

SVĀTOPLUK IN CZECH AND CZECH-WRITTEN HISTORIOGRAPHY. A FEW CRITICAL REMARKS.

PART TWO: FROM THE 1960S TO THE 1990S

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Abstract: HOMZA, Martin. *Svātopluk in Czech and Czech-written Historiography. A Few Critical Remarks. Part two: from the 1960s to the 1990s.* For many reasons, Czech historiography in the 19th – 21st centuries established the main themes and trends in the research of Svātoplukian topics. This article presents the second part of a detailed analysis of the interpretive arc from the glorification of Svātopluk to the reduction of his significance as a ruler, which this Central European school of history underwent in the period under review. The article has been divided into several parts because of its large scope. In the second part I focus primarily on two giants of their time – Lubomír E. Havlík and Dušan Třeštík. Both of them created powerful lines of understanding of the Great Moravian period and the reign of Svātopluk I. Nevertheless, there is an abysmal difference between their approaches to examining the same issue. Havlík looks at it from a Moravian perspective, while Třeštík perceives the same topic from a Czech perspective. For Havlík, the Roman and papal dimensions of Svātopluk are important; for Třeštík, the emphasis is more imperial, although sometimes Central European. For Havlík, Svātopluk is clearly the king of the Moravians, whereas for Třeštík, the same ruler is rather a duke of the East Frankish Empire. It should also be noted that Havlík's image of Svātopluk is complex, while Třeštík's is rather selective. Paradoxically, however, contemporary Czech historiography tends to build on Třeštík rather than Havlík.

Keywords: *Svātopluk I, Borivoj, St. Methodius, Cosmas of Prague, (Pseudo)Christian, Moravian tradition, legitimism, Central Europe, Papacy, Empire, rex Sclavorum*

In the introduction to my first article devoted to the figure of King Svātopluk in Czech historiography, I suggested that the view of the first Czech chronicler, Cosmas of Prague, which frames thinking about the earliest history of the Czech lands to this day, does not correspond to the idea that Czech-speaking Moravians have of the same topic. It should also be noted that despite timid attempts, the Moravians failed to create a convincing concept of their own history in the Middle Ages (Wihoda 2001, 25-32). However, this does not mean that they did not try to do so in later times as well. In chronological order, this includes in particular the following authors writing in Latin, German, or Czech – Dubravius († 1553), Bartolomej Paprocký († 1614), Tomáš Jan Pešina z Čechorodu († 1680), Jan Jiří Ignác z Středovský († 1713), Bonaventura Josef Pitr († 1764), Alexius Habrich († 1794), Antonín Boček († 1847), Josef Chytil († 1861), Řehoř Tomáš Volný († 1871), Beda František Dudík († 1890), Vincenc Brandl († 1901) and Berold Bretholz († 1936)... (Vojen Drlík – Jindra Pavelková (eds.) 2008). It is only understandable that the starting point in all known attempts to conceptualise a distinctive Moravian history was the so-called Great Moravian period. The central figure of such a history then, alongside St. Constantine the Philosopher and his brother St. Methodius, was understandably the Moravian king Svātopluk.

Another Moravian historian writing in Czech, Lubomír Havlík († 2000), also attempted a Moravian aspect, yet at the same time avoided a Marxist view of the interpretation of Great Moravian history. A native of the South Moravian town of Znojmo, Havlík took on the theme of Great Moravia relatively early, in the mid-1950s, and devoted himself to it continuously and systematically until the end of his life. Therefore, the international scene considers him one of the leading authorities on this topic. Havlík's unsurpassed merit is that he, together with a team of other scholars, comprehensively made available the source database for the history of Great Moravia, known as *Magnae Moraviae Fontes Historici* (hereafter MMFH).¹ A total of five volumes were published gradually between 1966 and 1977. Havlík also added extensive critical comments to the source texts dealing with Svätopluk. Focusing on these comments in detail is beyond the scope of this article, however.

Havlík was one of the few historians able to grasp the significance of Svätopluk as a contemporary ruler. He was also one of the first scholars to stress the necessity of paying attention to the development of the memory of Svätopluk not only in the Czech and Central European countries but also in a wider European context (Havlík 1991, 164-188). This concerns above all his reflection on Old Rus' (Havlík 1972b, 282-292; 1975, 178-194) and the Balkan dimension of the life of the *Legend of Svätopluk* (Havlík 1972a, 197-200; 1976, 13-15).

Particularly memorable here is his work *The Chronicle of Duklja and the Dalmatian Legend* from 1976, especially its section "*The History of King Svetopelek*" (Havlík 1976, 13-45) which I will analyze and quote from further on. The introductory part of this monograph describes the evolution of the memory of Svätopluk in Czech medieval hagiography. In my opinion, this is the work of Czech historiography that goes most deeply into the issue in question. In it, Havlík returned to the genesis of the different medieval hagiographic texts of Czech provenance focusing – like František Graus (1963, 289-305) and Rudolf Urbánek (1915, 1-9) before him – on the image of the Moravian ruler Svätopluk. Let me just state that the negative image of Svätopluk embedded in the *Legend of the so-called Christian* – arising from the conflict between Saint Methodius and Svätopluk, which resulted in Svätopluk being cursed – was precisely the reason why Havlík in his work from 1976 legitimately questioned the authenticity of the "most disputed" Czech medieval legend: "*Although the original core of the so-called "Christian" is likely to have originated in the period it refers to, later amendments from the 12th and 13th/14th centuries largely modified, expanded, altered, and interpolated the original wording...*" (Havlík 1976, 27) In line with the well-founded conclusion that no negative image of Svätopluk can be found in the domestic sources of the period, Havlík explains that this literary *topos* of an evil and debauched secular ruler and a holy bishop must have been introduced into the *Legend of (Pseudo)Christian* at a later point in time and had to come from a different area. (*Legenda Christiani*, 1978, 16 and 17). In this respect, Havlík saw two possible sources. The first might have been the negative image of Svätopluk depicted in *The Life of St. Clement of Ohrid* – what Havlík called "the Balkan source." The second could have been the image of the godson of Svätopluk I, Zwentibold of Lotharingia. Havlík then summarized his findings as follows: "*In the case of the so-called Christian, therefore, the question begs whether the negative characteristic [of Svätopluk] is genuinely of Czech origin or whether it is the result of contamination with the King of Lotharingia and King of Burgundy of the same name, or with the Ohrid environment...*" (Havlík 1976, 24)

I have long had a similar opinion about the origin of the "*black legend of Svätopluk*" in the Czech literary environment. It was (Pseudo)Christian who introduced the negative stereotype of Svätopluk into Czech medieval literature in the second half of the 12th century. This was

¹ MMFH I-V 1966-1977. After being re-edited and complemented, the first four volumes of this monumental work were published again between 2008 and 2013.

connected with the need to strengthen the legitimation scheme of the Přemyslids of Prague over those of Moravia, whose political imagination of Svätöpluk was expressed by naming their descendants Svätöpluk. For the Moravian Přemyslids, the positive image of Svätöpluk could serve as an effective ideological and legal tool to justify their claims to the princely throne of Prague, as was the case with Svätöpluk I of Olomouc (the Lion), at the turn of the 12th century. This also explains Graus' earlier observation about the "*conspicuous occurrence of this name in Moravia*" (Graus 1963, 295).

In the second part of the first chapter of the analysed work, Havlík introduced into the Czech environment the South Slavic variant of the "brightest" legend of King Svätöpluk contained in chapter IX of the *Gesta Regum Sclavorum*, otherwise known as the *Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja* (GRS I 2009, 30-64; GRS II 2009). After a rigorous linguistic analysis of this fragment, Havlík in the quoted monograph from the mid-1970s went on to analyse the contents of this source, dividing the wording of the legend – known in several versions – according to the most important motifs it contains. One by one, Havlík broke down all the different characters that appear in the story as well as the events it describes. However, he failed to pay the necessary attention to some legal stylisations contained in the work. Taking into consideration the recent tendency among Czech medievalists to negate Svätöpluk's royal title – which will be dealt with later – I need to comment on his sentence: "*The coronation ritual of [Svätöpluk] more Romanorum regum must, therefore, be [...] admitted to have existed since the 9th or 10th century and might have been known to the priest of Duklja [Dukljanin's Chronicle]...*" (Havlík 1976, 38-39) In my opinion, the examples Havlík presents testify in favor of Svätöpluk's coronation by a papal legate roughly ten years before his death. These arguments appear convincing, especially in connection with a series of powerful rulers related to the Carolingians, such as the Italian kings Berengar and Quido (Wido), who received their crowns from the Pope in the late 9th century. Probably just an oversight, Havlík forgot to mention perhaps the most analogous example to that of Svätöpluk, namely the elevation of the ruler of Provence, Louis III the Blind, to the rank of king by the same Pope Stephan V.

Havlík summarized his research of chapter IX of the *Gesta regum Sclavorum* (*Dukljanin's Chronicle*) in the sentence: "*It is quite clear that the information the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja provides on the life and activities of Svetopelek – even though many facts are cases of contamination with the Dalmatian environment – indicates that many facts might have been taken over from the history of 9th-century Moravia... [...] Therefore, it begs the question of whether the priest of Duklja also knew the assumed Moravian Chronicle...*"

My research led me to a similar conclusion, although I formulated it a little differently. What is important is that I also consider the original chapter IX of the *Gesta regum Sclavorum* (*Dukljanin's Chronicle*) to have originated in the 880s. (Homza 2024a, 127-150). Today I am no longer alone in this view (Kunčer 2023, 43-66).

Great Moravia and, therefore, Svätöpluk as well were the main topics of Havlík's professional career. Reflecting on this work requires hard, systematic effort, and even then some significant findings of Havlík's work – especially those hidden in small nuances – can remain unnoticed. Despite this risk, let me try to analyse yet another of Havlík's more synthetic works, the 1987 study *Moravians in the Middle Danube; Moravia and the Principality of Nitra – Great Moravia*. (Havlík 1978, 63-83). In this article, Havlík chronologically mapped the reign of the historical Svätöpluk I, bringing out some new aspects to take into account when studying this ruler. He clearly identified the main vector of Svätöpluk's foreign policy, namely Rome and the Holy See.

Havlík also analyzed the papal correspondence with Svätöpluk, a truly daring achievement for his time – two years before the fall of the Iron Curtain – and a downright revolutionary breakthrough in the context of previous Czech historiography works. On its basis, Havlík came to the relatively clear conclusion that for Svätöpluk "*the Papacy came before all worldly rulers.*"

Therefore, he argues, the legitimacy of Svätopluk's power derived from Rome. In the spirit of Pope John VIII's letter *Industriae tuae*, Svätopluk, his leaders, and all his people were taken under the patronage of the Roman Curia (Havlík 1983, 23-37). Havlík further developed this pro-Roman tone by analysing other letters from the Papal Curia to Svätopluk. Based mainly on two of these letters from Pope Stephen V to Svätopluk, the Moravian author was the first historian writing in Czech to note – not only Svätopluk's royal title – but also the “*theocratic origin of Svätopluk's power*.”

In this context, and on the basis of chronicler Regino and other sources, both contemporary – Pope Stephen V's letter *Quia te zelo fidei* – and retrospective – *Gesta regum Sclavorum*/Dukljanin's chronicle – Havlík writes that in 885 “*the Moravian ruler, rex, as most sources referred to him, changed from being a real king, so titled because of his power and position, into a king in the hierarchical system of the West-European universe*,” a thesis I fully endorse. In connection with the “*theocratic origin of Svätopluk's power*,” however, let me add that rather than the person of Svätopluk, it is the Kingdom, the institution, that Pope Stephen V's letter *Quia te zelo fidei* to Svätopluk, “*King of the Slavs*”, defines as “*coming from God*”. What this actually means can be the topic of a longer study.

It is practically impossible not to agree with most of these theses of the top expert on Great Moravia and, therefore, also on Svätopluk I. True, they can also be ignored, as Martin Wihoda decided to do recently (Wihoda 2015, 37). However, I will pay more attention to Wihoda only in the third part of this article. On the other hand, it is also necessary to make several observations or objections regarding some of them. For instance, the role of “*adversary of the Franks*” that Havlík assigned to Svätopluk on behalf of the Papacy. There is no doubt that Svätopluk was well aware of the significance of the Papal patronage he had managed to obtain. However, in terms of the Empire and the Carolingians, he was rather looking for some degree of mutually beneficial balance. Essentially, he was neither a collaborator of the Empire – as some claim – nor its opponent, as others – not only Czech – historians would like to have him be. It was not until 992 that Svätopluk and his relative, the East Frankish king Arnulf, became enemies.

It is also necessary to express disapproval of Havlík's “blindness” concerning the Nitra dimension of Svätopluk's rule. As a matter of fact, in Havlík's work, one would look in vain for Nitra, the starting point, residence, and supposed burial place of Svätopluk.

As already mentioned, it is really difficult to select from Havlík's prolific production of articles that examine the topic in question. Therefore, to sum up how Havlík understood Svätopluk towards the end of his life, let me focus on the only monograph about Svätopluk I ever written in Czech. Its title is *Svätopluk the Great, King of the Moravians and the Slavs*. This predominantly positivist work was published in Brno in 1994 and summarises the knowledge Havlík gathered over many years about this ruler. Like Václav Novotný (Homza 2024a, 102-103) before him, Havlík sought to evaluate Svätopluk's role in history as objectively as possible. The introduction of the work states: “*When focusing on Svätopluk today, our goal is not to idealise him, but to obtain an objective and comprehensive image of Svätopluk's place and role in history, with all the pros, cons, and contradictions found in the available written sources. Earlier historiography – often influenced by a Czech perspective – tends to accentuate the contradictions in Svätopluk's thinking as well as his negative attitude towards the Slavic liturgy and Archbishop Methodius, but has failed to examine the reasons behind this stance, especially in terms of the political situation of the time and the universalist philosophy of rulership in the Christian world. It has not considered it necessary to investigate the roots of the highly dramatised contradictions in Svätopluk. Nor has it attempted to answer the question of how, on the contrary, the representatives of secular and spiritual power in Moravia found common ground and where these joint efforts and mutual support were directed within the European oecumene*.” It was with this goal in mind that Havlík designed the composition and style of his work.

While Novotný created a kind of formula for how Czech historiography should approach Svätöpluk, Havlík chose to polemicise with some of the one-sided schemes – based on Novotný’s dictum – that Czech historiography had traditionally used to interpret Svätöpluk. For the most part, Havlík was successful. For instance, he again sought to outline Svätöpluk I’s foreign policy more clearly. Havlík correctly identified the 874 peace treaty Svätöpluk concluded with Louis the German in Forcheim as the key point of this policy. It was negotiated in Svätöpluk’s absence by his emissary, John of Venice. As in his previous works, I think that Havlík somewhat underestimated the degree of independence Svätöpluk’s realm enjoyed in relation to the East Frankish Empire, and, conversely, overestimated the role the Papacy played in Svätöpluk’s foreign policy. However, he was correct to conclude that Svätöpluk valued the Papacy more than the Empire, especially on symbolic and legal levels.

That is one of the reasons why Havlík paid a lot more attention than other scholars – except, perhaps, for František Dvorník, another historian from Moravia – to researching Svätöpluk I’s relationship with the papacy (Havlík 1965, 100-122). Similar to Dvorník (Homza 2018, 166-177), Havlík also analysed the meaning of the expressions *unicus filius* – “my sole son” or *dilectus filius* – “my beloved son” that the popes used to address Svätöpluk in their correspondence. Moreover, no other historian writing in Czech has paid more attention to Pope John VIII’s letter *Industriae tuae* from 880.

Havlík also drew attention to the analogy between the right to choose bishops – which was granted to Svätöpluk by Pope John VIII – and the later apostolic rights of the Hungarian kings. Nevertheless, he did not explicitly call it a legal precedent. His biased Moravian perspective also prevented him from taking a deeper look at the relationship between the Nitra bishop Wiching and Svätöpluk. And then, once more, he did not openly recognize Nitra as Svätöpluk’s seat.

As already indicated, Havlík was one of the first scholars to analyse in detail the letter *Quia te zelo fidei* that Pope Stephen V sent to Svätöpluk, King of the Slavs, in 885. However, he did not note that the Pope did not address Svätöpluk “King of the Moravians” but as King of (all) Slavs (*rex Sclavorum*). In my opinion, it is precisely in this respect that Havlík failed to sufficiently recognize the universal dimension of Svätöpluk’s policy, whose Slavic quality thoroughly suited the vision of a Christian Europe.

In connection with Svätöpluk’s relationship to Wiching and St. Methodius, Havlík is of the opinion that Svätöpluk was not against the Slavic liturgy itself and that his support for Latin primarily had to do with his intention to direct his realm towards the political, religious and cultural concepts of the Latin universe of the time. Havlík also exonerated Svätöpluk – as depicted in *the Life of Saint Clement* – from expelling the disciples of Saint Methodius from Great Moravia. In an insightful way, he put this in connection with the letter *Qui te zelo fidei* that Pope Stephen V sent Svätöpluk in 885, which indicates the need to organize a synod to discuss the origin of the Holy Trinity, i.e. the *Filioque* controversy concerning the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Son as well as from the Father.

Like Palacký and other older Czech historians (Homza 2024b), Havlík devoted a lot of effort to clarifying the relationship between Moravia and Bohemia. Havlík did not forget to emphasise the dependence of Bohemia on Svätöpluk, which was formally recognised by the East Frankish king Arnulf in 890. Furthermore, like other Czech and Moravian historians, he also saw one of the keys to understanding an earlier relationship between Moravia and Bohemia in having the (semi-) mythical first prince of Bohemia, Borivoj, baptised by St. Methodius in Moravia.

Havlík took a close look at Svätöpluk’s death, too. And similarly to Urbánek and Graus (Homza 2024b, 105-106, 108-110), he also dealt in more detail with Svätöpluk’s posthumous literary life. Once again, he went back to the South Slavic “brightest” legend of Svätöpluk included in chapter IX of the *Gesta Regum Sclavorum*, formerly known as the *Chronicle of Pope Dukljanin*. This legend

has Svätopluk reigning for 40 years and 4 months. Based on this information, Havlík calculated that Svätopluk stayed on the central seat of the Moravian Slavs from 871 to 894, that is, for 23 years. The remaining 17 years, in his words, correspond to Svätopluk's rule in the Principality of Nitra. However, Havlík did not put this finding in connection with Cosmas' rendering of the *Nitra Legend of Svätopluk*.

The last chapter of Havlík's monograph gives a brief yet perhaps the most comprehensive overview of the historical literary tradition about Svätopluk I. Again, however, it is necessary to emphasise that he made no deeper attempt to explain the causes of its origin or to find its commissioners, bearers, or the functions it played at a specific time and space. In the conclusions of his book, Havlík once again claims in a different way that Svätopluk was the king of the Moravians and refuses the idea that he was the king of all Slavs, conceding that perhaps that was what Rome thought he was. Although it would be possible to agree with this opinion considering that Rome at that time did indeed use some ethnic abstraction in its notion of a universalistic Christian Europe (Ivanova 2021, 574-586), this claim goes against the Slavic – not Moravian – character the unknown author of the *Life of St. Methodius* clearly emphasises in the fifth chapter of his work (The Life of Methodius 1983, 111). In fact, the well-known message that Rastislav and Svätopluk sent to the Byzantine emperor Michael III reads “...but we Slavs are simple people” = “..., а мы словѣни проста чадъ...” (MMFH II 2010, 124).²

As shown above, although the findings of Lubomír E. Havlík's monograph can be largely disputed, there is no doubt that this remains the most comprehensive monograph on Svätopluk I to date. On the other hand, one cannot help but get the impression that it was written as if in a hurry. The editing of the work is poor at best, and it also lacks footnotes providing supporting critical information. However, this is compensated to some extent by Havlík's comments on the first edition of the *Magnae Moraviae fontes historici*, as well as by over 300 further studies on Great Moravia and other Slavic themes.

Clearly, this historian from Moravia wanted to avoid the anachronistic interpretation of Svätopluk I that had distorted the hitherto Czech historical discourse on this issue. He wanted to look at Svätopluk I from the point of view of “the perception of the history of Moravia as a subject within a wider Central- and Pan-European context.” (Havlík 1994, 5-6). Obviously, this perception was directed mainly against Palacký and his contemporary followers, who understood Czech-Moravian history as a kind of whole. As the title of his book lets one expect, Havlík made Svätopluk I the ruler of Moravia, especially by building on the historical works that synthesised 19th-century Moravian patriotism. As already noted, for Lubomír E. Havlík, Svätopluk is mainly the bearer of the title “King of the Moravians.” That is why he made the Nitra dominium (*regnum*) of Svätopluk a fiefdom principality of Moravia as a part of the “Kingdom of the Moravians.” If truth be told, Havlík calls the Principality of Nitra – “Lower Moravia.” (Havlík 1976, 22-27). Havlík looked at Svätopluk through the lens of the neglected Moravian perspective of history, indeed.

A large part of today's Czech historians cannot come to terms with Havlík's interpretation (not only regarding Svätopluk himself). David Kalhous, for example, a contemporary historian from

² On the other hand, in the *Life of Saint Constantine*, one can read that the message was conceived by Rastislav in agreement with his “princes and moravians”. Writing Moravians with a small “m” is quite appropriate here, although Havlík (MMFH II 2010, 78) prefers a capital letter in its Czech translation. The reason is, as the translator and editor himself finally acknowledges when commenting on this term, that it refers to a privileged upper military stratum of society, not a nation, even in its medieval sense. In contrast, the self-identification “we, Slavs” describes the collective cultural identity of the entire community Rastislav and, of course, Svätopluk after him, ruled and with which they identified themselves. Marvin Kantor's English translation (Kantor 1983, 65) “his Moravian princes”, is inaccurate, as he omitted the conjunction “и с.” The correct translation is “princes and Moravians.”

Masaryk University in Brno, commented on it with the words: “...*Havlík's book* (Svātopluk the Great) *did not meet with any particular criticism in the Czech environment. [...] this book is generally considered marginal, and no one builds upon its conclusions.*” (Kalhous 2017, 64). Although it seems inaccurate to call it “marginal,” Kalhous’ claim that Havlík has few open critics or successors in Czech historiography appears to be a symptomatic feature of contemporary Czech medieval studies. Havlík’s interpretation of Svātopluk deviates from the official Czech line, which was set primarily by Dušan Třeštík. As a matter of fact, it does not fit any of the Slovak interpretations of Svātopluk I either. It does resonate with some of the ideas of František Dvorník († 1975), another great Moravian scholar. Dvorník, however, favoured the universalist legacy of Svātopluk I rather than his Moravian aspect. When assessing Havlík’s overall contribution to historiography, the political context of his last work should not be forgotten, for it stands in close connection with the unsuccessful emancipation efforts of the Moravians within the Czech Lands in the first half of the 1990s.

Cosmas’ conceptualisation of the earliest Czech history is a vicious circle in Czech-language medieval studies. One of František Graus’ most skilled students, Dušan Třeštík († 2007), grappled with it throughout his entire work (Wihoda 2003, 639–642; Sommer – Žemlička – Marková 2007, 1013–1019). An unusually original historian and inspiring thinker from the village of Soběduhy near Teplice, Třeštík was born to a Czech family in the once predominantly German Sudetenland. His career culminated in his role as a professor at Charles University in Prague. Although he started publishing relatively late, his subsequent scientific outputs were all the more significant. Třeštík’s work exhibits its own internal evolution and contradictions. And there are quite a few of them, indeed.

Most importantly, as a scholar of Czech history in particular, he spent his whole life trying to harmonise it with the history of wider Europe. There was, however, a certain tension, that eventually became characteristic of Dušan Třeštík’s work and could be simplistically described as a tensivity between Cosmas of Prague’s conception of Czech history and František Palacký’s conception of Czech history. As is well known, Cosmas set the history of the Czechs and their main dynasty, the Přemyslids, mainly in the context of the Holy Roman Empire, its emperors, and kings (Třeštík 1968). In contrast, Palacký saw the place of Czech history within the Habsburg Empire and in Central Europe. It did not escape Třeštík’s attention that the concept of Central Europe in the form of the Habsburg Empire was in some way associated with the Great Moravian Empire at the time of Svātopluk. After all, this was just as the case with Slovak historians of the late 18th century, who considered the Habsburg Empire to be a continuation of Svātopluk’s 9th century *Regnum Sclavorum* (Pilingová 2014, 387).³

After the fall of communism, Dušan Třeštík undertook to retell the general line of the “successful story of the Czechs (Přemyslids)” in a new fashion. He did so mainly in his publications *The Beginnings of the Přemyslids: The Appearance of the Czechs in History (530–935)* as well as *Thinking about History* (Třeštík 1997; 1999). By combining the key terms of postmodernism and contemporary historiography (Třeštík 2005), Třeštík successfully eliminated the latent inculcation of approaching the national history of the Czechs from an overly restricted perspective. He managed to do so to the point that he became a popular authority whom contemporary scholars of Czech medieval studies – as well as their less creative Slovak epigones – are very keen to cite (Lysý 2014).

In the end, it is difficult to decide which of the two mentioned visions of Czech history was more dominant in the work of Dušan Třeštík. What is certain is that even his view of history was

³ This was especially the case with Juraj (Georgius) Papánek († 1802), who viewed the kingdom administered by Maria Theresa as a continuation of Svātopluk’s Great Moravia.

strongly influenced by the political events of the time. The question that begs asking is, to what extent the notions contained in Třeštík's work were determined by the smoldering split of Czechoslovakia, which culminated on 1 January 1993. It will also be necessary to reflect on whether and how the formulation of his scientific theses was inspired by the vision of the re-anchoring of Czech history in the ongoing project known as the European Union, which, in the second half of the 1990s, was conflated with the idea of a restored Holy Roman Empire of the German nation by some thinkers of the time. Dušan Třeštík was not the only prominent Czech of his time who, after the fall of communism, succumbed to the tempting idea of putting the Czech Lands back into the new universalist project of Europe by renewing their ancient borders at the Morava and the Leitha rivers, i.e., in the spirit in which Czech history was once conceived by the aforementioned Cosmas of Prague. No wonder, then, that all of a sudden the Czechs were willing to get rid of the Slovak "appendage", by which Czech thinkers had been so keen to attach it to their history in previous decades (Homza 2024b).

His exclusively Czech and exclusively "Empire-oriented" approach to the beginnings of Czech history meant that Třeštík, as well as all those who preferred Cosmas' narrower concept of Czech history, needed to find a way to incorporate the history of Great Moravia and, necessarily, its inextricable king Svätopluk into it (Ludvíkovský 1965, 525-566). In this respect, he built on František Graus' thesis – formulated in his 1963 article *The Great Moravian Empire in the Czech Medieval Tradition* – about the discontinuity of the Great Moravian political and ecclesiastical structures in the early Czech environment.

Třeštík supported this idea, although only partially. In his book "Myslití dějiny" (*Thinking about History* he writes): "If we accept the fact that Great Moravia was the polity of the Moravian tribe, a "political" ethnic group that came to an end (but did not disappear!) together with its polity at the beginning of the 10th century, this means that it did not continue directly into any of the new polities that originated in the area in the 10th century" (Třeštík 1999, 163).

Třeštík characterized the relationship between contemporary Bohemia and Svätopluk as follows: "This Great Moravia is said to have been the 'first common polity of Czechs and Slovaks.' The fact is, however, that the Czech 'tribe' had no share in it. Bohemia was only conquered by Svätopluk, annexed to his empire by force, and remained part of it for only 12 years." (Třeštík 1999, 140). By the way, this conclusion is reminiscent of an earlier view that Slovak historian Milan S. Ďurica had expressed back in 1976 (Homza 2022, 7).

The basic contours of Třeštík's particular understanding of Svätopluk can already be found in his first major work, *The Chronicle of Cosmas*, from 1968. He would eventually develop them in more detail in the first edition of *The Beginnings of the Přemyslids* from 1981 and then again in 1985 (Třeštík 1985, 273-301) and 1986 in a German article that, symptomatically, deals with the relationship between Borivoj and Svätopluk (Třeštík 1986, 311-344). The title of the collective work "Great Moravia and the Beginnings of the Czecho-Slovak Statehood" in which Třeštík published his theses, as well as the title of his essay "Borivoj and Svätopluk, the Origin of the Bohemian State and Great Moravia", clearly show that Czech historiography was not quite ready to part with Great Moravia and Svätopluk yet. On the contrary, Třeštík had good reasons to try to connect the first Christian Czech prince, Borivoj, with Svätopluk and St. Methodius. The second edition of his book *The Beginnings of the Přemyslids* from 1997 somehow attempts to justify this connection: "the tradition about the baptism of Borivoj by Methodius and in connection with the rule of Svätopluk in Bohemia was apparently alive in Prague at least around the year 975." (Třeštík 1997, 323).

The chapter "The Baptism of Borivoj" of this book (312-325) developed this thesis in detail. The very question of Borivoj's baptism had been studied many times in Czech medieval studies before him. Indeed, this baptism had often been made into the stamp that validated the Czech Přemyslids as successors to the Moravian Moymirids. However, no one before Třeštík

had elaborated on this issue to such an extent. This paper does not intend to analyse all of his conclusions, but let me just point out the shortcomings of the construction he built around the first Czech prince – Svātopluk's court – and Archbishop St. Methodius. Třeštík was well aware of these deficiencies: "*The situation (providing historical proof of Borivoj's baptism) looks almost hopeless...*" For, as is well known, it is difficult just to prove that a Czech prince named Borivoj really existed in the 9th century, since there is only one, if ever, source (the later redaction of *the Annals of Fulda*) that could prove his historical realness (The Annals of Fulda II 1992, 68). The issue is rather problematic. Equally questionable is whether the first Přemyslid to be baptised was not Borivoj's son – Spitihnev (Vlasto 1970, 86-87). Even the prolific Czech medieval hagiographic works do not make this straightforwardly clear. Třeštík was conscious of this himself: "*Not even these (hagiographical texts) agree on who, in fact, was the first Czech Christian prince.*" (Třeštík 1997, 312).

So, what could have made him try to connect Borivoj – St. Methodius and Svātopluk? (Legenda Christiani 1978, 20). The key to understanding his motives does not seem to lie in proving any Moravian-Czech continuity – which Třeštík had already dissociated from anyway – or discontinuity, but rather to support the authenticity of (Pseudo)Christian, an effort that at times appears to go just too far. In his opinion, this work was written at the end of the 10th century or the first third of the 11th century. The dates, however, simply do not add up. Cosmas has Borivoj being baptised in the year Svātopluk died, i.e. 894 (Cosmae Pragensis 1923, 32). However, since (Pseudo)Christian insists that Borivoj was baptised by St. Methodius, this must have happened before the archbishop died, i.e. on 6 April 885.

Consequently, if Třeštík wanted to defend the authenticity of (Pseudo)Christian, he had to accept his version of the baptism of Borivoj (Třeštík 1997, 312-347). Whether he succeeded or not, and to what extent, I cannot say. However, I am afraid that the fable about the baptism of Borivoj by St. Methodius at the court of King Svātopluk and the sentence that (Pseudo)Christian has St. Methodius saying to Borivoj before baptising him: "*...you will become the lord of your lords, and all enemies will be subject to your power...*" (Legenda Christiani 1990, 169) – especially in its intent – rather clearly points to the 12th-century political status of Moravia. As a matter of fact, at the very time Třeštík would like to have (Pseudo)Christian writing his chronicle, the Czech elites had to tackle completely different issues than trying to legitimise their claim over Moravia by having their first prince baptised by St. Methodius.

In this respect, it seems best to return to the explanation that Cosmas of Prague offers, namely: "*In the year of the Lord's incarnation 894. Bořivoj, the first Catholic duke of the holy faith, was baptized.¹⁵⁶ It is commonly said that in the same year, Svatopluk, the king of Moravia, vanished from the midst of his army and was never seen again.*" (Cosmas of Prague 2020, 60-61). As I have already suggested above, with this statement the Czech historical tradition dissociates itself from Svātopluk – according to František Graus, in fact, Czech tradition denies any connection with the king of Moravia – just as the Arpadians dissociated themselves from Svātopluk as the *Rex Sclavorum*.

Even for Dušan Třeštík it was not easy to organically integrate the history of Great Moravia into the Czech "storyline." Seeing that he could not accomplish this in as perfect a way as he originally intended, Třeštík decided to make it impossible for anybody else to appropriate this history for themselves. The cited essay from the book *Thinking about History* ("Myslití dějiny") says: "*Great Moravia was not the polity of any of today's nations or their predecessors*" (Třeštík 1999, 162-163). He certainly had the Czechs, Slovaks, and Moravians in mind. However, depriving the Slovaks and, especially, the Moravians of the Great Moravian tradition requires a lot more than that. There are plenty of arguments to refute that claim, indeed.

In principle, Třeštík made the same mistake that Havlík had done before him. Essentially both Havlík and Třeštík *prima facie* ascribed the history of Moravia to the Moravians. The difference is that whereas Havlík had the present-day Moravians in mind, Třeštík meant those of the 9th century. The problem is that in the 9th century there were no Moravians as a distinct nation or tribe. The Moravians of that time were an exclusively military estate and the holders of the executive power in the political system of Great Moravia. The *Life of Saint Constantine* (chapter XIV) writes that these “moravians” together with the “princes” helped draft the legacy to the Byzantine Empire (The *Life of Constantine* 1983, 65). This clearly shows that the “moravians” and the “princes” constituted a privileged class. However, the cultural identity of Great Moravia was an attribute of the entire population of Great Moravia, of the “common people” who identified themselves as “we, Slavs.” It was, in all important respects, in their name that the mentioned message was formulated, as the *Life of St. Methodius* gives testimony of in the mid-880s (chapter V).

That indicates that the Great Moravian Empire primarily belonged to all the Slavs living in Moravia, Slovakia, Transdanubia and the Tisza region. The ancestors of the Czechs and also the Moravians are likely to have come from among these Slavs, as Nestor describes in *A Tale of Bygone Years* (the *Russian Primary Chronicle*) at the beginning of the 12th century: “There was at the time one Slavic race [nation] [...] the Slavs who settled along the Danube...” (Hazard Cross – Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953, 53). Curiously, Třeštík refers to this source to set the Czechs along the Danube in the mid-6th century. He does so in his book *The Beginnings of the Přemyslids*, which bears the subtitle *The Appearance of the Czechs in History (530 – 935)*. The truth is that *A Tale of Bygone Years* nor any other source makes any mention of the Czechs at around 530. As it is clear from the quotation, it only mentions the Slavs living in the Danube area. As a matter of fact, also here, Třeštík once again followed the line of Czech medieval tradition, which has the Czechs coming from Croatia to the Elbe led by their great-grandfather who was called “Czech.”

In line with his thesis, according to which if the history of Great Moravia does not belong to the Czechs, it belongs to no one, the second amended edition of *The Beginnings of the Přemyslids* cunningly undermines the basic arguments many Slovak scholars had used to put Slovak history in direct connection with the Great Moravian tradition for centuries. True, Třeštík does not do it systematically – attacking just some details rather than the general concept – but instead in short, isolated bursts. For him, Pribina was “an adventurer of Moravian origin” (Třeštík 1997, 103), the Pannonian prince Kocel was “a petty Frankish vassal” (1997, 277). He also questioned the Nitra Principality as the traditionally accepted location of Svätopluk’s original military and political base: “We do not know exactly where Svätopluk’s regnum was located. The Nitra Principality is usually thought of in this respect, but it is not certain.” (1997, 279). On the other hand, he writes: “However, we can locate Rastislav’s regnum relatively precisely.” Of course, the core of Great Moravia is meant, i.e., South Moravia with castles such as Mikulčice, Pohansko, and Uherské Hradiště. However, in another book – *The Origin of Great Moravia* (Třeštík 2010, 131), he has no doubt about the Nitra Principality of Svätopluk. “The territory of the ‘Merehans’ is thus identical to Svätopluk’s regnum in 869 and to Wiching’s Nitra diocese in 880.”

All these mentioned inconsistencies were not the first and certainly not the only disdainful words the Prague professor wrote against the Slovak perception or against any exclusively Moravian interpretation of Great Moravia. Possibly he started doing that quite inconspicuously, but all the more unconventionally. For instance, in the article named *Digression I: Methodius and the Hungarian King*, which appeared in 1987 as part of the more broadly conceived article *The Fall of Great Moravia*, page 66 contains Třeštík’s now already legendary sentence opposing Havlík’s earlier argumentation in favor of Svätopluk’s royal title: “here I cannot refute that Svätopluk had a royal title. It is based on a misinterpretation of Regino’s report a. 890, MMFH I, 137-139 and other sources.” Although Třeštík never explained what he actually meant by that, the sentence became

a “holy inspiration” for all those who later refused to recognize Svätöpluk’s royal rank. However, as this paper and my previous article on the Czech written tradition of Svätöpluk (Homza 2024b, 1-15) and on the history of Svätöpluk in Slovak historiography show (Homza 2022), Svätöpluk being a king was not just Havlík’s belief but a deep conviction shared by practically the whole of the hitherto Czech, Slovak, and Moravian historical tradition, which forms an integral part of the broader European historical tradition. By refusing to recognize, without further explanations, the royal crown for Svätöpluk, Třeštík also opposed the hitherto Czech tradition dating as far back as to Cosmas of Prague. It is difficult to disclose the reason why Třeštík adopted the official viewpoint of the East Frankish Empire contained in *The Annals of Fulda*. This approach is understandable in the case of Austrian historian Herwig Wolfram (Wolfram 2024; Homza 2018, 166-177), but – for the foregoing reasons – not for a Czech historian. Therefore, Třeštík’s 1986 stance on Svätöpluk’s royal title strikes me as deliberate.

Such a turn in the way Czech historiography approached Svätöpluk seems very contradictory, even in terms of Třeštík’s later work. Let me illustrate it with one of the possible examples from the second edition of *The Beginnings of the Přemyslids* (1997). Most of them can be found in chapter 14, which Třeštík symptomatically called *Great Moravia*. Pages 277-296 deal rather extensively with Svätöpluk. In connection with the most important ruler of Great Moravia, however, Třeštík had no problem acknowledging “that Great Moravia (thanks to Pope John VIII’s letter *Industriae Tuae* to Svätöpluk from 880) became coequal to the European family of nations, alongside Louis the German’s East Frankish Empire, Alfred the Great’s empire in Anglo-Saxon England, and the Spanish-Asturian empire on the Iberian Peninsula.” (Třeštík 1997, 283). The rulers of all these countries were considered Christian kings. Would this mean, then, that Svätöpluk was also a king of a Christian monarchy, according to Třeštík?

Where we need to look for the sources of Dušan Třeštík’s provocative pronouncements regarding the royal dignity of Svätöpluk and the Slovak conception of their early medieval history is suggested by an episode that, at first glance, does not so much belong to historiography. Although it does not seem to have anything to do with the writing of history, it still needs to be recalled. In the mid-1980s, the Slovak film studio Koliba wanted to make a historical feature film about Svätöpluk. Unfortunately, Dušan Třeštík together with another Moravian scholar Josef Poulik († 1998) – who was a professor at the University of Brno (then called Ján Evangelista Purkyně University) and a high functionary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia – put a stop to the project. Their argument against it was that a film about Svätöpluk, or about Saints Constantine (Cyril) and his brother Saint Methodius, “could lead to some discord and even ill feelings within the Czech nation.” (Kopal 2014, 210).

As has been shown here, Třeštík’s interpretation of Svätöpluk is full of contradictions. On the one hand, he actually rejected the royal title of Svätöpluk as well as Havlík’s arguments in favor of it. On the other hand, however, based on Havlík’s analysis – let me redress here David Kalhous’ (2017, 64) claim, according to which no one in Czech historiography follows up on it (sic!). Třeštík acknowledged the significance that Havlík ascribes to the privilege granted by the papal letter *Industriae tuae* grants. On a practical level, he saw its importance in the fact that Svätöpluk and St. Methodius received a distinct archbishopric subordinated to the Pope. On a symbolic level “...however, it was of great significance for the legitimacy of the polity in question, which no longer derived from the empire but, in fact, from God directly and was, therefore, almost equal to the legitimacy of the empire in terms of ‘power’.” Building on Havlík, Třeštík even understood that this document had a constitutive character for Central Europe, as around the year 1000 – based on Pope John VIII’s bull to Svätöpluk – first Poland under Mieszko I (with the document *Dagome iudex*) and later the Pannonian (Hungarian) kingdom of Stephen I: “Poland and Hungary achieved both a royal title and an archbishopric, both a kingdom and an archbishopric, as subordinates of

St. Peter, most likely according to the model of Great Moravia.” Třeštík failed to notice, however, that this bull was also referred to in the Balkans for similar purposes, as Havlík had once again pointed out. Whereas Třeštík did notice the fact that one of Miesco (Mieszko) I’s sons was named Świętopelk, he forgot to mention that Vladimir I – the Great or the Saint – of Kievan Rus’ also named his son Sviatopolk (I the Accursed). Although Dušan Třeštík liked to identify himself as a regular non-partisan civilian and preferred to reproach nationalism, especially to his Slovak friends, he remains a historian of the Czech nation. As his essays in *Thinking about History* show, however, his biased stance did not represent the slightest problem for him.

As already mentioned, from a scholarly point of view, his perception of the beginnings of Czech history was most influenced by the first Czech chronicler, Cosmas of Prague, as well as by his *prima facie* determination to defend the authenticity of (Pseudo)Christian at all costs. Although Třeštík’s stance towards the father of the modern concept of Czech history, František Palacký, was basically critical, in the end he simply retold and reshaped Palacký into a postmodern version of the “successful” beginning of the Czechs (starting with the Přemysls).

Despite the fact that Třeštík’s interpretation of Svätopluk is self-contradictory in itself, as well as selective – compared to Havlík – and that it lacks Novotný’s objectivity (Homza 2024a, 102–103), he still managed to become the person most responsible for the modern tendency in Czech-language historiography to gradually “diminish” the significance of Svätopluk for Czech history. Třeštík formulated this trend in the form of two historiographic theses. The first one consists – like his tutor Graus – in dissociating from the hitherto generally accepted view that Svätopluk’s royal tradition continued into the beginning of the Přemyslid monarchy in the 10th century. In other words, Třeštík did not consider the Czech Kingdom to be the direct heir of Svätopluk’s Kingdom of the Slavs. However, his divergence from the royal tradition of Svätopluk did not prove to be tight enough in Czech literary tradition. In order to address any gaps, Třeštík decided to elaborate on the construction of the baptism of Borivoj at the court of King Svätopluk by the archbishop of Moravia, St. Methodius. The second historiographical thesis is perhaps more vaguely defined and derives from Třeštík’s overall work. It consists in inconspicuously and implicitly giving the history of Great Moravia a Czech character while weakening its Slovak, Moravian, and even Transdanubian dimension.

To sum up, in the second part I focus on two giants of their time – Lubomír E. Havlík and Dušan Třeštík. Both of them created powerful lines of understanding of the Great Moravian period and the reign of Svätopluk I. Nevertheless, there is an abysmal difference in their approaches to examining the same issue. Havlík looks at it from the perspective of a Moravian. Třeštík perceives the same topic from a Czech perspective. For Havlík, the Roman and papal dimension of Svätopluk is important. For Třeštík, it is more Imperial, although sometimes Central European. For Havlík, Svätopluk is clearly the king of the Moravians. For Třeštík, the same ruler is rather a duke of the East Frankish Empire. And it should also be said that Havlík’s image of Svätopluk is complex. For Třeštík it is rather selective. Paradoxically, however, contemporary Czech historiography tends to build on Třeštík rather than on Havlík.

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