



The history and archaeology of Great Moravia: an introduction

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Historical geography is not in fashion any more. With an increased awareness of, and consequently caution about, the constructed character of maps and borders – both old and modern – historians of the early Middle Ages have become immune to the kind of debates that were still very popular in their discipline fifty years or so ago. The precise location of this or that battle or the boundaries of this or that polity are of course always subjects of some interest, but there seems to be a general, albeit tacit, agreement about the secondary importance of such topics to the general understanding of the broad historical process. This is not the case, however, for one of the most controversial issues of the ninth-century history of east central Europe, the location of a polity known as Great Moravia. In a region of the continent with a quite recent history of shifting political frontiers, the issue of where exactly did Rostislav rule when receiving the mission of Sts Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius may be understandably viewed as a matter of nationalist concern. However, as recent studies have shown, the political geography of east central Europe in the ninth century is also a matter of considerable concern for the understanding of Carolingian politics, in terms of both military campaigns and core–periphery relations. Few are the scholars whose work made that association more obvious than Imre Boba.

Boba's *Moravia's History Reconsidered*, published in 1971, was well conceived and thoroughly researched. It brought to bear several languages and many categories of evidence, from archaeology and linguistics to philology. And it sparkled with clarity and insight. The main idea was that what scholars long considered 'to be a nation-state called Moravia, inhabited by Moravians, was in fact a patrimonial principality around a city named Marava', which can be 'easily identified with the Sirmium of antiquity'.¹ Still, the strenuous criticism the 'Boba thesis' attracted from

¹ Imre Boba, *Moravia's History Reconsidered: A Reinterpretation of Medieval Sources* (The Hague, 1971), p. 2.

many corners, and the accumulation of over thirty years of subsequent scholarship, call into question its continuing viability.

The book was informed by Boba's firm belief that the 'spiritual and material culture of the people of the ninth century in the northern Morava valley, as expressed in burial rites and the typology of sacral edifices, has been interpreted, not on the basis of comparable and well-identified archaeological material from neighboring regions, but with reference to the Cyrillo-Methodian mission and the information known from the written sources on Moravian history'.² The book thus addressed with some delay the issue at the centre of the 1100th anniversary, in 1963, of Cyril and Methodius's mission.³ Pope Paul VI's homily at the closing of the eleventh centenary of the mission referred to an almost abstract 'Magna Moravia', as the land somewhere in the 'East' in which Sts Cyril and Methodius preached the Gospel to the Slavs.⁴ By contrast, to the Communist regime in Prague the eleventh centenary was a good opportunity to shift the emphasis from church to state.⁵ The exhibit on Great Moravia touring Europe in 1963 had a purely propagandistic purpose, namely to attest the continuity from Great Moravia to modern Czechoslovakia. Great Moravia covered a territory stretching into Moravia *and* Slovakia; as a consequence, it could be celebrated as the archetype of the common state of both Czechs and Slovaks.⁶ In the early 1960s, Communist Czechoslovakia experienced a continuous decline in economic performance and the regime badly needed a good idea to divert attention from the serious crisis and create a new focus of political loyalty. In 1963, the ultra-Stalinist Prime Minister (Viliam Široký) was replaced by a

² Boba, *Moravia's History*, p. 140.

³ Boba's book came out at the lowest ebb of scholarly interest in Great Moravia and things Moravian. See Stefan Albrecht, *Geschichte der Großmährenforschung in der Tschechischen Ländern und in der Slowakei* (Prague, 2003), p. 268.

⁴ Besides Pope Paul VI's homily, the celebration of the 1100th anniversary of Cyril and Methodius's mission resulted in the creation of a Cyrillo-Methodian Institute in Rome, which greatly benefited from the financial support of the Slovak Catholic Federation of America. To some Slovak-Americans, the Institute's goal was primarily to train priests expected to continue the work of the 'apostles of the *Slovaks*' (emphasis added). See M. Piroch, 'American Slovaks and SS. Cyril and Methodius', *Slovakia* 13 (1963), pp. 25–8, at p. 28; Albrecht, *Geschichte der Großmährenforschung*, p. 265.

⁵ That the exhibit had specifically anti-church goals results from the minutes of the 18 January 1962 meeting of the subcommittee in charge of advertising the exhibit, in which two historians, Dušan Třeštík and Zdeněk Smetánka, were given the task of shifting the emphasis from religious (the conversion to Christianity) to secular, 'cultural' issues (the influence of the Byzantine culture). See Albrecht, *Geschichte der Großmährenforschung*, p. 201.

⁶ A point correctly understood by Martin Eggers, *Das 'Großmährische Reich': Realität oder Fiktion? Eine Neuinterpretation der Quellen zur Geschichte des mittleren Donauraumes im 9. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1995), pp. 20–1; see also Albrecht, *Geschichte der Großmährenforschung*, p. 289. For the Great Moravia exhibit, see Jan Filip (ed.), *The Great Moravia Exhibition: 1100 Years of Tradition of State and Cultural Life* (Prague, 1964). Most typical of this kind of 'jubilee' research is Jaroslav Böhm's *Velká Morava: tisíciletá tradice státu a kultury* (Prague, 1963), which was also published in English, French, German and Russian translations.

younger, more liberal Jozef Lenárt of Slovak origin. Lenárt inaugurated a programme of economic reforms. At the same time and with the tacit approval from Antonín Novotný, the Party secretary, he capitalized on the unique opportunity to organize a secular celebration of the 1100th anniversary of the Cyrillo-Methodian mission, which was supposed to demonstrate the positive impact of the Great Moravian tradition on the more recent history of unity between Czechs and Slovaks.⁷ Ever since his years of service for Radio Free Europe in Munich (1952–9), Boba had remained an informed observer of the political developments on the other side of the Iron Curtain. He must have correctly assessed both the changes taking place in Prague and the political meaning of the ‘jubilee’ research done in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s. A freshly minted Ph.D. in 1963, Boba decided to respond to that kind of research with a careful examination of an impressive collection of sources – Western, Byzantine and Slavic – which he analysed to produce well-buttressed conclusions capable of convincing ‘even the most skeptical scholars’.⁸

While admitting that Boba’s thesis may require a thorough-going revision of the early medieval history of east central and central Europe, most historians of the Carolingian age are loath to engage it in any serious way. Some still concur with Archibald Lewis’s assessment that it provides ‘a pattern of development more logical and sensible than that provided by the more traditional views’.⁹ Others believe, with some reason, that they can detect in Boba’s thesis ‘a political aim’, namely ‘to deny the historical validity of Slovak territory’.¹⁰ In spite of all appearances, such contrasting

⁷ Antonín Novotný was among the first party officials to visit the 1963 jubilee exhibit in Brno (Albrecht, *Geschichte der Großmährenforschung*, p. 203). A similar recipe for a secular counter-celebration was in use at the same time in neighbouring Poland, in preparation for the anniversary of the Millennium of Poland’s conversion to Christianity (1966). See Zbigniew Kobyliński and Grażyna Rutkowska, ‘Propagandist Use of History and Archaeology in Justification of Polish Rights to the “Recovered Territories” after World War II’, *Archaeologia Polona* 43 (2005), pp. 51–124, at pp. 58–9.

⁸ Archibald Lewis, Review of *Moravia’s History Reconsidered*, by Imre Boba, *Speculum* 48.1 (1973), pp. 112–13, at p. 113. Imre Boba earned his doctoral degree from the University of Washington in 1962, with a dissertation on the role of the nomads in the history of Kievan Rus’, later published as *Nomads, Northmen and Slavs: Eastern Europe in the Ninth Century* (The Hague and Wiesbaden, 1967). Boba was already working at that time on his later famous thesis about Moravia, as demonstrated by his article, ‘The Episcopacy of Methodius’, published in *Slavic Review* 26.1 (1967), pp. 85–93, in which he claimed that Methodius’s diocese was south, not north of the Danube. Even without following developments overseas, Boba could have hardly missed the ‘grand jubilee’ of 1963, which was celebrated in many cities of the United States with the support of the Slovak Catholic Federation of America as the anniversary of the advent of Sts Cyril and Methodius ‘in the land of the ancient Slovaks, Great Moravia’. See Albrecht, *Geschichte der Großmährenforschung*, p. 265 with n. 957.

⁹ Lewis, Review, p. 113. Most prominent among Boba’s advocates remain Charles Bowlus and Martin Eggers.

¹⁰ Vincent Sedlák, ‘The Ancient Slovak Settlement Area and its Management until the End of the Middle Ages’, in Pavol Števec (ed.), *Slovaks and Magyars: Slovak–Magyar Relations in Central Europe* (Bratislava, 1995), pp. 11–40, at p. 22. For an interesting interpretation of the vehement

views may not be based exclusively on political choices. The traditional interpretation (Moravia north of the Danube River) was mainly based on the extraordinarily rich evidence produced by various archaeological sites in the present-day Czech Moravia and in Slovakia, the excavation of which had begun shortly before and after World War II, but had been spurred by the celebration of the eleventh centenary of the Cyrillo-Methodian mission. By contrast, the arguments of Imre Boba were exclusively based on written sources and his understanding of archaeology was at best primitive (even by the standards of the 1960s) and at worst, dismissive. By 1970, archaeological excavations in Czechoslovakia had produced an impressive amount of evidence in the form of hillforts and large cemeteries showing a clear wealth differentiation and status markers.¹¹ Boba dismissed all that on grounds that ‘the civilization presented by the archaeological complex of Pohansko, Mikulčice, etc. has no roots in the preceding culture of the region and appeared in the area from the outside only during the ninth century’.¹² Since archaeological excavations focused mainly on hillforts, Boba viewed the relative lack of open settlements as an indication of a ‘territorially limited foreign military occupation’.¹³ He correctly noted the chronological relation between large Late Avar cemeteries in south-western Slovakia (e.g., Devínska Nová Ves)

reaction to the Boba thesis in Slovakia as an ‘injunction to remember’, see Gil Eyal, ‘Identity and Trauma: Two Forms of the Will to Memory’, *History and Memory* 16.1 (2004), pp. 5–36, at p. 18. Boba later supported the idea of an early Hungarian settlement in the Carpathian Basin (much earlier than that of the Slavs in Great Moravia). He linked Gyula László’s idea of a ‘twofold conquest’ to the *secundus ingressus* mentioned in medieval sources and drew the conclusion that some of the ancestors of present-day Hungarians had been in the Carpathian Basin since 680. See Imre Boba, ‘A Twofold Conquest of Hungary or *secundus ingressus*’, *Ungarn-Jahrbuch* 12 (1982–3), pp. 23–41, at p. 23. For similar conclusions pertaining to the history of Transylvania, see his ‘Transylvania and Hungary: From the Times of Álmos and Árpád to the Times of King Stephen’, in Kálmán Benda, Thomas von Bogay, Horst Glassl and Zsolt K. Lengyel (eds), *Forschungen über Siebenbürgen und seine Nachbarn. Festschrift für Attila T. Szabó und Zsigmond Jakó* (Munich, 1987), pp. 17–32.

¹¹ For a general survey, see Josef Poulík, ‘The Latest Archaeological Discoveries from the Period of the Great Moravian Empire’, *Historica* 1 (1959), pp. 7–70. For hillforts, see Josef Poulík, *Velkomoravské hradiště Mikulčice. Průvodce po archeologických výzkumech* (Gottwaldov, 1959); František Kalousek, ‘Die großmährische Burgwallstadt Břeclav-Pohansko’, *Sborník prací filozofické Fakulty Brněnské Univerzity. Rada archeologicko-klasická* 9 (1960), pp. 5–22; L’udmila Kraskovská, ‘Vel’komoravské hradiško v Jure pri Bratislave (výskumy na hradišku)’, *Sborník Slovenského Národného Múzea* 57 (1963), pp. 67–103; Boris Novotný, ‘Výzkum Velkomoravského hradiště “Pohansko” u Nejdku na Lednickém ostrove’, *Památky Archeologické* 54.1 (1963), pp. 3–40; Vilém Hrubý, *Staré Město. Velkomoravský Velehrad* (Prague, 1965). For cemeteries, see Vilém Hrubý, *Staré Město. Velkomoravské pohřebiště “Na Valách”* (Prague, 1955); Bořivoj Dostál, ‘Drevneslavianskii mogil’nik v Moravskom Zhizhkovce (r. Breclav)’, *Sborník prací filozofické Fakulty Brněnské Univerzity. Rada archeologicko-klasická* 5 (1956), pp. 91–106; Darina Bíaleková, ‘Vel’komoravský hrob z Horných Motesic’, *Študiijné zvesti* 6 (1961), pp. 284–5; Bořivoj Dostál, *Slovenská pohřebiště ze střední doby hradištní na Moravě* (Prague, 1966).

¹² Boba, *Moravia’s History*, p. 140.

¹³ Boba, *Moravia’s History*, p. 141.

and the earliest hillforts in the region, but concluded that 'the archaeological complex in the northern Morava River valley was only a ninth-century extension of the main body of Pannonian Avar civilization'.¹⁴ Such ideas were at variance with the chronology of the Avar age well-established by 1970 on the basis of Ilona Kovrig's masterful analysis of the Alattyán cemetery, as well as with the opinions of those Czechoslovak and Hungarian archaeologists who had long noticed the striking similarities between Late Avar and early Moravian assemblages.¹⁵ Moreover, the pre-Moravian phases of occupation at Mikulčice and on other hillfort sites in Moravia and Slovakia had already been revealed and published by 1970.¹⁶

It is perhaps worth mentioning in this context that Boba made no reference to any comparable evidence south of the Danube, in the region of Sirmium. None of the Avar-age cemeteries excavated by Yugoslav archaeologists between 1945 and 1970 north of the Lower Sava River and its confluence with the Danube, continued into the ninth century and no Carolingian swords or any other kind of artefacts associated with high status have been found in that region.¹⁷ Until quite recently, very little was known about the archaeology of the region along the Morava River in

¹⁴ Boba, *Moravia's History*, p. 141. While Boba used 'Avar' in a strictly ethnic sense, 'Late Avar' as used here is an archaeological *terminus technicus* referring to the chronology of the Avar age (c.580 to c.820) as established by Ilona Kovrig in her path-breaking analysis of the Alattyán cemetery (see below, n. 15). Similarly, although 'Moravian' is frequently used in an ethnic sense, the use of the term in this and the other papers of this collection is mainly geographic (i.e., in reference to the eastern region of the present-day Czech Republic known as Moravia) or chronological. For example, a hillfort is 'Moravian' because it is located in Moravia; it may be dated with some degree of certainty to the age of Great Moravia (ninth century); or both.

¹⁵ Josef Poulík, 'Kultura moravských Slovanů a Avari', *Slavia Antiqua* 1 (1948), pp. 325–48; Béla Miklós Szoke, 'Über die Beziehungen Moraviens zu dem Donaugebiet in der Spätawarenzeit', *Studia Slavica* 6 (1960), pp. 99–100; Jan Eisner, 'Avary i Velikaia Moravia', in Kráštiiu Miiatev and V. Mikov (eds), *Izsleduvaniia v pamet na Karel Shkorpil* (Sofia, 1961), pp. 87–93. For Devínska Nová Ves, see Jan Eisner, *Devínska Nová Ves. Slovanské pohřebišťe* (Bratislava, 1952). For the chronological system of the Avar age, see Ilona Kovrig, *Das awarenzeitliche Gräberfeld von Alattyán* (Budapest, 1963).

¹⁶ Anton Točák, 'Die vorgrossmährische Periode in der Slowakei', in František Graus, Jan Filip and Antonín Dostál (eds), *Das grossmährische Reich. Tagung der wissenschaftlichen Konferenz des Archäologischen Instituts der Tschechoslowakischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Brno-Nitra, 1.-4.X.1963* (Prague, 1966), pp. 53–7; Zdeněk Klanica, 'Vorgrossmährische Siedlung in Mikulčice und ihre Beziehungen zum Karpathenbecken', *Studijné zvesti* 16 (1968), pp. 121–34.

¹⁷ For Avar cemeteries in northern Serbia and eastern Croatia, see Zdenko Vinski, 'K izveštaju o iskapanju nekropole u Bijelom Brdu', *Historijski zbornik* 4 (1951), pp. 304–11; Pavle P. Wellenreiter, 'Slovenska nekropola iz VII–VIII veka u Bogojevu', *Rad Vojvodanskih Muzeja* 1 (1952), pp. 135–43; Olga Šafarik, 'Nalazi sa nove avarsko-slovenske nekropole u Malom Idjoshu', *Rad Vojvodanskih Muzeja* 4 (1955), pp. 63–70; Pavle P. Wellenreiter, 'Iskopavanja 1959 godine u Bogojevu', *Arheološki pregled* 1 (1959), pp. 162–3; Jovan Kovačević and Danica Dimitrijević, 'Brdašica, Vojka, Stara Pazova – nekropola', *Arheološki pregled* 3 (1961), pp. 116–20; Pavel P. Wellenreiter, 'Čonoplja, Sombor – avarska nekropola', *Arheološki pregled* 7 (1965), pp. 160–1; Otto Brukner, 'Čik, Bačko Petrovo Selo – nekropola iz doba seoba naroda', *Arheološki pregled* 10 (1968), pp. 170–3.

Serbia.¹⁸ Most conspicuously absent from the gazetteer of recent finds in that region are any ninth-century analogies for the many churches excavated on hillfort sites in the Czech Moravia and in Slovakia. The presence of churches at Staré Město, Sady, or Mikulčice, as well as clear signs of conversion to the form of Christianity favoured within the Byzantine empire (such as the pectoral cross with Greek inscription found in Sady) speaks strongly in support of the traditional idea of locating the early medieval Moravia north of the Danube on the territory of the present-day Czech Republic and of Slovakia. The literature on the churches found in Moravia and Slovakia was already abundant by the time Imre Boba published his *Moravia's History Reconsidered*.¹⁹ Despite clear evidence of a ninth-century date and attribution, he dismissed the argument by insisting that 'the churches excavated in Moravia could be dated to the eleventh or twelfth century'.²⁰

To be sure, Boba's book found virtually no echo among those archaeologists, to whose work and conclusions the author had given such a cavalier treatment.²¹ To this day, no archaeological refutation of Boba's arguments has been produced, despite the extraordinary explosion of 'Moravian' studies in both Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The impression one gets from some of the most recent literature on this subject published by archaeologists using historical sources, is that Boba's book

¹⁸ Vesna Manojlović-Nikolić, 'Lokaliteti IX–XIII veka u srednjem Pomoravlju', *Zbornik narodnog muzeja* 17.1 (2001), pp. 377–94.

¹⁹ Jaroslav Böhm, 'Deux églises datant de l'empire de Grande Moravie découvertes en Tchécoslovaquie', *Byzantinoslavica* 11 (1950), pp. 207–22; Josef Poulík, 'Nález kostela z doby říše Velkomoravské v trati "Špitálky" ve Starém Měste', *Památky Archeologické* 46.2 (1955), pp. 307–51; V. Hrubý, V. Hochmanová and J. Pavelčík, 'Kostel a pohřebiště z doby velkomoravské na Modré u Velehradu', *Časopis Moravského musea* 40 (1955), pp. 42–126; Josef Poulík, 'Some Early Christian Remains in Southern Moravia', *Antiquity* 38 (1958), pp. 163–6; Josef Cibulka, *Velkomoravský kostel v Modré u Velehradu. A začátky křesťanství na Moravě* (Prague, 1958); Josef Poulík, *Dvě velkomoravské rotundy v Mikulčicích* (Prague, 1963); Vladimír Vavřínek, 'Study of the Church Architecture from the Period of the Great Moravian Empire', *Byzantinoslavica* 25 (1964), pp. 288–301; Josef Pošmourný, 'Cirkevní architektura Velkomoravské říše', *Umení* 12 (1964), pp. 187–202; Václav Richter, 'Les "basiliques" grand-moraves', *Sborník prací filozofické fakulty Brněnské univerzity. Rada archeologicko-klasická* 14 (1965), pp. 209–29; Josef Pošmourný, 'Die bautechnische und architektonische Erkenntnisse in der grossmährischen sakralen Architektur', in Graus, Filip and Dostál (eds), *Das grossmährische Reich*, pp. 107–10; Josef Cibulka, 'Die Kirchenbauten des 9. Jahrhunderts in Großmähren', in *Grossmähren. Ein versunkenes Slavenreich im Lichte neuer Ausgrabungen. Ausstellung der Tschechoslowakischen Akademie der Wissenschaften im Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Schloss Charlottenburg Berlin (West), 22. Oktober 1967 bis 8. Januar 1968* (Berlin, 1967), pp. 43–54.

²⁰ Boba, *Moravia's History*, p. 142. The first church attributed to the ninth century was found by Vilém Hrubý in 1949 at Staré Město, but its dating remained for a long while problematic because of the lack of any clearly dated archaeological assemblages associated with the building. By contrast, the church excavated in Sady was dated by means of the grave-goods found in the eighty-seven burials surrounding the building, all of which go back to the second half of the ninth century.

²¹ See also the remarks of István Petrovics, 'Boba Imre (1919–1996) és a Nagymorávia-kérdés', in István Tóth and István Ferencz (eds), *Szlavisztikai Tanulmányok* (Szeged, 1998), pp. 21–8.

was never published, or, if it was, that it had no relevance for the archaeological research currently going on in Moravia.²² Historians in both countries were quite late in noticing the Boba thesis, and their response was often limited to reproducing the arguments that have for so long supported the traditional interpretation of Great Moravia as located north of the Danube River.²³ Most reactions were based on linguistic or, at best, historical arguments, broadly defined and relevant mostly to the conclusions Boba drew on the basis of post-ninth-century sources.²⁴ Following the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, a hostile, rather than critical, attitude towards Boba's ideas became the norm among Slovak historians.²⁵ Boba's conclusions drawn from the examination of ninth-century Frankish annals have to this day received no rebuttal from any Czech or Slovak historian. Meanwhile, most challenges to Boba's work came from outside the Czech Republic and Slovakia.²⁶ None of them made use of the archaeological evidence so abundantly available in recent publications. Advocates of Boba's thesis equally ignore

²² E.g., Robert Snašil, 'Grad Morava', in Ludek Galuška, Pavel Kouřil and Zdeněk Meřinský (eds), *Velká Morava mezi východem a západem. Sborník příspěvků z mezinárodní vědecké konference. Uberské Hradiště, Staré Město 28.9.–1.10.1999* (Brno, 2001), pp. 355–64.

²³ The first reaction to Boba's thesis was published fourteen years after Boba's book. See Peter Ratkoš, 'Uzemný vývoj Veľkej Moravy (fikcie a skutočnosť)', *Historický časopis* 33 (1985), pp. 200–23 (published in English translation as 'The Territorial Development of Great Moravia (Fiction and Reality)', *Studia Historica Slovaca* 16 (1988), pp. 121–55).

²⁴ See Z. Charous, '“Morava, moravsky” v písmenných pramenech 9.–13. století', *Slovenská Archivistika* 22 (1987), pp. 97–113; Josef Zemlička, '“Moravané” v časném středověku', *Česky časopis historický* 90.1 (1992), pp. 17–32. See also Lubomír E. Havlík, 'King Sventopluk's of Moravia Image in the Middle Ages', *Critica storica* 28 (1991), pp. 164–79; Lubomír E. Havlík, '“He megalé Moravia” und “he chora Moravia”', *Byzantinoslavica* 54 (1993), pp. 75–82.

²⁵ E.g., Ján Steinhübel, *Veľkomoravské územie v severovýchodnom Zadunajsku* (Bratislava, 1995); Richard Marsina, 'Najstaršia poloha Veľkej Moravy', in Alexander Avenarius and Žuzana Ševčíková (eds), *Slovensko a európsky juhovýchod. Medzikultúrne vzťahy a kontexty (Zborník z životnému jubileu Tatiany Štefanovičovej)* (Bratislava, 1999), pp. 27–43.

²⁶ Gerhard Birkfellner, 'Methodios Archiepiscopus Superioris Moraviae oder Anmerkungen über die historisch-geographische Lage Altmährens (Vorläufige Stellungnahme zu jüngsten hyperkritischen Lokalisierungsversuchen)', in Evangelos Konstantinou (ed.), *Leben und Werk der byzantinischen Slavenapostel Methodios und Kyrillos. Beiträge eines Symposiums der Griechisch-deutschen Initiative Würzburg im Wasserschloß Mitwitz vom 25.–27. Juli 1985 zum Gedenken an den 1100. Todestag des hl. Methodios* (Münsterschwarzach, 1991), pp. 33–8; Henrik Birnbaum, 'The Location of the Moravian State – Revisited', *Byzantinoslavica* 54 (1993), pp. 336–8; Walter K. Hanak, 'The Great Moravian Empire: An Argument for a Northern Location', *Mediaevalia historica Bohemica* 4 (1995), pp. 7–24; Srdjan Pirivatrić, 'Vizantijska tema Morava i “Moravije” Konstantina VII Potrojenita', *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog Instituta* 36 (1997), pp. 173–201; Eduard Mühle, 'Altmähren oder Moravia? Neue Beiträge zur geographischen Lage einer frühmittelalterlichen Herrschaftsbildung im östlichen Europa', *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 46 (1997), pp. 205–23; Herwig Wolfram, 'Moravien-Mähren oder nicht?', in Richard Marsina and Alexander Rurtkay (eds), *Svätopluk 894–1994. Materiály z konferencie organizovanej Archeologickým ústavom SAV v Nitre v spolupráci so Slovenskou historickou spoločnosťou pri SAV. Nitra, 3.–6. október 1994* (Nitra, 1997), pp. 235–45; Henrik Birnbaum, 'Where was the Missionary Field of SS. Cyril and Methodius?', in *Thessaloniki Magna Moravia* (Thessaloniki, 1999), pp. 47–52.

archaeology.²⁷ Clearly, the state of research on the location of Great Moravia has by now become a dialogue of the deaf.

Is consensus still possible in the ongoing debate surrounding Boba's thesis? Can we hope to turn this dialogue of the deaf into a historical synthesis and reconstruction of the historical tradition pertaining to Great Moravia? Can historians and archaeologists working on Great Moravia ever overcome the growing distrust surrounding any attempt to bring them together for a broad discussion of their conclusions and theories? It is such questions that participants in a session organized for the 2006 International Congress on Medieval Studies were invited to ponder, if not answer. The session was devoted to the thirty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *Moravia's History Reconsidered*. The goal was to bring together historians and archaeologists in a discussion about the state of current research. Three papers in this dossier are in fact expanded versions of those presented in May 2006 in Kalamazoo. It would have been hard, if not impossible, to represent all existing viewpoints and opinions. The purpose, therefore, was to encourage discussion, not to describe variety. It was clear from the very beginning that the different theoretical backgrounds of participants trained in history (or philology) and archaeology, respectively, would make it difficult to reach consensus. But it also became obvious that at a closer look the conclusions reached on both sides invite more research before any attempt is made to obtain synthesis.

This special *EME* themed issue includes four papers: two by archaeologists and two by historians. The two archaeologists raise questions of fundamental importance, while at the same time illustrating what recent theoretical change in their discipline can do for the re-evaluation of the problem. Abandoning the idea of illustrating through archaeological material what is otherwise known (or rather guessed) from literary sources implies finding a social interpretation for the sudden rise to prominence, shortly after the year 800, of the local elites in southern Moravia (north of the Danube) and the complete lack of analogy for that process in any other part of the Carpathian Basin. The emphasis has now shifted towards a broader understanding of the abundant archaeological evidence, which can now be examined at a much higher resolution than in the past and thus invites interpretations of a historical nature. For Jiří Macháček, at stake is neither adopting nor rejecting Boba's thesis, but

²⁷ Eggers, *Das 'Großmährische Reich'* is based on a misconstrued chronology for the site at Cenad, identified with Morisena of the eleventh-century *Life of St Gerard*, but also with the city of Morava, Bishop Methodius's see. Recent archaeological excavations produced no evidence of a ninth-century occupation phase, but confirmed that the earliest medieval remains are no earlier than the eleventh century. See Petre Iambor, 'Archaeological Contributions to the Study of the Early Medieval Town of Cenad (Timiș County)', *Transylvanian Review* 10.2 (2001), pp. 98–111.

finding a working hypothesis that could be 'fully supported by the evidence available for the current state of research'. He points to the need to apply models of interpretation provided by political anthropology in order to account for the extraordinary evidence presented by the excavation of the ninth-century stronghold at Pohansko, near Břeclav, which he sees as an emporium (à la Richard Hodges), a *palatium* and a *munitio* at the same time. As Macháček notes, however, 'Great Moravia never reached the level of social and political organization most typical for the rise of states in early medieval Europe'. This conclusion should warn against any hasty attempts to look for 'core areas', 'capital cities', or clear-cut political and military boundaries. Instead, scholars should focus on the complex interaction between various regions both inside and outside the Carpathian Basin.

Cultural influence rather than military conquest is at the heart of Naďa Profantová's contribution. She brings to the fore the reinterpretation of the archaeological record of ninth- and tenth-century Bohemia in the light of the relations established between Bohemian and Moravian elites. By contrast, Charles Bowlus argues that there is more than meets the eye in contemporary Frankish sources pertaining to centres of power in Moravia. According to him, neither the *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*, nor the *Heimo-Urkunde* can be cited as proof for the location of Moravia north of the Danube. He further suggests that the hillforts north of the Danube excavated by Czech and Slovak archaeologists 'first appeared in that landscape at the time when written sources describe Sventibald's expansion to the north-west from a power base located somewhere in southern Pannonia'.

Conversely, David Kalhous's paper effectively undermines one of Imre Boba's arguments in favour of locating (Great) Moravia south, and not north of the Danube River. Boba laid a particularly strong emphasis on a passage in the Old Church Slavonic *Life of Methodius*, in which Methodius is said to have been ordained 'bishop in Pannonia at the see of Apostle Andronicus, one of the Seventy'. According to Boba, since the see in question must have been Sirmium (present-day Sremska Mitrovica, in Serbia), Methodius's diocese could not have possibly been Moravia in the present-day Czech Republic. However, through a thorough examination of the apostolic tradition linked to Sirmium, Kalhous demonstrates that the author of the *Life of Methodius* drew his inspiration for this particular passage from the Roman tradition. In other words, the passage must be interpreted not as an indication that Methodius resided in Sirmium, but as an illustration of the papal concerns to defend Methodius's rights against the rival claims of the archbishop of Salzburg. Church politics, and not political geography, was on the mind of the unknown author of the *Life of Methodius*. Moreover, by calling Methodius a 'bishop *in*

Pannonia, no necessary link was thus established with Sirmium, since that city was never the capital of all provinces named Pannonia, but just of Pannonia Secunda. Whether or not Sirmium ever had a metropolitan status in late antiquity, the idea of restoring an archdiocese of ancient origin served the specific interests of the papacy in the circumstances surrounding the ninth-century conflict with Byzantium over Illyricum.

There are, as expected, more questions than answers. More work needs to be done in order to bring the two lines of argument together. But in the considerable amount of research flowing in the capillaries of every one of the papers included here, one can detect not just the signs of change, but also the first steps towards some common ground. These papers point to some bridge-building that remains to be done on both sides, but they also suggest that historians and archaeologists working on Great Moravia may be close enough to shake hands.

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