

ETHNOGENESIS OF SLOVAKS

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The generally prevailing opinion is that Slovaks are descendants of the Slavs (Slovens) who lived in this territory during and before the 9th century. The Hungarian historian J. Karácsonyi (1901) was the only one to suppose that the local indigenous Slavs had died out or had become Magyars and that contemporary Slovaks are the progeny of the White Croats who arrived from the north and north-west by the twelfth century. The Czech historian Václav Chaloupecký (1923) maintained that the Slovaks are really Czechs by origin but their almost 1000-years' existence in the Kingdom of Hungary led to their separation from the Czechs. This is not correct since, according to contemporary sources (Annals of Fulda) the Moravians (living to the west of the Slovaks) were also considered to be an independent people in the 9th century. The Slovaks also have to be regarded as an independent people, who have not created their own ethnonymum but their female is "Sloven-ka", language is "sloven-ský", the country is "Sloven-sko".

The first concrete and undeniable Slavonic ruler who we know by name in the territory of what is today Slovakia, lying on the Middle Danube, was Prince Pribina with his seat in Nitra. The Archbishop of Salzburg Adalram consecrated a Christian church in Nitra in (about) 828, which was probably the church of the chief priest (archpresbyter) directing Christianization all over Pribina's principality of Nitra. This principality was certainly already more than a tribal formation which had been established after a long evolution at the turn of the eighth and ninth centuries after the defeat of the Avar kaganat by the troops of Charlemagne. The Slovaks or the ancestors of the Slovaks did not live in their own state for long, since about 833 the Principality of Nitra was conquered by Mojmir, the ruler of the Principality of Moravia, the western neighbour of the Principality of Nitra. Pribina escaped with his entourage and after several-years of wandering became ruler over the Transdanubia by consent of the Eastern-Frankish King Louis the German. The Principality of Nitra became part of the state called in historiography Great Moravia for three quarters of a century. The Nitra region originally created the eastern part of this state, mostly governed by a younger member of the dynasty. At the beginning of the tenth century, after the fall of Great Moravia, the Slovak territory was gradually in-

cluded into the Hungarian state, from the turn of the millennium the Kingdom of Hungary, in which the Slovaks actually lived until 1918. In spite of the non-existence of their own statehood, the overwhelming majority of historians considered the Slovaks even in the past to be an ancient community, which, or the ancestors of which, at least from the time of the Migration Period, i.e. from the end of the fifth and the sixth centuries, have mostly lived in the northern parts of the Carpathian Basin (on or above the Middle Danube).

Substantially different opinions concerning the origin of the Slovaks were presented at the beginning of this century by the Hungarian historian J. Karácsonyi and towards the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century by the Czech historian Václav Chaloupecký. Although their opinions have only been accepted by a small part of historians, they still survive, often only latently, and this is why we have to get acquainted with them. At first, in his study on the probable borders of the Kingdom of Hungary under Stephen I (1001-1038), Karácsonyi (1901) thought that only a small part of Slovakia was populated, predominantly south-western Slovakia and the most southern parts of central and eastern Slovakia. On these grounds he then, twenty years later (1921), published a work, written allegedly during World War I, entitled "Our historical right to the territorial integrity of our country" and he argued that the ancestors of the modern Slovaks are not identical with the original Slavonic inhabitants of this territory in the ninth century since they were allegedly integrated into the Hungarian nation. The modern Slovaks are allegedly descendants of the White Croats who moved from the upper Morava and upper Odra rivers gradually by the twelfth century to the Kingdom of Hungary and only thus succeeded in preserving themselves as an independent ethnic group.

The Czech historian Václav Chaloupecký also based his ideas on research into the development of settlement. In his work "Old Slovakia" (1923) he also admitted the population of only (approximately) south-western Slovakia and the most southern parts of central Slovakia before the thirteenth century; the rest of the Slovak territory was according to him a primeval forest until the thirteenth century and an intentionally unpopulated frontier region of the Kingdom of Hungary. He argued that the Slovak people was not created from one Slavonic tribe but represented a real Slavonic microcosm. As for the language, its core was (allegedly) Czech. He emphasized his opinions in his work the "Walachians in Slovakia" (1947), also considering the Walachian population, especially in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, to be significant co-agents in the ethnogenesis of the Slovaks.

Regardless of the fact that modern historical and archaeological exploration in the last decades showed the opinions of both Karácsonyi and Chaloupecký about the lack of population of the greater part of Slovakia before the thirteenth century to be wrong, their views can be said to be both identical and controversial in many directions. They almost agree in characterizing the extent of the oldest settlement; however, in the ethnogenesis of the Slovaks there is a principal controversy. J. Karácsonyi has completely eliminated the possibility of the continuity of Slavonic population in Slovakia

before the twelfth and after the eleventh centuries (when, according to his visions, there were probably no original Slavs in what is today the territory of Slovakia). V. Chaloupecký has no doubts about the fact that after the eleventh century the Slavonic inhabitants of south-western Slovakia (from the Morava river up to the region around the river Hron) were descendants of those Slavs who had lived there in the ninth and the tenth centuries. Their opinions can be considered in a way identical because they both wanted to put forward arguments that would lead to a political solution to the Slovak question or, better to say, the integrity and legitimacy of the Kingdom of Hungary and Czechoslovakia in the period of writing their works. None of them concealed their intentions, they even underlined it.

By arguing that the Slovaks are later immigrants to the already existing Hungarian state, J. Karácsonyi wanted to prove that the separation of the territory of Slovakia from the historic Kingdom of Hungary was unjustified. On the other hand, V. Chaloupecký tried to prove that original old Slovakia was small, mostly unpopulated, and its original inhabitants were really of Czech origin, who also later created, in spite of their state and legal affiliation, a linguistic, geographical, and cultural unity with Bohemia and Moravia. These circumstances should have been, according to him, understood as a basis and historical justification or apology for (the newly formed) Czechoslovakia and as the primary characteristic of Slovak history; he thus tried to justify historically the formation of Czechoslovakia and also the theory of one united "Czechoslovak nation". If J. Karácsonyi through his thesis about the lack of population of central and eastern Slovakia and the annihilation or complete assimilation of the original Slavic inhabitants throughout the Slovak territory tried to prove primary contribution of the Magyars and the Hungarian (or rather Magyar) state to populating these areas, V. Chaloupecký, with his good command of Slavonic languages and dialects, also had to defend the thesis of the lack of population of central and eastern Slovakia because he knew that the dialects spoken in central Slovakia could hardly be considered Czech and their bearers (from an ethnic point of view) could not be Czechs.

Both these scholars politically updated the account of the ethnogenesis of the Slovaks in order to prove the historical justification of the existing situation or the unjustness of this situation from the historical perspective. From the historical point of view it is a complete fiction to speak of a Czechoslovak nation since for instance the Annals of Fulda evidently show that towards the end of the ninth century the Czechs regarded themselves as a completely different ethnic group from their eastern neighbours the Moravians and the ancestors of the Slovaks – Slovaks lived still further to the east of the Moravians. Denial of the continuity of the Slavs living in the territory of what is today Slovakia before the eleventh century and those who have been living there since the eleventh century is also incorrect. In particular the oldest local names in a written form can serve as evidence. On the basis of the known development of the (Slovak) language these names can serve for determining the time of their formation (before the thirteenth century; in the tenth century or

before the tenth century). Therefore it should be adequate to deal with the ethnogenesis of Slovaks in more detail.

Ethnogenesis is here understood as the gradual formation of an independent supratribal community – nation (differentiated from others). The creation of common awareness is considered to be the basis of this process predominantly and most frequently. All supratribal communities as well as still existing nations were created gradually from indigenous family and tribal communities which were usually ethnically related and lived in geographical proximity. In many cases the supra-tribal (state) organization contributed to the creation of a nation. In other cases, it might have been the awareness of the jointly comprehensible common language of people who lived within a common state organization. In the latter case the creation of a nation (common awareness) was certainly a longer process. By and large, all greater ethnic communities were formed through gradual-voluntary or sometimes also rapid-violent union of smaller ethnic communities and during the centuries of their existence all nations mostly naturally assimilated smaller ethnic groups of immigrants as well as the enclaves of other ethnic groups existing within their territory.

In the opinions of old historians, which were still partly accepted in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Carpatho-Danubian Basin was the old country of origin of the Slavs. From the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries onwards, the opinions that the old country of the Slavs was north of the Carpathian Mountains, between (Oder), Vistula and Dnieper started to prevail. The ongoing archaeological research confirmed these views. The Slavs came to the Carpatho-Danubian Basin after the fall of the realm of the Huns gradually towards the end of the fifth and in the sixth centuries. In its eastern part they met the remnants of the Germanic Gepids. On their movement southward a part of the Langobards settled temporarily in the third quarter of the sixth century in the territory of what is today south-western Slovakia. In the second half of the sixth century the Avars penetrated into the Carpatho-Danubian Basin, gradually occupying its central part and conquering the Slavs living there. On the basis of the analysis of the old local names, the linguists assume that a little later the demarcation line between the western and southern Slavs was approximately in the southern corner of Lake Balaton and continued approximately eastward. The situation changed at the turn of the ninth and tenth centuries when the old Magyars came at first to the eastern and after several years also to the central and western parts of the Carpatho-Danubian Basin and settled there for ever.

There is no direct documentation about the Slavonic tribes and their names or their political organization from the sixth and seventh centuries. It is not very probable that the centre of the so-called Samo's realm (623-658) was in the territory of what is today Slovakia. No concrete records were preserved from the period of the following 150 years; and there are no historical supports for direct connection of the ethnogenesis of the Slovaks with the so-called Samo's realm. The oldest Slavonic ruler in the Slovak territory known by name, Pribina, has already been mentioned in the introduction. It can hardly be unambiguously decided whether Pribina

was prince of a greater tribe or of two or three smaller joined tribes whose settlements might have been along the rivers Váh, Nitra, part of the middle Hron or also in Turiec and Pribina ruled over that (by then probably territorially increasing) formation as early as in the second or the third generation. As has already been said, Pribina's principality had an independent position even after joining Great Moravia. This is corroborated by the fact that when Great Moravia became an independent church province in 880, the first suffragan bishopric of Moravian archbishop was created in Nitra; this indicates that this territory was regarded as a distinctive unit almost 50 years after its occupation.

If, from a scientific perspective, a particular community can be assigned sovereignty only when its members are aware of the antithesis of "us–them", then certainly the people living in Pribina's principality fulfilled this presupposition: they definitely were aware of their difference from the Moravian Slavs (Moravians) whose ruler subdued them. Further development within the Great Moravian state, dualistic from the political point of view, did not lead to the loss of this developed and existing specific consciousness. It is probable that as early as in the third quarter of the ninth century, the territory in the east up to Spiš and Gemer, where Slavs closely related to the Nitra Slavs lived, was attached to the Nitra demesne administered by Duke Svätopluk. All in all, the awareness of belongingness of the inhabitants already existing in Pribina's former principality in the first third of the ninth century can be taken as the original basis of the common (gradually built together) consciousness of the Slovak ancestors. But the presupposed existence of this common consciousness of inhabitants as early as in the first third of the ninth century is only justifiable in the geographically western part of Slovakia. The original political and territorial integration process lasted one to two centuries and in some stages there also operated oppression of the stronger.

If Pribina's Nitra principality was no more than a tribal political formation (which is less probable), then it was a tribal territory, where the majority of the population was also interconnected through blood relations and Pribina was a tribal ruler (Prince). Also in this case the population of the Nitra tribal territory (tribal principality) should be taken as the original core or the basis of the contemporary Slovak ethnic group. The presupposition or an opinion that in the period of the existence of the tribal order the territory to both east and west of the Little and White Carpathians might have been the area belonging to only one tribe has to be resolutely refused. By contrast, it is probable that there were originally at least one or two small tribes (tribal territories) and one larger tribe (as both territory and the number of inhabitants are concerned), who became in the first phase of supratribal integration hegemony of the particular territories (Moravians, Nitra Slovâns) on both sides, eastwards and westwards of the above mentioned geographic boundary, as conditioned by the geographic division of the area. Affiliation of the most northerly parts of present-day Moravia and of north-western Slovakia (northward of Púchov) to the Moravian and Nitra principalities is problematic since these areas

probably preserved the settlement of the so-called White Croats (whose main seats were probably in present-day Silesia and western Little Poland).

If the outlined idea is correct, we can in fact speak about common consciousness of (the larger part of) the ancestors of the Slovaks (about “a united Slovak” people/nation) in approximately the first third of the 9th century at the latest; of course, only on the territorially greater western part of present-day Slovakia. Its inhabitants called themselves Slov(i)ens (Sloväns). The more eastern part of the territory of what is now Slovakia, inhabited by the Slavs, very close relatives to the ancestors of the Slovaks who had, however, not yet lived in a higher stage of political organization, became part of the eastern (Nitra) demesne under the Moravian dynasty in the third quarter of the ninth century at the latest. We can hardly assume that this Slavonic population would have acquired a common consciousness with the inhabitants of Nitra principality during several decades (870–910); even the three quarters of a century of the coexistence of the inhabitants of the Nitra principality with the Moravians were not enough to create a common (Great) Moravian consciousness (and a so-called united people/nation).

The descendants of the Nitra Slovians and the Slavs living to the east of them lived, however, in the same state after the fall of Great Moravia, in the Kingdom of Hungary, with the hegemonic Magyars. For the Magyars, the Slavonic population living all over the northern part of the Kingdom of Hungary were united (equal) Slavs, whom they had found there on their arrival and called them “Tót” in their language. The Slavs of northern Hungary inhabited, of course, a larger territory than that of present-day Slovakia; the same Slavs had lived in the northern part of Transdanubia, where they were partly annihilated, partly relatively rapidly assimilated; they lived scattered (in sparsely settled areas) in the area of present-day Hungary, the southern part of Carpatho-Ukraine and present-day north-western Rumania. The process of domestic integration of these northern Hungarian Slavs, in terms of the acquisition of a common consciousness, continued intensively at least until the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries. If the Hungarians as their hegemons considered the Slavs to be united (equal) definitely from the tenth century, then this circumstance also contributed to their integration among themselves. It should be said that particular names were preserved for other Slavs (Russians/Rusyns, Czechs, Poles) in Latin sources from oldest times (Ruthenus, Bohemus, Polonus). The Slavs of Upper Hungary were called “Slavi-Sclavi”, which cannot be translated as “Slavs” in the general sense but it has to be taken and translated as a differentiating name (in contrast to Russians, Czechs, and Poles) for the inhabitants of the northern part of the Kingdom of Hungary who had not created their own ethnonym, for the Slovians – ancestors of the Slovaks, (later) Slovaks. The name “Tót” was also used by Magyars for those Slavs who lived in southern Hungary as early as at the time of their arrival and who had not created their own ethnonym either. With regard to the 300-400-km distance between the northern and the southern “Tóts”, they could hardly ever have been interchanged or identi-

fied in spite of the same name in Hungarian, even in the old Latin sources (Sclavus – Slavus).

The process of the creation of a common consciousness among all the Slavs living in the northern parts of the Kingdom of Hungary was launched in the tenth-eleventh centuries. It was completed approximately towards the end of the twelfth century at the latest. From that time on we can speak about Sloviens-Slovaks (“united” Slovak people) throughout the territory of what is today Slovakia and very probably also scattered (in smaller numbers) in the areas bordering the eastern part, partially also the southern and south-eastern parts. Although the Slovak people did not create any political organization at that time, its territorial ethnogenesis could be considered as completed in the twelfth century. The influence of the state formation where the northern Hungarian Slavs lived, namely the Kingdom of Hungary coacted there.

It should be emphasized that territorial completion of the ethnogenesis of the Slovaks during the twelfth century cannot be regarded as possibly delayed. The Slavs living in the neighbourhood of the Slovaks who had established their own state did not reach completion of their territorial ethnogenesis earlier. In the case of the Czechs, who definitely annexed Moravia as late as at the beginning of the eleventh century, the earliest period when we can speak about the completion of territorial ethnogenesis is the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, maybe even a little bit later. We know that the Moravian ethnic consciousness existed already in the first third of the ninth century and was relatively settled (strong). We also know from reliable sources that there had existed specific Czech ethnic consciousness, which, after Svätopluk’s death in 894, was perceived as independent; the Czechs complained twice by then (895, 897) that the Moravians had oppressed them and wanted to free themselves from their rule with the aid of their own allies – the Bavarians. In such a situation, it is not imaginable for any serious historian that Moravians could, immediately after their definite annexing to the Czech principality at the beginning of the eleventh century, have felt themselves to be Czechs. The Poles were in a similar situation, chronologically shifted maybe even a little later; this might be proved by a particular in-depth analysis.

It is certain that every process of ethnogenesis usually had a very old ethnic and territorial core expanding during favourable development, sometimes also (territorially) stagnating or being temporarily reduced, and (the so-called natural, non-violent course being assumed) absorbed less developed (not so strong) consciousnesses. This process was more rapid within organized state formations and it was slower without a supporting state organization. In the second vital phase of the ethnogenesis of the Slovaks which completed their territorial expansion, the Hungarian state with the hegemonic Magyars, played an important role. Although the Magyars negatively intervened in the life of the Nitra Sloviens – old Slovaks because they annihilated part of them, some were expelled from their settlements and part of them assimilated, they later helped the Slovaks to complete their creation within the extent of their present territory.

Ultimately, a seemingly complicated question has to be replied what was the ethnonym or original name of the (old) Slovaks. The oldest documents confirming the name “Slovak” are from the fifteenth century. The oldest written records on the history of Slovakia and Slovaks date back to the ninth through thirteenth centuries and are exclusively in Latin. Even in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries “Slovák” used to be translated into Latin as Slavus (as evidenced in preserved Slovak texts). It had not definitely been translated in any other way even before the fifteenth century, the time when first documents of the name Slovák appeared. The Nitra Slavs called themselves Sloviens (Slovāns, Slovens). The name of the Slavs who lived in (present-day) eastern Slovakia sounded the same or similar. Outside the Kingdom of Hungary, a Slav from northern Hungary probably labelled himself (but was labelled also by others) as a Hungarus according to the country he came from.

The proof of the assumed ethnonym of the old Slovaks (Slovak ancestors) Slovien (Slovān, Sloven) is the contemporary name of the female member of the Slovak nation ‘Slovenka’, the language spoken by (contemporary) Slovaks ‘slovenský’ and the territory where they live ‘Slovensko’. If the mentioned forms should be derived from the present names of the male member of the Slovak nation “Slovák”, the female in Slovak should be “Slováčka” (not Slovenka), “slovácky” (not slovenský) language, “slováčtina” (not slovenčina) and “Slovácko” (not Slovensko). All these forms in the contemporary Slovak language are derived from the name Slovien (Slovān, Sloven) which has to be taken as original.

The name Slovák was formed from Slovien-Slovān-Sloven, similarly as “Polak” from “Polan” (in Polish). In the Polish language, however, the female member of the Polish nation derived from “Polak” is “Polka”, the language is “polski” and the country “Polska”. There is a probability of the development of the form “Slovák” for a male member of the Slovak nation in a non-Slovak milieu (in Moravia, Little Poland, Bohemia) and started to be used secondarily in Slovakia. In all foreign languages (Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, Hungarian, German, Italian, French, English, etc.) the names of the female member of the Slovak nation, the Slovak language and the Slovak territory are, in contrast to Slovak, derived from the name Slovák (e.g. in German: Slowakin, slowakische Sprache, Slowakei).

In the ethnogenesis of nations (peoples/ethnic groups) two phases have to be differentiated: the first, in which nation (people/ethnic group) was created as a separate unit and the second, during which, under favourable conditions, the nation thus created expands territorially and accepts related or neighbouring ethnic group(s) which had not yet been directly included into a particular nation (with a higher degree of the awareness of belonging) or had long been isolated in the territory of their settlement. By creating nations, political (state) organization plays an undeniably important role. It is, however, sometimes forgotten that even the organization of a multinational state whose bearer is a genuine secluded nation (not similar to neighbouring nations) like the Hungarians undoubtedly were among the surrounding Slavs, can influence inte-

gratingly another nation co-existing with them in a state organization and thus encourage completion of its creation and territorial expansion.

There is no claim to any general validity of what I have said here. The process of ethnogenesis depends on particular gifts and starting points, and general as well as specific conditions. The process of ethnogenesis described can be valid for the ethnogenesis of western and southern Slavs, the ethnogenesis of the Slovaks described can serve as a concrete example. Attention devoted to the fact that the level of social development and the structure of society influence the level of national consciousness is sometimes not sufficient. National consciousness 1000 years ago cannot be assessed according to modern criteria since at that time (and even much later) their contents and extent were of different quality and quantity and could have been influenced or weakened by the social position of its bearer.

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