

# Preface

## The Origin of the Slovak People

If we review the historic events of the Carpathian Basin from the time of the Hungarian settlement to the present, we observe that for most of those centuries people in this region lived in complete social and economic harmony with the Hungarians. On closer scrutiny we find that for a period of eight centuries there is no mention of the Slovak people in any historical accounts. Not even an exploration of legends and chronicles reveals any hint of their existence.

Before the Hungarian settlement of the region, the northern areas of the Carpathian basin played host to a succession of Celtic, Kvad, Avar, Frank, and Moravian-Slav peoples. The Kvads, at the end of the second century, were destroyed by the armies of Marcus Aurelius (121-180) Roman Emperor who invaded the territory as far as present day Trencsén [1]. In the fifth century the Huns replaced the Romans. After the collapse of the Hun Empire, Avars arrived at the western slopes of the Carpathian mountains in several waves. The Avars in the eight century were conquered by the Franks. Then, in the ninth century, the Moravian Slavs established themselves as an 'Empire'. It was at this time that the Slavs entered the pages of history.

It was Prince Mojmir (830?-846), who expelled the Nyitra area Moravian ruler, Pribina, and set himself up as Mojmir I. While Mojmir was forging his new Moravian Empire, Pribina received refuge from the Franks and was appointed 'Comes' (Fortress Commander). But by the time the Hungarians appeared in the Carpathian Basin, the Moravian Empire was quickly disintegrating. The Czechs had disassociated themselves from the Moravians and succumbed to the Franks. The Moravians were then displaced by the Magyar tribes. Now squeezed beyond the boundaries of the Carpathians, the Moravians made one more attempt to regain some territory. They broke into Hungary, but in the Battle of Bánhida (907) the Hungarian forces destroyed their armies and shattered their empire. The 'Great

Moravian Empire', which had existed merely sixty-years, was extinguished.

Nestor (965-1116), a Kiev Monk, in his chronicle referred to the inhabitants of the Moravian Empire as 'Slavs'. Cosmas (1039-1125) a Czech writer does not even mention Slovaks in his work dealing with Slav nations. Similarly, the XV century 'Pozsonyi Jegyzék' refers to the inhabitants of the surrounding border areas as Slavs only. There is no mention of Slovaks. However, it often refers to the people of the region as Tót, Vend, Hungari-Slavoni, Slaven, Wenden, etc... The word "Slovak"[2], in reference to the present-day Slovaks, was first coined by Antal Bernolák[3].

The Slovak ethnic identity appears to have emerged out of groups of people already settled in the northern regions of the Carpathian basin and from those slavic peoples who migrated there for centuries after the Hungarian conquest. Following the Battle of Bánhida, the Árpáds, the X Century ruling house of Hungary, settled tribes of 'Kuns', 'Besenyős', and 'Székelys' along the frontier regions as border guards, and built stone fortresses to secure their territory. The relics of some of the fortresses can still be seen today.

In the XII century, Hungarian kings settled considerable numbers of Germans in the counties of Nyitra, Turóc, Trencsén, Liptó, and Szepesség. These were augmented by Bavarians, Saxons, Flamands, and Schwabs who cleared forests, mined, and later became active in industry and commerce. In the XIII century Polish, Czech, and Minor-Russian settlers arrived, followed by the infiltration in the XVI century of Vlach shepherds of South-slavic origin to the grassy slopes of the Carpathian mountains.

The first large-scale ethnic melange took place in the days of the Turkish invasion in the XV century. At this time thousands of Hungarians took refuge in the Northern regions. The history of the Northern regions reflects the lives of these peoples for a period of ten hundred years. The fate of the Hungarian, Slavic, and others who had settled there was shaped within the same framework, but the initial process of becoming a nation in the case of the Slovaks did not take

place until the XVII century. It began during the era of language struggles, as the Slovak language was not uniform. During this linguistic turmoil, it was mainly the intelligentsia who assumed the leading role of the ever-strengthening Slovak cultural and national movement.

Samuel Czambel [4], the greatest Slovak linguist, considered the Slovak language not Northern but of South-Slavic origin. By the end of the XIII century a significant number of Hungarians and Germans became Slavs as a result of intermarriages. Their numbers swelled to over 200,000.

Upper-Hungary witnessed the development of three distinct Slovak linguistic and spiritual regions in its territory. The purest of these were the 'Middle-Slovak', whose area extended from the Vág river to the Csórba watershed. The educated evangelical elements of this group became the most faithful proponents of the Czech cultural and linguistic influence. In contrast, the people who were not affected by this cultural and linguistic influence, later became instrumental in creating a Slovak national autonomy.

The Slovaks, whose territory extended from the chains of the White Carpathians to the line of the Vág river, were adversely influenced by the Czech. As a result of the Czech assimilation techniques, this area became a breeding ground for the strongest anti-Czech movements. The unbreakable spirit of the Slovak priests, educated at the University of Nagyszombat, pitted them against not only the Czech, but the evangelical Slovaks as well.

The 'Eastern-Slovak', in the linguistic sense, strongly differed from the literal Slovak language. These Slovaks call themselves "Slovjaks". The Eastern-Slovaks whose area extended from the Csórba watershed to the less defined boundaries of the Ruthenian ethnographic region. These Eastern-Slovaks, who inhabited the regions around the towns of Kassa (Košice) and Eperjes (Prešov) and settled in the counties of Abaúj and Sáros (Šariš), always share strong cultural, social and friendship ties with their Hungarian neighbours [5].

The modern slovak cultures, in search of their cultural and national heredity, pursued a three pronged historical theory. These theories, developed from Slavic, Czech and Slovak perspectives, often contradicted each other.

According to the general Slav theory, the infiltration of Slovaks in the southernly direction had preceded the separation of the other Slavic tribes. Accordingly, it proposes that the slovaks did not settle at their first stop, in the vicinity of Dévény, Modor, Nyitra, but proceeded southward inundated the southern part of Moravia as well as the Ens and Lajta rivers areas in the south. There is no historical or archeological evidence of such a large scale invasion having taken place.

The Czechs theory denies that the Slovaks, together with the Czechs, crossed over the Visztula and Ode rivers, the threshold of their ancient Slavic land, in racial, linguistic and social unity. According to Czech theory, the Slovak split from the Czech linguistic mainstream occurred while both groups were still in their Central European homeland and this transition took many centuries. The Czech linguistic claim is that the Slovak language is but a dialect of the Czech. Their theory presupposes that the Slovaks are Slavic-Czechs or perhaps Slavic-Hungarians! Their theory also states that the separation of the Slovaks from the Czech mainstream was caused by the appearance of the Hungarians along the valley of the Danube. The author of the modern Czech theory, Frantisek Palacky, regards this as the singular event which prevented the unification of the Northern and Southern Slavs and the establishment of a great Central European Slavic Empire.

The Slovak people accept only part of the Slav theory. According to their version the Slovaks separated early from the other Slavic groups in their ancient land and arrived to the area of the Mátra and Tatra mountains in the early part of the first century as a separate tribe. Historical accounts place the Czechs and Slavs in the Bohemian, Moravian and Serbian area no earlier than the VII century.

The Slovaks consider themselves the inheritors of the Great Moravian Empire. For example, the Slovak author Skulteti pictured

the Danube as the southern border of the Slovak lands, extending from lower Austria through Dévény, Komárom and Esztergom. This border then extended further through the foothills of Mátra and Bükk all the way to Miskolc, then turned east along the Tisza and Bodrog rivers enclosing the Slovak areas towards the Polish border. From such geographic license, it is only a small step to the Safarik or Stur theory, or the most recently stumbled-upon "Pannonia theory", which elevate the Slovak tribe as the successor of the ancient establishment of all the Slavs.

"Slovak was the Lord along both shores of the Danube where it enters Austrian land", wrote a slovak poet, "all the way to the Black Sea, and from the Tatra mountains to Szaloniki!" However, this view is not corroborated by the emperor and great historian, Constantine, or any chronicler of the era. The Hungarian concept, substantially differs from these three theories by stating that the "Slovak" ethnicity developed only after the Magyar settlement of the Carpathian region and as a result of the amalgamation of various homogeneous peoples. Later, other cultural elements settled on this core, notably the Czech, Polish, minor-Russian and the Vlach. [6]