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From Slavic Leader to National Ruler: A Modern Discursive Construction of the Early Medieval Rulership of Pribina († 861)

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Abstract

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Pribina was a Slavic leader of unknown origin from the 9th century who was expelled by the Moravian prince (*dux*) Mojmir I. However, his rank in the territory north of the Danube before exile is a matter of an age-long scholarly debate. This article presents an analysis of historiographic discourse which has resulted in the national scholarly construction of an early medieval, hypothetical Slovak/Nitrian rulership of Pribina. The aim is to illustrate the gradual progression of scholarly concepts regarding this rather shadowy Slavic leader and his supposed ethnically distinct north-Danubian domain, which is typically presented in historiography as “The Nitrian Principality.” In this study, the genesis of historiographic narrative about the putative “first ruler” of modern Slovaks’ ethnic ancestors, adopted mainly by Slovak historians, archaeologists and intellectuals in general is traced. A discourse analysis of intellectual writings about Pribina and Nitra is used to demonstrate how the particular narrative of “national ruler” unambiguously correlated with modern socio-political transformations during the political creation of Slovakia after the First World War. The article suggests that the notion of Pribina as original independent ruler emerged in the late 19th century and was cemented in the scholarship only after 1918 due to the formation of Czechoslovakia and subsequent need for an official version of distinct Slovak history.

“Here in Central Europe, first of all, we are all writing the national history. For us it is a discipline as any other and very easily we forget that it is a product for obvious demand. That was the case at least at the beginning, during the national ‘awakening,’ and this function still lies in the histories we are writing, independently of us.”¹

Dušan Třeštík

It is no secret that the disciplinary and methodological roots of modern European historiography lie in the dynamic period of the so-called national awakening. Hence, the beginning of modern historiography as a scholarly discipline and a creative intellectual activity has always been closely linked to the concept of “nation.”²

1 TŘEŠTÍK, Dušan. *Mysliť dějiny*. Praha : Paseka, 1999, p. 103.

2 See, for instance, IGGERS, Georg – WANG, Edward Q. – MUKHERJEE, Supriya. *A Global History of Modern Historiography*. London : Routledge, 2008, pp. 53–92; BERGER, Stefan. The Past and Present of European Historiography. Between Marginalization and Functionalization? In LOK, Matthijs – BRUIN, Robin – BROLSMA, Marjet (eds.) *Eurocentrism in European History and Memory*. Amsterdam : Amsterdam University Press, 2019, pp. 25–42; BERGER, Stefan – CONRAD, Christoph. *The Past as History: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Modern Europe*. Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; WOOLF, Daniel. *Of Nations, Na-*

More precisely, the impetus for writing different histories originated in the endeavour to understand—or rather “discover”—the past of every modern nation. European intellectuals, and later even the wider public, across every country looked far into the distant past in an attempt to understand where “they” came from by searching for links between modern citizens or their ancestors with pre-modern societies and polities. For that reason, intellectuals keen on studying historical sources “discovered” national or ethnic continuity with the pre-modern medieval past thanks to the teleological and ethnocentric paradigm of history.³ Such a historiographic model provided explanatory potential and scholarly relevance for the contemporary socio-political setting and the cultural politics of modern nation states.

Premodern Past in Modern Nationalistic Discourse

Scholarly exploration—or rather creation—of national history can be traced back beyond the 19th century to the pre-modern era, even leading some contemporary intellectuals to reach back to the Early Middle Ages or Antiquity for the sake of seeking out national beginnings.⁴ Notwithstanding the social reality of particular demographics or cultural continuity across the centuries and pre-modern polities, it is obvious that especially during the 19th and 20th centuries, scholarly and public narratives around the Early Middle Ages were very often influenced by intrinsic, nationalistic biases, which stemmed from contemporary socio-political aspirations and prevailing cultural schemes. Such intellectual patterns and scholarly preoccupations were determined primarily—but not exclusively—by the concept of “nation.”⁵ Though popular, it remains a simplification to automatically link medieval communities with modern populations uncritically in the sense of “national origin” and uniform ethno-cultural continuity.⁶ Nevertheless, the post-romantic generation of intellectual authorities on medieval studies widely adopted previous nationalistic historiographic schemes, but at the same time, new cultural categories and discursive tendencies were created due to the need to explain the ancient history of particular nations. As such, the early medieval history of

tionalism, and National Identity. Reflections on the Historiographic Organization of the Past. In WANG, Edward Q. – FILLAFER, Franz (eds.) *Many Faces of Clio. Cross-cultural Approaches to Historiography. Essays in Honor of Georg G. Iggers*. New York; Oxford : Berghahn, 2006, pp. 71–103.

- 3 GEARY, Patrick J. – KLANICZAY, Gábor (eds.) *Manufacturing Middle Ages. Entangled History of Medievalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Leiden; Boston : Brill, 2013; POHL, Walter. Identität und Widerspruch: Gedanken zu einer Sinngeschichte des Frühmittelalters. In POHL, Walter (ed.) *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen. Von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters*. Wien : ÖAW, 2004, pp. 23–36; GEARY, Patrick. *The Myth of Nations. The Medieval Origins of Europe*. Princeton; New Jersey : Princeton University Press, 2002, pp. 15–40.
- 4 JENSEN, Lotte (ed.) *The Roots of Nationalism: National Identity Formation in Early Modern Europe, 1600–1815*. Amsterdam : Amsterdam University Press, 2016; SCALES, Len – ZIMMER, Oliver (eds.) *Power and the Nation in European History*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- 5 WOOD, Ian. *The Modern Origins of the Early Middle Ages*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 94–221; GRAUS, František. *Živá minulost. Středověké tradice a představy o středověku*. Translated by Jan Dobeš. Praha : Argo, 2017, pp. 156–199.
- 6 See, for instance, GEARY 2002, p. 155 ff.; BREUILLY, John. Changes in the political uses of the nation: continuity or discontinuity? In SCALES, Len – ZIMMER, Oliver (eds.) *Power and the Nation in European History*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 67–102.

many European countries was not only reconstructed by scholars, but at the same time, also constructed through scientific discourse based on teleological explanations and subsequently, a dissemination of ideas to the (national) public.⁷ It can be argued that these “national” biases and preconceptions or methodological points of departure have played fundamental roles not only in the public’s understanding of early medieval history, but also in scholarly works and generally speaking, among intellectual discourse in both the Czechoslovakia and during the short era of the wartime Slovak State.⁸

The Slovak historiographic national master narrative, or national story, was constituted in the time of inter-war Czechoslovakia when the professional Slovak historiography was established.⁹ The goal was to explain who Slovaks were historically and especially, in what period of history they came into existence or began act as a collective. The Slovak or Slavic speaking Upper Hungarian intellectual elite articulated conflicting versions of national history already in the period of enlightenment and especially the romantic era of the 19th century.¹⁰ However, the “official” master narrative of Slovak history may have definitely been created and publicly disseminated only in the context of the common state of Czechs and Slovaks after 1918. Only from this time the Slovak conception of national history began in scholarly discourse with an early medieval individual who is known from medieval sources as *Privina* (Pribina).¹¹ Even though older conceptions of Slovak national history, or the history of Slavs from Upper Hungary, from the enlightenment and romantic era were also strongly linked with the Mojmirid (Great) Moravia and Cyril and Methodius, on the contrary, Pribina as a supposed distinct ruler was integrated into the national narrative only after the First World War (WWI).

- 7 THIESSOVÁ, Anne-Marie. *Vytváření národních identit v Evropě 18. až 20. století*. Translated by Pavla Doležalová. Brno : Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2007; BERGER, Stefan – LORENZ, Chris (eds.) *Nationalizing the Past. Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; BERGER, Stefan – DONOVAN, Mark – PASSMORE, Kevin (eds.) *Writing National Histories. Western Europe Since 1800*. London : Routledge, 1998. For the Slovak national context, see VÖRÖS, László. *Analytická historiografia versus národné dejiny. Národ ako sociálna reprezentácia*. Pisa : Pisa University Press, 2010, p. 10 ff and passim; for the Czech national milieu recently, see SMYČKA, Václav. *Objevení dějin. Dějepisectví, fikce a historický čas na přelomu 18. a 19. století*. Praha : Academia, 2021. On teleological master narratives cf. CARR, David. Teleology and the Experience of History. In TURNER, Aaron (ed.) *Reconciling Ancient and Modern Philosophies of History*. Berlin; Boston : De Gruyter, 2020, pp. 311–326.
- 8 In that sense, one can agree with the apt words of Třeštík, quoted at the beginning of this article: TŘEŠTÍK 1999, p. 103. For the social function of national historiography, see VÖRÖS, László. Social Demand and the Social Purpose of History: What is Missing from Alun Munslow’s Classification of Historiography? In *The Hungarian Historical Review*, 2017, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 776–803; VÖRÖS, László. The Social Function of Historical Knowledge and Scholarly History Writing in the 21st Century. In *Historický časopis*, 2017, vol. 65, no. 5, pp. 785–797.
- 9 See HUDEK, Adam. *Najpolitickéjšia veda. Slovenská historiografia v rokoch 1948 – 1968*. Bratislava : Historický ústav SAV, 2010; HUDEK, Adam. Slovak Historiography and Constructing the Slovak National Story Up to 1948. In *Human Affairs*, 2006, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 51–45.
- 10 See, for instance, HOLLÝ, Karol. The Historical Narration as a Political Programme. Analysis of Images of the Past in the Texts of the Slovak National Movement’s Programmes from 1848 and 1861. In HUDEK, Adam (ed.) *Overcoming the Old Borders. Beyond the Paradigm of Slovak National History*. Bratislava : Institute of History, Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2016, pp. 45–58; KRIŠTOF, Pavol. Záborského neromantická koncepcia nacionalizmu. In *Forum Historiae*, 2013, vol. 7, no. 2, p. 25 ff.; HOLLÝ, Karol. Franko Vířazoslav Sasinek as the ‘historiographer of Slovaks’. In *Leidschrift*, 2010, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 145–163.
- 11 In the following text, the variant “Pribina” is used, which is, unlike in the English and German historiography, commonly used in Slavic language historiographies.

Contemporary early medieval sources referring to the 9th century leader are scarce and ambiguous.¹² In fact, no medieval text explicitly states who Pribina was before his exile and subsequent governance of Pannonia after 840; there are only two sentences from a Salzburg source called *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum* (*Conversio*) connecting him with the regions north of the Danube. However, a rather strange mention of “his property in Nitrava” was possibly inserted into the source latter as an interpolated sentence by an unknown copyist.¹³ As such, there are essentially two contesting interpretations among medievalists regarding Pribina’s position. One explanation, considerably younger, claims that he was originally a gentile ruler of a Slavic tribe or ethnic group centred in Nitra. Others on the contrary believe he could have been Moravian or another local leader, but subordinated to the *dux* Mojmir who eventually sent him to exile. In Slovak historiography, the former explanation resonates almost exclusively, which reckons a distinct tribal or ethnic rulership of Pribina possibly different from the Moravians, which is articulated in the scholarship as “The Nitrian Principality.”¹⁴ This stems from the fact that Pribina and his supposed tribe or even principality¹⁵ were, in the course of the 20th century, appropriated by Slovak national historiography due to a reputed origin from Nitra in western Slovakia.¹⁶ Currently, a consensus can be seen within the Slovak historiographic paradigm claiming that Pribina was actually the first domestic ruler of Slovak or Slavic origin. However, a number of historians and archaeologists throughout the 20th century, and also the older scholarship, did not agree with such an interpretation and an alternative explanation still exists in international scholarship treating Pribina as a lesser chief subordinated to the prince Mojmir. Furthermore and perhaps more interestingly, before the 20th century and specifically before the creation of the Czechoslovak republic, the Slovak intellectual elite did not

12 Cf. STEINHÜBEL, Ján. *The Nitrian Principality: The Beginnings of Medieval Slovakia*. Leiden; Boston : Brill, 2021, p. 111 ff.; WOLFRAM, Herwig (ed.) *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum. Das Weißbuch der Salzburger Kirche über die erfolgreiche Mission in Karantänien und Pannonien mit Zusätzen und Ergänzungen*. Ljubljana : Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, 2013, p. 183 ff.; SIEKLICKI, Jan. *Quidam Priwina: Z zagadnień kształtowania się państwowości morawskiej w IX wieku*. In *Slavia Occidentalis*, 1962, vol. 22, pp. 115–145; in short HARVÁT, Matej – KALHOUS, David. *Written Sources: The Expulsion of Pribina according to the *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum**. In POLÁČEK, Lumír (ed.) *Great Moravian Elites from Mikulčice*. Brno : Czech Academy of Sciences, Institute of Archaeology, 2020, pp. 38–40.

13 “Cui quondam Adalrammus archiepiscopus ultra Danubium in sua proprietate loco vocato Nitrava consecravit ecclesiam.” WOLFRAM 2013, Cap. 11, pp. 74, 76; LOŠEK, Fritz (ed.) *Die *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum* und der Brief des Erzbischofs Theotmar von Salzburg*. *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Studien und Texte* 15. Hannover : Hahnsche, 1997, p. 123, footnote no. 130.

14 In detail, see STEINHÜBEL 2021, p. 110 ff.

15 There are no exact written or archaeological data about such an entity, only more or less plausible presumptions based on an interpretative combination of different sources. Pribina’s initial rank was unknown or unimportant in Salzburg, thus *Conversio* mentioned him as “quidam Privina” (some Pribina).

16 His origin from Nitra is contentious as there is only one ambiguous—probably not contemporary and therefore spurious—sentence connecting him with the “Nitrava.” This sentence could have been fabricated perhaps after 880 and the temporary establishment of the Nitrian bishopric. Cf. BETTI, Maddalena. *The Making of Christian Moravia (858–882): Papal Power and Political Reality*. Leiden; Boston : Brill, 2014, p. 153ff.

understand Pribina as a distinct leader of their ancestors and surprisingly, not even as an independent ruler. Pribina's independent power and politically autonomous rulership were formulated in the scholarly (national) discourse expressly and decisively at the moment when the (Czecho-)Slovak national historical narrative was created. Before the political reality of the Czechoslovak state—as shown in the following pages—there was an almost total consensus among scholars that Pribina was not the leader of a distinct tribe different from Moravians and therefore was not appropriated and connected with (pre-modern) Slovaks exclusively.

The understanding of the origin of this Slavic leader, or Prince Pribina, is therefore an apt example of the changing narrative strategies that were influenced, and sometimes even conditioned, by prevailing political and cultural debates. In the following text I will try to demonstrate to what extent the historiographic explanation of early medieval past was influenced and/or determined by the “national question.” For this purpose, the theory of discursive construction¹⁷ will be employed to identify the intentionality and the narrative tendencies of intellectual writing ranging from the modern period before 1918, but mostly among Czechoslovakian scholars and partly, in public discourse as well. It will be argued that the case of Pribina is yet another example of “national” instrumentalisation of pre-modern individuals or communities. Such use—and abuse—of premodern history is interested in the medieval rulers and representatives of power who hold discernible appeal in the genre of narrative national history.¹⁸ Historians and intellectuals with explicit or implicit “national concerns” in their works not only sought the qualities of a particular “national hero” in Pribina,¹⁹ but may have created the medieval version of “Slovak history” not necessarily in accordance with available historical evidence.

17 WODAK, Ruth et al. *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 2009, (1st edition 1999); DeCILLIA, Rudolf – REISIGL, Martin – WODAK, Ruth. The Discursive construction of national identities. In *Discourse & Society*, 1999, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 149–173.

18 Cf. the case of historiographic instrumentalisation of the medieval “Samuel's State” in the Balkans: PANOVA, Mitko B. *The Blinded State. Historiographic Debates about Samuel Cometopoulos and His State (10th–11th Century)*. Leiden; Boston : Brill, 2019; or the older interpretive schemes of Hungarian archaeology on the question of the “seizure of the homeland” BOLLÓK, Ádám. Excavating Early Medieval Material Culture and Writing History in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Hungarian Archeology. In *Hungarian Historical Review*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2016, pp. 277–304; see also GRAUS 2017, pp. 130–140, who shows how the local “barbaric” leaders, such as the Germanic Arminius and the Celtic Vercingetorix began to be nationalised and mythologised from the 19th century onwards. In doing so, these ancient leaders, who until then had not occupied a “national” significant place in the works of scholars or in popular tradition, gradually acquired privileged positions as prominent “national heroes” in the eyes of nationalist-minded intellectuals. Subsequently, they became the first major rulers of the Germans (Arminius-Hermann) and the French (Vercingetorix).

19 For “national heroes” cf. GRAUS 2017, pp. 132, 140–43, 156–157; ZIELIŃSKI, Bogusław. Bohater narodowy w świadomości kulturowej Słowiańszczyzny. In RAŠTICOVÁ, Blanka (ed.) *Literární mystifikace, etnické mýty a jejich úloha při formování národního vědomí*. Uherské Hradiště : Slovákce muzeum, 2001, pp. 25–42, on p. 27 emphasizes that Pribina represented a historical figure forming the “pantheon of heroes-progenitors of Slovak statehood.”

A Long Road to Independence: Pribina in Scholarly Discourse until 1918

After the 9th century, neither medieval writers nor cultural tradition showed any particular interest in the figure of Pribina. This historical individual, unlike the Mojmirid Moravian princes, did not find a place in medieval historical narratives, contrary to ruler Svätopluk and Cyril and Methodius, who appeared quite frequently in the writings of several chroniclers from the 10th to 15th century while the activities and events associated with them, real or fictional, sometimes played a role—albeit limited—in legitimizing narratives and the strengthening of cultural traditions in the clergy environment.²⁰ However, on the contrary, Pribina and his alleged principality based in Nitra remained an unimportant or even unknown historical topic from the Early Middle Ages. The first significant mention of Pribina comes at the end of the Middle Ages, in the chronicle of Bavarian humanist scholar and historian Johann Turmair, known as Aventinus, from 1517. According to him, “Brynno” acted both before and after expulsion in the north of the Danube as a kind of “minor king” of the Moravians.²¹ As we shall see in the case of other older authors, Pribina was clearly thought of as a local Moravian leader. During the early modern period, it took quite a long time for Pribina to find his way into other historical works and narratives about the ancient Moravian past. His figure appears primarily in texts of the Moravian and Hungarian Baroque and Enlightenment historians, who regarded him consensually and irrespective of social conditions or authorial tendencies as a Moravian or a Moravian-subordinate leader who was simply banished from the territory above the middle Danube by his sovereign prince Mojmir.²² It should be stressed that

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- 20 ANTONÍN, Robert. On the memory and oblivion of Great Moravia in the literary tradition of the Bohemian middle ages and in the modern historiography. In ANTONÍN, Robert et al. (eds.) *The Great Moravian Tradition and Memory of Great Moravia in the Medieval Central and Eastern Europe*. Opava : Slezská univerzita, 2014, pp. 123–141; ALBRECHT, Stefan. Das Großmährische Reich in der Historiographie des römisch-deutschen Reiches. In ANTONÍN, 2014, pp. 37–82; GYÖRFFY, György. Die Erinnerung an das Grossmährische Fürstentum in der mittelalterlichen Überlieferung Ungarns. In *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol. 17, 1965, pp. 41–45; MARSINA, Richard. Cyrilometodská tradícia na Slovensku. In *Studia Historica Tyrnaviensia*, vol. 5, 2004, pp. 25–36; BLÁHOVÁ, Marie. Cyrilometodějská tradice v českých zemích ve středověku. In BARCIAK, Antoni (ed.) *Środkowoeuropejskie dziedzictwo Cyrylo-Methodiánske*. Katowice : Societas Scientiarum Silesiae Superioris, 1999, pp. 135–148; WIHODA, Martin. Cyrilometodějská tradice v paměti přemyslovského věku. In KOUŘIL, Pavel (ed.) *Cyrilometodějská misie a Evropa – 1150 let od příchodu soluňských bratří na Velkou Moravu*. Brno : Archeologický ústav AV ČR, 2014, pp. 298–301.
- 21 Ioannis Aventini *Annales ducum Baioariae IV, X 27*. In BARTOŇKOVÁ, Dagmar et al. (eds.) *Magna Moravia fontes historici 1: Annales et chronicae*. 3rd ed. Praha : Koniasch Latin Press, 2019 (1st edition 1966), p. 388.
- 22 PESSINA DE CZECHOROD, Thoma Joanne. *Mars Moravicus. Sive bella horrida et cruenta [...]*. Pragae : Typis Joannis Arnolti de Dobrosławina, 1677, pp. 139–140. Pešina considered Pribina to be one of Moravia’s “leading aristocrats” (*ex Optimatibus praecipuus*). The Jesuit Bohuslav BALBÍN writes, like Aventine, about one of the “little kings” of the Moravians *Epitome rerum Bohemicarum autore Bohuslao Balbino*. Pragae : Typis Universitatis Carolo-Ferdinandae, 1677, p. 12; Similarly BEL, Matthias. *Notitia Hungariae novae historico-geographica divisa in partes quatuor, quarum prima [...]*. Viannae : Johannus Petrus van Ghelen, 1742, p. 315; PILARZ, Adolphus – MORAVETZ, Franciscus. *Moraviae historia politica et ecclesiastica cum notis et animadversionibus criticis probatorum auctorum. Pars prima*. Brunae : Joannes Silvester Siedler, 1785, p. 29.

such an interpretation, already present in the older scholarship, is possible precisely on the basis of contemporary written sources.²³

At the same time, it was not only the Baroque and Enlightenment scholars from Moravia and the Kingdom of Hungary, but also other contemporary historians who understood Pribina as a subordinate lesser chief or a Moravian local leader.²⁴ Moreover, according to a considerable number of older scholars, it was only after his arrival in the Eastern March and subsequent baptism that Pribina “received the land by the river Nitra” where he was meant to function in the Frankish service under King Louis.²⁵ Such an interpretation resulted primarily from a contradiction in the medieval source *Conversio*, which could have been due to the interpolation of the sentence about the church in Nitra-va, thereby de facto distorting the chronological logic of the text.

Exceptionally, however, Pribina was also seen as a distinct leader of this time, even different from the Moravians. Samuel Timon, who is usually regarded as author of the first conception of the history of the Slovaks, or the Upper Hungarian Slavs,²⁶ mentioned him as a “Slavic prince” in his historiographical work *Imago antiquae Hungariae*.²⁷ Timon’s historical construction, similar in this respect to that of Štefan Katona, Juraj Sklenár and other Upper Hungarian historians of the 18th century, was still treating the Great Moravian period, as well as Pribina, in a rather detached manner, without any significant effort to actualise it for the Slovak or Slavic context in the Hungarian monarchy.²⁸ Therefore, in Enlightenment writings, the theme of the ancient Moravian principality figured mostly only on the level of scholarly polemics on the localization of Old Moravia (*Altmähren*) or its power centre, eventually serving as an object to emphasize or trivialize the role of the Slavs in the Christianization of the regions of the Habsburg monarchy.²⁹ Thus, unlike

23 Cf. SIEKLIČKI 1962; HARVÁT – KALHOUS 2020.

24 HANSIZIUS, Marcus. *Germaniae Sacrae Tomus II. Archiepiscopatus Salisburgensis chronologicè propositus*. Augusta Vindelicorum : Sumptibus Martini Happach et Franc. Xav. Schlüter, 1729, p. 124; ASSEMANI, Josephus Simonius. *Kalendaria ecclesiae universae tomus tertius*. Roma : Faustus Amideus, 1755, p. 61. For the list of an older scholars treating Pribina, Kocel and Nitra see BANÍK, Anton Augustín. Pramene, literatúra i podstata dejín o Pribinovi a Kocelovi. In *Kultúra*, 1933, vol. 5, no. 7/8, pp. 541–564.

25 E. g. DÜMMLER, Ernst. *Geschichte des ostfränkischen Reiches I*. Leipzig : Dunder & Humblot, 1887, p. 33; NOVOTNÝ, Václav. *České dějiny. Díl I. Část I. Od nejstarších dob do smrti knížete Oldřicha*. Praha : Jan Leichter, 1912, p. 292.

26 MARSINA, Richard. Samuel Timon a jeho predstavy o najstarších dejinách Slovákov. In *Historický časopis*, 1980, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 245–264; MARSINA, Richard (ed.) *Slovenský historik Samuel Timon 1675–1736: Zborník k 320. výročiu narodenia*. Trančianska Turná : Obecný úrad, 1995; TIBENSKÝ, Ján. *Chvály a obrany slovenského národa*. Bratislava : SVKL, 1965, p. 96 ff.

27 TIMON, Samuel. *Imago antiquae Hungariae*. Cassoviae : Typis Academicis Soc. Jesu, per Joan. Henricum Frauenheim, 1733, p. 276; on the corresponding page, moreover, it is written in margin “Privina dux Sclavorum Nitriensis exul.”

28 Sklenár, for example, located Pribina and his domain south of the Danube, in the area around the Sava River. Adalram thus consecrated a church somewhere in the territory of the former province of Moesia and according to him, Nitra north of the Danube was conquered only by Svätopluk. SZKLENÁR, Georgius. *Vetustissimus Magne Moraviae situs*. Posonium : Ioannes Michael Lander, 1784, pp. 62–64, 105, 109–112. Katona understood Pribina as the second prince of the Moravians in Nitra whom Mojmir “deprived of his rule” (*Privina principatus spoliatus a Moymaro*) KATONA, Stephanus. *Historica critica primorum Hungariae ducum*. Pest : Ioannes Michael Weingand, 1778, pp. 538–539.

29 Cf. ALBRECHT, Stefan. *Geschichte der Grossmährenforschung in den Tschechischen Ländern und in der Slowakei*. Praha : Slovanský ústav AV ČR, 2003, p. 24; TIBENSKÝ, Ján. Vznik, vývoj a význam

Svätopluk, the Slav Pribina played no role in debates about the legal-historical relationship of nationalities in Habsburg Hungary. At the same time, even the Enlightenment Hungarian historiography, emphasizing the nomadic origins of the settlement of the territories of the Kingdom of Hungary did not significantly diverge from predominant contemporary discourse on the position of Pribina before his expulsion across the Danube, treating him as the Mojmir's co-ruler who had governed the Moravian territories up to the river Hron.³⁰

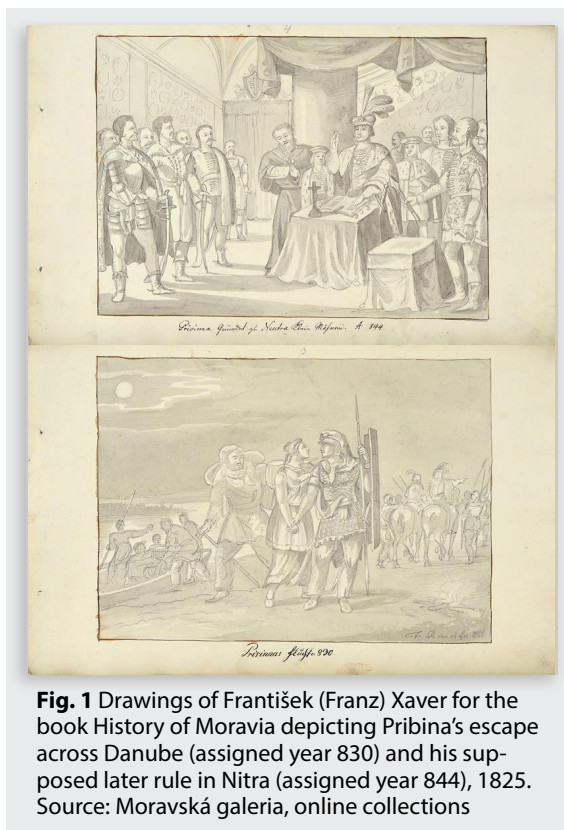


Fig. 1 Drawings of František (Franz) Xaver for the book *History of Moravia* depicting Pribina's escape across Danube (assigned year 830) and his supposed later rule in Nitra (assigned year 844), 1825. Source: Moravská galeria, online collections

From the point of view of current historiographic discourse, it may come as a surprise that even the first extensive “nationalistic” scholarly work on strictly Slovak history by Juraj Papánek from the late 18th century did not reserve any special place for the historical individual who is today most often understood as the first documented medieval ruler on the territory of Slovakia.³¹ Pribina basically merges with the other Mojmirids, who were presented as “Slovaks.” However, according to Papánek, he was not the ruler of a separate territory but a successor of the Mojmir. The nascent national historiography of the late 18th century had not yet embraced the character of an exiled leader or presumed

“Slavic prince” who, on the basis of the Nitrava remark in the *Conversio*, may have been associated with the territory of Upper Hungary. In the search for continuity with the ancient—and at best, glorious—past, Princes Rastislav and Svätopluk, who resisted the “Germans” militarily as well as the “intellectuals” and saints Constantine and Methodius, served this purpose above all.³²

velkomoravskej tradície v slovenskom národnom obrození. In HOLOTÍK, Ludovít (ed.) *O vzájomných vzťahoch Čechov a Slovákov*. Bratislava : SAV, 1956, p. 146 ff. The Great Moravian history was more closely connected with the Slavs from Upper Hungary only by Štefan (István) Salagius.

30 See PRAY, Georgius. *Annales veteres Hunorum, Avarorum et Hungarorum*. Vindobona : Hermann Iosephus Krüchten, 1761, p. 288; SALAGIUS, Stephanus. *De statu ecclesiae Pannonicae libri VII*. Quinque-ecclesiis : Joannes Joseph Engel, 1777, pp. 72, 145.

31 PAPANĚK, Georgius. *Historia gentis Slavae. De regno regibusque Slavorum atque cum prisci civilis et ecclesiastici, tum huius aevi statu gentis Slavae*. Quinque-ecclesiis : Joannes Joseph Engel, 1780, pp. 3, 183–184; Cf. ALBRECHT 2003, p. 24 ff.; KUTNAR, František – MAREK, Jaroslav. *Přehledné dějiny českého a slovenského dějepisectví*. Praha : Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1997, p. 183; TIBENSKÝ 1956, p. 150; TIBENSKÝ, Slovenská historiografia v období slovenského národného obrozenia (1780–1830). In *Historický časopis*, 1980, vol. 28, no. 4, p. 531 ff.

32 See TIBENSKÝ 1980, pp. 531–553; HUDEK, Adam – ŠKVARNA, Dušan. *Cyril a Metod v historickom vedomí a pamäti 19. a 20. storočia na Slovensku*. Bratislava : Historický ústav SAV, 2013, p. 26 ff.; ŠKVARNA, Dušan. *Začiatky moderných slovenských symbolov. K vytváraniu národnej identity od konca 18. do polovice 19. storočia*. Banská Bystrica : UMB, p. 52 ff.

Similarly, historians from the era of the national-awakening (e.g. Pavol J. Šafárik, František Palacký, Jonáš Záborský, František V. Sasinek) did not associate Pribina with the beginnings of the political formation of Slovak ancestors.³³ This idea was articulated only later via assumptions about the alleged distinct (non-Moravian) principality. It was probably Czech legal historian and publicist Hermenegild Jireček, who in the second half of the 19th century as the first scholar developed a thesis of a separate “Nitra principality,” which would become established as a new paradigm during the next century.³⁴ He also presented the wholly new notion that “this principality was associated with Moravia under Mojmir I.”³⁵ Thus, it is quite possible that it was Jireček’s texts that in some respects, challenged the previously unified paradigm and at the same time, considerably encouraged a new interpretation of Moravian conquest of the alleged independent principality of Pribina. At the end of the 19th century, Moravian archivist and historian of German origin Bertold Bretholz, without any secondary intention or immanent tendency,³⁶ contributed to the solidification of a scholarly interpretation of the Mojmir attack on the “Slavic prince” Pribina, which was not dissimilar to the views of Jireček, in stating that Mojmir had in fact attacked a Slavic prince, conquered his domain, annexed it to his principality and then expelled Pribina.³⁷ However, Bretholz claimed in a later work, like his predecessor Beda Dudík, that Pribina resided “im Osten Mährens.”³⁸ In line with the transformation of the state of historical knowledge from the last third of the 19th century, Nitra in the Early Middle Ages, according to some authors, should have already formed the centre of a principality but still not a “tribal” one. Therefore, according to authoritative dictionaries from the Bohemian environment, which provide a summary of knowledge from the times of the late Habsburg monarchy, Pribina did not abandon the position of minor prince subordinate to Mojmir.³⁹

33 See bibliography in BANÍK 1933, pp. 548–556. There is, however, clear nationalistic instrumentalisation of Pribina in the writings of Jozef M. HURBAN, for instance in his: *Osudové Nitry*. In *Almanach Nitra*, 1842, vol. 1, pp. 19–48.

34 JIREČEK, Hermenegild. Knížectví Přibinovy. In *Světózor. List pro zábavu a literaturu*, 1859, vol. 2, no. 16, pp. 313–317, esp. 316; JIREČEK, Slované nitranští. In *Světózor*, 1861, vol. 3, no. 8, p. 231 ff.; JIREČEK, Dějiny říše Moravské (Pokračování). In *Světózor*, 1860, vol. 3, no. 8, pp. 60–62; JIREČEK, Počátek biskupství nitránskeho. In *Světózor*, 1859, vol. 3, no. 22, pp. 374–380, esp. p. 374.

35 JIREČEK, Říše Moravská. Rozprava historická. In *Světózor*, 1859, vol. 2, no. 22, p. 362.

36 In the case of Jireček’s periodical texts there is a noticeable effort to present the old “Slovak history” from the position of sympathiser of the national movement of Slovaks. The eventual contacts of Jireček with Slovak intellectual elites from the nationalist circle would be worthy of more thorough research. On Jireček’s conception of Pribina and Nitra cf. BANÍK 1933, p. 546; SIEKLICKI 1962, p. 119.

37 BRETHOLZ, Bertold. *Geschichte Mährens. Erste Band, Erste Abtheilung (Bis 906)*. Brünn : Karl Winifer, 1895, p. 33: “Als Moimir seine Macht im Lande westlich von der March gefestigt hatte, griff er den östlich vom Flusse wohnenden Slavenfürsten Přibina an, der seinen Sitz in Neitra hatte. Er besiegte ihn und dehnte sein Reich, nach dem heutigen Ungarn hin aus.” Cf. SIEKLICKI 1962, p. 119.

38 BRETHOLZ, Bertold. *Geschichte Böhmens und Mährens bis zum Aussterben der Přemysliden (1306)*. München; Leipzig : Duncker & Humblot, 1912, p. 48. The prominent 20th century Moravian historian L. E. Havlík also used the theory of the Nitra region as “Eastern Moravia.”

39 Entry “Pribina”. In *Riegrův slovník naučný VI*. Praha : I. L. Kober, 1867, p. 935. See also entry “Nitra”. In *Riegrův slovník V*, 1866, p. 847; entry “Pribina”. In *Ottův slovník naučný, dvacátý díl*. Praha : J. Otto, 1903, p. 665. It is symptomatic that Pribina, according to the dictionary entry, returned to Nitra after the (first) expulsion with East Franconian support. See also entry “Nitra”. In *Ottův slovník naučný, osmnáctý díl*, 1902, p. 340.

Jireček's and Bretholz's interpretations thus represented a significant diversion from the established thesis, for instead of writing about the entrusted land, these authors described a separate principality or prince.

It is noteworthy also that in the still instructive Czech History by Václav Novotný published a few years before WWI, the following is said about Pribina's position before his expulsion: "What the nature of Pribina's princely power was cannot be ascertained today. Perhaps he was the last of the tribal princes to hold out until the time of Mojmir."⁴⁰

Nevertheless, even Novotný evidently did not yet refer to a tribal prince in the sense of the later concept of *dux gentis*, but rather understood Pribina as one of the Moravian, or generally Slavic, leaders of the middle Danube.⁴¹ In the spirit of the older Enlightenment tradition, especially Gelasius Dobner, Novotný assesses the consequences of his expulsion in terms of the unification of the two parts of Moravia: "With Pribina's expulsion, Mojmir became the autocrat of unified Moravia."⁴²

Slovak intellectual elites and apparently even the first Slovak historians have not yet incorporated this alleged Nitrian prince into the otherwise widely instrumentalised Great Moravian tradition. At the end of the 19th century, only preliminary and rather marginal attempts to see Pribina and his people as "Slovaks" can be found, including a gradually expanding emphasis on the historical specificity of the Nitra region in contrast to Moravia.⁴³

It seems to be symptomatic that Július Botto (1848–1926), the generally acknowledged author of the first modern historiographical synthesis of Slovak history, remained considerably distant from the notions of later Czech-Slovak authors in the first decade of the 20th century at a time of intensifying national-emancipatory cultural efforts. Botto not only did not consider Pribina as the first ruler of the principality which would be the presumed historical predecessor of Slovakia (politically not yet in existence in his time), but he also did not deduce anything from available historiography about the allegedly independent status of this protagonist. According to Botto's historical conception, "the first known Slovak ruler was Mojmir I,"⁴⁴ while Pribina remained a "partial duke around the Váh River" subordinate to a "great

40 NOVOTNÝ 1912, p. 292.

41 In his work, Pribina appears as Mojmir's "duke", following the example of "his prince" at the consecration of the church in Nitra.

42 NOVOTNÝ 1912, p. 291ff, quote on p. 294.

43 The search for Slovak historical "individuality" or territorial distinctiveness in the context of the pre-Great Moravian Pribina's activity was apparently not yet relevant, even for active Slovak or sympathetic nationalists such as Sasinek, Škultéty or Pič. See e.g., PÍČ, Josef L. Anonymus Belae notarius. In *Slovenské pohľady*, 1882, vol. 2, no. 5, pp. 401–404, here on p. 403 writes about the Principality of Nitra as a separate territory, especially in the Arpad period, but omits any activity of Pribina. On the triangle Pič – Sasinek – Škultéty and their research tendency cf. HOLLÝ, Karol. Josef Ladislav Pič ako slovakista: spolupráca so Slovenskými pohľadmi a historická ideológia slovenského národného hnutia. In DUCHÁČEK, Milan – BÍLKOVÁ, Jitka et al. (eds.) *Václav Chaloupecký a generace roku 1914. Otázniky české a slovenské historiografie v éře první republiky*. Praha; Liberec; Turnov : Technická univerzita v Liberci, 2018, pp. 83–116.

44 BOTTO, Július. *Slováci. Vývin ich národného povedomia*. 2nd ed. Bratislava : Veda, 1971, (1st edition 1906), p. 29.

duke” and “was demanding a kind of foolish independence.”⁴⁵ Botto, like his academically educated contemporaries, was not only a scholar but above all, a cultural activist “working for the nation,” which is evident in the overall intention and treatment of his historical synthesis. Like his predecessors and successors, he tried to use the socio-cultural mobilising legacy or heritage of the Moravian “Empire” to actively stimulate the national consciousness of Slovaks in Habsburg monarchy.⁴⁶ However, Pribina’s “foolish claim to independence” did not yet possess sufficient potential that could be utilized to strengthen the awareness of a common and glorious past, unlike the ruling of Mojmirids. Though, this was about to change after WWI and the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic.

Princes of Two Brotherly Nations: Pribina as the First Slovak Ruler

The “tradition” of Great Moravia represented a key historical argument for the newly established Czechoslovak state used not only in the framework of cultural policies, but also in the search for political legitimacy. At post-war peace negotiations in Paris, there was even a proposal on Eduard Beneš’s initiative to name the new state of Czechs and Slovaks “Grandmoravia” (Velkomoravia).⁴⁷ It is therefore probably not far from the truth to admit that the “Great Moravian tradition”—or historiographical myth⁴⁸—played quite an important role legitimizing and mobilizing the practical conceptions of Czecho-Slovak political elites. The new republic, the establishment of which was ideologically justified also through the political myth of the restoration of the Great Moravian statehood—representing the “first state of the Czechs and Slovaks”—found important cultural workers and disseminators of the official “state-forming” historical narrative in the historians.⁴⁹

In the gradual formation of contemporary discourse about Pribina as “Prince of Nitra” a Czech historian working in Bratislava after 1918, Václav Chaloupecký (1882–1951), clearly stood out the interwar period.⁵⁰ During his

45 BOTTO 1971, p. 32. The diction reflects the work of Sasinek.

46 On Botto’s historical thinking in detail, see: HOLLÝ, Karol. Historik a „národná disciplína“: ideologicko-politický aspekt historického myslenia Júliusa Bottu s dôrazom na interpretáciu genézy a charakteru textu Slováci. Vývin ich národného povedomia (1906). In IVANIČKOVÁ, Edita (ed.) *Kapitoly z histórie stredoeurópskeho priestoru v 19. a 20. storočí: pocta k 70-ročnému jubileu Dušana Kováča*. Bratislava : Veda, 2011, pp. 159–176.

47 HADLER, Frank. Das Großmährische Reich: tschechoslowakischer oder slowakischer Ur-Staat? Deutungskämpfe im 20. Jahrhundert. In WILLOWEIT, Dietmar – LEMBERG, Hans (eds.) *Reiche und Territorien in Ostmitteleuropa: Historische Beziehungen und politische Herrschaftslegitimation*. München : R. Oldenburg, 2006, pp. 359–378, here p. 363. According to PODHRÁZKY, Zbyněk. *Hlavní skutečnosti ovlivňující tvorbu nové československé ústavy v letech 1946–1948*. Master thesis. Brno : Právnická fakulta MU, 2006, p. 22 the name “Republic of Moravia” or “Velkomoravia” was used by Beneš even in negotiations before the end of the Second World War.

48 HADLER, Frank. Historiografický mýtus Velké Moravy v 19. a 20. století. In *Časopis Matice moravské*, 2001, vol. 120, no. 1, pp. 155–171.

49 See the programmatic instruction of Slovak historical research by leading Czech historian and politician KROFTA, Kamil. *O úkolech slovenské historiografie*. Bratislava : Academia, 1925, pp. 5–18; cf. also KAPRAS, Jan – NEMĚC, Bohumil – SOUKUP, František (eds.) *Idea Československého státu*. Praha : Národní rada československá, 1936. On the role and content of political myths, cf. MANNOVÁ, Elena. *Minulosť ako supermarket? Spôsoby reprezentácie a aktualizácie dejín Slovenska*. Bratislava : Veda, 2019, pp. 54–69. For such activist tendencies of a historians in general cf. BERGER – LORENZ 2010.

50 Chaloupecký’s work, personality and career conditions are investigated in a broader and interest-

time at the newly founded state Comenius University, his professional goal became, among other things, the creation of a unique and representative professional synthesis of the older history of the territory of Slovakia. Chaloupecký completed his task quickly and at the same time, at a high professional level. His book *Staré Slovensko* (Old Slovakia) was published in 1923 and immediately became a real scientific event as a pioneering scholarly publication defining the topic “medieval Slovakia.” However, due to its importance for the historical self-awareness of Slovaks, the book also became a target of nationally oriented criticism raised from Slovak patriotic positions. It is no coincidence that the need to oppose Chaloupecký’s interpretation is still observable today among some Slovak medievalists.⁵¹ More interestingly, the author, in broadly conceived and in many ways pioneering research, set himself the goal of “showing and proving the existence of Slovakia as a special geographical and historical individuality.”⁵²

In such a defined research aim, it was Pribina, known from *Conversio* and a few other records, who became a notional bridge for Chaloupecký with which he could not only connect Slovak (Nitrian) with Czech (Moravian) history, but at the same time, Pribina was also referred to as the first power representative of the “historical individuality of Slovakia.” With partial scholarly caution, Chaloupecký nevertheless employed the territorial term “Nitriansko,” which was being used increasingly frequently in publications on the Slovak past,⁵³ as evidence of the foundation of a more advanced political organisation and thus as scientific proof of historical Slovakia in the Early Middle Ages. While the historically corroborated prince of the Moravians, Mojmir, unsurprisingly represented the historical Moravians and also partly the Czechs in contemporary discourse, on the other hand, “our Pribina” for domestic intellectuals such as Jozef Škultéty represented the Slovak part of the common historical state with the Moravians where “the unification of the nation in the Pribina’s domain” occurred before 833.⁵⁴ Chaloupecký, who was eagerly (but not very carefully) read by Škultéty and other Slovak intellectuals, linked in his book “the Principality of Nitra ruled by Privina and after him Svatopluk”⁵⁵ exclusively with Slovakia, which was not

ing context by DUCHÁČEK, Milan. *Václav Chaloupecký. Hledání československých dějin*. Praha : Karolinum, 2014.

- 51 Critics blamed Chaloupecký’s conception primarily for the theory that a large part of the more mountainous areas of today’s Slovakia, especially central and eastern Slovakia, was not significantly populated before the 11th–13th century and the colonization processes of the High Middle Ages. He also claimed that “historical Slovakia” was originally “the Czech land.” CHALOUPECKÝ, Václav. *Staré Slovensko*. Bratislava : FiF UK, 1923, p. 313ff.
- 52 CHALOUPECKÝ 1923, p. 287; Cf. BLÜML, Josef – JIROUŠEK, Bohumil. *Historik Václav Chaloupecký a Slovensko*. In POSPÍŠIL, Ivo – ZELENKA, Miloš (eds.) *Aktuální slovakistika*. Brno : Ústav slavistiky FiF MU, 2004, pp. 11–14. The intentional research goal constructed in this way was noticed in a similar context in the work of Pič by HOLLÝ 2018, p. 92 ff. Almost identical research questions are also stated by STEINHÜBEL, Ján. *Nitrianske kniežatstvo. Počiatky stredovekého Slovenska*. Bratislava : Rak, 2016, p. 12.
- 53 BOHÁČ, Jozef. *Dejiny staroslávnej Nitry*. Nitra : B. Fílder, 1928, p. 5 ff; ŠKULTÉTY, Jozef. Nitra. In *Národné noviny*, 28 January 1921, p. 1 ff.
- 54 ŠKULTÉTY 1921, p. 1.
- 55 Regarding Svätopluk’s alleged princely residence in Nitra, it should be noted that the contemporary Annals of Fulda (or other sources) do not record that Svätopluk’s domain (*regnum Zuentibaldi*) in the 60s of the 9th century was directly in Nitra. This localization was deduced by scholars precisely on the assumption of Pribina’s Nitra principality, which, however, is likewise not directly mentioned by any source. In the historiography, there were also different opinions about the



Fig. 2 Max Schurmann's painting of Pribina and Kocel' with the Slovak national symbol (upper right corner), 1933. Source: webumenia.sk

uncommon in his time. He assessed the status of Nitra precisely according to the ideas of Jireček and Bretholz, though without direct references, as “a separate Slavic principality” and Pribina was discussed with a certain restraint as a “Slovak prince.”⁵⁶

Chaloupecký's synthesis of the medieval history of Slovakia resonated strongly in both professional and lay discourse, especially in the eastern part of the republic. The Slovak ruler Pribina and the Nitra region as the beginning of historical Slovakia were presented in almost the same way in interwar historical syntheses and textbooks of Czechoslovak history,⁵⁷ as well as in the press of the time.⁵⁸ With a new statehood for Slovaks as a result of political independence from the Kingdom of Hungary, the narrative of a separate

historical Slovak principality became more firmly anchored in historiography. Before the establishment of Czechoslovakia, the “lesser principality of Pribina” (*údelné knížectví*), which was still presented this way by the majority of scholarship, acquired the status of a tribal principality in national historiography after 1918.⁵⁹ This principality, to which historians have attributed a separate status independent from Moravia at this time, should have formed an important eastern component of Great Moravia. The Great Moravian Principality, in turn, represented a common historical symbol—or historical myth—of the united Bohemians, Moravians and Slovaks. However, apparently even in the 1920s, the theory of unification

localization of Svätopluk's initial domain (*regnum*). E.g., Z. Dittrich localized this “*regnum*” in eastern Bohemia and Třeštík possibly to Bratislava Castle.

- 56 CHALOUPECKÝ 1923, p. 25; see also CHALOUPECKÝ, Václav. Nitra a počátky křesťanství na Slovensku. In CHALOUPECKÝ, Václav – HOFFMAN, Ján (eds.) *Dva články o Pribinovi*. Bratislava : Ministerstvo školoství a národní osvěty, 1930, pp. 3–18, esp. pp. 8–12.
- 57 PEKAŘ, Josef. *Dějiny Československé*. Praha : Klementinum, 1921, pp. 11–12; BIDLO, Jaroslav – ŠUSTA, Josef. *Všeobecný dějepis pro vyšší třídy škol středních. Díl druhý*. Praha : Historický klub, 1921, p. 31.
- 58 “Nitra was the main centre of the Slovaks, where their own and independent prince resided.” Privina. In *Lidové Listy*, 5 March 1933, p. 1; “...der einzige slowakische Fürst.” Ein Fürst der Slowaken. Die Pribina feier und die Stadt Neutra. In *Grenzboten*, 11 April 1933, p. 4.
- 59 CHALOUPECKÝ 1923, p. 27. However, he did not yet claim that Nitra was the main suprartribal centre of the whole “historical Slovakia” as Steinhübel, for example, and before him Ratkoš and others believe nowadays. According to Chaloupecký, Nitra was only one of the tribal principalities in the territory of today's Slovakia, similarly to “Bratislavsko” (Poznansko) or “Povážsko” (province of Wag) or Hont, which were meant to be transformed into counties in the Kingdom of Hungary. Chaloupecký's main research goal was to reconstruct the historical picture of the whole interwar territory of Slovakia. The Nitra region was thus an important part and a certain centre, but not the whole territory.

of the Moravian and Nitra principalities as a result of Mojmir's military attack, which is nowadays considered by the majority to be a historical fact, had not yet been definitely established. According to Chaloupecký, Pribina "was to be expelled from his principality by the Moravian Rastic."⁶⁰

It was the *Old Slovakia* as the first authoritative academic treatment of the medieval history of the eastern part of Czechoslovakia that, despite a wave of backlash from Slovak nationalist intellectuals,⁶¹ brought further impetus to the broader scholarly discourse for consolidation of the concept of the first, and characteristically Slovak, early medieval power formation. Interwar scholars from Slovakia and Bohemia such as Juraj Hodál, Josef Cibulka and others automatically operated with the view, irrespective of nationality or scholarly inclination, that in the 30s of the 9th century, the Moravians led by Mojmir attacked the neighbouring Slovak principality, expelled the local ruler and annexed his domain to their own.⁶² Particularly in the works of Hodál, a priest, teacher and historian with no academic training but with a strong national consciousness, Pribina and his supposed principality represented early medieval "Slovakia."⁶³

The concept of a separate, Pribina Nitra region was further strengthened as a result of unprecedented social turmoil related to the presumed 1100th anniversary of the consecration of the church in Nitra mentioned in that dubious sentence from Chapter 11 of the *Conversio*. During 12–13 August 1933, the so-called Pribina celebrations took place, which considering the background of commemoration of the alleged construction of the first church in Nitra, served as an important political platform for Slovak intellectuals, cultural figures and incumbent politicians seeking to assert the greatest possible degree of autonomy for Slovakia within the common state.⁶⁴ In the 1930s, it was in the context of the Pribina celebrations and accompanying autonomist manifestations that the political and cultural actualisation of this historical actor, already understood in Slovakia as its own and historically first "national hero," grew in relevance. The insufficiently documented history of the north Danube region and an early medieval local leader with unclear origins and an uncertain relationship to Nitra became more prominent in this period as the

60 CHALOUPECKÝ 1923, pp. 25–26 with reference to Novotný's *České dejiny I*, where, however, there is no mention of Rastislav's intervention. Apparently the older interpretation from the times of Baroque and Enlightenment writings about Rastislav's conquest of Nitra region was still in use here. Chaloupecký did not elaborate on this claim further.

61 See DUCHÁČEK 2015, p. 203 ff.; BLÜML – JIROUŠEK 2004, p. 12 ff.

62 "In 828 the Moravians struck our land and, having driven away our last independent ruler, Privina, they took our territory and conquered the Slovaks." HODÁL, Juraj. *O praobyvateľoch dnešného Slovenska*. Trnava : Spolok sv. Vojtecha, 1925, p. 37; CIBULKA, Josef. Pribina a jeho kostel v Nitre, In *Život*, 1933, vol. 15, pp. 84–92; HRUŠOVSKÝ, František. Počiatky kresťanstva na Slovensku. In *Kultúra*, 1933, vol. 6, no. 7/8, pp. 502–513, esp. pp. 505–507.

63 HODÁL, Juraj. *Kostol kniežata Privinu v Nitre. 830–1930*. Nitra : Jednota, 1930, p. 8 claims, similar to older scholarship, that Pribina built a church in Nitra only after he was expelled from Mojmir and baptized in the Eastern March, from where he returned and "took possession of his principality, Slovakia." Hodál presented the concept of a distinct "Slovak principality" particularly in his article HODÁL, Juraj. *Dejiny slovenského kniežatstva počas moravského nadpánstva*. In *Kultúra*, 1926, vol. 1, no. 7/8, pp. 354–381.

64 ARPÁŠ, Róbert. Pribinove slávnosti ako pripomienka cirkevno-národnej veľkomoravskej tradície. In *Historický časopis*, 2017, vol. 65, no. 4, pp. 655–674.

subject of wider nationalist instrumentalisation. Thus, during several days of festivities and cultural events, loud appeals were made by the most influential interwar Slovak politicians calling for people to “follow in the footsteps of the Slovak prince Pribina.”⁶⁵ Andrej Hlinka, leader of the Slovak People’s Party (Slovenská ľudová strana), loudly proclaimed, “Today’s magnificent, eleven hundredth anniversary is living proof that we were a self-sustaining, independent nation and we want to remain so!”⁶⁶ A desired political independence not yet sufficiently realised on the state level at that time was therefore inevitably projected onto the professional understanding of this historical individual.⁶⁷

Pribina was increasingly loudly portrayed as the first ruler of the (ancestors of) Slovaks. It should not be forgotten that even before 1918, he was mentioned in the scholarship almost exclusively as an inferior Moravian administrator, a partial prince or an otherwise unknown Slavic leader, while only a minority of authors (Hurban, Jireček) associated his activities directly and solely with the Slovaks of Hungary. In the 1920s and 1930s, therefore, we can observe a paradigm shift in the understanding of Pribina’s power status, strikingly correlated with political changes and the collective aspirations of Slovak intellectuals as well as a large portion of the general public.⁶⁸

After the announcement of Slovak autonomy in the autumn of 1938 and a few months later, during the establishment of the Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party as the dominant political force of the newly formed Slovak State under the protection of Hitler’s Germany, Pribina’s historiographical image gained even more distinctive features as an independent medieval ruler. This was the case especially in the markedly propagandistic work of the “ľudák regime’s court historian” František Hrušovský (1903–1956), where Pribina appears as “the first Slovak ruler.”⁶⁹ Given the political “divorce” of the Slovaks from the Czechoslovak state, it is not surprising that Slovak nationalists needed to demonstratively demarcate themselves from the Czechs also by the appearance of a typically Slovak, and non-Moravian, national ruler. However, it is characteristic of the “ľudák” interpretation of national history that, as in Hrušovský’s writings (but also in the younger rightwing “neo-ľudáks” historicized literature),⁷⁰ the other

65 After ARPÁŠ 2017, p. 671.

66 Quote after ZAJONC, Jozef. Prečo je Nitra starodávne mesto? In KREKOVIČ, Eduard – MANNOVÁ, Elena – KREKOVIČOVÁ, Eva (eds.) *Mýty naše Slovenské*. Bratislava : Premedia, 2013, p. 139. Similarly, then minister of education and national edification Ivan Dérer also spoke, see ARPÁŠ 2017, pp. 669–670. Cf. also poem from KRASKO, Ivan. Pribino, knieža náš! In BAJANÍK, Stanislav (ed.) *Slovensko sa rodilo v Nitre. K 60. výročiu Pribinových slávností v Nitre roku 1933 a prvému výročiu prijatia ústavy*. Martin : Matica slovenská, 1993, pp. 37–38 (other speeches by politicians are also reprinted here).

67 On the occasion of the celebration, a scientific conference was held, the results of which were published: STANISLAV, Ján (ed.) *Ríša Velkomoravská: zborník vedeckých prác*. Praha : J. Mazáč, 1933; see also BANÍK 1933, 541ff.

68 MANNOVÁ 2019, p. 61: “Myth forms the basis of the cult of personality; the revered figure is glorified, possibly reinterpreted, then monumentalized and finally mythicized—historical development is personalized and interpreted as inevitably linked to the glorified personality.”

69 HRUŠOVSKÝ, František. *Slovenské dejiny*. 4th ed. Turčiansky sv. Martin : Matica slovenská, 1940, (1st edition 1939), p. 15.

70 For instance, in the writings of Milan S. Ďurica or Arvéd L. Grébert.



Fig. 3. Commemorative medal issued on the occasion of Pribina's celebrations in 1933. Legend: PRIBINA DUX SLOVACORUM NITRIAE FUNDAV.ET. Author: Ján Koniarek. On the right the Frontispiece of Hrušovský's synthesis of Slovak history with a reproduction of Koniarek's medal.

Moravian rulers of the Mojmirid family were also characterized as “Slovaks.”⁷¹ Slovak historiographical works from the period of the wartime Slovak State, in particular the prominent linguist Ján Stanislav (1904–1977), emphasized and evidently greatly overestimated the importance

of Nitra, which was supposed to be, according to some Slovak authors, the seat of Archbishop Methodius.⁷² In Stanislav's linguistic work, one can observe a schematic identification of the ethnic designation “Slovenes”⁷³ with an exclusively Slovak population. This can be seen, for example, in the author's understanding of Pribina's nobles from the time of his activity in Blatnohrad whose names are known from the *Conversio* and the *Codex Aquileiensis*.⁷⁴ Individuals with Slavic names who figured in Pribina's close circle during his governance of Pannonia were presented in the works of Stanislav and other researchers as (Old) Slovaks.⁷⁵

In some respects, a shorter treatise by the historian Daniel Rapant (1897–1988) differs from the propagandistically nationalistic narratives of the time, in which for the first time we encounter a relatively convincing hypothesis about the Bavarian origins of Pribina's wife, something now often regarded as a historical fact.⁷⁶ Rapant's thoroughly reasoned arguments (not only about the construction of the church in “Nitrava” according to *Conversio*) were often contradic-

71 HRUŠOVSKÝ 1940, p. 16: “Mojmir rules from Devín the western part of the Slovak territory.” On the ľudáks historiographical conception, see HUDEK 2010, pp. 45–48; FINDOR, Andrej. *Začiatky národných dejín*. Bratislava : Kalligram, 2011, pp. 114–149. To Hrušovský especially see HUDEK, Adam. Historik František Hrušovský: žiak Václava Chaloupeckého ako tvorca ľudáckej koncepcie slovenských dejín. In DUCHÁČEK – BÍLKOVÁ 2018, pp. 117–129.

72 STANISLAV, Ján. *Slovanskí apoštoli Cyril a Metod a ich činnosť vo Veľkomoravskej ríši*. Bratislava : SAVU, 1945. For contemporary critique of this assumptions, see RAPANT, Daniel. K otázke pôsobenia sv. Cyrila a Metoda na Slovensku. In *Historický zborník*, 1945, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 270–276; POLÁCH, Ota S. J. Metropolitné sídlo sv. Metoda a Nitra. In *Historický zborník*, 1946, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 274–294.

73 It was an Old Church Slavonic term for Slavs in general, but Slovak scholars considered, and still sometimes consider, this ethnonym to be a separate ethnicity of the particular north Danubian “tribe”, distinct from, for example, the Moravians and Czechs. Cf. LYSÝ, Miroslav. *Mojmírovci, Moravia a Franská ríša. Štúdie k etnogenéze, politickým inštitúciám a ústavnému zriadeniu na území Slovenska vo včasnóm Stredoveku*. Bratislava : Atticum, 2014, p. 78 ff.

74 STANISLAV, Ján. *Pribinovi veľmoži*. Bratislava : Slovenská učená spoločnosť, 1940. Cf. also the strongly biased and highly dubious onomastic methods used for discovering the southern “Slovak” early medieval settlement in a book written after the Vienna Award of 1938 (completed in 1943) STANISLAV, Ján. *Slovenský juh v stredoveku I*. 2nd ed. Bratislava : NLC, 1999, (1st edition 1948), on p. 11: “Pannonia was Slovak”, and “Through our study, we are gaining Pribinaš and Kocel's principality into Slovak history.”

75 STANISLAV, Ján. Zo štúdia slovanských osobných mien v Evanjeliu cividalskom (Ev. Civ.). In *Slavia*, 1941, vol. 18, pp. 87–100.

76 RAPANT, Daniel. Pribynov kostolík v Nitre. In *Elán*, 1941, vol. 12, no. 3/4, pp. 18–21.

tory to the theories of his teacher Chaloupecký,⁷⁷ as well as to the nationalistic pretensions of Hrušovský,⁷⁸ but at the same time cemented in many respects the state of knowledge on Pribina available to this day. Even for Rapant, it was obvious in the 1940s that he did not understand Pribina other than as the first independent ruler of the direct ancestors of the Slovaks.

In this regard, the works of Slovak historian František Bokes (1906–1968) should also be mentioned. In 1943, he published the educational historical publication *Slovak Living Space in the Past and Today*, in which he outlined a similar dualistic understanding of the political map of the middle Danube region during the 9th century as is usually presented today. According to him, north of the middle Danube in the first decades of the 9th century there should have existed two centres of supratribal power: one of Mojmir and the other of Pribina. The Principality of Nitra headed by Pribina was to be integrated into a larger political unit; Great Moravia, by the Moravians.⁷⁹ However, Pribina's alleged principality was not quite explicitly “Slovakised”, as Bokes emphasised rather the Slavic and overall Great Moravian character of the territory in question. A few years later, in his large-scale synthesis of Slovak history published after the war within the new political environment of the restored Czechoslovakia, he subsequently extended the “dualistic” thesis to include a more pronounced Slovak slant, writing rather symptomatically about “unifying Moravian-Slovak efforts.”⁸⁰ Pribina and Mojmir appeared to be historical representatives of the same political and national communities (Czechs and Slovaks), which after the Second World War, were reunited within the borders of the reestablished Czechoslovakia.⁸¹

Communist Nationalism and beyond: Pribina at the Beginning of “Medieval Slovakia”

After the February 1948 communist coup d'état, a new Marxist frame and scheme for older history occurred. Despite a proclaimed international approach, post-war historiography adhering to the Marxist-Leninist methodology did not cease to manifest elements of national historiography, (re)constructing and “scientifically” documenting the historical narrative of the Czech and Slovak—as opposed to the Czechoslovak—nation.⁸² In the first post-war

77 Cf. DUCHÁČEK 2015, pp. 140–159, 238–245.

78 Hrušovský's views regarding Pribina are disputed in RAPANT, Daniel. Ešte raz o Pribynovom nitrianskom kostolíku. In *Elán*, 1943, vol. 13, no. 7, p. 5.

79 BOKES, František. *Slovenský životný priestor v minulosti a dnes*. Bratislava : Čas, 1943, p. 29 ff.

80 BOKES, František. *Dejiny Slovenska a Slovákov. Od najstarších čias po oslobodenie*. Bratislava : SAVU, 1946, p. 31 ff. The “own Slovak history” begins with the year 822 and the first known appearance of the Moravians in written sources. Bokes mentioned “the first Slovak princes Koteloch, Svätopluk, Pribina, Kocel, Rastislav and others.” It is worth noting that Rapant, in a devastating review of this synthesis, accused the author of allegedly reproducing verbatim “mine Pribina” i.e., Rapant's writing: See RAPANT, Daniel. Dr. Fr. Bokes: Dejiny Slovenska a Slovákov. In *Historický sborník*, 1946, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 474–509, quote on p. 476.

81 For example, Krofta spoke about the “Moravian-Slovak Empire” and perceived Pribina as “a Slovak prince, perhaps one of the tribal princes in Slovakia, who probably united the rule over several tribes in his hands and thus established a larger principality.” KROFTA, Kamil. *Dejiny Československé*. Praha : B. Janda, 1946, pp. 7–15, quote on p. 10.

82 HUDEK 2010, p. 148–169; GÓRNY, Maciej. Past in the Future. National Tradition and Czecho-

general survey of Slovak history written by archaeologist and art historian Ján Dekan (1919–2007), which also defined the Early Middle Ages as a period of the “beginning of the nation,” Pribina’s supposed principality clearly constitutes a distinct power unit, markedly different from Mojmir’s Moravian principality.⁸³ It was in post-war research that the dualistic conception of the origin of Great Moravia was definitively established and argumentatively supplemented. According to this theory, the Moravian Principality was to be the first “common state of the ancestors of the Czechs and Slovaks”, established after the union of the Principalities of Nitra and Moravia. These two political units, only one of which is actually historically documented, were meant to represent distinct autonomous political and ethnic entities, which after the expulsion of Pribina from Nitra, were to be integrated into the “Great Moravian State.”

While mainly Czech and Moravian as well as several foreign scholars have not always explained the original position of Pribina in terms of an independent tribal prince during the more than forty years of existence of the post-war socialist Czechoslovak Republic,⁸⁴ on the other hand, Slovak historians and archaeologists have unanimously and without any significant doubt professionally “canonized” the historiographical image of the Nitra principality with Pribina as its first and last ruler attested to in the sources. In the writings of leading Slovak medievalists Branislav Varsik,⁸⁵ Peter Ratkoš,⁸⁶ Matúš

slovak Marxist Historiography. In *European Review of History*, 2003, vol 10, no. 1, pp. 103–114. On post-war communist nationalism and the Slovak professional instrumentalisation of 9th century history, cf. KOPAL, Petr. Filmový projekt Velká Morava. Případ komunistického nacionalismu. In *Paměť a dějiny*, 2010, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 55–63.

- 83 DEKAN, Ján. *Začiatky slovenských dejín a ríša Velkomoravská*. Bratislava : SAVÚ, 1951, p. 43 ff., where he writes about the “Moravian-Slovak tribal divide” and the “political-administrative dualism of united Moravia.”
- 84 E.g., GRAUS, František – MACEK, Josef – TIBENSKÝ, Ján. *Přehled československých dějin. Do roku 1848, Díl I*. Praha : ČSAV, 1958, p. 46; VANĚČEK, Václav. *Štát Moravanov – Velkomoravská ríša*. In BÖHM, Jaroslav (ed.) *Velká Morava. Tisícročná tradícia štátu a kultúry*. Praha : ČSAV, 1963, p. 18; HAVLÍK, Lubomir E. *Slovanské státní útvary raného středověku*. Praha : Academia, 1987, p. 64; DIETRICH, Zdenko R. *Christianity in Great-Moravia*. Gronigen : Instituut voor Middeleeuwsche Geschiedenis, 1962, pp. 67–72; VLASTO, Alexis P. *The Entry of the Slavs into Christendom*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1970, p. 24.
- 85 In 1946, at the first congress of the Slovak Historical Society, Varsik outlined the research areas for the search for and discovery of Slovak medieval history, VARSIK, Branislav. Výskum slovenského etnika (Stav, problémy a nové úlohy). In VARSIK, Branislav. *Zo slovenského stredoveku. Výber historických štúdií a článkov z rokov 1946–1968*. Bratislava : SAV, 1972, pp. 35–64. Neither Pribina nor the Principality of Nitra is mentioned in this text. It emphasizes, in particular, the distinctiveness of the so-called Slovenes (Slovieni) and their continuity with the Slovaks. VARSIK, Branislav. O vzniku a rozvoji slovenskej národnosti v stredoveku. In *Historický časopis*, 1984, vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 529–550, on p. 548 accentuating the claim of Bálint Hóman, he writes about “the Slovak autochthonous inhabitants of Nitra.”
- 86 RATKOŠ, Peter. K otázke etnického charakteru Veľkej Moravy. In HOLOTÍK, Ludovít (ed.) *O vzájomných vzťahoch Čechov a Slovákov*. Bratislava : SAV, 1956, pp. 24–37, esp. pp. 30–32; RATKOŠ, Peter. Územný vývoj Veľkej Moravy (fikcie a skutočnosť). In *Historický časopis*, 1985, vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 202, 218; RATKOŠ, Peter. *Slovensko v dobe veľkomoravskej*. Košice : Východoslovenské vydavateľstvo, 1988, p. 33 ff.

Kučera⁸⁷ and Richard Marsina,⁸⁸ the “old Principality of Nitra” represented an unquestionable historical entity, which was quite often anachronistically and uncritically associated with almost the entire territory of modern Slovakia. According to the belief of Slovak historians, Pribina ruled an organized political unit whose population was to form a sort of ethnic basis of the emerging “feudal nationality” of the Slovaks.⁸⁹ The ethnic origin of the Slovaks in the person of Pribina and his alleged principality was perhaps most vocally pursued by the historian Kučera, later briefly also Minister of Education (1992–1993), who wrote:

It is mainly a geographically closed area of the old Nitrian principality, occupying the greater part of today's Slovakia, where for the first time in the history of our Slavic ancestors the development was so advanced that already in the first third of the 9th century, an organized political unit was formed under the leadership of Prince Pribina. This phenomenon was of immeasurable significance for the further developmental fate of Slovakia, for its territorial and organizational and administrative constitution.⁹⁰

From the 1970s onwards, Kučera promoted a strongly nationalised version of the early medieval history of the territory of Slovakia, in which, similar to other Slovak authors, he emphasised the political and economic sophistication of the Slavic settlement in forming the Kingdom of Hungary vis a vis the participation of the “less sophisticated” Magyar nomadic social strata. At the same time, in writing with an admittedly nationalistic angle, he repeatedly stressed that it was “Prince Pribina” and the supposed polity administered by him that was of fundamental importance for the Slovaks and Slovak history. In the 1980s, Kučera himself was substantially involved in efforts to create a Slovak series of historical films about the times of Great Moravia,⁹¹ the one of which was intended to depict the idealised reign of Pribina. Petr Kopal, who has studied the unrealised, strongly nationalistic film project in detail, pointed out that Kučera also promoted a historical perspective identifying Pribina with the Slovaks in the very design of this never shot film.⁹² The figure of the unknown exile and the latter Pannonian governor thus became a prototype of the desired historical independence and political individuality of Slovaks during the subsequent conjuncture of Slovak nationalism in the times of occupied

87 KUČERA, Matúš. *Slovensko po páde Veľkej Moravy*. Bratislava : VEDA, 1974, p. 25ff; KUČERA, Matúš. Veľká Morava a začiatky našich národných dejín. In *Historický časopis*, 1985, vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 163–196; KUČERA, Matúš. Veľká Morava a slovenské dejiny. In POULÍK, Josef – CHROPOVSKÝ, Bohuslav (eds.) *Veľká Morava a počátky československé štátnosti*. Praha : Academia, 1985, pp. 245–271.

88 MARSINA, Richard. *Metodov boj*, 2nd ed. Bratislava : Spolok slovenských spisovateľov, 2005, (1st edition 1985), p. 26 ff; MARSINA, Richard. O začiatkoch slovenských dejín. In MARSINA, Richard. *Ku koncepcii a vývoju slovenskej historiografie*. Bratislava : PostScriptum, 2013 ((1st published in 1996)), p. 95 ff.; MARSINA, Richard. *Nové pohľady historickej vedy na slovenské dejiny. I. časť: Najstaršie obdobie slovenských dejín (do prelomu 9.–10. storočia)*. Bratislava : Metodické centrum mesta Bratislavy, 1995, p. 4 ff.: “The first Slavic ruler in the territory of Slovakia known by name is Pribina, who is therefore the first indisputably credible historical figure of Slovak history.”

89 KUČERA 1985, p. 184; HALAGA, Ondrej R. K otázke vzniku slovenskej národnosti. In *Historický časopis*, 1962, vol. 10, no. 2, p. 243, 257; CHROPOVSKÝ, Bohuslav – MARSINA, Richard – RATKOŠ, Peter et al. *Dejiny Slovenska I (do roku 1526)*. Bratislava : Veda, 1986, p. 90 ff.

90 KUČERA 1974, p. 25.

91 KOPAL 2010, pp. 55–63.

92 KOPAL 2010, p. 58.



Fig. 4 The bronze statue of Pribina at the Nitra castle square, 1989, author Tibor Bártfay. Photo: Jakub Godiš

and “normalized” Czechoslovakia.⁹³ Such an image was replicated exactly by the domestic national historiography.

During the second half of the 20th century and basically until the seminal works of Ján Steinhübel,⁹⁴ the question of Pribina’s Nitra region was not given any more systematic attention, which was undoubtedly influenced by the considerable lack of sources and the general absence of any further accurate contemporary data about such a speculated rather than source-documented principality. However, despite the ambiguity of available source material, the “Principality of

Nitra” has almost unanimously established itself in research as a historical fact and the historical origin of Slovakia. Thus, the image of the “Nitrian tribal prince Pribina” embedded in Slovak historiography did not change during the late 20th century. Foreign research quite understandably focused on the securely documented, historiographically and archaeologically better researchable Lower Pannonian Carolingian province with its centre in Blatnohrad (Mosapurc).⁹⁵ In the last third of the 20th century, Slovakian archaeological research created allegedly exact theories about the so-called Blatnica-Mikulčice horizon material manifestation (Blatnicko mikulčický horizont, BMH) and the absolute dating of the violent demise of “Pribina’s castles.”⁹⁶ Mojmir’s putative conquest of the neighboring Pribina principality was presented as a historically and archaeologically documented—

93 SLANINA, Adam. *Podoby slovenského nacionalizmu medzi rokmi 1990 – 1992*. Bachelor thesis. Praha : UK FF Ústav Politologie, 2021, pp. 17–22; MARUŠIAK, Juraj. Slovenská spoločnosť a normalizácia. In SZIGETI, László (ed.) *Slovenská otázka dnes*. Bratislava : Kalligram, 2007, p. 320 ff.

94 STEIHNÜBEL, Ján. Nitrianske kniežatstvo a zánik Veľkej Moravy. In *Historické štúdie*, 1996, vol. 37, pp. 7–26; STEIHNÜBEL, Ján. Pôvod a najstaršie dejiny Nitrianskeho kniežatstva. In *Historický časopis*, 1998, vol. 46, no. 3, pp. 369–416; STEIHNÜBEL 2021.

95 For foreign notions about Pribina and Nitra, see e.g., DOPSCH, Heinz. Passau als Zentrum der Slawenmission. Ein Beitrag zur Frage des “Großmährischen Reiches”. In *Südostdeutsches Archiv*, 1985/6, vol. 28/29, pp. 5–28, here p. 9 ff; WOLFRAM, Herwig. *Salzburg, Bayern, Österreich*. Wien; München : R. Oldenburg, 1995, p. 311 ff; MITTERAUER, Michael. *Karolingische Markgrafen im Südosten. Fränkische Reichsaristokratie und bayerischer Stammesadel im österreichischen Raum*. Wien : Böhlau, 1963, p. 87 called Pribina “ein slowakischer Teilfürst.”

96 Mainly BIALEKOVÁ, Darina. Návrh chronológie praveku a včasnej doby dejinnej na Slovensku. Slovanské obdobie. In *Slovenská archeológia*, 1980, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 213–221, here pp. 215, 219; BIALEKOVÁ, Darina. Zur Datierungsfrage archäologischer Quellen aus der ersten Hälfte des 9. Jh. Beiden Slawen nördlich der Donau. In CHROPOVSKÝ, Bohuslav (ed.) *Rapports du III^e Congrès International d’Archéologie Slave. Tome 1/2*. Bratislava : VEDA, 1979, pp. 93–103.

therefore unquestionable—fact precisely on the basis of disputed and now revised archaeological data.⁹⁷

After the dissolution of the Czechoslovak state in 1993, the historical instrumentalisation of Mojmirid Moravia, and older Slavic history in general, lost its significance, especially in Bohemia.⁹⁸ On the contrary, partly in Moravia⁹⁹ but largely in the newly founded Slovak Republic, the Great Moravian and Cyriilo-Methodian “state tradition” found a place not only in the preamble of the new constitution, but expressly in the historiographical and historical-publicist conceptions or constructions of medieval Slovak history. That is the case of a programmatically nationalist and primordialist book based on the ethnic interpretations of history collecting many texts of Slovak national(istic) historians.¹⁰⁰ Pribina stands here at the origin of the essentially understood Slovak ethnogenesis. Among other things, the authors reprinted a rather revealing statement on the controversy surrounding the statue of “king” Svätopluk erected in 2010 at the Bratislava castle which was originally inscribed with the words “King of the Old Slovaks.”¹⁰¹ In the statement, a group of historians and archaeologists signed the following words: “The existence of a sovereign Slovak Republic naturally requires that we perceive our own history in accordance with a positive evaluation [sic!] of the entire ethnogenesis of the nation, continuously documented since the time of Prince Pribina and its national-emancipatory development.”¹⁰² Therefore, Pribina is usually, but not exclusively, understood in public and professional discourse as the first source-documented, politically sovereign but later subjugated ruler of the ancestors of the Slovaks.¹⁰³

97 The problematic nature of the automatic “excavation of history” by Slovak archaeologists, who in this case attempted to reconcile the deductions of historians about Nitra with the material sources, was pointed out by TŘEŠTÍK, Dušan. K poměru archeologie a historie. In *Archeologické rozhledy*, 2001, vol. 53, no. 2, pp. 357–361, here p. 360; Similarly PROFANTOVÁ, Naďa – PROFANT, Martin. Archeologie a historie aneb „jak vykopávat“ dějiny? In KLÁPŠTĚ, Jan – PLEŠKOVÁ, Eva – ŽEMLIČKA, Josef (eds.) *Dějiny ve věku nejistot. Sborník k příležitosti 70. narozenin Dušana Třeštíka*. Praha : NLN, 2003, p. 244 ff. However, Třeštík, like most historians, still accepted both archaeological concepts, BMH and the theory of the extinction of Pribina's castles, which were also used to substantiate his own interpretations, cf. TŘEŠTÍK, Dušan. *Vznik Velké Moravy: Moravané, Čechové a střední Evropa v letech 791–871*. Praha : NLN, 2001, p. 110 ff. For the revision of BMH, see recently ROBAK, Zbigniew. The Origins and the Collapse of the Blatnica-Mikulčice Paradigm. In *Slovenská archeológia*, 2017, vol. 64, no. 1, pp. 99–153. For the new dating of hillforts based on modern natural-scientific methods HENNING, Joachim – HEUSSNER, Karl-Uwe – PIETA, Karol – RUTTKAY, Matej. Bojná and the dating of hillforts of the Nitra Principality. Contribution of natural sciences to the archaeological research. In PIETA, Karol – ROBAK, Zbigniew (eds.) *Bojná 2, Nové výsledky výskumov včasnostredovekých hradísk*. Nitra : Archeologický ústav, SAV, 2015, pp. 335–345.

98 TŘEŠTÍK 1999, p. 158 ff.

99 HAVLÍK, Lubomír E. *Svatopluk Veliký, král Moravanů a Slovanů*. Brno : Jota, 1994.

100 MARSINA, Richard – MULÍK, Peter (eds.) *Etnogenéza Slovákov. Kto sme a aké je naše meno*. Martin : Matica slovenská, 2011 (1st edition 2009).

101 *Stanovisko slovenských historikov, archeológov a jazykovedcov*. In MARSINA – MULÍK 2009, pp. 168–169. Cf. also HADLER, Frank. Alter Slowake! „Vernünftiger Staatshistorismus“ statt „Slawenbeschwörung“. In *Osteuropa*, 2009, vol. 59, no. 12, pp. 273–279.

102 MARSINA – MULÍK 2013, *Stanovisko slovenských*, p. 168.

103 E.g., a popular but specialist-written collective work SEGEŠ, Vladimír (ed.) *Kniha kráľov: Panovníci v dejinách Slovenska a Slovákov*. Bratislava : Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo, 2003, p. 19: “By name, Pribina was the oldest known Slavic ruler in the territory of Slovakia. The accounts about him should be considered as a reliable, documented source of Slovak history.”; p. 20: “Since then, we can speak of the beginnings of the Slovak nation, whose members were then

The most thorough historiographical treatment of the topic so far was offered by Ján Steinhübel, whose detailed explanations elaborated and basically concluded the issues that had been under discussion since the time of Chaloupecký's search for the "historical individuality" of Old Slovakia. In his seminal work, *The Nitrian Principality: The Beginnings of Medieval Slovakia*, Steinhübel seeks scholarly answers to questions that have long intrigued (especially) Slovak historians and public; "Are the Slovaks also an old historical nation? Who and when laid the national, territorial and historical foundations of Slovakia? Can we find our historical beginning? Can we find a historical Slovakia?"¹⁰⁴

The answer for the author and a large portion of researchers and recipients of historiography seems to be, as it has been since the 1920s, the Nitrian principality with its alleged only known independent ruler which is supposed to constitute indisputable evidence of the medieval origins of today's Slovakia. Steinhübel's consistent—and very influential in Slovakia—conception of early medieval history¹⁰⁵ is clearly not based on nationalistic aspirations, but rather on the implicit need to search for and to find the national history and the "solid historical origins" of Slovakia and Slovaks. Nevertheless, researchers outside the Slovak environment usually do not see convincing evidence in the available medieval sources about "historical Slovakia" or Slovaks as a separate ethnic or national group, which would have been already internally and externally differentiated from the generally understood Slavs in the (Early) Middle Ages.¹⁰⁶

called Sloveni or Slovienes." Pribina and his presumed principality in Nitra were consistently postulated as a fact, proving the national origins of Slovaks and Slovakia with patriotic fervour by M. Kučera and his pupil M. Homza. KUČERA, Matúš. Slovensko v zápase o svoju historickú a národnú identitu. In *Studia academica Slovaca*, 2002, vol. 31, (unpaginated); HOMZA, Martin. Niekoľko téz k počiatkom slovenského etnika. In *Studia academica Slovaca*, 2002, vol. 31, (unpaginated). Available online: https://zborniky.e-slovak.sk/SAS_31_2002.pdf

104 STEINHÜBEL 2016, p. 12.

105 The author conceived several synthetic essays about the early medieval period where the Principality of Nitra organically fits into the master national narrative about the origins of Slovakia in the 9th century. Cf. e.g., STEINHÜBEL, Ján. The Duchy of Nitra. In TEICH, Mikuláš – KOVÁČ, Dušan – BROWN, Martin D. (eds.) *Slovakia in History*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 15–29.

106 E. g. GRAUS, František. *Die Nationenebildung der Westslawen im Mittelalter*. Sigmaringen : J. Thorbecke, 1980, p. 7 who outlined the possibility of the formation of Slovak national consciousness only in the context of the Kingdom of Hungary but did not specify the period and left the question open; ŠMAHEL, František. *Nalézání, setkávání a míjení v životě jednoho medievisty*. Praha : Argo, 2009, p. 35 noticed that Graus remained rather reserved on the question of possible Slovak medieval national consciousness; TŘEŠTÍK 1999, p. 140 according to whom the "Slavs-Slovaks" ethnically differentiated themselves only gradually after the later medieval period; Cf. skepticism of KALHOUS, David. Svatopluk I.: kníže nebo král? K otázce legitimizace velkomoravských knížat ve středověké i moderní historiografii. In *Historia Slavorum Occidentis*, 2016, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 63–64 and footnote no. 1. The theorist of nationalism, Anthony Smith, noted that the Slovaks as an ethnic community did not have the distinctive attributes of a nation even in the 18th century (e.g., a common historical myth or a wider supra-regional cohesion) SMITH, Anthony D. *The Nation in History. Historiographic Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism*. Hanover : UP of New England, 2000, p. 86 and footnote no. 14. Among the Slovak social scientists who argue in favour of a much later, modern formation of Slovak nation e.g., ĎUROVIČ, Lubomír. Tá naša (slovenská) identita...? Ako sa formovala politicky a teritoriálne? In SZIGETI László (ed.) *Slovenská otázka dnes*. Bratislava : Kalligram, 2007, pp. 32–40; SÝKORA, Peter. Úvod do mytológie slovenského národa. In SÝKORA, Peter. *Boj s drakom*. Bratislava : Fragment, 1992, pp. 76–104. Of course, it does not pose a problem for primordialist researchers, and the general public, to call the pre-modern Slavic-speaking population the (Old) Slovaks without being aware of the methodological and factual problems of such claims.

Conclusion

In conclusion, one peculiarity of Slovak medievalist discursive tendencies can be ascertained, that is to say, a rather persistent preoccupation with the explanatory framework of national history.¹⁰⁷ Modern nationality and the “national question” in its many facets tends to insitantly influence not only research questions regarding the pre-modern—some would say even pre-national—past, but sometimes even the analysis of historical sources. At least as far as the Early Middle Ages are concerned, scholars and other intellectuals, not to mention the general public or politicians, are quite often—intentionally or unintentionally—unable or unwilling to separate their perspective from the notion of “nation” when explaining the early medieval past. Therefore, the Early Middle Ages in particular are all the more valuable the more “we”, as contemporaries, while often circumventing a set of discontinuities and methodological problems, can positively identify ourselves with the people who lived in that era. It was the intellectuals, and from their ranks especially historians, who during the twentieth century, but also today through academic research, to a large extent saturated the need for national self-identification amongst a portion of society. However, such a research endeavour is often not solely based on a critical knowledge of history, but also on the creation of historical myths that live in the collective memory.¹⁰⁸ Looking at the older scholarship and tendencies in intellectual discourse, one can see quite clearly that the modern understanding of an early medieval Slavic leader was, and still is, determined not primarily or exclusively by available historical data, but rather by individual and/or collective “national” considerations which are quite modern and situational.

107 This feature has been also noted by MÚČSKA, Vincent. Niekoľko poznámok k súčasnosti slovenskej medievistiky. In DOLEŽALOVÁ, Eva – NOVOTNÝ, Robert – SOUKUP, Pavel (eds.) *Evropa a Čechy na konci stredoveku. Sborník příspěvků věnovaných Františku Šmahelovi*. Praha : Filosofia, 2004, p. 452; cf. also survey on the national preoccupation of Slovak medievalist research by ŠEDIVÝ, Juraj. Die slowakische Geschichtsforschung des 20. Jahrhunderts auf der Suche nach „ihrem“ Frühmittelalter. In REIMITZ, Helmut – ZELLER, Bernhard (eds.) *Vergangenheit und Vergegenwärtigung. Frühes Mittelalter und europäisches Erinnerungskultur*. Wien : ÖAW, 2009, pp. 253–262. Šedivý, however, concluded—rather optimistically—that recent historians who deal with the Early Middle Ages (Steinhübel, Homza) do not essentialise this period in order to create a national history.

108 See MANNOVÁ 2020; IFVERSEN, Jan. Myth in the Writing of European History. In BERGER, Stefan – LORENZ, Chris (eds.) *Nationalizing the Past: Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe*. Hampshire; New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 452–457; HEIN-KIRCHNER, Heidi. Politische Mythen. In *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 2007, vol. 11, pp. 26–31. Available online: <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/30604/politische-mythen/>; FINDOR, Andrej. (De)Constructing Slovak National Mythology. In *Sociológia*, 2002, vol. 34, no. 3, pp. 195–208.