciated in the future.

Why St.
Constantine
the
Philosopher
Began his
Mission in
Moravia

On the other hand, it is also necessary to say that the actions taken by St. Constantine the Philosopher did not become clear until now. In our previous pages I already pointed out that it is not completely obvious and clear why St. Constantine the Philosopher began his mission in Moravia and why he did what he did, since no one has yet clearly identified the actual motive for his mission to the Slavs sitting on the Danube. My doubts arise from comparing *The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher*, *The Life of St. Methodius* as well as *The Tale of the Translation of the Books* (*Skazanie o prelozhenii knig*), which has been preserved in the East Slavic milieu, from the end of the 11th century. *The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher* clearly states that St. Constantine the Philosopher was invited by Rastislav together with the princes of the country and the Moravians. On the other hand, according to *The Life of St. Methodius*, which was written a little later but before the death of Methodius himself, i.e. around 885, the invitation was written by Rastislav and Svätopluk. To make matters worse, the *Tale of the Translation of the Books* says that the invitation was actually the work of all the Slavic princes along the middle Danube, namely Rastislav, Svätopluk and Kocel of Pannonia.

Internal
Relations
between
Rastislav,
Svätopluk
and Kocel

However, we know very well that there was strong animosity among these three figures. In fact, the Rastislav's Moravians killed Pribina, Kocel's father

back in 860. In 869, Svätopluk would betray Rastislav in a separate peace agreement and deliver him later on to the Franks. Clearly there was nothing resembling agreement, harmony, or mutual love among them. Therefore, it bears asking whether the contemporary sources describe a historical reality, or rather their own wish of what should have happened. The answer is obvious. The authors of *The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher* and *The Life of St. Methodius* wrote what they would have liked to have. In other words, they retrospectively create a historical reality that should legitimize their current legal status.⁸⁸

It was not nearly as rosy as some would have it today. To make matters even more complicated, one also needs to consider the position Constantine the Philosopher himself enjoyed at the court of Byzantine Emperor Michael III. The relationship between them was far from clear. It was not just a question of saying “go and do it because I ask you to do it”. In fact, Constantine the Philosopher found himself in a rather unfavorable position because his protector was Theodora, actually Michael’s mother. The same emperor’s mother, who had been expelled from the Byzantine court by that time. Too many things just do not fit in, so it really bears asking back to the question “what was the real motive”?

I think that what Rastislav really wanted was a bishop. *The Life of St. Methodius* speaks about sending “a teacher”. *The Tale of the Translation of the Books* says “a teacher”. So, there is a discrepancy here. Let me get back to the contradictions of the different sources concerning what Constantine is actually supposed to do in Great Moravia. Namely, according to the *The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher*, when Emperor Michael summons him, he asks him:

“ ‘Philosopher [St. Constantine], I know that you are weary, but it is necessary that you go there. For no one can attend to this matter like you.’ And the Philosopher answered: ‘Though I am weary and sick in body, I shall go there gladly if they have a script for their language.’ Then the Emperor said to him: ‘My grandfather and my father, and many others have sought this but did not find it. How then can I find it?’ And the Philosopher answered: ‘Who can write a language on water and acquire for himself a heretic’s name?’”

The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher, chapter 14.

To sum it up. Constantine asks him one important thing: How am I supposed to do it? How can I go there and be called a heretic when I write with my finger on the water? “I do not have letters”. But, what does “I do

*How
Rastislav’s
Request for
a Bishop
Became
a Request for
a Teacher*

*The
Question of
the Slavic
Letters*

⁸⁸ Mirela Ivanova, “Inventing and Ethnicising Slavonic in the Long Ninth Century,” *Journal of Medieval History* 47, 4–5 (2021): 574–86.

not have letters” actually mean? What letters? This takes us to the point. Monk Chernorizets Hrabar/Hrabr the Monk will eventually make it clear to us. In his defense of the Slavic letters known as the *Treatise on the Letters* (*O Pismenech*),⁸⁹ Hrabar describes how those letters were actually revealed to St. Constantine.

“To begin with, in the past the Slavs had no books but, being pagans, read and augured with strokes and notches. After they converted, they were forced to write down the Slavic speech with Roman and Greek letters without adapting them. But how can one write well with Greek letters бозъ or животъ, or зъло, (...) and other things like those? And so it was for many years. Then God, who loves humanity, who arranges everything, and who does not leave the human species without wisdom but brings everyone to reason and salvation, took mercy on humanity and sent down St. Constantine the Philosopher, called Cyril, an orthodox and truthloving man, and he invented thirty-eight letters for them, some modeled after the Greek letters, some according to the Slavic speech.”

Hrabr the Monk: *The Treatise on the Letters*, chapter 1.

That is a pretty key expression: “Revealed letters”. You see, that system of writing did not develop for economic or legal reasons like those we know from earlier history, when we talk about the Phoenician, Greek, Latin or Hebrew alphabets. The system Constantine is about to create has a different purpose – religious and cultural. This is a really significant difference against everything we have seen so far. The Latin and the Greek system are the systems of Ancient Pagan history. The Hebrew system is the system of the Jews, of the *Old Testament*. This indicates that in order to capture the truth of God, there is a need for something completely new, and perfect. And now we come to the mystery, which is called the Glagolitic script or *Glagolica/Hlaholika*

*The Mystery
of the
Origin of the
Glagolica's
Letters*

There are two different theories about its origin. What model did St. Constantine use to develop this Glagolitic script? There is an endogenous and an exogenous theory. The exogenous theory says that there already were other characters. Constantine just took them and combined them eclectically into something new. There is another, an endogenous theory. According to it, these characters are autonomous although influenced to some extent by the existing norms.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Hrabr the Monk, “Treatise on the Letters,” in Petkov, *The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria*, 65–68.

⁹⁰ Boris Uspenskij, “Glagolitic Script as a Manifestation of Sacred Knowledge,” *Studi Slavistici* 10 (2013), 7–27.

ⴗⴗ	ⴑⴑ	ⴒⴒ	ⴓⴓ	ⴔⴔ	ⴖⴖ	ⴘⴘ	ⴚⴚ	ⴜⴜ	ⴞⴞ	ⴠⴠ	ⴢⴢ
az	buki	vedi	glagol	dobro	jest	zhivete	dzelo	zemlja	izhe	i	dzherv
a	b	v	g	d	e	zh	dz	z	ī	i	đ, y
ⴐⴐ	ⴒⴒ	ⴔⴔⴔⴔ	ⴖⴖ	ⴘⴘ	ⴚⴚ	ⴜⴜ	ⴞⴞ	ⴠⴠ	ⴢⴢ	ⴣⴣ	ⴥⴥ
kako	ljudi	mislete	nash	on	pokoj	rtsi	slovo	tverdo	uk	fert	kher
k	l	m	n	o	p	r	s	t	u	f	kh
ⴐⴐ	ⴒⴒ	ⴔⴔ	ⴖⴖ	ⴘⴘ	ⴚⴚ	ⴜⴜ	ⴞⴞ	ⴠⴠ	ⴢⴢ	ⴣⴣ	ⴥⴥ
oht	tsi	cherv	sha	shta	jer	jery	jerj	jat	jo	ju	
oh	ts	ch	sh	sht	o, e	ü	i	je, ja	jo	ju	
ⴒⴒ	ⴔⴔⴔⴔ	ⴖⴔⴔⴔ	ⴘⴔⴔⴔ	ⴚⴔⴔⴔ	ⴜⴔⴔⴔ	ⴞⴔⴔⴔ	ⴠⴔⴔⴔ	ⴢⴔⴔⴔ	ⴣⴔⴔⴔ	ⴥⴔⴔⴔ	
jus malij	jus malij	jus bolshoj	jus bolshoj	thita	izhitsa						
ě	jě	ǒ	jǒ	th	ü						

Figure 5: Glagolitic script.

The truth might be somewhere in the middle. Take the letter “sh” [Ш], for instance, which resembles a comb. It is obviously borrowed from Hebrew. But there are completely new characters of letters based on the new system which is a combination of three basic geometric shapes already known to the ancient Greeks. Namely, the line, the circle, and the triangle. A line is a connection of two infinite points. If we cross it horizontally and vertically, we get a cross. So the cross is the point where everything begins and everything ends. Therefore, the first letter of the alphabet, which is called AZ, means that it starts deep inside us, like the Greek “az”, or the Hebrew “om”, something starts deep inside us and ends with the “Z”, i.e. an exhalation. That means, the beginning and the end, or the crucifixion of Christ.

“...St Cyril created the letter az. Being the first letter given by God to the Slavic people to untie the tongue of those who learn to understand through the alphabet, az is pronounced with the mouth widely open, while the other letters are pronounced with a small opening of the mouth.”

Hrabr the Monk: *The Treatise on the Letters*, chapter 1.

The circle is God’s perfection, that is absolutely clear. And then there is the triangle. The triangle, depending on whether it goes from top to bottom, like the Divine Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or whether it goes from bottom to top, an isosceles triangle, is basically a representation of the human principle. The intersection of these two triangles is the well-known, old and powerful symbol – hexagram. By combining these different characters, we get a consequential situation, namely the enormous graphic impressiveness and depth of the Glagolitic script. Take, for instance, the word *Isus*

[Jesus]. Its abbreviated form is "IS", that is "Ǫǫ" [Ǫ = (I) and ǫ = (S)]. "I" [Ǫ] is formed by a triangle at the top whose lower part intersects a circle. That means the human principle or the divine principle coming from above. On the other hand, "S" [ǫ] is actually a triangle at the bottom whose upper part intersects a circle. We also have "<I>IS = Ǫǫ </I>", which also graphically represents a God-man doctrine: that Christ was both God as well as a man. If you translate this into its numerical value, then suddenly the number of meanings of the Glagolitic script is incredibly strong.

The Glagolitic script did not originate for economic objectives. It originated for religion and cultural purposes as an instrument of communication with God. I need to emphasize this again. And I think that St. Constantine the Philosopher himself, in *Proglas*,⁹¹ said it quite clearly:

*The
Glagolitic
Script
did not
originate
for Economic
Purposes*

*"For to the one who will accept these letters,
Christ himself will reveal his wisdom.
Your souls, too, he will strengthen with letters."*

St. Constantine the Philosopher, *Proglas*, verses 90–92.

*Glagolica as
the Key to
Understanding
the
New Slavic
Cultural and
Religious
Paradigm*

The alphabet is the key to understanding the new Slavic cultural and religious paradigm St. Constantine the Philosopher has created. In order for understand a little deeper the mystique of this whole message, one needs to know that in creating this script, St. Constantine the Philosopher goes far beyond his own time. He invented a specific character for each Slavic phoneme. A *phoneme*, of course, is a meaning-bearing sound, or if you want "the smallest unit of sound that distinguishes one word from another word in a language". This linguistic abstraction was first developed in the late 19th century by Polish linguist Jan Badoin de Courtenay († 1929). In practice, however, this means, what is said coincides with what is written. In the classical semantic triangle there is an idea, a thought, then there is the utterance, the sound, what you actually say, and there is an object denoted by a sound; and there is the written form. So, unity is achieved between the sound, i.e. the word, and the graphic depiction of that sound. In this respect, capturing the divine Gospel, that message, in those letters, is actually an extraordinary achievement of St. Constantine the Philosopher.

This is something unparalleled in hitherto history and shall remain unparalleled long afterwards. The Glagolitic script – it must be said again and again – is kind of a contemplative tool through which one can access Evangelium, the Message ("the Gospel") of *the New Testament*. This takes us to

⁹¹ Konštantín Filozof, *Proglas*, the 2nd ed., trans. Michaela Chorvátová (Bratislava: Herba, 1998), 59 pp.

yet another dimension of what St. Constantine the Philosopher tried to give to the Slavs.

It is not only that the letters were first revealed to him and then he began to translate the Gospel into Old Church Slavonic using them. The Gospel he translates first is not just any gospel. It is *The Gospel of St. John*. It is not by chance that it begins:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. And the Word was God.”

The Gospel of St. John 1, 1.

That alliteration, the repetition of those vowels and consonants in “Word” [*Slovo*] clearly associates *Slovo* [Word] with *Sloven* [Slav]. Come to think of it, that association makes perfect sense. The vase of the ideological construction of “the Slavs as a nation of *Slovo*” (Word). Thus, it is no coincidence that St. Constantine the Philosopher first translated *The Gospel of St. John*. What he is trying to do – and his brother St. Methodius devoted his whole life to achieving this purpose as well – is to create a kind of Church of St. John (Slavic Church). But who is St. John? John is one of the Apostles. He is also considered to be the author of *The Gospel of St. John* and of *The Apocalypse of St. John*. St. John was Christ’s beloved. The one who, according to the scriptures, is not meant to die. Instead, he will still be here when Christ returns. This suggests, the purpose was to create a church that remains faithful to Christ. The emphasis on absolute accuracy when translating the Gospel, combined with its orientation toward the future, creates an internal tension that is deeply embedded in everything St. Constantine the Philosopher actually did. People often ask me: what was actually the issue with St. Constantine the Philosopher? I answer them: that it WAS not, or perhaps to a certain extent it WAS, as the Gospel later says:

“He [the “Word” = Slovo] was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.”

The Gospel of St. John 1, 10.

Just to some extent it WAS, but – above all – it IS and WILL BE. That is, the fulfillment of what St. Constantine created by teaching us as the nation of the *Book* [the Bible] is only meant to be (when and if we finally understand it). When talking about the future, we must say that in order for that newly formulated and from the view of the economics of Salvation limit thought of Slavdom definition to survive into the future, it needed a formal legal framework.

*Speculations
around the
Reasons
why St.
Constantine
the
Philosopher
First Began
to Translate
the Gospel
of St. John
into Old
Church
Slavonic*

And that is precisely what Kocel and St. Methodius accomplished when St. Methodius was appointed Archbishop first of Pannonia, later of Moravia – *Sancta Ecclesia Marabensis*⁹² and at the end of his life in *Sclavonia* (the Slavic Land). In order to make it possible to justify and defend what they had created – you know, it was not any easier at that time than it is now – St. Constantine the Philosopher develops a whole system of questions and answers and he actually gives it to his pupils.

They are to be found in *The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher* and are somehow encoded in four basic dialogues Constantine the Philosopher – allegedly or really – conducts throughout his lifetime. Each of these dialogues was extremely relevant in its time and is even more relevant today. I suppose it has its own metaphysics, which will perdure as long as there is someone able and willing to understand it at least a little bit. These dialogues are the following: *The dialogue with the iconoclast John the Grammarian of Caesarea*; the second one is the *Dialogue with the Muslims*, the Hagarenes, the Saracens; the third one is the *Dialogue with the Jews* and the last one is the *Dialogue with the supporters of Trilingualism*.

I am not going to analyze each of these dialogues. They all have their own deep structure that needs to be understood. I will only say that they were intended for the disciples of St. Constantine the Philosopher and helped create and still create a number of unambiguous and clearly articulated philosophical-theological questions and explanations of how these should be answered.

Interestingly, both in *Proglas* and in *The Life of St. Constantine the Philosopher*, these texts were preserved mainly in the monasteries that Alexander Avenarius – I keep quoting him – called “*the interaction centers of Slavic culture and religion*”.

Coincidentally, such centers were also in *Transdanubia* and the Tisa Valley, and the Holy Mountain of Athos and the whole Balkans. This is a very important moment because first, through the contemplative preservation of that knowledge, that is, when you calligraphically transliterate and at the same time think about what you are writing, you get another perception. Later on, these beautiful and deep thoughts made it into the lay world. In Old Rus’ and later in Russia itself, but also in Serbia and the Balkans with other Slavs, it created a new construction called the “*Slavic Paradigm*”. A cultural and religious framework. This framework is essential and we can identify it, whether we are talking about Fyodor M. Dostoyevsky († 1881), Vladimir S. Solovyov († 1900), or both of the Bulgakovs – Sergey N. Bulgakov († 1944)

⁹² Betti, *The Making Christian Moravia (858–882)*, passim.

and Michail A. Bulgakov († 1940), not to forget about Pavel A. Florenskiy († 1934) and Milorad Pavić († 2009), Serbian, and more and more writers. All of them contemplate and convey these ideas to this day. In principle, we need to talk about a certain “sum of thoughts”. This sum is still here today, and this is precisely the point I have been trying to get to, as one of the main answers. Why all this has happened?

With its creation, St. Constantine the Philosopher actually gave the word “Slavic” new content, to the extent that the Russian semanticist and philologist Vladimir N. Toporov († 2005) declared that “the Slavs as a nation of the Word” would become the main *mythologem* of the Slavs as such, the core motive of their existential myth. That is, the main motive from which we start and to which we constantly return. This is the metaphysical content of the word “Slav” which is still so difficult to understand without penetrating into the depths of the message that St. Constantine the Philosopher passed on to us.

But there are also the practical results the mission actually brought about. These are more or less academic topics that are still taught in schools today. Let us hear it directly from the documents I have quoted and here we can also comment on it as follows:

“For previously he [St. Methodius] had translated with the [Constantine] Philosopher only the Psalter, the Gospel together with the Apostolos, and selected church liturgies. And then he translated the Nomocanon, that is, the Rule of the Law, and the Books of the Fathers.”

The Life of St. Methodius, chapter 15.

These were some of the essential components required for the Slavic liturgy. In the second phase – this mostly concerns St. Methodius – when he already had his own disciples in Great Moravia:

“Afterwards, rejecting all the tumult and placing his sorrow upon God, he first took from among his disciples two priests who were excellent scribes and translated quickly from the Greek language into Slavic—in six months 73 beginning with the month of March to the twenty-sixth day of the month of October—all the Scriptures in full, save Maccabees.”

The Life of St. Methodius, chapter 15.

By all of this work they constitute the very basic manuals necessary to make something so deeply conceived, so very thoughtful, capable of living practically, capable of functioning within society. St. Constantine the Philosopher emphasizes this again and again: The issue here are souls, the pastoralism of souls, which are the key for those for whom it is intended,

*New
Conceptual-
ization of the
Name Slavic*

*Practical
Results of
the Mission
of Saint
Thessaloniki
Brothers*

the Slavs, to become “the Nation of the Word”. This is the key idea. But this idea also needs an everyday framework it can be implemented within. Therefore, the other dimension – no less important than the first, the metaphysical one – was the ecclesiastical-legal arrangement of the Slavic Church.

*Rome as the
very Centre
of the Slavs*

We see that the ecclesiastical and legal recognition, first the Old Church Slavonic language and then of the Slavic liturgy and the church organization of St. Methodius – the Pannonian, Moravian, Slavic archbishopric, it all came from Rome. Rome is fascinating in many ways, but when you go to Rome and you look at it as a Slav, and you arrive, let us say, at Termini, the main railway station, you will soon get to the Basilica of St. Mary Major, where the books were translated. Next to it is the Basilica of St. Praxedes, where Constantine the Philosopher himself lived.

Then you go to the Basilica of St. Clement, where St. Constantine the Philosopher is buried. Next you go to St. Peter’s square and there, among the big fifty saints of the Catholic Church, are also St. Constantine and St. Methodius. And we can go on and on. Rome is the place that keeps emphasizing the significance of St. Constantine the Philosopher, especially in his dialogue with the Orthodox world. His significance represents the practical execution of the Slavic message, which we know from the non-Catholic part of the Church, i.e. from the Orthodox part, the Slavic part.

*Waves in
which the
Legacy
of the St.
Thessaloniki
Brothers
were
revitalized*

Rome has always been well aware of this. Even though they sometimes almost forget about it, they keep it in a passive commemoration and after all they always come back to it. There are many ways how the “ideomakers” revitalize the legacy of the holy brothers in Rome. That is why it comes in waves. For instance in the 11th century, in the 14th century, with the Jesuits in the 16th century, in the 17th century, but also in the 18th century. What we need to keep in mind is that even emperors and kings understood the practical possibility of carrying out the Cyrillo-Methodian Mission. They understood it very well, especially here in Eastern Central Europe.

To illustrate this, let me mention Emperor Charles IV († 1378) who found the beauty of the Slavic liturgy and Glagolitic script somewhere in Dalmatia and, since he understood it quite well, as Kocel once did, he founded a “Slavic monastery” in Prague, namely the Emmaus Monastery/*Na Slovanech*. Of special interest for Slovak history is that one of his almost “contemporaries”, for instance St. Hedwig of Anjou founded a similar monastery in Poland, in Cracow’s Kleparz district. Indeed, they comprehend SS. Constantine and Methodius’s legacy and they work intentionally with it. Also St. Pope John Paul II understood it and he made St. Constantine the Philosopher and his brother Methodius co-patron saints of Europe. St. Pope John Paul II wanted Europe to breathe using both lungs (the eastern as well as the western one).



Figure 6: *The mosaic of Saints Constantine and Methodius in the Basilica of St. Praxedes in Rome, 10th century (Photography by Peter Ivanič).*

This means that both “lungs” or parts of Christian Europe should join into one circulatory system and for this purpose St. Constantine the Philosopher and his brother St. Methodius are more than useful tools. To sum up on the one hand, there is the deep mystical metaphysical side of the legacy of Saints Constantine the Philosopher and Methodius, which is present here, but which will grow all the more important depending on whether (and how) we become Slavic in the spirit Constantine the Philosopher would have us. And then there is the other practical side, which allows for very intensive work precisely with Constantine and Methodius’ legacy in the dialogue between East and West.

*One
Curiosity
at the End
instead
Summary* And a curiosity to finish with – I like ending my lectures with this type of thing. Until the French Revolution the French kings swore on a Bible written in Glagolitic and Cyrillic letters. Some people in Bratislava might not be inclined to give St. Constantine the Philosopher the recognition he deserves but – as far as I am concerned – if he has been good enough for lords, kings, emperors, Popes and tsars, I think he can suit for them just as well.

Chapter 15

Svätopluk as a Historical Figure

In this chapter I will focus on the historical figure of Svätopluk I, the most important ruler of Great Moravia and the most important of all the Moimirids. *The Annals of Fulda* give us relatively accurate information on the exact place Svätopluk occupies within the Moimirid dynasty. They mention Rastislav being his *avunculus*, i.e. uncle. This indicates that Rastislav's sister or brother must have been one of Svätopluk's parents. We do not know when Svätopluk was born or how his political career actually began. However, some available data indicate that in 845–846, after the Treaty of Verdun, a great “castling” took place on Louis the German's eastern border. Most probably, when Rastislav was designated to the central Moravian throne, Svätopluk was also appointed to the vacant throne of Nitrian principality. It happened in the year 846.

We do not know much about this, though. We can only make assumptions. Most likely, the Urban Agglomeration of Nitra really was the center of Svätopluk's power. Due to the latter written tradition given by Bohemian (Czech) chronicler Cosmas of Prague, one can assume it was the place Svätopluk would stay more permanently. In other words, it was his seat. In 869, Svätopluk enters the scene of history by his own name when the Frankish annalists notice him by the name.

*Clarification
of the Topic*

*The Origins
of the
Reign of
Svätopluk I.
and the
Nitrian
principality*

“In August King Louis, gathered his troops and divided the army into three parts. The first he sent under his namesake [Louis the Younger] with the Thuringians and Saxons to crush the presumption of the Sorbs. He ordered the Bavarians to assist Carloman, who wished to fight against Zwentibald, the nephew of Rastiz. He himself kept the Franks and Alemans with him to fight against Rastiz. When it was already time to set out he fell ill, and was compelled to leave the leadership of the army to Charles his youngest son and commend the outcome to God. Charles, when he came with the army with which he had been entrusted to Rastiz's huge fortification, quite unlike any built in olden times, with God's help burnt with fire all the walled fortifications of the region, seized and carried off the treasures which had been hidden in the woods or buried in the fields, and killed or put to flight all who came against him. Carloman also laid waste the territory [regnum/realm] of Zwentibald, Rastiz's nephew, with fire and war. When the whole region had been laid waste the brothers Charles and Carloman came together and congratulated each other on the victories bestowed by heaven. Meanwhile,

Louis their brother came against the Sorbs, and after he had killed a few, forced the rest to turn and run. Many of them were killed, and the Bohemians, whom the Sorbs had brought to fight for pay, were partly killed, partly forced to return to their homes with dishonour, and the remainder surrendered."

The Annals of Fulda, year 869.

It is in connection with a large expedition Louis the German undertakes against misbehaving Rastislav. The south wing of this expedition is entrusted to the eldest son of Louis II the German, Carloman, Prefect and Duke of Carantania. Carloman attacked Svätopluk's *regnum*. There are not many possibilities he could have attacked from other than the south, i.e. from the friendly part of the empire. Kocel was already active there at that time, too. This clearly shows where Svätopluk appears and what competencies he has.

"Zwentibald, Rastiz's nephew, took thought for his own interests, and commended himself and the kingdom he held to Carloman."

The Annals of Fulda, year 870.

There must be an understanding that in connection with this expedition Svätopluk concludes a separate peace agreement with Carloman. Of course, Rastislav reproaches Svätopluk for having concluded that separate peace. This results in the mentioned internal conflict between them, which ends up with Svätopluk handing over Rastislav to Louis the German. How this came about is described in one of the most adventurous stories ever told in *The Annals of Fulda*. It is therefore worth quoting it here.

"Rastiz was furious at this and laid ambushes in secret for his nephew [Svätopluk]; he plotted to strangle him at a banquet when he was not suspecting any attack. But by the grace of God he was freed from the peril of death. For before those who were to kill him had entered the house, he was warned by one who knew of the plot, and set out as if to go hawking, and so evaded the ambush laid for him. Rastiz saw that his plot was revealed and followed after his nephew with soldiers to capture him. But by the just judgement of God he was caught in the snare he had set, for he was captured by his nephew, bound and brought to Carloman, who sent him under a guard of soldiers to Bavaria lest he should escape and had him kept in prison until he could be brought to the king's [Louis the German] presence."

The Annals of Fulda, year 870.

What the
Conclusion
of a Separate
peace
Between
Svätopluk
and
Carloman
Reveals

The fact that Svätopluk made a separate peace proves he had the authority to do so. This also speaks of the relationship between Nitria and Moravia. To describe it, let me quote the eternal *enfant terrible* of Slovak historiography

of the last third of the 19th century, Jonáš Záborský. Záborský whose relations of Nitrian principality to Moravian principality compared to Poland's relationship with Russia in his time, i.e. "a never ending and incurable ulcer that torments the body".

The years 869–870 see Rastislav being sentenced to death, blinded and confined in a prison (in a monastery?). But also Svätopluk was imprisoned. The situation in Moravia becomes very opaque. For new administrators, new imperial margraves arrive. One of them is William I, the other Engelschalk I. Also this duplication of offices indicates the dual character of Great Moravia. Otherwise, one would have been enough. Moreover, as it was Kocel who should have been given Nitria for it was his original property, the fact that he did not, highlights something else. The Empire had learned that strengthening one party – Moravia – at the expense of the other – Nitria – could easily backfire. Louis II makes a Solomonic decision. That solution was, indeed, sending William and Engelschalk I who most probably were related to Kocel. This is supported by the fact that in the 880s, when Kocel was already dead and Arnulf inherited this territory, he appointed the sons William II and Engelschalk II as the new administrators of Pannonian Transdanubia.

Around 870, a difficult situation arose: there was no potential Moimirid successor. However, the exception proves the rule and a man who goes by Slavomir (*Sclagamar*) appears. Slavomir was a priest. He was ordained before St. Constantine and Methodius arrived or before they went to Rome. Therefore, he was one of those Franco-Slavic clergymen, like Gorazd and others. Being a priest, Slavomir is asked by those who remain – the Moravians – to rise up against the ruling Frankish power. Slavomir concocts a huge uprising, which forces the empire to release Svätopluk. Then Carloman goes with Svätopluk to straighten things out in Moravia. We know what happened next. Svätopluk defected from the side of the Franks to the side of the Moravians. Moravians subsequently beat the Franks head-to-head.

Subsequently he sides with the Moravians and becomes their ruler. On the one hand, the Moravians choose him among themselves to be their prince (*kňaz/knieža*). On the other hand, however, the Frankish Peace makes it necessary for these princes – and this applies to the Moimirids as well – to be recognized by the Empire as well. In an attempt to restore the previous *status quo*, however, the East-Frankish Kingdom first undertakes a series of military expeditions. However, these expeditions are a big fiasco. The Czechs (Bohemians) also took part in them in coalition with the Moravians. This could point at some close Moravian-Bohemian relations. The question has, of course, been thematized in historiography, especially in the 19th century. In this respect, *The Royal Frankish Annals* mention a "wedding caravan"

Imprisonment of Svätopluk I. and Ascension to the Central Princely Seat of the Moravians

The First Slavic Alliances of Svätopluk I

around the early 870s. As I have already mentioned František Palacký made up a story according to which Svätopluk married Svätožizna.⁹³ However, there is no evidence whatsoever to support such a claim. What we do know is that the Bohemians were on Svätopluk's side at the time. The Lusatian Serbs and the Polabian Slavs eventually join Svätopluk, too.

Looking at the situation Louis the German had with his sons – Louis the Younger, Carloman and Charles – as well as with other centrifugal forces he had to face; it is obvious that at one point Louis the German had no choice but to make peace with Svätopluk. Interestingly, a foreigner, John of Venice – apparently a Benedictine monk – is given the task to negotiate this peace and so becomes the first “Slovak Foreign Affairs Minister”. He is the very man who also managed to get St. Methodius out of prison in Bavaria. In the meantime Svätopluk had entrusted – this is key information – all the churches in the castles (gords/strongholds) to St. Methodius.

Now, let us get back to the Peace of Forchheim. The conclusion of this contract determined not only the rule of Svätopluk, but also the development of Central Europe for centuries to come. In which sense? In it, Svätopluk trades peace with Louis the German for a green light to the east. Let me quote this information as it was preserved in the *Annals of Fulda*.

The Treaty of Forchheim in 874: the Recognition of Svätopluk as a Prince of the Moravians by King Louis the German

“[King Louis II the German] spoke with Carloman and Louis [III the Younger/the Saxon] his sons in the villa of Forchheim and there he received the ambassadors of Zwentibald [Svätopluk] who sought peace and promised fidelity. The head of the embassy was John, a priest of Venice, who even confirmed whatever he said with an oath so that the king might have all doubt removed and believe what he said, namely that Zwentibald would remain faithful to the king all the days of his life and would pay the tribute ordained by the king annually, if he were only allowed to live peacefully and rule quietly. The king also heard the messengers of the Bohemians and gave them leave to depart, and after this he took himself to Bavaria.”

The Annals of Fulda, year 874.

The point is very simple. It is precisely this treaty – which guarantees Louis the German stability on his eastern border up to his death – that enables Svätopluk to attack the areas that are not considered to be part of the Empire. We need to understand that any attack needs to have a legal basis – today and back then. We can say that in Forchheim, Svätopluk was given the Carolingian rights to spread Christianity to areas where Christianity had not yet been permanently rooted. From *The Life of St. Methodius* we know

⁹³ Recently: Steinhübel, *The Nitrian Principality*, 210–11.

what areas these were. Some sentences from *The Life of St. Methodius* well characterize the period that came after the Treaty of Forchheim according to the optics of the Moravians:

“And Prince Svätopluk and all the Moravians received him. They entrusted to him all the churches and clergy in all the towns. And from that day forth, God’s teachings grew greatly and the clergy multiplied in all the towns. And for that reason the Moravians began to grow and multiply, and the pagans to believe in the true God, casting aside their lies. And the Province of Moravia began to expand much more into all lands and to defeat its enemies successfully, as they themselves are always relating.”

The Life of St. Methodius, chapter 10.

The given description corroborates expansion of Svätopluk I after 874. Wording of the source clearly shows that the Moravians already had their own oral tradition and talked about their glorious victories.

In another part, the biographer of *The Life of St. Methodius* gives more specific information about the direction of Svätopluk expansion:

“A very powerful pagan prince settled on the Vistula and began mocking the Christians and doing evil. Communicating with him, Methodius said: ‘My son, it would be better for you to be baptized of your own will in your own land, so that you will not have to be baptized against your will as a prisoner in a foreign land; and remember me. And so it came to pass’.”

The Life of St. Methodius, chapter 10.

Svätopluk was heading his expansion into not yet Christianized countries and nations. This is no surprise as we know that from the time of Rome, of Samo, of the beginnings of the Moravians, that the Slavs on the Danube exploited the road later by the historians named as “from the Khazars to the Germans”. It is a large part of the Silk Road, which goes to Baghdad and continues further to China. Of course, Svätopluk also wanted to have a share of this way himself and the Treaty of Forchheim gave him the rights he needed to do so. The question that bears asking is how far Svätopluk managed to get. Archaeological research has found Great Moravian imports in Transnistria, at the Dnipro River valley (Ukraine) and even along the Upper Volga and Oka valleys Russia.⁹⁴ Therefore, there is a need to count with the Moravians being somewhere there, incredibly far from their current habitat. This, of course, has some implications. We will discuss

⁹⁴ Svetlana Rjabceva, “The Contact of Great Moravia with Eastern Europe,” in *Catalogue of the Exhibition “Great Moravia – 1150 Years of Christianity in the Heart of Europe”*, ed. Pavel Kouřil (Brno: Archeologický ústav Akademie věd ČR, 2014/2015), 162–69.

them more extensively elsewhere, though. Here just one sentence – Vikings were not the first that invented the road to Baghdad using the Upper Volga. For now, let us get back to Svätopluk.

The Meaning and Functions of the first Archbishopric of the Slavs

The representation of the party of Svätopluk by the papal legate John of Venice at the negotiations in Forchheim indicates a positive relationship with the Roman Curia. The mutual advantage of this bond was to be demonstrated in a short time. The fact that Svätopluk gets his own archbishopric itself indicates that he meets all the conditions necessary to be considered part of the great Latin and Christian universe, i.e. *Imperium Christianum* to become a member of the rulers of this world. The added value happened to be that first Slavic Church metropolia, which came into being as a consequence of Roman papal policy and in opposition to previous imperial ecclesiastical Christian policy in this part of the world. The author of *The Life of St. Methodius* put it in a single sentence, which St. Methodius is said to have uttered in his defense at the memorable trial conducted against him by the Bavarian bishops. When they offended him: “*You are teaching in our territory.*” St. Methodius answered: “*If I had known it was yours, I would have remained far away; but it is Saint Peter’s.*” The first Archbishop of the Slavs here speaks in accordance with the idea of the restoration of the *Illyricum*, as discussed in the previous chapter. The letter known as *Industriae Tuae*, i.e. “Your zeal”, which Pope John VIII wrote to Svätopluk in 880, confirms the same aim. Moreover, it enhances it with yet another legal argument. Namely, not only the Slavonic archbishoprics, but also the whole of Svätopluk’s Empire is taken under the patronage of the successors of St. Peter.⁹⁵ To be clear, the Pope says:

“...Because by the grace of God you have despised other rulers of this world, out of your most faithful love and together with your noble faithful men and all the people of your empire, you have chosen Saint Peter, prince of the apostolic church and its deputy, to be your patron, assistant and protector in all, and bend your head to his and his deputy’s protection, with your pious mind and the help of God you yearned to remain his most devoted son until your end. And for this strong faith and devotion of Yours and Your people, the Apostolic See with open arms embraces you with immense love as our only son and together with all those loyal to you, we take you into our fatherly womb as sheep of the Lord that have been entrusted to us ...”

The letter *Industriae Tuae* issued by Pope John VIII, year 880.

⁹⁵ Lubomír E. Havlík, “The Roman Privilege ‘*Industriae tuae*’ for Moravia,” *Cyrrillomethodianum* 7 (1983): 23–37.

After the failure of the aforementioned plan to win Boris I, as political guarantor of the Holy Roman Curia's project of *Illyricum*, this role fell to the strongest Slavic ruler of this area and it was Svätopluk. In the second place this letter is also known for being a very strong reminder of the rights Great Moravia had to use Old Church Slavonic. Here in liturgy. But the significance of this letter lies elsewhere. In fact, it defines a specific legal framework for Svätopluk's kingdom within the *Imperium Christianum*.

Quoted words express with absolute clarity that Svätopluk has been taken under the Patronage of St. Peter. This has a paramount historical and legal dimension. Indeed, although Svätopluk always showed a well disposed attitude towards the Empire, he derived his legal rights from Rome. Otherwise, Rome's policy towards Svätopluk is not so exceptional at the time. Rome proceeded similarly to Svätopluk's contemporary, Branimir of Croatia.⁹⁶

*Svätopluk
and Papacy:
The
Patronage of
St. Peter*

Similarly has been done by the Pope Marinus I († 884), successor of John VIII, as he also took Alfred the Great from England under patronage of the Holy See by sending him the relic of the Holy Cross (*Lignum Domini*). In a word, this patronage relationship is not exclusive to the Latin universe, but favors the authority of the Pope over that of the Emperor. Also this is precisely also the framework defined in the letter *Dagome iudex* in which Mescio I, the Polish prince, will move historically. Later on, the very same legal dimension tradition will eventually grant St. Stephen I, who is a vassal of the Pope together with his renewed Pannonian Kingdom.

This legal situation did not change until 2004 when "The Fourth Reich" finally managed to get beyond its historical and legal boundaries and Slovakia, together with Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary became part of it. The term "The Fourth Reich" may sound inappropriate to some, but it is not mine. To the best of my knowledge it was first used by great Polish historians and foreign minister of Polish Republic Mr. Bronisław Geremek. It seems to me appropriate for the strategic alliance between France and Germany that forms the core of today's European Union. Getting back to Svätopluk, his policy was simply clever because it has allowed him to reach a stable balance between the West and the South. In other words, on the one hand he remained part of the Western Latin universe, but on the other hand he derived the legitimacy of his royal power from the Holy See in Rome, not from Imperial Aachen.

While Louis the German lived – he died in 876 – Svätopluk complied with the terms of their agreement. In the same year, Louis' son Carloman ascended

*Svätopluk
and the East-
Frankish
Kingdom*

⁹⁶ Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, 261. See also Mate Zekan, "Branimir's Croatia in the Letters of Pope John VIII (Fragment of a Study)," *Most*, no. 1-2, (1990): 276-81.

the throne of the East – Frankish Empire. Carloman did not live long. He died in 880. Now, *The Royal Frankish Annals* mention that when Carloman marched against his relative Charles the Bald to Italy in 877, there were “*various Slav peoples*” that means Slavic troops in his army. Indirectly it points out that Svätopluk also supported Carloman in his Italian military campaign.

*Svätopluk
Becomes
a Member
of the
Carolingian
Kindred*

This takes us to another aspect of Svätopluk’s rule, namely that Svätopluk became a Carolingian at some point of his life. Many may find it strange and surprising to call Svätopluk – one of the Moimirids – a Carolingian. Some sources say that Svätopluk was the godfather of Arnulf’s eldest son. More importantly, tradition also has Svätopluk to be the husband of Arnulf’s sister: “*Svatopluk takes a wife Arnulf’s sister Gisela,*” writes in the author of later *Bavarian annals*.⁹⁷ Interestingly, she is known as Gisela. By means of this double kinship, Svätopluk becomes a member of the Carolingian family. The question that bears asking is when this happened. Historians consider two crucial dates. The first one is around the year 876. The latter, which led to the formally recognized annexation of Bohemia, is around 889–890. I am more inclined to accept the first option.

*The
Relationship
of Svätopluk
with his
Brother-
in-law and
Relative,
Arnulf of
Carinthia*

There is a complex and multi-layered relationship of Svätopluk with his brother-in-law and relative, Arnulf. Arnulf, like Carloman, was the ruler of Carinthia. This implies that Arnulf was, the southern neighbor of Svätopluk and his *regnum*. The relationship that existed between the two men is crucial for the development of Central Europe as such.

Namely, it can be said that while they lived in peace, the whole territory thrived. But when they went into conflict, it ultimately brought destruction to both. The relationship between the Empire and Svätopluk continued to develop after Carloman’s death in 880. It gained new momentum around 880, when another of Louis the German’s sons ascended the East Frankish throne, namely Charles III the Fat, who, coincidentally, would also become Emperor from 881. We need to keep this in mind because Charles III was the last of the Carolingians to manage to renew Charlemagne’s dream of a unified Latin power collaborating with Rome – the restored Christian Roman Empire – *Imperium Christianum*. We also need to know that Arnulf, Charles the Fat’s nephew, was not very happy about this because he aspired to become East – Frankish King or even more. It is remarkable that after 876, when Kocel disappears from the scene, Arnulf gets Pannonia back. And, more importantly, when he gets Pannonia, he becomes a neighbor of

⁹⁷ Ioanis Aventini “*Annales ducum Boiorum*”, in *Magnae Moraviae Fontes Historici*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Dagmar Bartoňková and comp. 3rd ed. (Brno: Universitas Masarykiana Brunensis Facultas Philosophica, 2019): 409: “*Suatebogus (Svätopluk) Gisalam sororem Arionulphi uxorem duxit.*”

the Bulgarians. The relationship with Bulgaria is, of course, another great concern to Svätopluk himself, for he also has a common border with the Bulgarian Empire in the Tisa Valley. Therefore, the further development of Svätopluk's policy now also depends on Arnulf's moves. Svätopluk has two strings he can pull. One is Charles III the Fat, a more distant one. The other one is Arnulf. Svätopluk wants to be friends with both of the Carolingians. He cannot take anyone's side as this would set the other against him. This is something he needs to tackle in order to keep a stable balance.

Around 882, however, this balance becomes unbearable. Arnulf makes what seems to be later a fatal mistake and entrusts Pannonia to the sons of William and Engelschalk I. By this move, Arnulf takes the whole of Carinthia and the so-called *Marcha Orientalis*, from Aribo who had the support of Charles III the Fat. This situation would eventually lead to the Wilhelminer War. William II and Engelschalk II are "Wilhelminers", i.e. members of a Bavarian noble family. And – as we have already mentioned – these Wilhelminers are most supposedly related to the Pribinas. In addition, Arnulf's potential alliance with the Bulgarians – together with the assassination attempt on Svätopluk *The Annals of Fulda* write about – lead Svätopluk to launch a series of military attacks that would become known in history as the Wilhelminer War. The final result of these wars is Svätopluk annexing Pannonia. This happened between 882 and 884. Up to this point, Svätopluk had always directed his expansion efforts into territories beyond the Empire. This time, however, he attacks Pannonia, a territory with a long and complex historical, legal and Church tradition, at the moment considered as a part of the East-Frankish Kingdom. This might be a heavy task. Why did this intervention actually take place? For what *The Annals of Fulda* tell us is just part of the history. Indeed Svätopluk had already got the archbishop he wanted – whose seat, by the way, was the city of Sirmium, present-day Sremska Mitrovica. From the point of view of Svätopluk, annexing Pannonia was a logical step of his newly formulated foreign policy. The aim of which was the same as for his Western neighbors – to participate in the legacy of Rome. Svätopluk's understanding of the *Orbis Romanus* policy⁹⁸ was slightly different, mostly dependents of the papal vector. But the first step to this was his acceptance of the Papal plan of the restoration of *Illyricum*. Of course, this did not go entirely out of his own head. It was mainly the policy of the Roman Popes of the second half of the 9th century. Svätopluk, however, adopted it, and became a convenient and confident instrument of

*The
Wilhelminer
War and the
Annexation
of Pannonia
by Svätopluk*

⁹⁸ As for the inspiration I have used: Sarti, *Orbis Romanus Byzantium and the Legacy of Rome*, passim.

it. Certainly it could not have been done without suitable advisers, and here Svätopluk could rely on a whole plethora of learned authorities around him. Starting with St. Methodius, through John of Venice, not excluding the first bishop of Nitria, Wiching.

The Anonymous author of the *Gesta Regum Sclavorum* ("The Deeds of the kings of the Slavs") also as *Regnum Sclavorum*⁹⁹ which is then preserved in a later compilation and is generally known as *The Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja* formulated Svätopluk strategy to become a part of the Roman World (*Orbis Romanum*) as follows:

"The King [Svätopluk] also decided, that in his time, all the borders of the provinces of his kingdom be recalled and recorded (that is, written down) in so far as they knew them. He spoke about this announcement but, at that time, no one could be found to give the King a reliable answer on this matter. Then, the King, full of God's wisdom, and using sound counsel, the wise-men and noblemen as messengers to the honorable and apostolic man, Pope Stephen [Stephen V], and to the Emperor of Constantinople, Michael [Michael III], asking them to send him old charters, in which borders, and the territory of provinces and lands were written down, along with their wisest men. And when the King's messengers arrived to Rome and presented the King's words to the Pope Stephen, the honorable Pope rejoiced greatly – mostly because he took the opportune moment to send wise-men, who would feed and satisfy the King and his people, with heavenly bread and the word of life, who were new in faith."

Gesta Regum Sclavorum, chapter IX.

Conquering Pannonia was a significant transgression to the Peace of Forchheim. Therefore, it needed to be validated by a higher authority than the contemporary duke of Carantania – Arnulf. Svätopluk received this approval in 884 in Kaumberg (Treaty of Kaumberg), where he met the Emperor Charles III the Fat. Let me read about this new meeting between Svätopluk and the current emperor.

"The Emperor [Charles III the Fat] set out through Bavaria to the east, and coming to the River Tullnbach, had a meeting at Mons Comtanus [the Kaumberg near Tulln]. To this there came among others the dux Zwentibald [Svätopluk] with his nobles and became by joining of hands, as is the custom, the emperor's vassal. He swore fidelity to him with an oath that as long as Charles should live he would never come into his kingdom with a hostile army."

The Annals of Fulda, year 884.

⁹⁹ The English translation see: Asmin Omerović, "Regnum Sclavorum" (MA Thesis University of New Hampshire University, 2014), 72–79.

Let us compare it with the Peace of Forchheim:

“[Zwentibald] *would remain faithful to the king all the days of his life.*”

On the other hand, at that very moment Charles III makes Svätopluk his personal vassal. By making him his personal vassal, Charles elevates Svätopluk above other princes of the empire, i.e. in this way, Svätopluk is promoted to a level we can compare with other kings of the then Frankish Empire, i.e. East Franconia, Lorraine and West Franconia. I am not the only or the first one to see this encounter as Svätopluk being promoted to the rank of king and recognized by the highest secular authority of the then world, the Emperor of the restored Roman Empire, from the 13th century known generally as the Holy Roman Empire. This is by no means the only recognition Svätopluk received after conquering Pannonia. In fact, the whole point was to validate this conquest.

A few months later he got an even bigger and more impressive recognition, namely from Rome. Since the days of Nicholas I, Hadrian II, John VIII and then their successors, Rome had been building close ties with the rulers along the middle and lower Danube. These Popes – such as Marinus I or Hadrian III – did not live very long but also contributed to the building of Rome’s Papal power. To a certain extent, all these men tried to continue the efforts their predecessors had carried out. It is obvious that the significance Svätopluk has in this complex pan-European game does not remain unknown to them. We do not know much about Pope Marinus’s policy towards Svätopluk. One can only deduce that when Hadrian III set off to see Charles III the Fat, he wanted to confirm his policy aimed at restoring the Roman Christian Western Universe. However, the Pope died on the way and never met Charles III.

In September 885, a new man named Stephen V ascended to the Holy See. He is best known for his harsh reaction to the legacy of St. Constantine the Philosopher and his brother St. Methodius. For now, we are going to focus on something else in relation to Svätopluk. Namely, sometime after this date – i.e. in the early autumn of 885 – Pope Stephen V wrote the famous letter to Svätopluk in historiography known as *Quia te zelo fidei* (“For in zeal for the faith thou hast consecrated”)¹⁰⁰ in which he addresses him as *Rex Sclavorum*.

*Svätopluk
and the Pope
Stephen V:
Svätopluk
Proclaimed
Rex
Sclavorum*

¹⁰⁰ *CDSI*, pg. 27–29, no. 35: “Stephanus episcopus, servus servorum dei, Zuentopolco, regi Sclavorum. Quia te zelo fidei sanctorum apostolorum principi, Petro videlicet regni celestis clavigero, omni devocione devovisti eiusque vicarium pre cunctis huius fluctivagi seculi principibus principalem patronum elegisti eiusque te cum primatibus ac reliquo terre populo tuicioni pariter commisisti: continuis precibus deum bonorum omnium largitorem exoramus, ut ipsius muniaris suffragio, in cuius manu sunt omnia iura regnorum, quatenus eius vallatus auxilio et intervencionibus apostolorum principum Petri et Pauli et a diabolicis muniaris insidiis et corporali sospitate leteris,

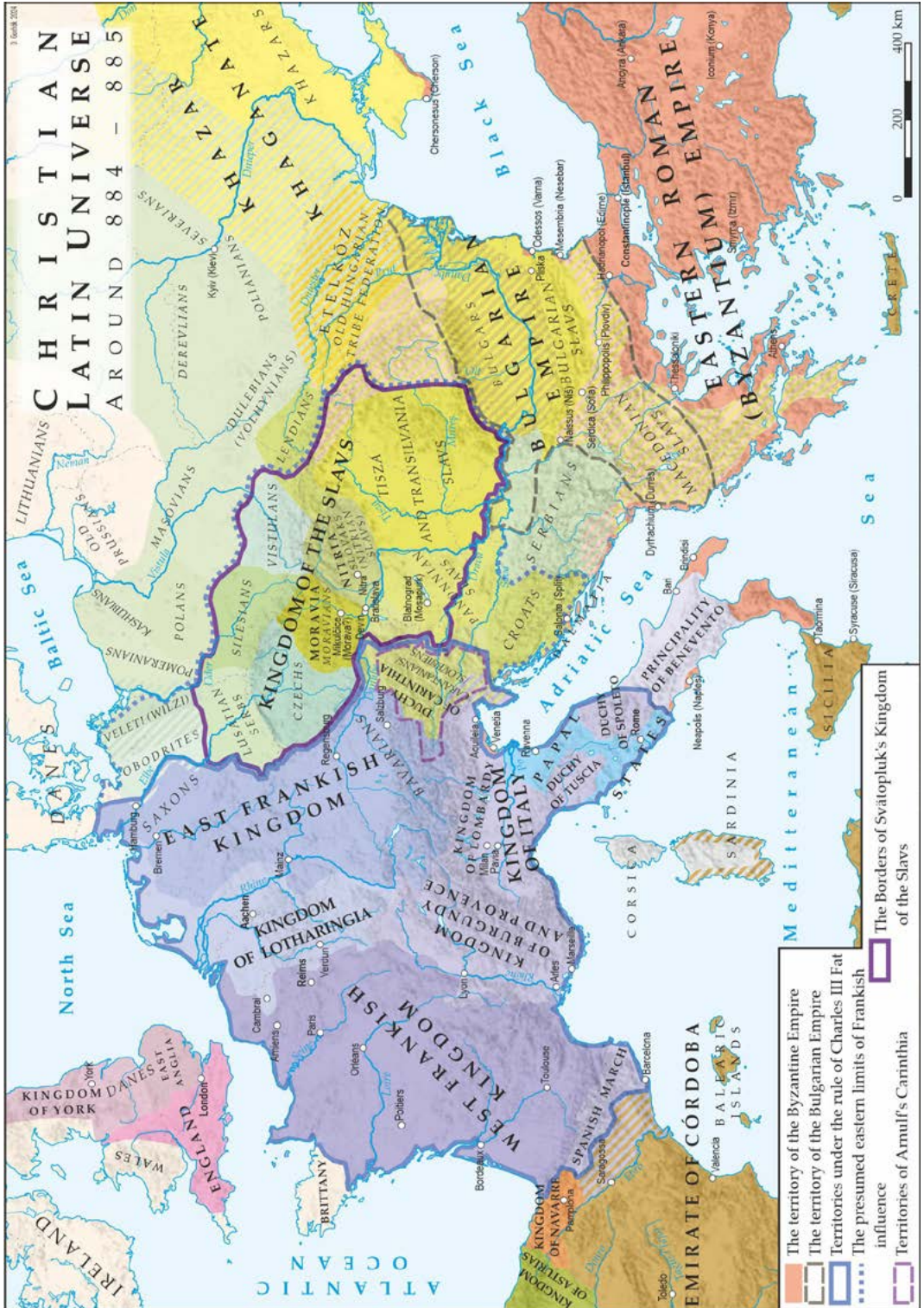
“Stephen, bishop, servant of the servants of God to Zuentopolco [Svätopluk], King of the Slavs. For in zeal for the faith thou hast consecrated thyself with all devotion to the prince of the holy Apostles, that is, to Peter, the key-bearer of the Kingdom of heaven, and thou hast chosen his deputy before all the princes of this world to be thy chief patron, and thou hast at the same time, with the great men and the people of [thy] country, given thyself up to his protection, by unceasing prayers we beseech God, the giver of all good things, in whose hand rest all the rights of kingdoms, to strengthen thee with his favor...”

The Letter Quia te zelo fidei by the Pope Stephan V, (early autumn 885).

In my opinion, these lines reflect the most crucial geopolitical event our territory saw in the 9th century. It is the deciding voice in the debate among historians related to whether the concept of *Regnum Sclavorum* was an original Ottonian invention or a renewed concept from the Carolingian era. Personally, I am convinced that the political imagination of the Kingdom of the Slavs is a product of the 9th century. In my opinion, this is the result of the peculiar relations between the secular power of the contemporary Carolingian Emperors and the generation of powerful Popes of the second half of the 9th century.

I will try to elaborate the reasons why I lean towards the earlier period below. The main reason is that the originality of the letter itself cannot be questioned in any historical way. The second thing is that the author of the letter recognized Svätopluk into the rank of a King both ways directly – *expressis verbis* calling him *rex Sclavorum* and indirectly by the content of the letter itself. However, in order to be clear, we are not talking about the Emperor recognizing someone’s royal rank, as it is the case of the later Bohemian kings. We are talking about the declaration of royal authority by the Papacy. Given royal dignity is recognized by the Papacy by virtue of the holy succession of its office of Vicar of St. Peter. In doing so, the letter clearly emphasizes that the things of the (Slavic) kingdom come from God, *the giver of all good things, in whose hand rest all the rights of kingdoms” (in cuius manu sunt omnia iura regnorum)*. So this is not only a proof of the existence of a royal title for Svätopluk I, but especially a declaration of the existence of the kingdom. Kings and kingdoms are fundamentally two different things. A royal title is conferred *ad personam*. Its exercise belongs to a category limited by the time of its bearer’s life. Kings can be easily deposited. A Kingdom whose rights derive from God is, by contrast, unlimited in time, that

ut anima et corpore tutus, ab eterno iudice bonis operibus decoratus perpetua felicitate doneris.”



Map no. 13.

is, eternal.¹⁰¹ Simply put, a kingdom, by the nature of its origin, exists even though it has no designed kings.

The Pope's words about the divine origin of the kingdom, as will be discussed, have serious implications for the restoration of the kingdom on the Danube around the year 1000. Between the years 884/885 the *Imperium Christianum* consisted of four main provinces/kingdoms West Franconia, Lotharingia, East Franconia and *Sclavinia*.

And this was the model Emperor Otto III, would eventually get back to when he tried to renew the great program of the Carolingians and – resuming the political program *Renovatio Imperii Romanorum* – acknowledged that it would consist of four equal Christian provinces – kingdoms: *Gallia, Roma, Germania* and *Sclavinia*.¹⁰²

The content of the letter *Quia te zelo fidei* was based on the already mentioned letter of Pope John VIII to Svätöpluk known as *Industriae Tuae* from 880. By means of this bull came under the protection and Patronage of St. Peter's and received from John VIII royal and Apostolic rights. Both letters can be considered as formative and constitutive for the development of Papal Central Europe.

The same is repeated almost verbatim in the letter of Pope Stephen V to Svatöpluk, King of the Slavs from the late summer, early autumn of 885. The letter is not complied, it was Svätöpluk who was granted the Apostolic rights the later kings of the Kingdom of Hungary are known to have enjoyed. As a matter of fact, Pope John VIII writes Svätöpluk: “We [John VIII] also consecrated as bishop elect of the holy church of Nitra, that very priest, by the name of Wiching, whom you sent to us...” – this is key information. It goes on: “We wish that you [Svätöpluk] send to us at the right moment another suitable priest or deacon... whom we shall similarly consecrate as bishop.”

In other words, the Papacy concedes to Central and East-Central Europe the very same Apostolic rights to appoint bishops it would eventually take away from the western rulers in the 11th century.¹⁰³ However, it is Svätöpluk – not Stephen – the first ruler to be granted these rights.

*The
Apostolic
Rights of
Svätöpluk*

¹⁰¹ Ildar H. Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language of Authority in the Carolingian World* (c. 751–877). (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008), 102.

¹⁰² Johannes Fried: *Otton III i Bolesław Chrobry*, trans.: Elżbieta Kaźmierczak and Witold Leder. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 2000, passim. German original Idem: *Otto III. und Boleslaw Chrobry: Das Widmungsbild des Aachener Evangelisars, der „Akt von Gnesen“ und das frühe polnische und ungarische Königtum: Eine Bildanalyse und ihre historischen Folgen: Frankfurter Historische Abhandlungen 30*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1989, a second revised edition of this work was published in Stuttgart in 2001.

¹⁰³ Betti, *The Making of Christian Moravia (858–882)*, 213: „The political acknowledgment of Svatöpluk was assured not just through the administrative titles conferred by the Pope in his correspondence, but also by the granting to him of the royal prerogatives usually

Now, let me go back to that Papal policy and to the fact that the Pope addresses Svätopluk *Rex Sclavorum*. It bears asking a legitimate question: does the Pope refer to Svätopluk using just a nominal title, or has he been crowned already? For these are two different things. I cannot elaborate on this issue in detail now, but I believe that Svätopluk's coronation had already taken place. Once more we can try to find the testimony of this coronation in the distant *Gesta Regum Sclavorum*, i.e. "The Deeds of the Slavic Kings".¹⁰⁴

"On the twelfth day, after the summit had finished, the King [Svätopluk] was [was anointed and]¹⁰⁵ crowned by the hand of the vicar Honorius and the cardinals and the bishops, in the fashion [according to the habit] of the Roman kings. There was great celebration among the people and his whole kingdom."

Gesta Regum Sclavorum, chapter IX.

Nevertheless, regardless of whether Svätopluk has been formally crowned or not, or where, or when this happened, decisive is that Arnulf himself has accepted this legal situation. He might have been a bit reluctant but he knew very well that in the current geopolitical situation he could not afford to go against the alliance of Charles III and Svätopluk. Svätopluk understood that his strategic future partner was Arnulf and, therefore, supposedly helped him to ascend to the East Frankish throne. In fact, we know that in 887 – when Arnulf of Carantania invaded Bavaria – among those who supported him in this struggle for Regensburg and the East Frankish title there also were Slavs. We can assume that these Slavs were Svätopluk's people. Apparently Svätopluk does not keep the deal they had agreed with Charles III in Tulln and does what he wants instead. It suggests he might have taken Arnulf's side. It means he might not have been in vain because Arnulf turned out to be the stronger one. One can say he was the last strong Carolingian to eventually become Emperor. However – this must be emphasized – Arnulf does not become Emperor until Svätopluk dies.

Let me go back to what Svätopluk pragmatically gained by this alliance. It gave him – among other things – the formally possession of Bohemia. As

*Deterioration of
Relations
between
Svätopluk
I King of the
Slavs and
Arnulf, King
of the East
Franks*

exercised by the Carolingian authorities in ecclesiastical matters in his dominion. The Pope gave to Svätopluk a leading role, never before held by a newly converted ruler, in the establishment of the episcopal organization of the Moravian church. He gave him the right, alongside Methodius as archbishop, to nominate the appropriate centers for the episcopal sees within the boundaries of his country, and to present suitable candidates for the episcopal dignity."

¹⁰⁴ Omerović, "Regnum Sclavorum", 72–79.

¹⁰⁵ In the English translation, the author has omitted the translation of the phrase *consecratus est* – "he was anointed".

already indicated, this happened in 890, when Arnulf recognized Svätopluk's annexation of Bohemia at Amand Hill or *Omuntesperch*.

The Annals of Fulda describe this as follows:

"In mid-Lent [March] the King set out for Pannonia and held a general assembly with the dux Zwentibald in the place which is called Omuntesperch in the common tongue. There among other things the said dux, [Svätopluk] at the request of the Pope, asked the king urgently that he should visit the church of St. Peter in the town of Rome, and should deign to rescue the Italian kingdom from the evildoing of Christians and the threats of the pagans, and hold it for his own use to control it."

The Annals of Fulda, year 890.

The *Annals* clearly point out the Roman dimension I have mentioned, that Svätopluk had an over-standard relationship with the Papacy. Even more, from the content it is clear that Svätopluk plays mediatory role between Pope Stephan V, Arnulf and Italian ruler Wido

As a matter of fact, Svätopluk is in the position to advise Arnulf on behalf of Rome. On the other hand, Arnulf has no choice but to acknowledge Svätopluk's annexation of Bohemia. It must be emphasized again that this territory is part of the Empire. Arnulf obliges mainly because he needs to tackle another threat, namely the Normans who are advancing into the empire from the north and northwest. At this point, Svätopluk seems to have helped Arnulf again and is willing to meet him. Eventually, however, Arnulf turns against Svätopluk – after defeating the Normans.

This takes us to the last feature, which also characterizes the relations between the Kingdom of the Slavs and the Kingdom of East Franconia, or the Empire as such, for decades to come. The point is that original allies eventually become rivals. When Svätopluk refuses to formally submit to Arnulf, i.e. to recognize his superiority, Arnulf is willing to join anyone, especially the Old Hungarian tribal confederation and, in 892, launches a series of expeditions against Svätopluk. This situation lasted until Svätopluk's death. Svätopluk, however, remains true to his former military reputation and dies undefeated in 894 unaware of the fact that his lifelong work will see quite some destruction shortly afterwards. Mojmir II, the oldest son of Svätopluk breathed one's last around 906 and after him the Moimirid dynasty died out by the sword. About five years later Louis the Child, son of Arnulf died, and with him vanished the dynasty of the Carolingians.

Chapter 16

The Origin of *the Legend of Svätopluk* and its Legacy in the History of Central Europe

In this chapter I will focus on the legend that emerged around Svätopluk. When talking about the historical figure of Svätopluk, I will repeat myself, that there is still no serious monograph about him. Sadly, even less is known about the evolution of his memory, about his legend, *the Legend of Svätopluk*. What is *the Legend of Svätopluk*? *The Legend of Svätopluk* is a set of stories that originated retrospectively, that is after some time and aimed to achieve specific goals that suited their commissioners.¹⁰⁶

*Clarification
of the Topic*

But first, let me introduce you to how the historical Svätopluk turned into the legendary one. From movies and sports competitions we know how a person becomes a legend in its lifetime. This is also the case of Svätopluk. His victories, invincibility and the wide scope of his policies earned him quite a reputation during his course of life. To some extent, this reputation eventually passed over into his legend. And just like anyone who does anything in his existence, not everyone liked everything he did. This is also reflected in his image, in that legend. So, up to this day there is a positive or white legend about Svätopluk and a negative or black one. That is the classic division of all legends. Some are good and some bad, white and black. This, also applies to Svätopluk. But how did it happen? Usually, as we are going to read, those who disliked him the most were his closest neighbors. And those were actually the representatives of the East-Frankish Empire. Over the last years of his life, Svätopluk fought a tough struggle against it for supremacy over Central Europe.

*How the
Historical
Svätopluk
Turned
into the
Legendary
one*

The Annals of Fulda write about the year 894 in a significant way:

“Zwentibald [Svätopluk], the dux of the Moravians and the source of all treachery, ... [here I would emphasize that the word „source“ is the translation of the Latin word “vagina”]... ...who had disturbed all the lands around him with tricks and cunning and circled around thirsting for human

¹⁰⁶ For more about this legend see: Martin Homza et al. *Svätopluk v európskom písomníctve: Štúdie z dejín svätoplukovskej legendy* [Svätopluk in European Writing: Studies in the History of the Svätopluk Legend] (Bratislava: PostScriptum, 2013), 747 pp.

blood, made an unhappy end, ...exhorting his men at the last that they should not be lovers of peace but rather continue in enmity with their neighbours."

The Annals of Fulda, year 894.

This immediate testimony tells how much the East-Frankish elites disliked him. A little westwards, chronicler and Abbot Regino of Prüm,¹⁰⁷ a contemporary of Svätopluk, reminds us in his chronicle:

"About that time [that is, in the year 894] Svätopluk, King of the Moravian Slavs, the wisest man among his people and of a very cunning spirit, lived to his last day."

Reginonis Chronicon, A. 894.

And there is another testimony from the early period, a bit later, namely that of Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus:¹⁰⁸

"The Prince (archon) of Moravia, Sphendoplokos, was valiant and terrible to the nations that were his neighbours."

Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De administrando imperio, chapter 41.

The Roman (Byzantine) Emperor left us a description of Svätopluk as a man who was feared by his neighbors and was a major threat to them. But he is also well known for his famous adaptation of the fable of the three rods, which Svätopluk tells his three sons to teach them they should stand united.

"This same Sphendoplokos had three sons, and when he was dying he divided his country into three parts and left a share apiece to his three sons, leaving the eldest to be great prince and the other two to be under the command of the eldest son. He exhorted them not to fall out with one another, giving them this example by way of illustration: he brought three wands and bound them together and gave them to the first son to break them, and when he was not strong enough, handed them on to the second, and in like manner to the third, and then separated the three wands and gave one each to the three of them; when they had taken them and were bidden to break them, they broke them through at once. By means of this illustration he exhorted them and said: 'If you remain undivided in concord and love, you shall be unconquered

¹⁰⁷ Reginoni abbatibus Prumiensis, "Chronicon cum continuatione Treverensi", edited by Fridericus Kurze, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum* (thereafter MGH SRG in us. schol.), vol. 50 (Hannoverae: Hahniani, 1890), 196 pp.

¹⁰⁸ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Gyula Moravcsyk and transl. Romilly James Heald Jenkins, 2nd edition (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967), 361 pp.

by your adversaries and invincible; but if strife and rivalry come among you and you divide yourselves into three governments, not subject to the eldest brother, you shall be both destroyed by one another and brought to utter ruin by the enemies who are your neighbors’.”

Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, chapter 41.

Although the archetype of this legend has been known since antiquity, it is remarkable that the Byzantine Emperor adapted it to Svätopluk I.

These are the elements that would influence the stereotype of Svätopluk, whether in the writings of the Empire in Latin language or in the Slavonic writings. To some extent, the Slavonic sources are marked by the fact that Svätopluk was involved in the expulsion of the disciples of St. Methodius from his kingdom. No wonder that the image of Svätopluk that has persisted in the Orthodox tradition also reflects this stereotype. For instance, *The Life of St. Clement of Ohrid* – from a later period – depicts him as a basically uneducated man in matters of faith.

*Negative
Stereotype of
Svätopluk in
Old Church
Slavonic
Literary
Monuments*

“The Prince (Svätopluk), however, understood very little of what was said, as he was too completely and utterly dumb to comprehend any divine matter; he was brought up in a sheer barbaric manner, briefly said, with no education whatsoever, and also (...) because vicarious pleasures rid him of all his sense. How could a man entirely distanced from the sanctity of modest life, without which no one lays his eyes on the Lord, ever penetrate any contemplations of the Trinity?”

The Life of St. Clement of Ohrid, chapter X, 31.

A few lines later we read about Svätopluk as a man who wallowed in the mire of women’s passions. A ladies’ man (*imitatio Salomoni*). Svätopluk was, of course, the one who settled the dispute between the disciples of St. Methodius and Wiching in favor of Wiching’s pro-Latin oriented ones. However, it is necessary to emphasize a serious aspect here. Namely that Svätopluk was fearful of saints and, most importantly, held Methodius in high regard. Despite this negative stereotype, which is still shared by the Orthodox world and its Greek Catholic continuation, Svätopluk is described here as a God-fearing and reverent person.

This heads us to our next issue, which is also basic part of his legend: his proper personal name. In the Middle Ages names were given following a philosophy intrinsic to the given dynasty. Under normal circumstances, these names are more or less constant and usually go back to the grandfathers of the newborn. And, all of a sudden, the name Svätopluk appears in the surrounding dynasties. It is also significant that this name, Svätopluk,

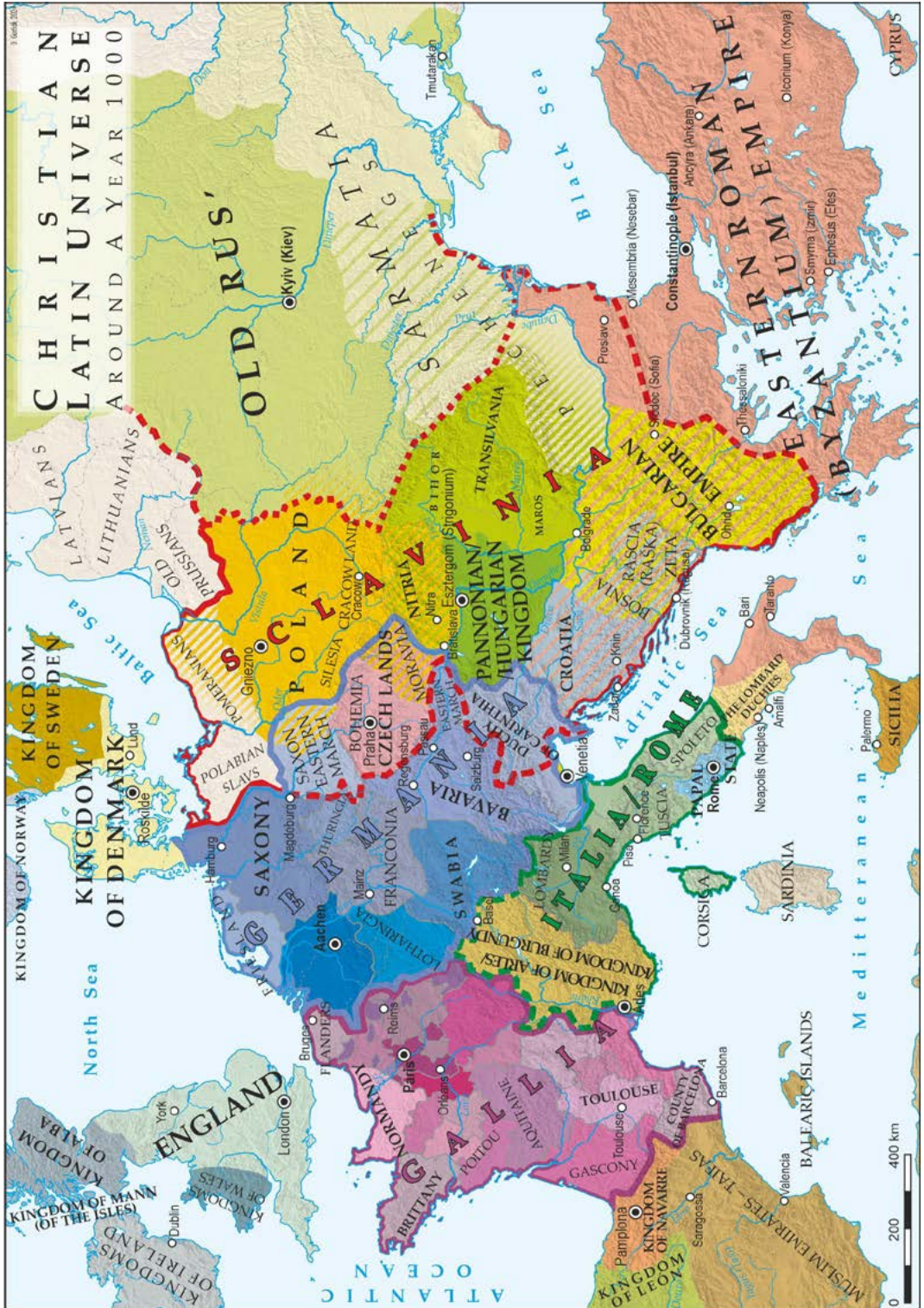
*Personal
Proper Name
Svätopluk as
a Semantic
Base of his
Legends*

appears at more or less the same time at different places. This is, by no means, a matter of coincidence. Take Mescio I in neighboring Poland. The first known historical prince who accepted Christianity named according to Thietmar of Merseburg one of his sons Świątopęk/Swentepulk. Moreover, Mescio I also has a daughter named Świątosława and the name Świątosława shares the first part of the name Svätopluk, which is *Svět/Svat-* or *Swent-* or *Swiet-*. At about the same time, Vladimir the Great and his brother Yaropolk I decide to name their son Sviatopolk, too. (I have said it like this on purpose because the Russian chronicles have Sviatopolk I having one mother but two fathers.) This Sviatopolk, however, will be known in Eastern Slavic literature as Sviatopolk I the Accursed. Sviatopolk I married the daughter of Boleslas the Brave. His special priest is the Bishop of Kolberg, who also is pro-Latin oriented. And it is this Sviatopolk I who pushes the Old Rus' – which has just accepted Christianity – towards the West. Perhaps this is also why Sviatopolk I also has a Christian baptismal name – Petr.

More importantly, the grandfather of Sviatopolk I the Accursed was the first of the Rurikids to go by the bi-thematic West Slavic name of Sviatoslav Igorovich. This name is also interesting as it also contains the theme *Svět-* or *Sviat-*. Moreover, the same theme appears again at approximately the same time in the Trpimirović dynasty of Croatia. In fact, Stephen Držislav named his eldest son Svetoslav (Suronja). In short: in the late 10th and early 11th century, different men in different parts of East-Central Europe are called Svätopluk or have the theme *Svět-* in their name. The question this necessarily raises is whether this is a coincidence? Or is it the power (*potentia*) of a great ruler's name, which is closely intertwined with the political programme of Svätopluk I?

The giving of such name simply makes direct reference to historical Svätopluk around the year 1000. Having the name Svätopluk at one historical moment in two different places and in two new born dynasties is then not a matter of chance. It reflects an idea, a political imagination: to return to Svätopluk, the creator of “the *Regnum Sclavorum*”, i.e. the Kingdom of the Slavs. So, the Sviatoslav Igorevich of Rus' we spoke about, wants to establish his Empire on the Danube and moves south to the Bulgarian city of Preslavs. Saint Vladimir the Great expanded his empire westwards. Sviatopluk gets his baptismal name Peter. Now, in the work known by its first words *Dagome iudex*, i.e. “Judge Dagome”, the father of Świątopęk/Swentepulk of Poland – Mescio I, puts his empire, i.e. Poland, under the Patronage of St. Peter – the very same way Svätopluk once did. Thus, the political imagination associated with the name Svätopluk starts to play a role in the political strategies of the new dynasties striving to go back to Svätopluk's greatness. And the political attribute of this greatness is his *Regnum Sclavorum* as a part

*The
Svätopluk's
Political
Imagination
Regnum
Sclavorum*



Map no. 14.

of the political Western Latin world. There is also a second aspect, namely – the patron of this kingdom is Rome, that is, the successors of St. Peter, where these rulers get their legitimacy or their royal title from.

So, this is the first wave and it passes around the year 1000. It is then that the world sees the emergence not of one *Sclavinia*, but of two of them. Namely Poland and Pannonia, the later Kingdom of Hungary. Both these countries, however, were considering – together with the Czech Principality – going back to the Kingdom of Svätopluk. History did not develop that way, i.e. to the restoration of this universal Slavic kingdom. However, some signs suggest efforts in that direction, especially around the year 1000. At that time we have *Gallia, Roma, Germania* and *Sclavinia*, as the four basic provinces of the Latin tetrarchy, as the basic program of Otto III and his faithful friend St. Vojtech-Adalbert († 997), bishop of Prague and martyr. Things developed otherwise, though. Instead, the local particularism in which new dynasties are embodied grows stronger. However, the historical moment of these dynasties comes at the time of the great struggle between the imperial throne and the Holy See. The Papacy and the empire, i.e. the ecclesiastical and the secular power, compete for hegemony over the Latin world.

New Thematizations of Svätopluk's Legend in Times of Struggle for Investiture

This struggle begins with the accession of Pope Gregory VII and Emperor Henry IV the Accursed. Curiously, after some decades – the 1050s, 1060s, 1070s – the name Svätopluk reappears in the Slavic dynasties of East and Central Europe. Quite unexpectedly, we can even find it again in Old Rus' which is also sometimes called Kievan Rus'. In fact, after the victory of Yaroslav the Wise († 1054) against his Catholic brother Sviatopolk I the Accursed and, therefore, of the Byzantine-oriented Slavic Orthodoxy, no one would expect the Moimirids name Svätopluk to appear in Old Rus' ever again. The opposite, however, is true. Yaroslav's son was Iziaslav I Yaroslavich († 1078) of Kiev and this Iziaslav surprisingly named his son, Sviatopolk II Iziaslavich. Sviatopolk II Iziaslavich also gets a Christian baptismal name Michael, something we may get back to later on. Moving on, the Nitrian Princes, Geza I Magnus and St. Ladislav I, have a sister called Euphemia. Euphemia eventually became the wife of Duke Otto I of Olomouc in Moravia. Worth mentioning is that Otto in Moravia and Euphemia – a Moravian Prince and a Nitrian Princess – named their eldest son Svätopluk, too. By the way this is the first time the name Svätopluk appears in the Premyslids dynasty. Never before and hardly ever after will the name Svätopluk appear in a Czech dynasty. Now let us have a look at another element in the *Legend of Svätopluk*. This is the new commissioner of this work. As surprising as it may sound, its universal commissioner is the Holy See in Rome. In fact, in the frame of the Investiture Controversy, the Papacy seems to be



Figure 7: Codex Gertrudianus: St. Peter with the Princess Gertrude, the Prince Yaropolk and his wife Cunegunde of Meissen (f. 5^v) and the coronation of Prince Yaropolk and his wife by St. Peter and St. Irene (f. 10^v), see: <http://www.librideipatriarchi.it/en/the-foroiulienne-evangeliarium>.

looking for some kind of political support. And this support means symbolically to have the new Svätöpluk. The ancestors of St. Peter in Rome are craving for Svätöpluks. This is the time that the first letters in which the Popes sent Svätöpluk are being transcribed in Rome.¹⁰⁹ And thanks to this, they have been preserved for us.

Let me make another step concerning the spread of the Svätöpluk's political imagination in the 11th century Old Rus'. This name refers to Sviatopolk II Iziaslavich. However, the political imagination associated with the political deeds of the first known Svätöpluk is more associated with Yaropolk II Iziaslavich, brother of Sviatopolk II. Yaropolk II not only started minting coins with the image of St. Peter, but also built the first church in Kiev, which he dedicated to the first Pope – St. Peter. During his diplomatic mission in Rome, he eventually, following the example of Svätöpluk, King of the Slavs attempted to bring Rus' under the Patronage of St. Peter (*Patrimonium beati Petri*).

“In the Hands of God Rest all the Rights of Kingdoms”

¹⁰⁹ Betti, *The Making Christian Moravia (858–882)*, passim.

The whole story is not only well documented in written sources, including the contemporary letters of Pope Gregory VII to Poland and Rus' in this matter, but we also have it contaminated in an image, that says it all. *The Gertrude Psalter* of Cividale/*Egbert Psalter* or *Codex Gertrudianus* (see Figure 7, above) from the last third of the 11th century preserves one beautiful illumination depicting St. Peter standing behind Yaropolk II Iziaslavich who is being crowned by Christ himself. For the sake of better understanding the practical plane of the investiture ritual, let me demonstrate this.

It is clear from the illumination that royal power is solicited and conferred symbolically through St. Peter (practically through his contemporary vicars). Moreover, in contrast to the concept of the sacral power of the Eastern and Roman Emperors, there is a Roman-Papal mediation between God and designated king. Formally, however, it is a bilateral act in the spirit of the old Latin *do bis dat*, i.e., "I give in order to receive". The Papacy initiates the crowning of the ruler and his anointing. The crowned and anointed ruler was subsequently taken under the protection and Patronage of St. Peter as *Patrimonium beati Petri*. In return, the crowned ruler expresses his willingness to serve the interests of the Papacy, and offers the Church worldly guarantees and support.

This picture clearly depicts the right the Roman Popes are given by the will of Christ to produce kings who are subject to Rome. In short, in the Eastern tradition the name of Sviatopolk – also by means of Sviatopolk I (Peter) the Accursed I mentioned – clearly begins to be connected with the Latin Roman tradition. For this reason, after the 1070s, Old Rus' needed to generate a new narrative of that evil, black Svätopluk-Peter. This is, of course, Sviatopolk I the Accursed, who is said to have killed his brothers Boris (Roman), and Gleb (David) so that he can seize power after his father Vladimir the Great. The issue here is not whether he killed them or not, though. The contemporary Russian and Scandinavian sources differ in this respect. The real issue is that this legend contains a reference to Rome, a Latin reference for Svätopluk's royal rights. In Rus', however, these rights were not supposed to mean anything any longer around the middle of the 12th century, when an anti-legend concerning Sviatopolk I the Accursed was elaborated.

This is also the time when Cosmas of Prague writes down the *Nitrian Svätopluk's Legend*.¹¹⁰

The Nitrian
Svätopluk's
Legend in
the Later
Czech
Context

¹¹⁰ At the moment there are two translation of Cosmas to English. Older – Cosmas of Prague, *The Chronicle of the Czechs*, trans. Lisa Wolverton (Washington, D.C: CUA Press, 2015), 328 pp and more recent – Cosmas of Prague, *The Chronicle of the Czechs*, ed. János M. Bak and Pavlína Rychterová, trans. Petra Mutlová and Martyn Rady with the cooperation of Libor Švanda (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2020), 499 pp.



Figure 8: Johann Sadeler, “Rex SVATOCOPIUS”, in *Oraculum anachoreticum* (Ventijs cca 1598): “Defeated by the army of the Frankish Empire King SVATOCOPIUS took off / his armour at the foot of the Zobor hill: / Refuge with three hermits he finally found, / in joy from having replaced the Kingdom with God.”

“Borivoj was baptized the first Catholic duke of the holy faith. In the same year, Svatopluk, the King of Moravia—as it is commonly said—fled in the midst of his army and was never seen again. But the truth of the matter is that he came to himself when he recognized that he had unjustly taken up arms against his lord Emperor and fellow-father Arnulf, as if forgetting his benefice. For Svatopluk had subjugated not only Bohemia but other regions as well, from there all the way to the River Oder and toward Hungary to the River Gron. Having repented, with no one knowing of it in the darkness, he got on his horse in the middle of the night and, passing through his camp, fled to a place on the side of Mt. Zobor, where three hermits had once built a church with his money and assistance in a great forest inaccessible to men. When he arrived there, he killed the horse in a secret place in the forest, buried his sword in the ground, and, with the light of day dawning, approached the hermits. Without their knowing who he was, Svatopluk was tonsured and dressed in hermit’s garb. As long as he lived, he remained unknown to everyone. He told the monks with him who he was only when he realized death was at hand—and died immediately thereafter. His realm was held by his sons for a short, but less happy, time. With the Hungarians plundering part of it, the eastern Germans another part, and the Poles another part, it was subsequently laid waste by enemies.”

Cosmas of Prague, *The Chronicle of the Czechs*, book 1.14, year 894.

So, the Nitrian people believed that Svätopluk did not die, but disappeared amidst his army (*fled in the midst of his army*), as Cosmas reports. If this reminds you of King Arthur’s transition, it is because it actually stands on similar principles. However, Cosmas of Prague did not preserve just the first part, the popular one, the *Sicut vulgo dicitur* or “As it is commonly said”. In fact, he also wrote the second part, the *Sed revera* or “But the truth of the matter is”. And this second part of the legend tells how Svätopluk did not die but went to the forest and there he took off and buried his clothes, killed and buried his horse, and deposited his sword as well. Then he disguised himself as a monk and lived unrecognized as a penitent until his death.

Only in the very end did he disclose his identity. Of course, Cosmas heard this from the Benedictine monks on Zobor hill. However, it must be known that the patrons of the monastery at Zobor were the nobles from Hont-Poznan kindred as well as the Nitrian Arpadians. The Hont-Poznans date back to the times of Great Moravia. Therefore, to some extent the legend depicts their political ideas. The issue here is the sword that is buried there. This is the sword that gives its possessor the power to do what Svätopluk once did. That is, to unite Cis-Danubia and Trans-Danubia. And that is

what the Arpadians from Nitra actually did – *de facto* and *de iure*. This is of paramount significance. Thanks to this work we now know how the Nitrian Arpadians dealt with the Svätopluk legacy.

The first sentence Cosmas of Prague uses to start his narration is, also, meaningful. In this case but especially for Premyslids:

“ [in 894] *Borivoj was baptized the first Catholic duke of the holy faith. In the same year, Svätopluk, the King of Moravia—as it is commonly said—fled in the midst of his army and was never seen again.*”

This juxtaposition, i.e. being next to each other, clearly tells us that Svätopluk disappeared in the middle of the army at the same time Borivoj was baptized. When was Borivoj baptized? When Svätopluk disappeared in the middle of his army. Although these two events are not related, the fact that they were intentionally put next to each other by Cosmas in the text creates a logical connection: Borivoj is the successor of Svätopluk. Premyslids started to rule over Moravia when Svätopluk “*fled in the midst of his army*”. I am not going to analyze this matter in more detail as it has a life of its own in Czech tradition.

Around the middle of the 12th century,¹¹¹ so-called *The Legenda Christiani*¹¹² describes Borivoj being baptized at Svätopluk’s court by St. Methodius himself:

“[Borivoj] *Sparkling with of the bloom of remarkable handsomeness and youthful vigor, he once called on his prince or King in Moravia, Svätopluk, about a personal matter and one concerning people entrusted to him. And he was received well by him and was invited along with the others to banquet. However, he was not permitted to sit among the Christians but was asked to take his place on the floor in front of the table in the manner of pagans. And now, they say, bishop Methodius was distressed by his humiliation and said to him: ‘What a pity, such remarkable man! Although you have also princely power and rank, you are not ashamed of being banished from princely*

The Czech Legends of Svätopluk and the Idea of Translatio regni

¹¹¹ The dating of this written monument is controversial. Personally, I believe that this monument was created in the second half of the 12th century. See: Martin Homza, *Mulieres suadentes – Persuasive women: Female Royal Saints in Medieval East Central and Eastern Europe*, trans. Martina Fedorová et al. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017), 97. Traditional opinion says that it was written in the second half of the 10th century. See: David Kalhous, *Legenda Christiani and Modern Historiography* (Leiden/New York: Brill, 2015), 166 pp.

¹¹² English edition: “Life and Martyrdom of Saint Wenceslas and His Grandmother, Saint Ludmila (*Legenda Christiani*),” in *The Origins of Christianity in Bohemia: Sources and Commentary*, ed. and trans. by Marvin Kantor (Evanston (IL): Northwestern University Press, 1990), 163–203.

seats and would rather sit on the ground with swineherders for the sake of shameful idolatry.' Then he said: 'To what danger will I expose myself for this matter? What good Christian religion bring me?' 'If you renounce idols and evil spirits residing in them,' said Bishop Methodius, 'you will become the lord of your lords, and all your enemies will be subject to your power and your descendants will grow daily like a great river into which the flow of various streams pour.' (...) By this (...) he [Borivoj] yearned to receive the grace of baptism."

The Life and Martyrdom of Saint Wenceslas and His Grandmother, Saint Ludmila (Legenda Christiani), chapter 2.

On this occasion, St. Methodius tells Borivoj that if he agrees to be baptized "you will become the lord of your lords". To put it in contemporary language: you, the Premyslids from Prague, will dominate Moravia and incorporate it into your territory. This literary construction of a legitimized character is then further developed in later Czech tradition.

According to the basic idea of this ideological edifice, known later on also in Latin as idea of *translatio regni*, that means the idea the Kingdom of Moravia is transferred to Bohemia, i.e. Svätopluk's crown to Vratislav II, the first Czech king. However, its precise wording, comes just from the 14th century and is formulated in *The Chronicle of Dalimil* and *The Chronicle of Přibík Pulka of Radenín* and other writers who wrote in the circles of Czech King and Roman Emperor Charles IV. As a matter of fact, Charles IV was particularly fond of Svätopluk's story. I would even dare say that, in this respect, Charles IV identified himself in the Slavic circumstances of Bohemian kingdom more with Svätopluk than with Charlemagne. Mainly because it was from Svätopluk that he and his Bohemian (St. Wenceslaus') crown got the right to control Poland and Rus'.

After the victory of the Nitrian line of the Arpadians, their representatives begin to write the new history of their kingdom, which will eventually become known as the Kingdom of Hungary. The problem now is what to do with Svätopluk's tradition. As a matter of fact, it suits one part of the Slavic population but not the other, non Slavic. As a result, the first anti-legend to emerge has Svätopluk welcoming those old Hungarians before being defeated by them and drowning in the Danube. This legend continues to evolve and is complemented by more and more new anecdotes. One of the best known originated in the 14th century and has Svätopluk selling his country for a white horse, a golden bridle and a golden saddle (see Figure 8).



Figure 9: Anonymous, *The Illuminated Chronicle Chronicle of the Deeds of the Hungarians*¹¹³ (the 14th century): The 14th century picture story of a legend in which Svätopluk sells his country (p. 21), see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronicon_Pictum#/media/File:Chronicon_Pictum_P21.jpg.

¹¹³ See English translation: Anonymous, *The Illuminated Chronicle Chronicle of the Deeds of the Hungarians from the Fourteenth Century Illuminated Codex*, ed. and trans. János M. Bak, László Veszprémy with a preface by Norbert Kersken (Budapest/New York: CEU Press, 2018), 426 pp.

I will not analyze it in more detail. I have done it in the other book.¹¹⁴ What matters is that, although negative, it also contains a clear reference to the starting point of the Arpadians. This starting point is actually Svätopluk himself who dies in the Danube. Svätopluk must therefore drown himself in the Danube. His body will merge with the water of the Danube. This is the moment from which Arpad, the chief of the Hungarian tribal confederation, can establish his power over Svätopluk's kingdom. Strange enough, if one compares this with how Czech history begins according to Cosmas of Prague. The first Bohemian Christian prince, Borivoj, is baptized in the year in which Svätopluk disappears in the midst of the army. In both the first and second cases, Svätopluk does not die. The legendary king cannot die. He merges with the chthonic element. The new power is then defined in opposition to the one that has become eternal. It is hard to say whether things happened this way. What is certain is that this is how legends are formed, and this is how the two dynasties of central Europe, the Premyslids and the Arpadians, have defined their power, albeit negatively, since Svätopluk.

We could go on listing some other *legends of Svätopluk* that appeared in the later chronicles from the Kingdom of Hungary in the Middle Ages. All of them just prove only one thing, that for several hundred years after the death of the great ruler there was still a living memory of this monarch across the social stratification of the Kingdom of Hungary, which was passed down through oral and written tradition.

But let me move on to the Slavs from the western part of Balkan Peninsula, to the Croats. Here we find the *Supetar Cartulary*. This is a document written in the Romanesque, Carolingian script from St. Peter's Monastery including one remarkable gloss:

"These were bans of Croatia from the family of Croats since the time of King Suetopelegi (Svätopluk) until the time of Suenimir [Zvonimir], a King of Croats: Stephanus Cucar, Saruba (...) Slauaz Cucar was a royal judge Presimir Cucar. In the time of Suenimir Petrus Sna (...) was a ban. They were all bans in Croatia..."

It contains the formula that from King Svätopluk († 894) to King Zvonimir († 1089) these four bans (lords) of Croatian blood ruled over the Croatians. The issue here is *"from King Svätopluk to King Zvonimir"*. This is clearly underlined here. Svätopluk is the legitimist sacral starting point of all Croatian

¹¹⁴ For more details see: Martin Homza, "Stredoveké korene svätoplukovskej tradície u Slovákov (čierna a biela svätoplukovská legenda)" [Medieval roots of the Svätopluk's tradition in the Slovak (Black and White Svätopluk Legend)], in Martin Homza et al. *Svätopluk v európskom písomníctve*, 48–141.

kings from the Trpimirović dynasty. Again, there is no time to analyze this in detail. It is essential to stress, however, that another dynasty, this time of South Slavic origin, derives its legitimacy from Svätopluk. However, this is by no means an isolated case in the Balkan Peninsula either.

This takes me further south, to Duklja and Bar, in today's Montenegro, and to the Vojislavljević dynasty and to the text known as *Gesta Regum Sclavorum* – *Deeds of the Kings of the Slavs*, also known as the *Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja*, *Barski rodoslov*, or simply *Regnum Sclavorum* (*Realm of the Slavs*).¹¹⁵ This is a Serbian-Montenegro dynasty whose name derives from the first bearer of the name Stephen Vojislav. Pope Gregory VII addresses Mihailo Vojislavljević as *Rex Sclavorum* – “King of the Slavs”.¹¹⁶ It is actually in his court and in the court of his son that probably the most beautiful and brightest work about Svätopluk originates. It is Chapter IX of *The Gesta Regum Sclavorum*, i.e. “*The Deeds of the Kings of the Slavs*”. It speaks about him as the “holiest” (*sanctissimus*), “most Christian” (*christianissimus*), “kindest” (*benignissimus*) and one “filled with the wisdom of God.” It was the Benedictines who are behind it. Moreover, it is commissioned by Rome. And, also, it is actually an agreement of the local elites. On the one hand, these elites need to preserve Old Church Slavonic as their liturgical language, which was banned by Rome after the Synods in Split. On the other hand, they also need to save the legacy of St. Constantine the Philosopher who, according to this text, is the one who baptized Svätopluk.

This could not have happened, though. First because Svätopluk was already a Christian. Constantine-Cyril could by no means have baptized Svätopluk. But the fact that the legend actually has them together in the Balkan gives to the story relevant dimension – preserve Old Church Slavonic in the liturgy of the local Benedictines. We could wrap it up here, but we find another meaningful message in the context of the Western empire, itself – the *Gesta regum Sclavorum* is the only source describing the actual coronation of Svätopluk I:

“On the twelfth day, after the summit [diet] had finished, the King [Svätopluk] was anointed and crowned by the hand of the vicar Honorius and the cardinals and the bishops, in the fashion [according to the habit] of the Roman kings. There was great celebration among the people and his whole kingdom.”

Gesta regum Sclavorum, chapter IX.

¹¹⁵ Omerović, “*Regnum Sclavorum*”, 61–139.

¹¹⁶ Wawrzyniec Kowalski, *The Kings of the Slavs: The Image of a Ruler in the Latin Text of The Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2021), 369 pp.

As it was seen so far, in the last decades of the 11th century there were several potential carriers of Svatopluk's political message. The accomplishments of the Vojislavljević family in the South Slavic regions, who had managed to free a large part of the Balkans from the domination of Byzantium and were ready to help the Holy See of Rome in other ongoing military and political struggles, became the deciding factors that elevated Mihailo Vojislavljević to the new, i.e., the second "King of the Slavs". As had become usual for the new successful dynasties in this part of the world at the time, being bestowed the crown was not enough. It was necessary to "seal" it with an adequate legitimizing narrative, i.e., with their dynastic *gesta*. In this context, the Vojislavljević concept of a "Slavic kingdom" could put to good use the story of the anointing and coronation of Svatopluk, the first King of the Slavs recognized by Rome. On the one hand, it legitimized the current power of the "new Svatopluk," Mihailo Vojislavljević. On the other hand, by connecting the baptism of Svatopluk with St. Constantine the Philosopher, a true believer recognized by Rome, it also blessed a substantial part of the Dalmatian-Croatian and Glagolitic-Slavic Benedictine tradition. In any case, this example also demonstrates the extraordinary potential of *the Svättopluk legend*. Here, unlike the Russian, Czech or Hungarian dynastical construction, but in the most positive sense.

*The Imperial
Legends of
Svättopluk*

The chapter on the legend of Svätopluk would not be complete if we did not talk about another line of *the Legend of Svättopluk*, which developed in the Empire itself. It is based on the historical event that it was Arnulf who let the evil – namely the nomads – into Europe, into the Empire in the 9th and 10th century. The Liutprand of Cremona testifies to this in his work *Antapodosis (Retribution)*¹¹⁷ from the 10th Century as follow:

“Meanwhile Arnulf, the strongest ruler among the northern peoples, found himself unable to overcome the vigorous resistance offered him by the aforesaid Centebald duke of the Maravani. Accordingly he broke down – O grievous tale! – the strong barriers which, as we have said before, are usually called the closures and called in the Hungarians to help him, a people greedy, reckless, ignorant of Almighty God, acquainted with every sort of crime, only eager for carnage and rapine. I use the word “help” but I should rather say ruin, for when Arnulf soon afterwards died these Hungarians proved themselves a deadly danger both to his people and to all the other nations in the south and west. What happened? Centebald was beaten, subdued and forced to pay

¹¹⁷ Liudprand of Cremona, "Antapodosis", in *The Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, ed. and trans. Frederick Adam Wright (London and New York: George Routledge & sons, 1930), 27–212.

tribute: but he was not the only one. How blind was King Arnulf's desire for power! How cruel and accursed did that day prove! The bringing down of one weak man brought down sorrow upon all Europe. How many women were



Figure 10: Jean Le Clerc, "Rex SVATACOPIUS", in *Oraculum Anachoreticum* (Paris, 1620).

left widows, how many fathers made childless, how many virgins debauched, how many of God's priests and people taken prisoners, how many churches laid waste and lands left desolate! And all this the result of blind ambition!"

Liutprand of Cremona, *Antapodosis*, book I, chapter 13.

Arnulf did so when he betrayed Svätopluk, a Christian, who had kept those nomads beyond the Carpathians.¹¹⁸ They had been driven out by Charlemagne when he expelled the Avars from this territory.

Today, many paths can be shown along which the memory of Svätopluk developed in the western part of Europe. One more of them is the image of Svatopluk in the works of the 16th century Bavarian historian Aventine. Unfortunately it has not been analyzed in detail to this day.

Another comes from the time of Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa, when the new sarcophagus of Charlemagne was being made. This sarcophagus shows Henry III and Henry V – who are described as *Imperatori Romanorum* – standing on both sides of Zendenoldus (Svätopluk), as *Rex Romanorum*.

*How a Great
Ruler
Became
a Saint*

There are also several later adaptations and actualizations of *Nitra legend of Svatopluk*. One of the most famous is attributed to Pope Pius II (Enea Silvio Bartolomeo Piccolomini) himself, who also writes it down in his *Chronicle of the Czechs*, that is, in the 15th century. Pope's version of the legend of Svätopluk became the basis for the later fame of his sanctity. Now, the legends about Svätopluk go beyond the Middle Ages. One of the most significant of these continuations can be found in the times of re-Catholicization. Following Svätopluk's example, Emperor Charles V († 1558) joins a monastery and stays there for the remaining two years of his life. Later on – in many 16th, 17th, and 18th century adaptations – we can also see Svätopluk as a penitent king who goes into seclusion.

Finally, in 1655, arose in the Benedictine milieu the *Legend of St. Svätopluk*, known in Latin after its first words as *In Finibus regni Hungariae*. The legend describes king and confessor, penitent King. Even the Jesuits have plays describing this metanoia from king to penitent. Curiously, this form of the *Legend of Svätopluk* reaches the Americas/New World. In the Dominican monastery in Cuzco, in the now Spanish colonies – originally a territory of the Incas – there is a fresco of Svätopluk as a penitent king and saint. And this is not the only reference to Svätopluk in the new world. Perhaps I can finish now with one more reference.

¹¹⁸ Stefan Albrecht, "Das Großmährische Reich in der Historiographie des römisch-deutschen Reiches," in *The Great Moravian Tradition and Memory of Great Moravia in the Medieval Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Robert Antonín et al. (Opava: Slezská univerzita, 2014), 37–82.

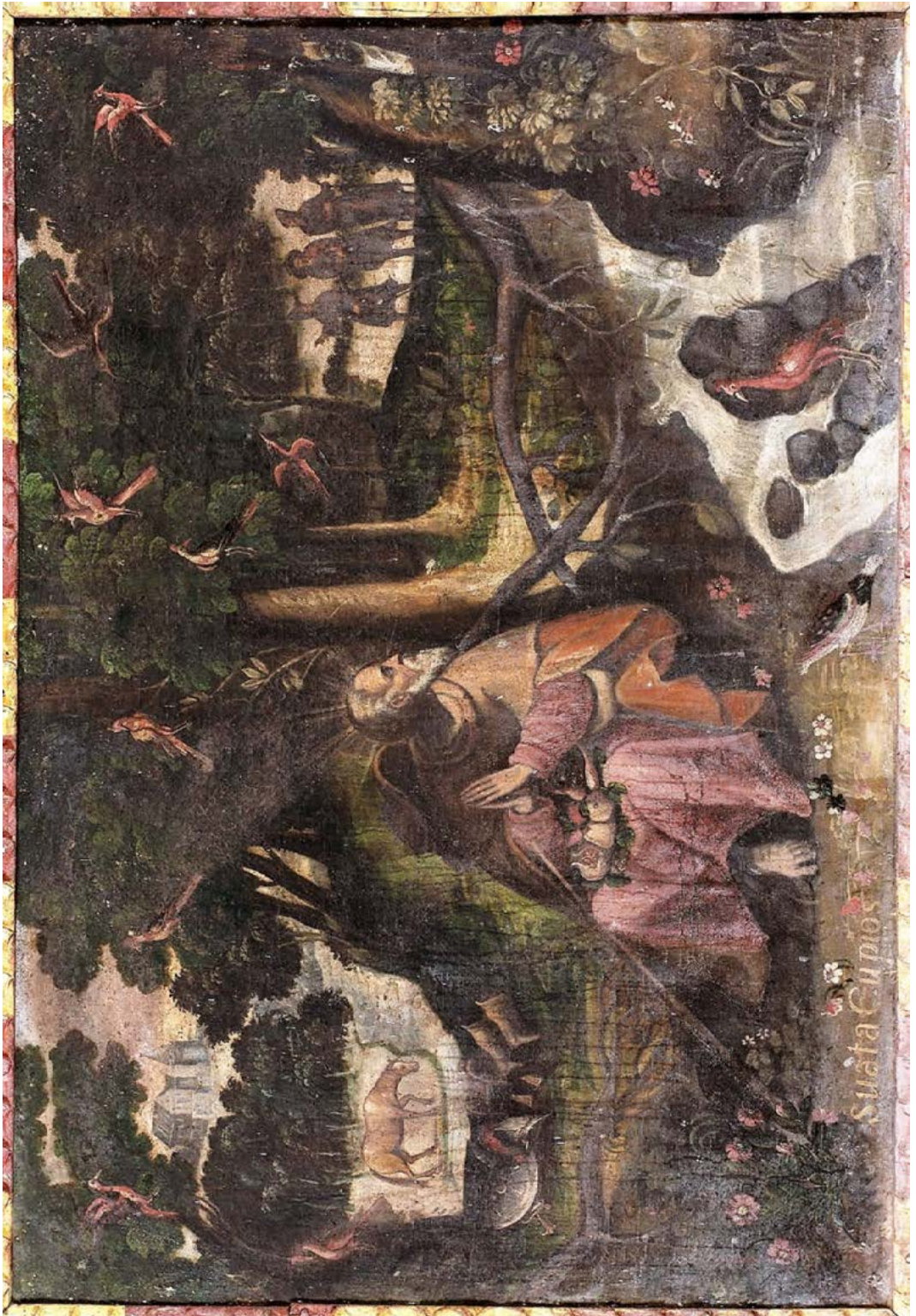


Figure 11: *Diego Quispe Tito* († 1681), *Suata Cupios* (Svätopluk) in Cusco (Peru).

In *The Concise History of the Slovak Nation* in Latin *Compendiata historia gentis Savae*, from the year 1793, Juraj Fándly († 1811), Slovak writer, scientist, representative of the Slovak national movement, included a beautiful copper engraving of Svätopluk. It is accompanied by a Latin inscription explaining that this engraving was created on the basis of older ones. I used to laugh at that but now that I have seen those older engravings, I have no reason to laugh anymore. Instead, I wonder how we could be so wise then and how can we be so unwise today.

Despite the often diminished, stereotypical, or completely distorted image of Svatopluk the historical figure and his legend – which is the result of the modern and traditional historiographies of the different nations – it can be stated that the universal legacy of the most important 9th century Slavic ruler remains to be unveiled for both the lay and professional public. This is a rather surprising statement considering the attractiveness of the topic. Nonetheless, the modern-day reception of Svätopluk still seems unable to break free from the tense emotional elements that blur his image that ever shifts between opposite poles – namely: good – bad; ours – not ours; king – not king.¹¹⁹

A synthesizing work that would comprehensively present Svätopluk I and his legend could finally contribute to solving this ambivalence by objectifying this problematic topic. Popes John VIII and Stephen V addressed Svätopluk *unicus filius* and *dilectus filius*, i.e., “only son” and “beloved son.” In 884, Emperor Charles III the Fat, received Svätopluk I among his vassals in Tula and held his hands in his own. Maybe in the same year – though it may have been a few years earlier – in order to win the favor of Svätopluk, another future Emperor, Arnulf of Carantania, gave his sister’s hand to Svätopluk and had his eldest son baptized Svätopluk after the boy’s godfather. Similarly, another Emperor, Charles IV, managed to skilfully include Svätopluk among his most important predecessors by means of his chronicler, Pribík Pulkava. Another Charles V, as it was said, and – by chance also Emperor – this time the fifth in line, secluded himself willingly in a monastery two years before his death, following the example of legendary Svätopluk.

As the previous lines prove, Svätopluk-related topics still need to be processed in greater scope and depth. More than the Middle Ages, however, the thesis laid out here concerns modern age writings (Jesuit plays, sermons, collections of Benedictine saints, lives of anchorites, etc.). Most of

¹¹⁹ Martin Homza, “Back to the Subject of the Royal Title of Svatopluk I or Reply to Ján Steinhübel and Other Present and Past *AntidicoSvatoplukians*,” *Slovak Studies* 2, no. 1–2 (2016): 160–86.



Figure 12: Juraj Fándly, "Copper engraving of the king Svätopluk", in *Compendiata historia gentis Slavae* (Tyrnaviae: Jelinek, 1793), frontpage (Photography by Martin Homza).

these genres depict variations of *the Nitra legend of Svatopluk*. Also in the 17th century the story of a penitent king who abandoned the benefits of this world and exchanged them for eternal values, added Svätopluk to the list of Benedictine saints.¹²⁰ At first glance this might sound surprising, especially considering what the “competent” authorities in Slovakia have recently said about the memory of Svätopluk I. The equestrian statue of King Svätopluk at Bratislava Castle has raised many objections. I can imagine what a stir the image of Svätopluk as a king and saint, which I have presented here, will cause. However, I did not have to invent it in any way. I have merely described what has somehow been left out of this lesser-known aspect of Slovak history. And I have by no means written everything.

¹²⁰ For example, Bucelin’s Benedictine legend from 1655, also known as: “*Sanctus Suatocopius rex. In finibus Hungariae...*”, in *Menologium Benedictinum sanctorum, beatorum atque illustrium ejusdem Ordinis virorum elogiis illustratum*, ed. Gabriel Bucelin (Veldkirchi, Feldkirch: Henricus Bilius, 1655): 188.

Chapter 17

The Fall of Great Moravia

The topic of this chapter may sound a bit sad at first glance: “The Fall of Great Moravia”. At least that is the way I saw it when I was much younger. It always made me a little sad to imagine the collapse of what, I thought was an ideal and splendid Kingdom of the Slavs. As my life went on and I grew in knowledge, I was able to come to terms with it, and today I know that nothing really serious happened. Everything that occurred could be explained by the metaphor of an anthill that someone poked with a stick. The next day, however, the hard-working ants had rebuilt it.

*Clarification
of the Topic*

But before we get to the final assessment, we need to think about the legacy Svätopluk actually left to his children, his successors, and to those who were to continue the work he and St. Methodius started in this territory. We need to be reminded that at the end of his life, Svätopluk got into a big conflict with his brother-in-law, Arnulf. However, as soon as Arnulf became King of the East-Frankish Empire, he no longer saw Svätopluk as his equal but, rather, as a subordinate.

*The Last
Years of
Svätopluk*

“The King [Arnulf] returned in triumph from Francia to Alemannia, and celebrated Christmas in state at the royal curtis of Ulm. From there he set out to the east, hoping to meet the dux Zwentibald [Svätopluk]; but the latter in his usual fashion refused to come to the King and betrayed his fidelity and all the things which he had promised before.”

The Annals of Fulda, year 892.

In view of the chain of successful events Svätopluk had in his record, which was directly proportional to his rank as King of the Slavs, confirmed by the authority of Pope Stephen V, he was neither ready nor willing to accept that.

Unfortunately, this led to Svätopluk ending up like Rastislav before him, i.e. skirmishing against the East Frankish Empire. Later on, the act of disobedience of Svätopluk was thematized many times since the time of Cosmas of Prague. It became a moral exemplum, which was used to show where the failure to recognize natural authority could lead.

This was one of the reasons why the accession of Moimir II to the central throne of Great Moravia – the Kingdom of the Slavs – was not as smooth as one would have expected. I recall an earlier story by Byzantine Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus describes it like this, before he died, Svätopluk – a dreaded and very powerful ruler – summoned his sons and gave

*The
Accession of
Moimir II to
the Central
Throne
of Great
Moravia*

them the famous three rods and asked them to break them one by one. Then he asked them to hold them together and try again.

This is certainly an actualization of Aesop's old fable. However, adapting this old story to Svätopluk's context was more than appropriate. Something similar must have happened in historical reality. Although Constantine Porphyrogenitus mentions three sons, historically we can only document two of them.

We still need to identify Predslav, i.e. the one who, along with Svätopluk and Svätožizna, is written in the margins of the *Gospel of Cividale*, which is supposed to have been written by St. Mark the Evangelist himself. Whether we identify it or not, it remains clear that there was an internal problem, though: The lack of concord among Svätopluk's sons, which was to keep his patrimony undivided.

When historians look at the internal organization of Svätopluk's kingdom and the patrimony he was supposed to divide among his sons, they come up with the following matrix: Svätopluk appointed his eldest son Moimir II – who was born before he married Gisela, a Carolingian – central ruler. Most probably, his seat was in Moravia proper. It is very likely – given the dual character of Great Moravia – that he made his younger son, Svätopluk II, ruler of Nitria. This can be expected thanks to the previous development we know. And the third son was Predslav. Whether there was a third son or not, Svätopluk needed to appoint someone to rule the southeastern part of the Great Moravian Empire. That is the area of the upper *Cistisia* (the right side of the Tisa River Valley) whose natural center is the city of Eger (in Slovak, Jäger). That is one of the internal problems Moimir II inherited. He needed to deal with his brother(s) and the centrifugal forces they represented.

Another internal problem he had to face were the local forces that had recognized Svätopluk's sovereignty – which was actually legitimate – but which broke away after his death. Let me illustrate this with a nice example, from *The Annals of Fulda* again, about the Bohemians breaking away from Great Moravia:

"In the middle of July 895 a general assembly was held at the town of Regensburg. There came there from Sclavania all the duces of the Bohemians, whom the dux Zwentibald[Svätopluk] had long kept by force from the alliance and control of the Bavarian people. The leading ones were Spitignevo [Spitihnev], and Witizla [Vratislav] and they came to the King and were honourably received by him, and, as is the custom, surrendered themselves to the King's power by joining hands, and were reconciled."

The Annals of Fulda, year 895.

Now we need to refer to the history of the Bohemians. They – Spitihnev I and Vratislav I – really thought they would go to Regensburg and ask Arnulf to protect them from Moimir II. After all, that is why they had paid him



Illustrace kji Přecechtěl, Křesťanství v 9. a 10. století v Čechách a na Moravě.

J. RUPPERT PŘECECHTĚL

SVATOPLUK KRÁL VELKO MORAVY A SYNŮVĚ JEHO, 894.

Svätopluk, König von Gross-Mähren und seine Söhne.

SVATOPLUK KIRÁLY ÉS FIAI.

Figure 13: Josef Ruppert Přecechtěl, The Legend of King Svätopluk and the Three Rods (Budapest, 1859).

tribute, and made an oath of fealty to the East Frankish ruler at 895. However, this tribute and oath of fealty proved to be lasting instead of temporary. Looking at the history of our region as the history of territories independent from the Holy Roman Empire – such as Poland and the Kingdom of Hungary – and of territories dependent on the Empire – Bohemia was part of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. But the Bohemians are not the only example. A few months later, the Lusatian Serbs and their representatives did just the same. As one can see, the Great Moravians actually suffered further territorial losses. And the same happened again in Silesia and Vistula principalities within a few years.

Later on, Cosmas of Prague writes that the Poles also took an active part in the fall of the Moravian Empire – the Kingdom of the Slavs. At that time they were still Silesians and Vistulans, no Poles, but we can assume they were the ones who broke away from Moimir II. To make matters worse, in 896 Arnulf commended Pannonia to the Prince of the Slavs, Braslav.

These are the ways the entire Kingdom of Svätopluk was reduced to what it had been back around a year 833, i.e. only Nitria and Moravia proper. Then internal discrepancies, which had smoldered under the rule of Svätopluk I, emerged to the surface again.

*The Balloon
Effect and
Limits of
Svätopluk
Expansion*

Svätopluk actually started to build a castle and church system with its garrison, the representatives of the local population built using a tithing (one tenth of a hundred) system. Every castle (hillfort/gord) had its church, which again was built on the tithe (church tax) system, etc. The proof for this one can find in a simple sentence from *The Life of St. Methodius*:

“And the Apostolic Father [John VIII] sent him at once. And Prince Svätopluk and all the Moravians received him. They entrusted to him all the churches and clergy in all the towns [gords].”

The Life of St. Methodius, chapter 10.

However, the army had basically reached the limits of its expansion. We call it the balloon effect. Each expansion escalates to the point where there is an objective choice. Deflate the balloon, or continue to discharge. And with Svätopluk’s death, the balloon just burst. This left over a big number of privileged warriors (*vítazi*) who were used to winning and taking a share of the spoils. All of a sudden, at one historical moment, they basically lose all of that. This is the opposite phenomenon to expansion, namely contraction.

In modern times this effect usually starts a civil war. Back then, however, there were no citizens in today’s understanding. Since brothers fought against each other, one can also call it a fratricidal war. However, here I prefer to use the expression “domestic war” because it takes place within one’s

household. And there was another additional thing which should be considered. A particularistic policy of individual subjects which were included into the Kingdom of the Slavs.

So, Svätopluk II and Moimir II actually got into an internal conflict that apparently ended up in Moimir II invading Nitria, defeating young Svätopluk II and imprisoning him. It must be said that this Svätopluk II was very young at the time. Evidence suggests he might have been under 13 years old. Again, *The Annals of Fulda*, describe this as follows:

“Afterwards there was a terrible dissension and feud which arose between two brothers of the Moravian people, Moymir [II] and Zwentopulk [II], and their followers, so that if either had been able to pursue and capture the other with his men he would have put him to death. Then the king and emperor, knowing about these things, sent his leading Bavarians [by the way: here we have the Bavarian lobby again] that is his margraves Liutpold and Count Aribo [who is the head of the Eastern Mark, which is a part of Bavaria] together with other faithful men, to the party which looked to him as their hope and refuge to be an aid to their liberation and protection.”

The Annals of Fulda, year 898.

“The party which looked to him” as their hope is Svätopluk II. The same *Annals of Fulda* will write the following for the year 899:

“Not long after this the Bavarians again confidently invaded the lands of the Moravians and plundered and laid waste wherever they could, and rescued the boy Zwentopulk [Svätopluk II], the son of the old dux Zwentopulk, from the dungeon of the city in which he was held with his men [we do not know where it was exactly, but it was probably somewhere in the Nitrian region] set fire to the city, and brought him out of pity back into their own country.”

The Annals of Fulda, year 899.

These manifold testimonies of historical sources – which will be rather scarce in later Slovak history – illustrate an intervention of the Empire into our history. Today we would say that Svätopluk II was rescued by means of a surprise attack operation. It was certainly not a large troop. It must have been a unit, which knew exactly where and when to attack, and set Svätopluk II and his close military retinue free. The question is what happened with the boy.

We know of one Svätopluk who worked as a vassal at Liutpold’s court for a long time. We do not know if it was this Svätopluk II, though. Then some speculations say that Svätopluk II stayed in that Nitra and joined the monastery his father Svätopluk had founded and stayed there unknown to

*Two
Hypothesis
concerning
the Last
Days of
Svätopluk II*

anyone and died as a penitent. Somehow the foundation of the Nitrian variant of *the Legend of St. Svätopluk* could have been laid.

*The
Moravians,
Slavs,
Bavarians,
Franks and
others*

Let's get back to what is relevant for today's reading, though. What are the other internal causes of that conflict? Besides the unhappy Moravians who were used to winning, there were the other subjects who had been annexed a few years earlier. We are talking about the military operation that set Svätopluk II and his people free. It would be naive to believe it was done out of pity. To get an idea why this was done, we need to imagine Svätopluk's famous raid into Transdanubia, Pannonia, to deal with grandsons of William and Engelschalk I, the "Wilhelminers" who had been put in charge of the Transdanubia principality. As we well know, Svätopluk acted brutally and showed no mercy. He had their limbs cut off, their ears, their eyes and even their genitals. Of course, at that time – we are talking about 882–884 – this caused a lot of resentment among these opposition groups. But who were these Nitrians and Transdanubians?

To get an idea, we need to look at what the sources tell us, for example in Regensburg. Franks, Bavarians and Slavs lived side by side in Regensburg. A similar structure can be assumed in the court of Svätopluk II in Nitra, as well as in Braslav's Blatnograd.

That means we need to count with the Slavs there – Nitrians who were not expelled from their principality together with Pribina. And definitely there were Moravians among them, and Germans, different ones, i.e. Bavarians, Franks, etc. We have quite a few testimonies about defectors from both sides who joined either the Franks or the Moravians. Therefore, the structure of the elites was rather mixed. This means that when the elites get enraged at the brutality the Moravians seem to have used, we need to expect its victims to crave for revenge.

*A Short
History
of the Old
Hungarian
tribal con-
federation
Presence
in the Pan-
nonian Basin*

This is where yet another external factor comes into play: a very irrational element known as the Old Hungarian tribal confederation. We have already paid attention to the phenomenon of nomadic communities and their behavior, so we have an idea of what the issue here is. We also need to realize that their presence in our region can be felt from the second half of the 860s, when their main activity moved to the area of the Dniester Valley. There they controlled a very strategic road that borders the Dniester and the Carpathian arch and flows into the Black Sea. That's why we can find these nomads, for example, in Przemyśl, not so far from the current Polish-Slovak border. We also have archaeological evidence of them in the old town of old Galič (Western Ukraine) from this period. So, at the beginning they come here as mercenaries, on one side or the other. Later on – this must be stressed – it was Arnulf who hired them to help him fight Svätopluk



Figure 14: *Mihály Munkácsy, Arrival (Conquest?) of the Old Hungarian tribal confederation (Budapest, 1893).*

I. Historiography, of course, has not forgotten to reproach him for this. As it was discussed earlier, specifically Liutprand of Cremona testifies to this in his work *Antapodosis (Retribution)*. In truth, Arnulf is blamed for having broken the peace Charlemagne himself had created when he made the Carpathians the easternmost walls of Western civilization. As a matter of fact, by allying himself with these unreadable nomads and hiring them against the Christians, Arnulf actually wiped out those walls. Curiously, today Hungarians which called themselves Magyars celebrate their glorious arrival in the Pannonian Basin which was to have happened in 896.

We know, however, that in 896 they were still fighting in the war between the Bulgarians and the Byzantines on the side of the Byzantines against Bulgarian Tsar Simeon. Therefore, they could by no means have settled in Pannonia in 896, the very year Arnulf commended Pannonia to Braslav. We also know that in 896, Simeon I the Great arranged for the Pechenegs to attack this tribal federation. The Pechenegs were a different nomadic community, more to the east of where the Hungarian tribal federation was at that time. By the request of the Bulgarian tsar Simeon they attacked the rear of the Hungarians – those who stayed and did not fight in the war – and decimated them.

Therefore, the arrival of the Old Hungarian tribal confederation was not as glorious as we can see in Mihaly Munkácsy's paintings in the Budapest Parliament from 1893 (see Figure 14)..

*A Few Words
about the
Glorious
Arrival of the
Old Hungar-
ian Tribal
Confederation*

The notion of their glorious arrival originated centuries later – in the 13th century in *The Gesta Hungarorum* by Anonymous Notary P. But I will refer to this in the next chapters.

*The Alliance
of Christian
Armies, the
Bavarians
and the
Moravians*

Let us, instead, go back to our earlier topic. The alliance of Christian armies, especially of the Bavarians and the Great Moravians, i.e. Moimir II, means that the threat they represented is beginning to be felt very intensively due to the imminent penetration of these hordes. This, however, has no permanent character either.

*The Alliance
of the "Bad
Christians"
with the Old
Hungar-
ian tribal
confederation*

On the contrary, around the year 900, some parts of the Moravians joined the Old Hungarian tribal confederation and actively participated in its expeditions against the Christians of that time, the real ones. These Moravians are referred to as "the bad Christians". They are the people who actually threaten the Christian world. Around the year 900, the Bavarian bishops complained to Rome about the Moravians in connection with the creation or restoration of the Moravian archbishopric:

"They themselves [the Moravians] have taken in a larger number of Hungarians [the Ungari] and have shaved their own heads of their false Christians according to their heathen customs (...), and they have sent them against

our Christians, and even themselves ambushed them, and led some into captivity, killed others, exterminated others at the bottom of the dungeons by hunger and thirst, banished innumerable ones into exile, and threw noble men and honest women into slavery; they burned the temples of God and destroyed all the edifices..."

The Complaint of the Bavarian bishops to Pope John IX, year 900.

Here we can see the dichotomous division of the Moravian society into two parts. One of them goes against these nomads and joins the Bavarians. The other joins the nomads and fights against the Bavarians and Moravians. It is a very confusing situation, which has several practical solutions. The most essential is to look for a *modus vivendi*, i.e. learn to live with each other. It seems that the humiliated and insulted parts of what is called Great Moravia – the Nitranians and Transdanubians – were those Moravians who shaved their heads and were part in the raids. At the same time, these from Moravia proper are leading a more or less successful fight against the newly formed political force that is gradually getting established in the Pannonian Basin thanks to those new ties.

Although, in 902–904, Moimir II still managed to repel nomadic raids; in 906 again, saw these hordes and their allied Slavs and Glomatians – Polabian Slavs – invading and plundering Saxony. This means that they had to pass through the territory of today's Moravia or through today's Slovakia. This implies that the political entity known as Great Moravia practically ceased to exist in 906. What was this fall like? How can we imagine it? Regino of Prüm writes about this year – he died in 915, but he wrote this famous sentence, which basically sums up everything we have talked about in two sentences:

The Question of the Last Battle of the Moravians

"About that time [that is, in the year 894] Svätopluk, King of the Moravian Slavs, the wisest man among his people and of a very cunning spirit, lived to his last day. His sons held his kingdom for a short and unhappy time, because the Hungarians [i.e. the Old Hungarian tribal confederation] utterly destroyed everything in it."

Reginonis Chronicon, year 894.

This bears asking a question that will accompany us in our next readings: What does "everything in it" mean? Hungarian historiography would like everything to mean really everything, i.e. there was nothing left. Therefore, these nomads had to build their wonderful polity from scratch. Yet it is true that the available historical and archaeological evidence tells us otherwise. It is confirmed that only settlements and hillforts on Lower Moravia were destroyed, such as Pohansko, Mikulčice, Uherské Hradiště, and Modrá near

What does "Everything in it" Mean

Velehrad. Interestingly, Olomouc was not destroyed, neither was Bratislava or Nitra. This is an intriguing situation to say the least. The current state of knowledge leaves no room for any *Katastrophentheorie*. This bears asking a question about the continuity, or discontinuity, of the later development in the Middle Danube territory and in Slovak history as such. As for me, I lean towards a continuous development theory – *Kontinuitätstheorie*. Therefore, in the following chapters I will try to explain how it happened that the anthill returned to its original state after about half a century, when it was pricked by a stick, which we call the invasion of the Old Hungarian tribal confederation. Before I come to that, let me just say that the extinction of the Moymirid dynasty in the male line did not extinguish the memory of all the great and important things that this dynasty achieved in the history of Europe in the 9th century. In place of many words for the time being, I will try to demonstrate this on the map attached below (map no. 15), which I hope is voluble.

Before that, however, I must say a few words about the Battle of Bratislava.

*The Battle of
Bratislava,
AD 907*

The Battle itself took place in the summer of 907. In this battle, the nomads and I suppose their “shaved head” Slavic alliances, annihilate Liutpold and his troops. Liutpold was the last guarantor of the political austerity of the previous Frankish peace, which Charlemagne had established. And then the situation just got even more confusing. To conclude today’s story, I would like to mention yet one more significant detail: The Battle of Bratislava in 907 basically moved the border of the Empire back to where it had been during the Avar Khaganate, i.e. to the Enns river.



Map no. 15.

Chapter 18

The Century from the Fall of Great Moravia (907) to the Origin of the Pannonian (Hungarian) Kingdom around the Year 1000 (*Interregnum* Question)

Clarification of the Topic

In this episode of history I will mostly focus on the events between the fall of Great Moravia and the rise of the Kingdom of Hungary. However, a far better and historically more exact denomination for it in this period would be is the Kingdom of Pannonia.

Did the Structures of the Svätopluk's Realm Survive About Continuity of the Moimirid Dynastie

First of all, we need to remember that not the whole structure of Great Moravia disappeared. Just the central territory, as we said in our last chapter. This is the area between Pohansko castle and Uherské Hradiště, i.e. the central positions of this realm. The question is: what happened to its dynasty? This is a really curious situation. When building his succession system, Svätopluk followed a different path than the Moimirid dynasty had before him. Instead of the avunculate – in which the heir to the throne is the eldest of your brother's sons, i.e. your nephew – he appointed his eldest son. This means he preferred primogeniture, a system that was not typical for the Moimirid, but was the one the Carolingians used. However, you still need to deal with those who claim to be members of the Moimirid dynasty. That is, with the other princes of the same lineage. The surrounding and later dynasties know two scenarios. In the first one, some of them are eliminated, i.e. murdered. In the second, however, some of them manage to go into exile to stay safe.

In my opinion, in the case of Svätopluk it went both ways. This had one crucial consequence. Namely, when Great Moravia disappeared, so did its basic structures. Firstly, the dynasty itself and its main male line disappeared.

The Moimirid in Bavaria

This means that not all the Moimirid disappeared, just Svätopluk's line. Moreover, this does not apply to the female line, i.e. the women, girls and young ladies of the Moimirid dynasty. As it had been the case in the early dynasties in the past, these ladies served to create different dynastic ties and alliances. Most of that elite – the other princes around the Moravians and the Moravians themselves – just died during that cataclysm around the year 906. But to be realistic, we need to assume that some of the representative members most likely went into exile. Where might have they gone? Liutpold the Margrave of the Eastern March – that large easternmost part of the empire – mentions having a vassal called Svätopluk. We do not know if this vassal was Svätopluk II, though. As a matter of fact, the entire 10th century

sees several other Svätopluks appearing in Western Europe.¹²¹ Their connection – if any – to Svätopluk II cannot be determined exactly, as yet.

In addition, the *Tale of Bygone Years* tells us about two men called Vyatko and Radim, who arrived from the West, namely from “the Lyakhs” i.e. from the Poland, with their people to the very heart of the future Old Rus’, somewhere between Smolensk and Moscow, and went up to the Oka and the Volga and settled there. After their leaders, those peoples became known as the *Vyatichs* or *Vyatichi* and the *Radimichs* or *Radimichi*. Interestingly, *Vyatko* is the diminutive of *Viačeslav*, i.e. *Viacslav*, i.e. Václav and *Radim* is actually Radomir. However, such bithemathical names were not standard among Polish Nobel names in the 10th or later centuries. So, we can quite reliably assume that these men are exiles from Great Moravia.¹²²

An analogous situation can be found in the genesis of the Principality of Poland. Przemysław Urbańczyk discussed it quite openly in Poland.¹²³ He assumes that a part of the Moravian elites also left in that direction, which politically was no one’s territory. And there they started to build the same structures we know from Panonnian-Transdanubian principality, Nitrian principality and to a certain extent from Moravia, too. Let us look at the example of the famous pre-Hungarian Poznan kindred, later the leading noble clan of Hont-Poznan in the Kingdom of Hungary (Pannonia). Although the exile of members of one of its branches is not documented in writing as in the case of Vyatko and Radim in Old Rus’, it is referred to in similar central toponymy in Poland and Slovakia. That is actually the same as Bratislava’s old name, *Posonium*. Moreover, near Bratislava – is the town of Pezinok, or *Bozin/Pozen*. Therefore, it is no coincidence that we can find the city of Poznań in Poland. It seems that a similar case may be the family of the Lords of Miskolc in Slovak Miškovec (*Myscouch*, Miškovci, the lords of Miskolc), whose continuity from the Great Moravian times to the Kingdom of Hungary/Pannonian kingdom is attested by archaeological findings from the site of Tapolcza/Teplica, near today’s city of Miskolc/Miškovec in Hungary. I admit that this is a somewhat speculative connection between the personal proper name of the first Polish ruler Mieszko I – Mescio I, which is also the family name of the Lords of Miskolc and from which the name of the present city in Hungary derives.

Nevertheless, the case of the name of Polish city Poznań indicates that it derives from two important lords in the nascent Kingdom of

*The Moimirids
in Rus’*

*The
Moimirid
and their
Lords in
Poland*

*The
Moimirid
and their
Lords in
Pannonia*

¹²¹ Martin Wihoda, “The Second Life of the Moimirid Dukes,” in *The Fall of Great Moravia: Who Was Buried in Grave H153 at Pohansko near Břeclav?*, ed. Jiří Macháček and Martin Wihoda (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019): 94–109.

¹²² Rjabceva, “The Contact of Great Moravia with Eastern Europe,” 162–69.

¹²³ Przemysław Urbańczyk, *Mieszko Pierwszy Tajemniczy* [The Mysterious Mescio I] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2012), 552 pp.

Pannonia-Hungary. One was called Hont and the other Poznan. Obviously, they are those who chose to stay. This takes us to the latter part of today's readings: What did those who decided to stay and represent the previous power actually do? Just like everyone else today and in the past in a dangerous situation, they could choose between leaving and staying.

Those who stayed ("shaved head") most probably decided to cooperate with the new power. The new power – the elites of the Old Hungarian tribal confederation – was a typically nomadic entity. It was a conglomerate, although not quite homogeneous in terms of ethnic composition, culture, or religion. Their common denominator was being nomads and, of course, wanting to get their hands on their neighbors' surplus produce. So, the Moravian nobles who were unhappy with the rule of the Moimirid probably decided to make the most of the new situation and established mutual bonds with them. What do these bonds look like in practice?

Later sources, like *the Hungarian-Polish Chronicle*,¹²⁴ tells us about that directly. But also Anonymous Notary P indicates it in his *Gesta Hungarorum*.¹²⁵ Here Anonymous Notary P writes that Arpad's son, Zoltan/Sultan, married the daughter of Menumorot a name meaning "Lesser Moravian". By doing so, he actually created a new lineage we can call the Moimirid-Arpadian dynasty. *The Hungarian-Polish Chronicle* speaks even more openly about a similar matrimonial union. It does not know Arpad, prince of the Hungarians (in the chronicle Ungarians) by this name but refers to him as Aquila, King of the (H)Ungarians.

*The
Testimony
of the
Hungarian-
Polish
Chronicle
or How
Sclavinia
Became (H)
Ungaria*

"Desiring to traverse the whole world, and in his eagerness to subdue the Roman Empire, he [Aquila] marched with his army against Rome, and advanced armed with fierce indignation. While he was sleeping in his tent during his first rest at night, a holy Angel appeared to him in a dream, saying: "The Lord God Jesus Christ commands you not to enter presumptuously into the holy city of Rome, where the remains of my apostles rest, and dare not attack it, but return and take vengeance on my chosen King Casimir, who, in the territory of Sclavonia and Croatia, wholly devoted to me in heart and mind, served me faithfully for a long series of years, on behalf of those who shamefully killed him by treachery, because they said: 'There shall never be a king over us, but we shall rule ourselves'."

The Hungarian-Polish Chronicle, chapter 3.

¹²⁴ *Uhorsko-poľská kronika: Nedocenený prameň k dejinám strednej Európy*, ed. and comment. Martin Homza; trans. Jana Balegová (Bratislava: Lúč, 2009), 223 pp.

¹²⁵ English translation: *Gesta Hungarorum: Anonymus Deeds of the Hungarians*, ed., trans. and comment. Rady and Veszprémy, 3–129.

Anyway, it says that after the Slavs lost the right to their kingdom for having killed their own King, it actually happened that Aquila – who had defeated them in an 8-day battle – did not know whether he should return to the *Magna Ungaria* (“Great Hungary”) he had come from, or stay in the newly conquered land of *Sclavinia*.

“He [Aquila] began to wonder what he should do, whether he should return to his own country or appropriate this occupied one. Therefore, the king spent many days in serious deliberation, and it seemed to him a good plan that if [the (H)Ungarians] would take Slavic and Croatian women as wives, he would thus gain the country in peace and tranquility. When he announced this to his army, the plan pleased all the men. He then went about the [Slavic] land and rejoiced over it, for it was a land of promise, as was the land of the nation of Israel. And when he had sent his messengers, he received a daughter of this tribe from the prince of the Slavs, and took her to wife. (...) Likewise his soldiers also married women of this tribe. (...) Then he called all his army together, and to the praise and glory of his army he called it (H)Ungaria.”

The Hungarian-Polish Chronicle, chapter 3.

So, according to the Anonymous author of *the Hungarian-Polish Chronicle* from the first third the 13th century, someone advised Aquila to stay and to marry a Slavic Princess. He not only obliged, but also ordered his soldiers to do just the same. And this is the how *Sclavinia* – actually according to the literary tradition – became *Ungaria*, i.e. the Land of the Slavs = *Sclavinia* became (H)*Ungaria*.

In fact, this is the standard model for an old dynasty to become the new one. This is perhaps the most popular way, i.e. through matrimonial bond or marriage. Other conquering forces did just the same. Take the best example of all – Alexander of Macedon. To annex Persia, he needed to marry a Persian Princess, Roxana. He married not one but several Persian Princesses. Just to make sure, I suppose. His soldiers, too, married Persian women and so a new civilization was born. We know it very well and call it the Hellenistic civilization. It represents a new quality. It must be assumed that something similar happened in our historical territory. On the one hand, there is the previous and decaying elite system. On the other hand, a new force arrives. Then the old and the new connect by means of matrimonial bond. And so, the newcomer, a foreigner, becomes a local. This is what most likely happened here formally and legally in the turn of the 9th–10th centuries.

Otherwise, it would be really hard to explain why the local Slavs did not rise up against the new coming power. Remember that just a few years earlier, in

870, Slavomir had led the Danube Slavs against the East-Frankish Empire. And the East-Frankish Empire was significantly more powerful than the nomadic Old Hungarian tribal confederation. Something had to happen that precluded an armed uprising of the settled population against the incoming nomads. The local Slavic elites must have some sympathy the newcomers. More importantly, not only did they form alliances, but also, as was already demonstrated on the example of “shaved heads” warriors, began to actively participate in their military robbery operations. This also explains how the practically decimated Old Hungarian tribal confederation – who came here more running for their lives than looking for loot – was suddenly capable of large-scale military operations in a wide pan-European area. The incoming nomads must have experienced significant growth both in quantity and especially in quality. That would not have been possible without the local warriors, those “bad Christians” and the rest of elites joining their side. This basically describes the situation in the Carpathian region at the time.

Whole this situation is probably best illustrated by Constantin Porphyrogenitus around the middle of the 10th century:

*The
Testimony of
Constantine
Porphyro-
genitus*

“The rest of the Croats stayed over against Francia, and are now Belocroats, that is, white Croats, and have their own Prince; they are subject to Otto the great King of Francia, or Saxony, and are unbaptized, and intermarry and friendly with the Turks.”

Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, chapter 30.

To clarify, it should be said here that by White Croats the Byzantine Emperor means Slavs around the Middle Danube. Only they “intermarry and are friendly with the Turks”. “Turks” is the name the Byzantines or the Greeks used for nomads in general and for “Ungari” (from Proto-Slavic *Оугрѣи*) in particular. The fact that they pay tribute to Otto I is also highly significant. For that means that these Slavs were subordinates of the Empire. This situation must have taken place around the time of the Battle of Lech (August 10th, 955). There are many theories of where White Croatia should be located more precisely. Tautologically, a statement is true when it is true in all its claims. In fact, all these claims can be applied rather unambiguously to the territory of today’s Slovakia and “their own prince” is then – by the sources, the unknown Prince of Nitria from the newly established Moimiriid-Arpadian dynasty.

In terms of external political circumstances there is yet one more issue. The Battle of Bratislava also meant that the Frankish Empire was pushed back to the border of the old Avar Khaganate, i.e. to the Enns river (modern Austria). This implies that the legal status from 791 when Charlemagne’s

*Renewal of
Legal Status
before 791*

raids against the Avar Khaganate began, had returned again for a period of 50 years. This is all the more cardinal as it is often forgotten. The structures found in Carantania, the Eastern March, as well as in Transdanubia – which at the time of the Frankish Peace appeared to have a lasting character – had ceased to form part of that territory for some time. It is not possible to speak of the total destruction of all churches, castles, clans, local tax collection and economic production systems, etc. On the other hand, however, we need to say that from a legal point of view, the Franks actually lost those territories for some time.

The legal status changed with the Battle of Augsburg on August 10, 955. In it, the leading power of the nomadic confederation of old Hungarians was completely defeated. Each such event also has its own deeper consequences. The defeat of the Old Hungarian tribal confederation and its (unnamed Slavic allies), brought about the rise in importance of one of its tribes, namely – the Magyars. Their military forces most likely did not take part in the expedition to Bavaria. The defeat at Lech had just brought them unshakable domination between the Carpathians and the Danube. The victorious East-Frankish King Otto I subsequently became Emperor. Similarly, Otto's ally, the Bohemian Prince Boleslas I the Cruel rose up the imaginary ladder of power.

About Consequences of the Battle of Augsburg on August 10, 955

A Bohemian Prince does not fight for the Empire for pure altruistic reasons, of course. What could have Otto I promised Boleslas I the Cruel for his help? The answer is simple. Boleslas I was given the rights Svätopluk had been granted almost 100 years earlier by Louis the German in Forchheim. That is the right to spread Christianity by military means.

Actualisation of the Peace of Forchheim

In practice it indicates that Bohemian Boleslas I the Cruel could occupy territories that previously belonged to Great Moravia, i.e. the Slavic Kingdom of Svätopluk. Starting from Bohemia, these territories are Moravia itself, Silesia, Vistula, and the land of the Lendians (Lyakhs), i.e. the easternmost West Slavic tribe in the region of the future Chervyen/Červenské (Red Ruthenian) castles. Such a boost was principal for the rise and self-confidence of the Premyslid dynasty. It also had paramount economic significance itself.

Another fundamental fact which should be considered is that an area of today's Slovakia formed part of that principality, namely the Váh River Valley. This is mentioned in the *Privilege of the Prague Bishopric*, which is only preserved by Cosmas of Prague whose authenticity is sometimes questioned. A content analysis of that privilege shows that, in fact, the Váh river region belonged to Boleslas I Cruel.

Provincia cui Vag Nomen est

Now, what was going on in the Pannonian Basin in the meantime? Simplifying it, some people imagine that the Magyars arrived, then plundered for 50 years and – after losing the battle of Lechfeld (Lech) – decided to become

About the New Situation in the Transdanubian Territory

farmers. But this is never how the story – history – goes. Instead, history has a more evolutionary character. After a violent intervention in the external form, the anthill unobtrusively returns to its original shape.

Expertly, this process is called acculturation. In other words, after two cultures meet for the first time, after the first contact – that we call interaction – a period of mutual acculturation follows. Just like the Avars before them, the newly arrived nomads realized that the territory between the Carpathians and the Danube was not suitable for their nomadic way of life. Consequently, they had to join the settled local population and to adapt to the new conditions of life. Unlike the Bulgarians or the Avars, however, these nomads – i.e. the Old Hungarian tribal confederation – never assimilated completely. More properly, their elite did not. Why not? Answering that question would take long hours of discussion. Certainly, Latin as the general language for the newly formed elite played a very serious role in this process. As we are about to see, this is a supreme issue. The assimilation of the ancestors of today's Hungarians/Magyars did not take place, but their acculturation was accomplished in the short time of at least two or more generations. This truth is wonderfully illustrated by well-known knowledge, according to which twenty percent of the Hungarian language of today still consists of Slavic words. However, this is even more evident in agricultural terminology, where it is almost fifty percent.¹²⁶ These are remarkable figures taking into account that for several hundred years the Magyars have intensively been working on purifying their language, getting rid of any foreign words.

In fact, after August 10th, 955 the Holy Roman Empire is once again becoming a dominant force in the Central European territory. It is getting back to those places and organizations it had ruled over in the past. After Otto I is made Emperor, he starts to act as the new Charlemagne. He begins to arrange his eastern territories the way Charlemagne and Louis the German had done before him. The first issue here is the Church, which is getting back the places it had occupied before. As for the future Kingdom of Hungary, this mainly applies to the territory of Pannonia, which was at the heart of the Salzburg archbishopric. No wonder, then, that a missionary bishop was sent to Pannonia as early as in the 970s. By the way, this chorbishop, that means missionary one, who goes by the name of Bruno and his seat became the *grad* (castle) of Veszprém/Vesprím. Something similar happens further north, in Silesia, as well. At the same time Chorbishop Ugrinus is sent there with a similar missionary task.

*The Holy
Roman
Empire
and Papacy
Return to
the Scene*

¹²⁶ See entry: „Hungarian Language“, *Wikipedia* (summer 2024), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian_language#cite_note-21.

The Papacy also takes an interest in the whole region again. Rome is well aware that the territories Svätopluk had once given to St. Peter as a fief, are still property of St. Peter's. Rome seems to be looking for the new Svätopluk, the new bearer of the idea that the lands to the east of the river Leitha are formally and legally independent from the Empire and, instead, dependent on the Papacy.

This situation kept deepening in the late 960s, when Otto I established his headquarters in Magdeburg and started building his metropolis there with its own archbishopric responsible mostly for the still pagan Slavic regions from the eastern border of the Empire. He basically claims the entire eastern area – legally and ecclesiastically – which stretches as far east as Kiev. By doing so, he seems to be following the footsteps of Svätopluk and St. Method. In 973, Emperor Otto I summoned all his vassals to an imperial Diet in Quedlinburg as we are we are informed by the the Saxon chronicler Thietmar from Merseburg:¹²⁷

Saxony as the New Centre of Gravity of the East Frankish Empire

“Frome thence, he [Otto I] went to Quedlinburg to celebrate the upcoming feast of Easter with Divine praise and earthly joy (23 March 973). Here also, at the emperor’s order, Dukes Miesco and Boleslau, and legates of the Greeks, Beneventans, Hungarians [Ungari], Bulgarians, Danes, and Slavs gathered along with all the leading men of the kingdom. When all matters had been settled peacefully and gifts had been distributed, they went home satisfied.”

The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg, book II, chapter 31.

Add to the above description the messengers from England and from Al-Andalus, who were delayed but eventually arrived at the diet in Quedlinburg, there is perhaps no better description of the ideal representation of contemporary Europe by a single ruler. Noteworthy, this is the first time the Polish ruler Miesco I appears in the Imperial court. Unknown representatives of *Ungari* were also sent to represent the newly reestablished political structures of the Transdanubian area. Some years before, as we are informed by the same source, Otto I. ordained in Old Rus’ by his own bishop St. Adalbert of Magdeburg. The mosaic of the renewed Latin Christian Universe according to the example of Charlemagne, was completed. At least theoretically.

This whole affair gets us – territory around the Danube – back to where it had been 100 years before. Geza, the first known Transdanubian ruler from the dynasty that will later on eventually call itself Arpadians, actually begins where Svätopluk had ended before him and Pribina even earlier. As

Transdanubia and its Road to the Reestablishment of the Monarchy

¹²⁷ English translation see: *Ottoman Germany: The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, trans. David A. Warner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 410 pp.

a matter of fact, Geza just takes over all the existing structures in the region. His main source of income is the Danubian Road, which he opened again for the West. This results in the formal Christianization of Pannonia. It was by no means a simple process. Two contemporary reporters, the chronicler Thietmar of Merseburg and the St. Bruno of Querfurt commented on its downsides. The former wrote the following memorable sentences about Geza and his wife:

“His [St. Stephan the King] father, Deuvix [Geza], was very cruel and killed many people because of his quick temper. When he became a Christian, however, he turned his rage against his reluctant subjects, in order to strengthen his faith. Thus, glowing with zeal for God, he washed away old crimes. He sacrificed both to the omnipotent God and various false gods. When reproached by his priest for doing so, however, he maintained the practice had brought him both wealth and great power. His wife, Beleknegini – the name means beautiful lady in Slavonic – drank immoderately and rode a horse like a warrior. Once, in a fit of anger, she killed a man. These polluted hands would have been better employed at the spindle, and her frenzied spirit should have been restrained by patience.”

The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg, book VIII, chapter 4.

A noticeable character is Geza’s wife – who is said to have drunk insatiably and to have killed a man in anger. She is the “highly exemplary mother” of future saint – Stephen I the King. She also went by a strange name, Beleknegini, meaning in Slavic “white (beautiful) princess”. It could be her title, but it could also be a description of a beauty like Thietmar claimed. Again, the Slavic name or title for the mother of future King St. Stephan I testifies that the whole territory of Pannonia is a mixture of cultures, religions, legal customs of the arriving nomads and the settled Slavs. It also helps to somehow remember the last years of the Avar Khaganate, whose remaining old structures are also part of the foundations on which the new political anatomy of Slavic principalities around the Danube are being built. The result is that after the mission St. Vojtech and his disciples – and later St. Bruno of Querfurt as well as St. Romuald – the region was re-Christianized and integrated into the renewed Roman Christian universe.

*Back to the
Project of
Tetrarchy
– Gallia,
Roma,
Germania
and
Sclavinia:
Renovatio
Imperii
Romanorum*

The question that bears asking here is up to what extent the Ottomans/Liudofings were interested in keeping the formal and legal continuity of the Carolingians, especially concerning their plans for creating a universal *Imperium Christianum* – the Empire of Christians. After many years of reflection, I am coming to say clearly that after the six decades that elapsed between the death of Emperor Arnulf and the proclamation of Otto

I as Emperor in 962, Ottonians have picked up exactly where the political imaginations of Charles III the Fat left off.

The first indications of this process can already be seen in the representative composition of the already mentioned Diet in Quedlinburg, which was organized by Otto I at the Eve of his life. I will quote once more what was written about this event in the authentic source the *Annals of Quedlinburg*.¹²⁸

“The Emperor Otto the Elder [Otto I] with the younger [Otto II] came to Quedlinburg and here celebrated Holy Easter on the 10th of the Kalends of April. There also came many legates of the nations, that is of the Romans, the Greeks, the Beneventans, the Italians, the Hungarians [Ungari], the Danes, the Slavs, the Bulgarians and the Rus’ [Rusci], with great gifts. In the same year Oto the Elder died in Mimelieba Non [Memleben].”

The Annals of Quedlinburg, year 973.

During the short and rather unsuccessful reign of Otto II – as well as of his wife and his mother’s regencies (Theophanu and Adelaide in collaboration with the Roman Popes, these ideas were further sophisticated.

Of course, these plans included restoring – the *Illyricum*. Although it was a former Roman province but already from the time of Svätopluk this term was deliberately substituted by *Regnum Sclavorum* or simply *Sclavinia*. Fortunately, quite concrete ideas of these ethnic unifications of Europe have been preserved in the form of very attractive miniatures. In this example from the *Registrum Gregorii* (a collection of letters by the Pope Gregory the Great), created around 983, we see how the Holy Roman Emperor (Otto II the Red) receives the homage of four nations symbolized by the four allegorical figures of women Germania, Gaul, Italy and Illyria (Sclavinia ?) (see Figure no. 15).

Plans to unite Latin Europe into four provinces according to the prevailing language finally culminated around the end of the first millennium of the Christian era. They were embodied in the ethereal rule of Otto III. The young emperor, surrounded by friends such as Bishop Vojtech-Adalbert of Prague and Pope Silvester II had great plans for Europe which are now commonly known by the phrase *Renovatio Imperii Romanorum* (“Restoration of the Empire”). Much has been written on the subject, but the best summary is probably by the German scientist Gerd Althoff.¹²⁹ We also know

¹²⁸ *The Annals of the Holy Roman Empire: The Annals of Quedlinburg*, trans. and annot.

Grzegorz Kazimierz Walkowski (Bydgoszcz: Walkowski, 2014). I would like to express my special thanks to prof. Walkowski for making me the English text available.

¹²⁹ Gerd Althoff, *Otto III*, trans. Phyllis G. Jestice (University Park [PA]: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 215 pp.



Figure 15: *Master of the Registrum Gregorii*: Allegory of the Tetrarchy from the reign of Emperor Otto II, cca 983. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Registrum_Gregorii#/media/File:Meister_des_Registrum_Gregorii_001.jpg)



Figure 16: Anonymous, Four Allegories (ROMA, GALLIA, GERMANIA and SCLAVINIA) of the restored Roman Empire come to pay tribute to Emperor Otto III, in the Gospel of Otto III, around a year 1000, p. 19–20 (Evangeliar Otto III. – Muntich, Bayer. Staatsbib., Cfm. 4453), see: <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/riew/bsb000096593>.

something about these plans from *The Life of St. Adalbert*¹³⁰ and from the narrative writings of the Empire at the time. We also know them from the illuminations that are related to the reign of Otto III. One of these illuminations depicts the female personifications of the 4 great provinces, namely Gallia, Roma, Germania and Sclavinia, bringing tribute to Otto III, the universal sovereign (see Figure no. 16). These are not just allegorical figures. They represent the ideal arrangement of Europe.

*On one
Missing
Province, or
what Europe
Lacks Today
for True
Unity*

Let me finish this readings with a short updating idea. No one has long questioned the existence of *Gallia*, i.e. Gaul or France today. But if at the beginning of the 19th century you had told someone that the dozens of different polities in the German-speaking territories east of France would unite to form one Germany, they would have laughed at you. And if you had told them that also Italy would unite under one single ruler, they would have cracked up. However, it took just a few decades for the spirit of the French Revolution – the new nationality spirit – to give birth to the German Empire and the unified Kingdom of Italy.

Why, then, has the area between the Baltic Sea and the Adriatic Sea – namely *Sclavinia* – failed to unite? This is perhaps a question for today's political scientists. We, historians, must say that many such attempts have already been made.

¹³⁰ "Life of Saint Adalbert Bishop of Prague and Martyr", trans. Cristian Gaşpar, in *Saints of the Christianization Age of Central Europe (Tenth-Eleventh Centuries)*, ed. Gábor Klaniczay and trans. Cristian Gaşpar and Marina Miladinov (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013): 95–182.



Map no. 16.

Chapter 19

How the Kingdom of Pannonia-Hungary was Re-established

Clarification of the Topic

In this chapter we are going to recap what we precisely know about the beginnings of the Kingdom of Hungary or, more exactly, at that time the Kingdom of Pannonia. At the last chapter, we described the dark 10th century like an anthill that has been poked into. At first glance it looks like the ants do not know what they are doing. After a while, however, the anthill looks again just the way it used to. Analogical civilization process happened between the Carpathians and the Danube in the 10th century. At the turn of the 10th and the 11th century, those who would eventually call themselves “the Arpadians” basically took over where the Moimirids had left.



Map no. 17: The Pannonian Basin in the middle of the 9th century according to the contemporary ideas of Slovak geographer and historian Ján Tomka Sásky (Bratislava/Posonium, 1751).



Map no. 18: The Pannonian Basin in the middle of the 10th century according to the contemporary ideas of Slovak geographer and historian Ján Tomka Sásky (Bratislava/Posonium, 1751).

Nowadays there are still many historians, mostly Magyar (Hungarian) ones – among them, for instance also official Cambridge historian Nora Berend, who in this respect speak of a complete historical discontinuity between earlier periods and establishing of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary/Pannonia by the ancestors of the Magyars (Hungarians).¹³¹ I am more inclined to support the far more likely alternative of the anthill. Of course, there is no denying that the Old Hungarian tribal confederation, – in which the tribe of Magyars includes, – played any role in this area during the 10th century. But it was an everyday process of changes, which had a myriad of implications and consequences. For instance, we know, the region was already inhabited by different Slavic peoples and Danube

The Continuity or Discontinuity

¹³¹ Nora Berend; Przemysław Urbańczyk and Przemysław Wasilewski, *Central Europe in the High Middle Ages: Bohemia, Hungary, and Poland, c. 900-c. 1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2013), 536 pp. (here p.108: “Political-administrative division (counties), minting and ecclesiastical organization were all introduced [in the Kingdom of Hungary] in the early eleventh century and represent a radical departure from the previous structures.”).

Bavarians, descendants of the Romans, Valachians-Rumanians, and each had their own and different economic, political and cultural traditions and customs. Therefore, the area between the Carpathian Mountains and the Danube area became a kind of laboratory of various interactions in which something new started to ferment and take shape.

In the end however, things as usual, went back to where they had been.

Interregnum
or once
more back to
the sentence
"... in
the Hand
[of God]
Rest all the
Rights of
Kingdoms"

That is why I am inclined to describe the 10th century as an *Interregnum* period, i.e. between reigns. A period in which no king had been appointed yet but a new one was being expected. And what is expected is, the comeback – in some way – of the historical and legal precedent Svätopluk had created in relation to Rome and the Empire. Namely, the two letters that Popes John VIII and Stephen V wrote within five years (880–885) to the King of the Slavs Svätopluk. The first of these is called *Industriae tuæ* and the second *Quia te zelo fidei* and we have discussed them a great deal above. Both letters are declared the patronage of the Holy See over the Kingdom of Svätopluk. The second letter includes the formula: "... in the Hand [of God] Rest all the Rights of Kingdoms". To understand this, the kingdom, since it comes from God, is irrevocable and endures even though it has no king. A good similar example is the medieval Kingdom of Poland, which was with small exceptions without a king from the 11th to the 14th century. And yet, even today, no one thinks that it has ceased to exist. This is the reason why the time between the death of one king and the inauguration of another is justified to be called the *interregnum*. It is in this spirit that the history of the 10th century in the area called the Pannonian Basin must be understood.

Looking
for the new
Svätopluk

I am just one of the many scholars who believe that it was here that the principles of the future restoration of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation were drawn following the models of the late Carolingian era. As it has already been mentioned here many times, an important part of this concept is *Sclavinia*. In other words, the Papacy – Rome – is looking for the new Svätopluk, for that new agent who would fit into that universal Roman Latin tetrarchy. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Mescio I – who attended the Quedlinburg diet – named one of his sons Svätopluk. Since one of Mescio's wife was Doubravka of Bohemia, the sister of Boleslas II the Pious, († 999), Czech Prince, they also had an older son named Boleslas. Even though it was undoubtedly a noble name, with his second wife, Oda of Haldensleben – from the North March – they had a son called *Świętopętk/Swentepulk*, i.e. Svätopluk. I know, I am going to repeat myself, but there is a need to stress this fact once again. At about the same time, Grand Prince of Rus' Yaropolk I of Kiev had a son named *Sviatopolk/Svyatopolk* = Svätopluk. Both examples are illustrative for what we call "Svätopluk political imagination" It is

basically the response to an external request. Either the Holy Roman Empire or the Holy See needed a new Svätopluk, someone who would bring Slavic Europe together anew. This is also the reason why at one and the same historical moment we can identify at least two willing propagators of the name Svätopluk among the main Slavic dynasties.

The Empire expects the archbishopric to be restored with its center in Prague, consisting of seven bishoprics. This is the model St. Vojtech-Adalbert appeared in as Bishop of Prague at the end of the 10th century.¹³² However, we should not forget some discrepancies – rather big ones, indeed – between Boleslas II and the Slavniks. The Slavnik dynasty represents the imperial-Roman notion rather than the specific Bohemian interests. This Roman notion is, in fact, the future St. Vojtech-Adalbert. That is why Vojtech-Adalbert actually leaves for Rome. As a matter of fact, he is said to have run away from Prague twice.

His story beautifully renders that attempt, i.e. to resist, at the end of the 10th century, which allegedly led to the creation of the *Sclavinia* we have been dealing with all the time. However, Adalbert is not the only person Rome and the Empire are preparing for this task. St. Bruno of Querfurt is just another such envoy or legate who has been assigned the task to remember this idea to this part of Europe. St. (+1025/1027), St., founder of the Camaldolese order – one of the major 10th century monks – is also trying hard to reform the Benedictine order. Both of them are also preparing their pupils and team for missions to Pannonia and, later, to the Polish Principality and the future Holy Rus'. At one point we are witnessing a frontal onset of the Latin world with basically the same goal, to restore the Roman *Illyricum* following the formula that to a certain extent had been successful in the 9th century: to reconstruct the territory that had already been part of the Christian world and potentially expand it further into the Old Rus'. These are the determinant lines of force here.

Another factor will soon significantly influence this whole political development. It is actually the fact that Boleslas II has the Slavniks murdered, except for the bishop, i.e. Adalbert, who is away from home, and his brother Sobeslav, who either managed to escape or might have been with Boleslas the Brave at the time. We see that the Polish Principality has already become a key player. An unknown country that basically came to light in the 960s has become one of the major Central European players within just two generations.

*The Idea
of Tetrarchy*

*St. Vojtech-
Adalbert
one of the
Creators of
the Concept
of Sclavinia*

*The
Slaughter of
the Slavniks
and the Con-
sequences for
the Plan of
Sclavinia*

¹³² The concept of St. Adalbert's *Sclavinia* Archbishopric researched in detail in Johannes Fried, *Otto III. und Bolesław Chrobry*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2001), 92.

Let me underline the fact that in the issue here is to find a way to legitimize the new position of this newcomer dynasty. It is not enough to be a successful leader. The Middle Ages – and a major part of the Early Modern Age – required to have some royal blood as well. In this case, we see that Mescio I is trying to refine his blood with Doubravka and Oda. It is with Doubravka that he has a son, Boleslas. As it turned out, Boleslas would eventually become the most capable bearer of the idea Mescio I represented. The same Mescio, at the same time – in the form of a document with a peculiar name: *Dagome iudex* – he hands over the Polish Principality under the protection of St. Peter in Rome. Just like Svätopluk I had done before him. The same model from the previous century is clearly repeating here. This is the line young Boleslas the Brave follows. Moreover, young Boleslas has yet other advantages. In addition to being an excellent soldier – of which he gives enough proof in a whole range of successful struggles throughout his life – he is also a skilled diplomat and, above all, understands Papal politics. That is why St. Vojtech-Adalbert seeks refuge with him after having worked in Pannonia for some time. A few centuries later, Jan Długosz (Johannes Longinus) would write beautifully about how St. Vojtech-Adalbert converted the local Huns and the Slavs, that is Hungarians (Magyars) and the Slavs (Slovaks) to Christianity. Afterwards, St. Adalbert finds refuge with Boleslas the Brave.

Interestingly, Boleslas the Brave turns his originally planned mission from the Baltic – where some Slavic tribes have not been baptized yet, such as the Obodrites, and Lutici, West Slavic tribal confederation, earlier also known as the Veleti (Wilzi/Wielzians/Wiltzes) – and directed it towards the Prussians.

It still remains unclear why Boleslas the Brave took that decision and why St. Vojtech-Adalbert agreed to it. In any case, we know that Adalbert eventually dies a martyr. There are several contemporary testimonies describing St. Vojtech-Adalbert's final dialogue with the representatives of the Prussians. The Prussians ask him who he is. And he answers:

"I am a Slav by birth, Adalbert by name, a monk by profession, and once a bishop by rank, but now by my function – your apostle."

Canaparius, *Life of Saint Adalbert Bishop of Prague and Martyr*, Chapter 28.

So, St. Vojtech-Adalbert declared "*sum nativitate Slavus*". That means, "*I am a Slav by birth*". Then he says a monk and a bishop, and so on. Significant here is that he does not identify himself as *Romanus*, *Germanus*, or *Bohemus*, i.e. Czech, though he might have. For he was a Latin monk, his diocese of Prague belonged to the Archdiocese of Mainz, which is in Germany, and he himself was bishop of Bohemia. It does not seem to be a coincidence. The self-stylization of Vojtech-Adalbert before his death is meant to signal

Sum
nativitate
Slavus
or on the
Significance
of the
Death of
St. Vojtech-
Adalbert in
Martyrdom
for the
Emergence
of Central
Europe

a certain ecclesiastical-political legacy for the plan of Christian unification of Europe around a year 1000.



Figure 17: Josephus Flavius, *Other pictorial representations of the idea of the Tetrarchy from around the year 1000. Four figures (ROMA, GALLIA, GERMANIA and SCLAVINIA) – allegories of the restored Roman Empire come to pay tribute to Emperor Otto III, in De bello Iudaico/The Jewish war, cca 1002, (Staatsbibliothek Bamberg MscClass79), see: <https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/item/V7O2QNS6RMHNZWCR2CIXOWGLFANQ6UD7>.*

This is monumental for the history of Central Europe. Precisely these words implied the idea of Slavonia-*Sclavinia* as a part of Western Catholic Universe. Of course, this bears asking a question that will resonate for a long time and actually resonates up to this day: What is the difference between the Slavic Catholicism of the Cyrillo-Methodian Mission and that promoted by St. Vojtech-Adalbert? This, however, is a topic for a completely different debate.

When Vojtech-Adalbert is killed, he receives the Crown of martyrdom. Then Boleslas ceremoniously exchanges his body, his relics, for gold and silver. After 997, Boleslas had him taken to Gniezno, which became the imagined new center of that *Sclavinia*. The solemn *inventio* of the remains of St. Vojtech-Adalbert and his subsequent – *elevatio* – *translatio* – *depositio* to the Cathedral in Gniezno, is beautifully elaborated on the copper doors of

this basilica to this day. In symbolic terms, *Sclavinia* thus received its own martyr, and – particular patron. St. Vojtech-Adalbert becoming the patron saint of the entire area between the Adriatic and the Baltic Sea, east of the Elbe river and far into the distant and unseeable Eastern European steppes is also an essential part of the *Sclavinia* plan. This is the story of St. Vojtech-Adalbert, around which a new Church will eventually be built. A Church that had Slavic in its name, according to the dominant language in that region.¹³³ However, the archbishopric established by the Holy See in Gniezno with the consent of the Roman Emperor Otto III, with its Latin orientation, was in line not only with the plan of the *Renovatio Imperii*, but also with the building of the universalistic *Imperium Christianum* as we have known it since the 9th century. In order to get some idea, I will give here the geographical definition of *Sclavinia* as given by the aforementioned first Polish chronicler Gallus Anonymus in his *Chronicle of the Princes of Poles*:¹³⁴

“So the Slavonian land [terra Sclauonica] is divided in the north into parts by or made up of these regions, and it runs from the Sarmatians, who are also known as Gets, to Denmark and Saxony, and from Thrace through Hungary, which in past times was occupied by the Huns (who are also called Hungarians) and, passing down through Carinthia it ends at Bavaria. Toward the south, starting from Epirus on the Mediterranean Sea it includes Dalmatia, Croatia, and Istria, and ends on shores of the Adriatic Sea, where Venice and Aquileia stand, separating it from Italy.”

Gallus Anonymus, *The Deeds of the Princes of Poles*, First: the Introduction.

This is also a new political situation. Both Boleslas and the high imperial elites are aware of exactly the same thing. And they decide that the current Emperor, Otto III, will pay a solemn visit to the relics of St. Vojtech-Adalbert – his friend and the patron of the planned *Sclavinia* – in Gniezno.

The *First Polish Chronicle* – attributed to Gallus Anonymus, but also the *Chronicle* by Thietmar of Merseburg¹³⁵ – beautifully describes how this event actually happened. In this wonderful story, Boleslas the Brave is signed with a diadem of a Roman Patricius in the presence of Otto who has come

On the
Symbolism
of the Visit
of Emperor
Otto III to
Boleslas the
Brave in
Gniezno

¹³³ For an understanding of the medieval concept of the nation (*natio*) and the function of the saint in its self-definition, see György Geréby, “The Nation, the Nations, and the Third Nation: The Political Essence of Early Christianity,” in *Theology and World Politics: Metaphysics, Genealogies, Politica Theologies*, ed. Vassilos Paipas (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020): 181–209.

¹³⁴ Gallus Anonymus, *Gesta Principum Polonorum: The Deeds of the Princes of the Poles*, ed. and transl. Paul W. Knolland Frank Schaer (Budapest: CEU Press, 2003):

¹³⁵ Gallus Anonymus, *Gesta Principum Polonorum*, ed. and transl. Paul W. Knolland Frank Schaer, 36 and 37 and *Ottoman Germany. The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, trans. David A. Warner, 183–85.

all the way to Gniezno, the old capital of the Polish Principality. Otto receives presents everywhere and, in the end, he takes part of the relics of St. Wojtech-Adalbert with him. All this comes about in the year 1000. It is necessary to realize that around the year 1000, Europe is full of intense millennial – chiliastic – assumptions. The whole continent expects the real turning point of the world. The second Kingdom of Christ is believed to come at last. And the perfect concept of the creation of the Slavic kingdom entirely fits this idea. Nevertheless, this is the ideal part of the story, the pure theory. A different thing is how it is to be implemented.

Moving just a few hundred kilometers further south, we find another candidate for King of the Slavs: Stephen, whom we have not mentioned much here yet. Although Stephen was born in Pannonia, his career started in Nitra. It is in the Nitrian principality that he tests his leadership skills. At this time, however, he is already active with his young wife, blessed Princess Gisela, the sister of Duke and later Emperor Henry II of Bavaria from the house of the Ottonians. And Henry II is Otto III's uncle. After his death he is also the only male heir to the East-Frankish royal title. And this royal title is equivalent to King of the Romans, which is, again, equivalent to the later Emperor of Universal Latin Christianity.

Of course, the Bavarian center follows the Bavarian interests, as it has done in the past. It had clearly followed them under Pribina, as well as under Svätopluk, both of whom also had Bavarian wives. In short, Bavarian politics continue to follow the same lines of force it had followed before. One can also call it the Danubian policy. The Bavarians and their centers are well aware of the implications the actual implementation of that “wonderful” tetrarchy plan would mean for the Bavarians and the Saxons. They certainly had not forgotten Rastislav's uprisings. Neither had they forgotten how Svätopluk's fame had recently gone to his head or how the East-Frankish King Arnulf had to spend the last years of his life struggling against the Moravians, i.e. the Danube Slavs. Of course, this was nothing Henry's politicians liked very much. This is why they renewed the policy of the former East-Frankish kingdom (*Renovatio regni Francorum*). This is why they sacrificed a princess of royal blood in a marriage that might have seemed meaningless at that point as the issue at hand was a completely new dynasty.

In fact, where is the origin of the Arpadians? No one really knows where this new dynasty came from. Certainly, they are not the old Moimirids. However, its dithematic Slavic names such as *Vladislav* (Ladislav), *Belo* (Vojtech/Adalbert), *Domoslav*, and even *Vaic/Waic* (Vjačeslav?), which is the name of St. Stephan the King before his baptism. This suggests that a share of its blood must have come from the old Moimirids. If this assumption is

Idea versus Reality: Instead of One Solution – Slavonia, Two Solutions for Central Europe – Kingdoms of Pannonia-Hungary and Kingdom of the Slavs-Poland

Who were the Arpadians

correct, and everything points to it, then, the marriage of Bavarian Gisela and Stephan is not so surprising. Figuratively speaking, this wedding was the moment in which the Queen Mother returned to the anthill. In the end, this investment – this marriage the Bavarians arranged – turned out to be very effective. All of a sudden the imperial policy of Otto III split into two main parts. The first – Saxon one followed the main idea of universalistic Christian plan for Europe while the other followed its practical aspects of older Bavarian experiences.

As a result, *Sclavinia* is divided into two parts: we can call them the “Polish” and the “Pannonian” parts (see the Map no. 16). The imperial and the Roman politicians were confronted with the huge dilemma of how to tackle this situation. Unfortunately, very little is known about all the details. Except for a few pieces of information, all we know comes from a later and already “domesticated” tradition. This whole story, a fable about how the crown for St. Stephen was sent from Rome by Pope Silvester II, appears at the end of the 11th century in *the Life of King Stephen of Hungary by Hartvic*, and is usually attributed to Bishop Hartvik (known as the *Legenda Hartvoicana*).¹³⁶ Although there is no other evidence of a such bishop in the Kingdom of Hungary in the time of the reign of the King Coloman the Learned († 1095), Bishop Hartvik is said to have written this work at the time. What we do know positively – according to Thietmar of Merseburg – is that Emperor Otto III, after Stephen had fulfilled certain conditions, did not object to Stephen being sent the crown and consecrated King.

“With the favor and urging of the aforementioned Emperor [Otto III], Waik [Stephen I], brother-in-law of Duke Henry of the Bavarians, established bishoprics in his kingdom and received the crown and consecration.”

The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg, book IV, chapter 59.

On what basis, however, did Stephen establish bishoprics? We know that in Poland the territories of the newly established episcopates roughly coincided with the oikumenes of the various West Slavic *gentes* (tribes) such the Polans, Pomeranians, Mazovians, Vistulans and Silesians... This is understandable, since there was no firm legal precedent. However, this is not true of the territories of Pannonia – Transdanubia and Nitria – Cisdanubia, where from 796 onwards we record vigorous Christianizing activity and the systematic building up of church administration.

¹³⁶ “Life of King St. Stephen written by Bishop Hartvic”, ed. and transl. Nora Berend and Cristian Gaşpar, in *The Sanctity of the Leaders: Holy Kings, Princes, Bishops and Abbots from Central Europe (11th to 13th Centuries)*, eds. Gábor Klaniczay, Ildikó Csepregi, and Bence Péterfi, (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2023), 684 pp (here 81–176).



Figure 18: An updated rendition of Sclavinia's political solution? Two kings adorned with crowns and holding lances (St. Stephen I and Boleslas the Brave?) pay homage to Emperor Otto III, in *The Liuthar-Evangeliar of Aachen*, f. 16^r (Aachener Domschatzkammer, Inv.-Nr. 25), see: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/14/Liuthar-Evangeliar.jpg>.

What
Crown, and
Where did
St. Stephen
Receive it
in the Year
1000

It is also not clear at first glance why the crown was given to Stephen and not to Boleslas the Brave, who after all was doing exactly the same thing as his southern neighbor in Poland. Why then, was the crown given to Stephen and not to Boleslas? What kind is this crown? There is no other known written evidence of a crown for Stephen I in contemporary documents. There is however, a depiction from those years that might shed light on what Otto III's plans for the political arrangement of *Sclavinia* actually might look like (see Figure 18).

The picture apparently shows two kings paying homage to the emperor. Both of them are holding lances in addition to the crown on their heads. Royal crowns on heads of the kings are understandable, but why lances? Around the year 1000, the Lance of St. Maurice was a key element in the legitimizing strategies of the Ottonians. Originally they were supposed to be in possession of the "Holy Lance" of Longinus used to pierce the side of Jesus. When after all, the Ottonians realized that their relic with the Nail of the Lord from the Holy Cross was not identical to Longinus' lance, they began to call their lance after St. Maurice, commander of the Theban Legion and a third-century martyr. This early Christian soldier martyr was highly venerated by Otto I. However, there must have been at least two more copies of the Lance of St. Maurice for one was given to Boleslas and another one to Stephen. Both were sent to the predicted rulers approximately at the same time. However, just one crown was sent to Stephen. This is how instead of one *Sclavinia*, the dual kingdoms actually in Central Europe came into being (see the Map no. 16). Now let us get back to the legend created by Hartvik, whose complemented version of the story how the crown was sent from the Holy See to Stephan eventually reappears in the chronicle known as the *Hungarian-Polish Chronicle*.

How The
Hungarian-
Polish
Chronicle
Describes the
Beginnings
of the
Kingdom of
Hungary

The name of this chronicle is symptomatic, as it originated in the Kingdom of Hungary in the thirties of the 13th century but made its career in the Polish kingdom later on. The *Chronicle* contains texts no other later works from this region include. In particular, it describes a well-known anecdote from the *Legenda Hartviciana* (*The Life of King Stephen of Hungary by Hartvic*) that has the Bishop of Cracow, Lambert, going to Rome to visit Pope Silvester II who already had a crown intended for Mescio I in the Chronicle. This is an obvious case of "contamination" in which the historical Mescio I becomes blended with his son Boleslas I the Brave. Coincidentally, however, Astrik or Anastasius from "Ungaria" – as the chronicle calls it – arrives in Rome at the same time and also asks the Pope for a crown for Stephen I. Facing this dilemma, Silvester does not know what to do. He falls asleep and dreams that he should send the crown to Stephen I rather than to Boleslas. This is a problem, though. If he sends the crown to Stephen, he can expect Boleslas

I the Brave to get upset to say the least. By the way, this crown can be assumed – reasonably enough – to be Svätopluk’s crown.

Consequently, the Pope gives Bishop Lambert of Cracow special letters binding Boleslas and Stephen to make peace with each other. *The Hungarian-Polish Chronicle* beautifully describes in the chapter 6 why and how the crown was not given to the Poles. It is worth reading:

“Thence, on the eve of the day the wondrous crown was to be sent to Mesco, Duke of Poland, an angel and messenger of Christ revealed himself to the Pope in a vision and said to him: ‘Tomorrow morning you shall learn that envoys of a lesser tribe rooted in the Eastern Hungary [Ungaria Orientalis] who have renounced their savage paganism will visit you and fall humbly on their knees urging you to give the royal crown and the grace of your Papal blessing to their Duke Stephen. Thence, you shall instruct that the crown that was intended for Mesco, Duke of Poland, be given to the Duke of Hungary without dispute and so oblige to their request’.”

The Hungarian-Polish Chronicle, chapter 6.

And so it is said to have happened. Curiously, after failing to get the crown and receiving papal advice to make peace instead, according to the same *Chronicle* Lambert meets Astrik in Venice and both continue northwards together. *The Hungarian-Polish Chronicle* renders an exceptional description of this event:

“After this privilege was established and confirmed, the Polish envoy, wanting to reach the Hungarian King, Stephen, sought out the Hungarian envoy in the city of Venice, which lies on the sea. Admirably, they met and spoke together, congratulating each other for carrying a crown and a royal rank ornament the one, and a confirmation of peace and friendship the other, that is the Polish envoy. As they neared Alba Regia [Székesfehérvár/Stoličný Belehrad], about a day’s journey away, they sent a messenger to announce their fortunate arrival to the king.”

The Hungarian-Polish Chronicle, chapter 6.

We need to keep in mind that the ancient title *rex* denotes every Christian ruler. However, of course, a king (*rex*) that has been crowned and anointed has a higher rank.

“The King [Stephan] came to meet them in the company of his bishops and clerics, and a large number of people who had gathered there, and received them with respect and honours. After praying for the sake of God’s name in front of all the people, they stood up and told the wonderful events God had blessed them with. The Hungarian envoy handed Stephen the royal diadem,

a crown made of gold and precious stones and, as a sceptre, a cross that was to be carried in front of him in the manner of the Apostolic office together with the confirmation of the apostolic privileges. Following the Pope's instructions, the Polish envoy offered him the confirmation of peace and friendship. King Stephen, willing to confirm it, had it written down as a memory for posterity. Afterwards, a Mass was held in honour of the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary. During the Mass, the King was anointed with holy oil and consecrated. After the Mass, he gave the whole crowd the kiss of peace, others kissed his holy hand and ring, and received his blessing. At the end, the bishops with the clergy and the knights with the people chanted 'Kyrie Eleison' in unison and blessed the almighty God and the holy Apostles Peter and Paul for the fact that the devoted and virtuous Stephen, anointed with holy chrism, was happily crowned with the diadem of royalty. Afterwards, they entered the royal palace, sat down to feast and merrily spent the following day in joy and gaiety."

The Hungarian-Polish Chronicle, chapter 6.

We do not know what the actual historical events looked like, but we have a beautiful tradition that – at least from the 13th century when the *Hungarian-Polish Chronicle* was written – gives us an idea of how things were expected to look like around St. Stephen's coronation. The real events must have been far more complexed than described in the chronicle, but we will examine this in greater detail in the final session of the series. Now, let us go back to the very coronation act. According to the information we have just read from *The Hungarian-Polish Chronicle*, it took place in *Alba Regia* (Székesfehérvár/Stoličný Belehrad). *Alba Regia* is traditionally considered the coronation place of the Hungarian, I have to say it – originally Pannonian, Kings. What historical and legal precedent makes this hill the coronation place, on which the magnificent temple of the Virgin Mary will be built, much bigger in size than the one Pribina had built before? Why are the coronations to take place precisely here? This brings us back to the strategic communication of the early medieval rulers with Roman World (*Orbis Romanus*) and Church tradition of the first military martyrs, which are intended to grant legitimacy not only to that Central European ruler. The crown was given to Stephen. He must have had better rights to it.

As a matter of fact, Rome is Pannonia. The VIth Herculean Legion is located in Pannonia. Its seat is not far away, in *Herculia*, only a few kilometers from *Alba Regia* (see the Map no. 19). The officer of this legion and at the same time another Christian martyr was St. Hadrian of Nicomedia, venerated especially by the Pribina family in *Blatnograd* (Mosapurc). This necessarily leads us to the historical precedent of the very first coronation that took



Map no. 19.

place. I believe it happened during Svätopluk's lifetime, as the 9th chapter of the *Gesta Regum Sclavorum* so eloquently describes. Instead of a conclusion I will quote it once more just for a small comparison:

“On the twelfth day, after the summit had finished, the King [Svätopluk] was [was anointed and] crowned by the hand of the vicar Honorius and the cardinals and the bishops, in the fashion [according to the habit] of the Roman kings. There was great celebration among the people and his whole kingdom.”

Gesta Regum Sclavorum, chapter IX.

Chapter 20

The Contribution of the Nitrian Principality to the Origin of Pannonian (Hungarian) Kingdom

We will arrive at the end of one historical period and in the beginning of the next one. This requires making a major historical and philosophical cross-section, for we will be talking about theses rather than historical events and actions by individual rulers, dynasties or lineages. Our last reading finished with the coronation of Stephen who would eventually be canonized. According to the *Hungarian-Polish Chronicle*, coronation and anointing took place in Alba Regia – Stoličný Belehrad/Székesfehérvár around Christmas of the year 1000 or at the beginning of 1001.

At this point, I would like to reiterate my belief that a Christian kingdom cannot be destroyed, since it comes from the power of God. By its very nature, a kingdom is a lasting idea. The *Interregnum* we can find in the 10th century, actually only restored the legal situation from the end of the 9th and the beginning of the 10th century. We have not talked about how it happened inside, but I think it is quite necessarily to focus on it. Stephen's position was not as simple as it might look like today based on what they tell us at school.

Stephen started his political career as the Duke of Nitria around 995.¹³⁷ After his father Geza died, Stephen faced a rather difficult situation: There was another contender for the position of main ruler over the territory between the Danube and the Carpathians. Historiography and later historians call this rival Kopáň. However, there was no one else by the name Kopáň. It is, more likely, a title similar to the Latin *Cupan* meaning *Župan* or *Zhupan*. The name of that rival who claimed supremacy over the area in question derives from this title, *Cupan*. Now, where does the antagonism between *Transdanubia* and *Cisdanubia* actually reside?

How is it possible that our historiography has failed to notice the geographical factors that have determined the antagonism between *Transdanubia* and *Cisdanubia*? Let us recap it simply and briefly: The Romans fought against the Quadi in Barbaricum. Later on, Samo – provided he was on the

Clarification of the Topic

The Idea of Interregnum and the Restoration of the Kingdom on the Danube around the Year 1000

Nitria as a Starting Point for the Unification of the Kingdom and Transdanubian Cupan

¹³⁷ György Györffy, *King Saint Stephen of Hungary*, trans. Peter Doherty (New York, Columbia University Press, 1994), *passim*.

The Conflict between Cisdanubia and Transdanubia as a Metaphysical Problem of the Organization of the Space between the Carpathian Mountains and the Lower Danube

territory of today's Slovakia – battled the Avars, who were in Transdanubia. After that, Svätopluk and Rastislav fought against Pribina from Transdanubia. Then – and this is the historical moment we are talking about – Stephen fights against Kopán (Cupan), also from Transdanubia. Eventually. In the future sequels of this book we will also witness the rather evident dispute between the Nitrian line of the Arpadians against its Transdanubian line. Namely the home war of Bela I, with his brother Andrew I, and later the sons of Bela I (brothers Geza I, Ladislav I and Lambert; and the son of Andreas – against Solomon. We could go on like that throughout history. To give an example for all, take the Turkish occupation when the still free part of the Kingdom of Hungary – which, in fact, matches most of the territory of today's Slovakia – fights against the Pashalik of Buda (sl. Budín). Today we still have a similar latent conflict between *Transdanubia* and *Cisdanubia*, we just call them Hungary and Slovakia. This directs us one's footsteps back to our question, to the reason for these conflicts.

Ideological and Practical Reasons for the Conflicts between Cisdanubia and Transdanubia

Today, we look at it from an ethnic perspective: beyond the Danube are the Magyars-Hungarians while we Slovaks are on this side of the Danube. It makes perfect "sense". However, the dispute between Kopán and Stephen is far from having an ethnic character. Therefore, we need to look for a different explanation. And that explanation is, of course, the one behind all conflicts: economic interests. The issue here is controlling the Danube waterway. The Danubian strategic artery has always been a key link between the west and the southeast of Europe. So, this might be the answer we were looking for.

Additional Justification of the Conflict as a Struggle between Christianity and Paganism

Later tradition, however, gave *Cupan* or Kopán an ideological connotation calling him a pagan. Consequently, the unification of the Kingdom of Hungary – still called Kingdom of Pannonia at the time – is presented as the struggle for the establishment of Christianity. This, however, is not historically true. Some archaeological findings show that *Zhupan/Cupan* was already a Christian at the time.

The Inner Powers which supported Stephen I

The question that bears asking here is: what forces supported Stephen? It was, with no doubt, Bavaria, the homeland of his wife. However, there were other local forces as well.

This was beautifully summed up by Slovak poet Samo Chalupka in his work *Odboj Kupov (Resistance of Kopán)*, where he speaks about that it was the Slovaks who backed Stephen and his efforts to restore the Kingdom in the Danube region in his struggle against Kopán – who symbolizes the ancestors of today's Magyars. Of course, this is a poetic abridgement. The reality was far from being that simple. There is a relatively later source I call *Gesta Ducum sive Principum Nitriae (Deeds of the Dukes or Princes of Nitria)*

– whose content is generally considered to have originated as far back as the 11th century.¹³⁸

These lost *Gesta* or Deeds tell us of an interesting situation. Before the conflict itself, Stephen and his people gathered at a place Slovenská brána (“the Slovak Gate”), just a few kilometers northwards of Esztergom/Ostrihom along the Hron at a place called Biňa. The preserved source was composed in the 14th century and it is already contaminated within the contemporary fashion. This source has Stephen being ritually “girded with sword,” i.e. becoming a knight – in 14th-century terms – and a king – in 9th–10th-century understanding. The 14th century source changed Hont for Hunt (dog) – a highly unlikely name for a knight – and Poznan for Paznan. These two knights are said to ritually gird Stephen “with sword” before the battle against *Cupan*. This might have actually happened. I just think – and I am not the only one among Slovak historians to share this view – that Poznan, the Poznans, and Hont, the Honts, are noble families of pre-Hungarian origin whose historical tradition goes back to the previous period traditionally known as the Great Moravian period. There is another question, though: “the sword”. What sword did they gird him with?

We have already spoken of Svätopluk’s sword. The *Nitrian Benedictine Legend of Svätopluk* has Svätopluk himself burying his sword somewhere in Zobor hill. Most likely, this is the sword we are talking about. We know about this sword from this legend. Of course, the Benedictine monks knew about it, too. We also know that the Hont-Poznans had the right of patronage over the Benedictine St. Hippolytus Abbey in Nitra. However, also the Nitrian branch of the Arpadians had the right of patronage over it at a higher level. Pure deductive reasoning takes us directly to a very – I would say even fairytale-like – connection between Svätopluk’s sword and the sword Hont and Poznan used to gird the future unifier of *Transdanubia* and *Cisdanubia*. But what was the political purpose behind such a ritual? This question has a clear answer. The same one Svätopluk had before him: to unite his kingdom (Moravia and Nitria) and eventually annex *Transdanubia* to it. One would say, Stephen actually follows the footsteps of Svätopluk. St. Stephen was not the last Arpadian, however, who from Nitra achieved the unification of *Cisdanubia* and *Transdanubia*.

*A few Words
concerning
Gladius
Beati
Stephani
Regis
Ungarorum
(the Sword
of St.
Stephen the
King of the
Hungarians)*

¹³⁸ Raimund F. Kaindl, “Studien zu den ungarischen Geschichtsquellen,” part 1–2, *Archiv für österreichische Geschichte* 81 (1895); part 3–4, *Archiv für österreichische Geschichte* 82 (1895); part 5–6, *Archiv für österreichische Geschichte* 84, 1898; part 7, *Archiv für österreichische Geschichte* 85, 1898 and part 9–12, *Archiv für österreichische Geschichte* 88, 1900.

In the end, Stephen I overpowers *Cupan* at Veszprém, has him executed and dismembered – according to later submissions – and hung on the gates of all major towns in the Kingdom of Hungary, i.e. the Kingdom of Pannonia. Of course, those towns were not fortified at the time, so there were no gates. This is pure *licentia poetica* or the “artistic license” of later, 14th-century composers. For us, however, essential is something else, namely – How could Stephen defeat *Cupan*? What were the reasons? The answer is simple. Because he controlled Nitrian principality and Nitria was, ultimately, a storehouse of precious metals. The Romans knew it. Later on also Venice and Florence and the Habsburgs and other important political forces knew it. That is why all of them sought to obtain control over Slovakia. So, Stephen I wins a decisive victory, deals brutally with *Kopáň/Cupan*, and unites *Transdanubia* and *Cisdanubia*. But that is not the end of his politics.

Being a good ruler, a good early medieval monarch, he centralizes his empire. Basically, he has three options: Firstly, to do exactly what he did with *Kopáň*, the same the Premyslids did with the Slavniks. This is a very effective solution that has one weak point, though: If a male descendant of this lineage remains alive, you can expect him to eventually come back to get you. This is what happened to the Premyslids when Sobeslav – the descendant of the Slavniks – returned to Prague with Polish Boleslas I the Brave. The second option is to marry off any sisters/daughters you have to make matrimonial ties. Stephen married his sister off to Samuel Aba, the ruler of the Upper Tisa Region. Noteworthy, Samuel Aba's domain was Feldebró – i.e. Debrovo Pole in Cistisia – and there, in Debrovo Pole, there is a beautiful Great Moravian church. The floor plan of this church has the form of a cross, pointing to a clear Byzantine influence. The third possibility is to appoint allies to different posts and give them estates. Poznan and Hont got estates in what had been *Cupan's* domain, *Transdanubia*.

If you want to build an early medieval monarchy throughout Europe, you also demand the support of the Church. Just that the Church is not a feudal ideology notoriously inclined to support a ruler. The Church is actually a belief, a parallel belief system with its own structures. At one point – we are talking about the early 11th century – the Church still symbolically lives in those castles (gords) together with the worldly power. The Church has not moved to the suburbia yet, it has not created its own separate premises that would eventually give origin to chapter streets and entire episcopal towns. Instead, it still lives in the castle together with the monarch or ruler, or with the *zhupan*, who has been appointed to this post. This helps us to understand the importance of the Church's role in the construction of an early medieval monarchy.

We already know that the castle system (gords system = hradský systém) originated in Great Moravia, most likely as early as in the Pribina-Kocel domain. This castle system was eventually taken over by Svätopluk. Stephen I finally took over this very administrative division into *comitatenses* or counties. Now, why is it necessary to elaborate on this *comitatus* system? As a matter of fact, some of those *comitatenses* take their name after their people, for example Hont and from him Hont county, or from another nobleman Aba Samuel – Aba county. So, this is nothing new. For instance, the Gemer region is named after one of Pribina's men named Gojmir. At this point, I would like to stress that I am neither the first nor the last scholar to back this thesis about the castle system persisting continuously from Great Moravia to the Kingdom of Pannonia-Hungary.

The Castle System

One of these scholars is, for instance, late historian Erik Fügedi († 1992) – who, by the way, had Slovak ancestors. The bottom line is that he also supported the continuous existence of this system.¹³⁹ So, to recap: what did Stephen I actually do? He renovated things that had already been there before and gave them new functionality. He established bishoprics. Now, where did Stephen establish those bishoprics and on what basis can he do that? First of all, we must not forget that the right to appoint or choose your own bishops was given to Svätopluk by Pope John VIII in his bulla *Industriae Tuae* from 880.

The Small Recapitulation

Stephen I just follows that line. Apparently, together with the crown he received from Rome, he was also given this right. It is on this basis that he can establish these bishoprics. Now, where do those bishoprics mostly originate? They originate in *Transdanubia*. As already mentioned, from the time of Pribina and Kocel, this is the most ecclesiastically structured territory. Therefore, it really makes sense that those bishoprics be created there. The next question concerns the archbishoprics.

Just like the archbishopric of St. Methodius legitimized the Kingdom of Svätopluk, in order to be King, Stephen I needed an archbishopric. Therefore, the Esztergom (Ostrihom) Archdiocese was established. In fact, it covers two-thirds of the territory of today's Slovakia. The second is the Archdiocese of Kaloča/Kalocsa, which administered the southern and southeastern territories of the Kingdom. It is intriguing that two archbishoprics were created in the early Kingdom of Pannonia-Hungary. In fact, you would expect one to be enough. Can there therefore be some clarification? The Archdiocese of Kalocsa was intended to include a territory that was already Christian, but Cyrillo-Methodian. The former, traditional center of it

¹³⁹ Fügedi, *Castle and Society in Medieval Hungary (1000–1437)*, 15–41. Mostly polemically with György Györffy.

was Sremska Mitrovica. However, it was replaced first by the episcopal center of Čanáď (Csanád) and later by the Archbishopric of Kaloča (Kalocsa).

*Why was
the Arch-
bishopric
Established
in Esztergom
and not in
Nitra*

The question that bears asking is why was the archbishopric established in Ostrihom and not in Nitra? To answer it, we need to go back to the peace treaty that was established between Poland and Hungary in April 1001. Although we do not know its exact wording, we can guess it based on the actual situation in the country. Stephen I is most likely to have requested his partner Boleslas the Brave to grant him the right to ecclesiastically rule the area of the Nitrian principality from the Archdiocese of Ostrihom. Therefore, he moved its Seat (*sedes*) from Nitra to Ostrihom leaving Nitra unmanned.

*About the
Abbey of St.
Hippolytus
on Zobor by
Nitra*

This does not mean, however, that Nitrian principality is left with no ecclesiastical institution. In fact, the Abbey of St. Hippolytus on Zobor hill remains there continuously. And sometimes the Abbot functions as Bishop. We are not going to look into the entire church administration Stephen I created.

*Svätopluk
and Stephen
I: Some
Similarities
and Dis-
similarities*

King Stephen – the restorer of the kingdom – strongly resembles Svätopluk – the holiest, most kind, most Christian king – as depicted in the 9th chapter of the *Gesta Regum Sclavorum*. These *gesta* also have Svätopluk establishing two archdioceses and other bishoprics during an 8-day synod. According to the same source, he also divides the country into “duchies” – *vojvodstvá* – and provinces – *comitates* – headed by *Comes*, in the mentioned sources – *zhupans*. The resemblance is more than obvious. However, some scholars – like late Tibor Živkovič, a historian from Serbia – say that the authors of the 9th chapter of the *Gesta Regum Sclavorum* copied from the *Lives of St. Stephen*. I think the opposite may be closer to the truth and the authors of the *Lives of St. Stephen* copied from chapter nine of the *Gesta Regum Sclavorum*. But let us not deal with this source, *Gesta Regum Sclavorum*, “Deeds of Slavic Kings” – the lost text of Svätopluk – as it is a whole chapter in itself.¹⁴⁰ Instead, let us get back to the Nitrian principality.

*About the
Borders of
the Nitrian
principality*

A popular argument with our southern neighbors, the Magyars, as well as with the Czechs on the west, says that Slovakia did not exist until 1918. I always reply that it is way more complicated than that. You can clearly see how the tradition of the Nitrian principality from Great Moravia continues into the Kingdom of Pannonia and – from the end of the 11th century – into the Kingdom of Hungary. This Nitrian principality has relatively firmly defined borders. I can read them to you from *The Hungarian-Polish Chronicle*.

¹⁴⁰ Martin Homza, “‘Realm of the Slavs’ and the Coronation of Svätopluk, King of the Slavs: Historical Fiction or Fact? A Few Sentences on the Origins of the Political Imagination of *Regnum Sclavorum*,” *Hiperboreea* 11, no. 2, (2024): 127–50.



Map no. 20.

The Chronicle describes these borders after the coronation we spoke about in our last chapter. It says:

“The border of the Poles reached to the bank of the Danube to Ostrihom Castle. From there they went to Eger [Jáger] Castle, then to the river called the Tisa; receding, they wended along the river which is called the Cepla [Topľa], up to Salis/Galis Castle [which most probably is Šariš, namely the Salt Castle of Solivar, near Prešov] and here between the Hungarians, Ruthenians and Poles they had their end.”

In other words, the Slánské Hills and the Levoča Mountains formed the eastern borders of the Nitra region. Not coincidentally, the pass over the Levoča Mountains is called *Branisko*, meaning in Slovak “Great Gate”. The Mátra, Bükk, Grätzen and Pilis Mountains formed the southern border. This takes us to the logical delimitation of the Principality of Nitria, and its borders. They have always been defined geopolitically by hills and massifs – the best borders indeed. This is also the way General Luigi Giuseppe Piccione saw it too, for example. In fact, when he needed to find a demarcation line between the emerging Czecho-Slovakia and the southern borders between Slovakia and the then after 1919/1920 Hungarian Republic, he had an easy task. Although he had no historical knowledge, he clearly saw this border from a military and tactical point of view.

*How did
Nitrian
Principality
get the Silver
Patriarchal
cross in
a Red Field*

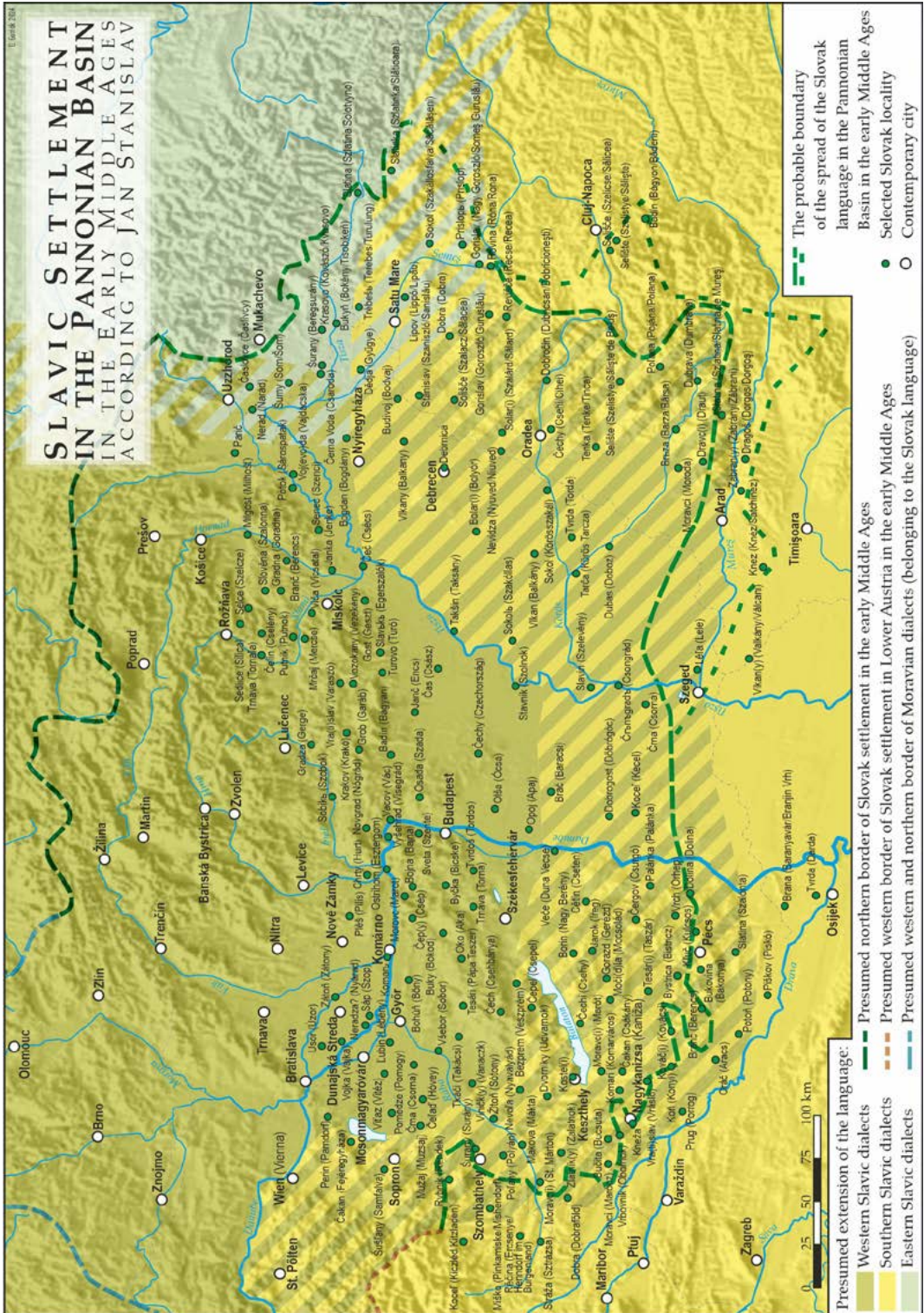
Now, why is Nitria so terribly important? Because all unification efforts within the Pannonian Basin had always been initiated and mostly successfully implemented by rulers from Nitra. That is the reason why the coat of arms of the Kingdom of Hungary contains a Patriarchal Cross (Two-barred Cross/Twin Cross) – which also appears in today’s Magyars heraldry. This cross is, in fact, the Two-barred Cross of Nitra, the Patriarchal Cross of the Nitrian Arpadians. How did Nitra get this silver Two-barred Cross in a red field? We can only speculate about that. And since I am Svätopluk positive, I believe that also this is thanks to Svätopluk.

*A bit of
Philosophy
and
Metaphysics
on the first
Centuries
of the
Monarchy
on the
Middle
Danube*

Svätopluk is the precedent we always need to go back to when reconstructing our history. Let us recap this once again historically and philosophically. So, Stephen I emerges from the Nitrian principality. Later on, Bela I – fighting his brother Andrew I – also emerges from Nitria and also unites his kingdom. Then, Bela’s sons: Geza I and Ladislav I – again Princes of Nitria – emerge from Nitria to rebel against Solomon and re-establish the Kingdom of Hungary.

*Who, in fact,
reestablished
the Kingdom
of Pannonia-
Hungary*

So the question bears asking – Who, in fact, reestablished the Kingdom of Pannonia-Hungary? What entity played the key role in the origin of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary? Again, I believe – quite rationally – that it is precisely Nitra, the Nitrian principality with its reserves of precious metals as well as with its economic and ecclesiastical structure that goes back way before the the year 1000, etc., etc. Indeed, the role the elites from today’s Slovakia played in the constitution of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary is of supreme importance. Then, someone comes and asks me: “So, why did Nitra actually lose that sovereignty?” My answer is: Nitrian principality gave up its sovereignty in order to consolidate peace. One would say, if you want peace, you need to give something up. After the Battle of Mogyoród on 14 March 1074, the rulers of Nitria overpowered Solomon and actually offered



Map no. 21.

to give up the territorial political sovereignty of Nitrian principality for what was supposed to be an everlasting peace in the Kingdom of Hungary.

*Some
Remarks
instead of
Summary*

Today we can see that this offering for peace worked consistently until 1918. We are not going to discuss why this Treaty of Nations was undermined, how it was undermined and who disrupted it. The reason is that the medieval constitutional nature of the Kingdom of Hungary – which was built on the general tolerance of all peoples and different religions within it – was lost. When speaking about the history of the Slovaks within the emerging Kingdom of Hungary, we need to say that their history is closely intertwined with the history of all the other ethnic, cultural, and religious subjects that formed the *Confluens nationum* conglomerate of nations, which the Kingdom of Hungary actually was. We also need to know that Slovakia as a separate territory did not cease to exist completely within the Kingdom of Hungary. It persisted at least in its own cultural specificity. That is the reason why, curiously, some charters from the territory of today's Slovakia – which was part of the Kingdom of Hungary – often use the expression *Via Hungariam*, “to the Magyar territories” as if it were a different country. We know that all major towns in Slovakia have this double cross. All noble families that come from Slovakia have in their coat of arms the Twin cross. The chronicles often refer to the “Upper parts” of the Kingdom. The territory of Slovakia is repeatedly merged into that egg-shaped unit, whether it be under Mathias de genere Chak of Trenčín, or under the Zápolyas, or the Habsburgs at the time of the Kingdom of Hungary. Again, there is a reason for this. This means that Slovakia never disappeared. Nitria does not disappear completely from history.

Neither do the Slovaks ceased to be visible in history. Slovakia and Slovaks just sacrificed their sovereignty in order for all the different nations within the Kingdom of Hungary to coexist in peace while being able to keep their individuality and their cultural particularism. Every single nation within the Kingdom of Hungary faced the same situation. So, there is nothing to complain over. But – as already said at the beginning – this is another chapter of our history and I will be more than happy to speak about it in the future, if possible.

Epilogue

In creating this work, I have tried to make the most of my many years of teaching experience. I firmly believe the overview first made public as youtube video lectures and eventually put down in writing will serve its purpose, namely to show that Slovak history is a specific and highly interesting component of historical science. Therefore, it needs to be continuously studied and researched.

This handbook aims at proving that Slovak history is a distinct chapter of the great history of Europe and a major one in the history of the Central European region. Although the time this work deals with spans from the early 6th to the early 11th century, it shows that the history of Slovakia and its people has mostly taken place around the Danube. At its very beginning, however, it reached as far south as the Peloponnese Peninsula and spreading out from the Danube to northern and eastern corners of Europe as well. The Slavic Kingdom of King Svätopluk and the mission of Saint brothers Cyril (Constantine) and Methodius were, indeed, so attractive that they became the example the forthcoming monarchies in the surrounding areas would choose to follow.

On the other hand, I have tried to show throughout my book that today's Slovaks and Slovenes are the bearers of the old name the Slavs. This name has been the basis of their cultural identity from the 6th century to the present day. Certainly, the content of this name, as I mentioned in the introductory chapter, has changed in time and space. In any case, it is still here today, like other names, including the ethnonyms of today's Greeks or French, which have been around for centuries and millennia. Although there are few points of contact between today's Greeks and the ancient Greeks, or today's French and the Germanic-speaking Franks of the 5th century; yet no one will take away from today's Greeks their ancient past and from the Franks their achievements in the construction of today's Europe.

My foremost objective has been to offer the fascinating, albeit intricate, story of a people that since the 6th century have continuously referred to themselves by their endonym *Sloveni*, *Slovania*. The outside world has mostly referred to them by their Latin exonym *Sclavi* or the Greek *Sklaboi* (Σκλάβοι). Reading these lines, you will also learn about the evolution their name has gone through and the different new meanings it has acquired. I might have just forgotten to say that this process is far from over. Just like the story of the Slovak nation. This narration includes the most important interactions between the bearers

of Slovak history and other communities as these common relations form an intrinsic part of the history of any nation.

Although the book has been dedicated to all non-Slovak readers in general, it is also apt for potential Erasmus students at the Faculty of Arts at Comenius University in Bratislava. I would, indeed, very much appreciate any comments you may have after reading it.

Slovak history still remains a kind of Cinderella story within the history of Europe. That is perhaps the reason why my highest ambition when creating the publication has been to show it to you in all its beauty in the hope you may fall in love with it. Should I manage to meet this objective at least partially would mean that my endeavor has definitely been worth every minute.

Martin Homza

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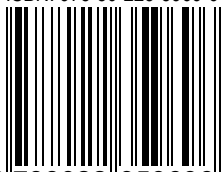
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