REWRITING MORAVIA'S HISTORY

Moravia, a principality of East Central Europe in the ninth century, in spite of the rather short duration of its existence (822 – c. 900), has assured itself a prominent place in past and present historiography. This is partly due to its spectacular political history under the princes Rastislav (846–70) and Sventopolk (871–94). The main reason, however, is the tremendous importance of its cultural legacy, connected with the activities in Moravia of the two saintly brothers, Constantine (later known as Cyril) and Methodius, both of whom have been credited with laying the foundations of most of the Slavic literary languages.

All scholars hitherto have agreed that the principality of Moravia, whatever its precise boundaries, was centered along the northern Morava River, a northern tributary of the Danube, in the central part of present day Czechoslovakia. However, some have disputed whether all elements of the cultural heritage credited to Cyril and Methodius should be attributed to a West Slavic milieu or whether one should consider some other Slavic region where the two brothers might have been active before reaching Moravia north of the Danube. The “West

1 This study is based primarily on the interpretation of written sources. References to modern authorities are made only exceptionally, either to indicate a more complete discussion of an issue presented briefly in the text or to substantiate topics which are not based on written sources, e.g. archaeology and philology. In most cases, sources cited or referred to will be identified in the text by author or title and by date. Complete references to editions used may be derived from the Bibliography at the end of this study. Notes will be used mainly for additional or more complete quotations from sources, as well as for references to basic monographs. More recent monographs consulted are also listed in the Bibliography. Most of the names, places and problems mentioned in this study may be found with a selective bibliography in the Słownik Starożytności Słowiańskich (Dictionary of Slavic Antiquities), Wrocław-Warsaw-Cracow, 1961–.

2 For a more recent summary of issues see the contributions of E. Georgiev and A. Dostal in Das Grossmährische Reich (Prague, 1966), 394–99 and 417–19. On the controversy concerning the use of Byzantine law in Moravia, see V. Ganev, Zakon Sudnyi Liudem (Sofia, 1959), and V. Procházka, “Deset poznámek ke Ganevovu výkladu krátké redakce Z.S.L.”
Slavic” and “South Slavic” (Bulgarian) elements in Moravia’s history were noticed already by V. N. Tatishchev over two hundred years ago, but the problems surrounding the controversy are still far from being solved.

A confrontation of current studies on Moravia’s history with the available sources reveals that a solution of the “Moravian-Bulgarian” controversy is hardly possible, because the study of the geography of Moravia itself has been based on assumptions rather than on historical evidence. The assumed connection between the northern Morava River and the principality of Moravia has never been proved. A scrutiny of the sources originating from the ninth century discloses that none of the places and events of significance for defining the location of Moravia are to be found north of the Danube. The same sources unequivocally attest that the jurisdictional territory of Archbishop Methodius was in Pannonia and could not cover areas north of the Danube. In view of the inseparable unity of ecclesiastical and secular aspects of medieval principalities, the realm of Rastislav and of Sventopolk had to coincide with the church province administered by Methodius, hence the principality of Moravia had to be also south of the Danube, in Pannonia.

Upon closer reading of the same sources it becomes evident that what scholars consider to be a nation-state called Moravia, inhabited by Moravians, was in fact a patrimonial principality around a city named Marava, inhabited by Sclavi, Slavi (Slaviene in Church-Slavonic). The inhabitants of that city were known as Sclavi Marahenses. A city of Marava/Maraha is indeed well attested in medieval sources. This Marava can be easily identified with the Sirmium of antiquity, Sremska Mitrovica of modern times. Saint Methodius is named in all sources bishop or archbishop of Marava and not of Moravia, as interpreted by modern historians. His title is consistent with the canonical principle whereby bishops are assigned to prominent cities and not to countries. The same practice prevails today. Similarly, principalities are normally defined by their main burg or urban center.

These basic revisions necessitate a scrutiny of the current interpretations of the history of the realm of Rastislav and later of Sventopolk as well as of the role of Cyril and Methodius in the ecclesiastical and cultural life of the Slavs. This history of “Moravia,” as reconstructed in Právněhistorické Studie, 9 (1963), 302–17. An illustration of the linguistic dispute is presented in George Y. Shevelov's article on the problem of Moravian components in Old Church Slavonic in The Slavonic and East European Review, 35 (1957), 379–98.