

Svätopluk as a Historical Figure: An Attempt at Reconstruction

Martin HOMZA 

Professor, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University Bratislava, Slovakia

E-mail: martin.homza@uniba.sk

Abstract: The article is part of a larger monograph on Svätopluk I, which maps Svätopluk I as a) a historical figure; b) European historiography on the most successful ruler of the Western Slavs in the 9th century, and c) the image (*imago*) of the ruler as retrospectively created by medieval writings across Europe. In this text, Martin Homza focuses on presenting Svätopluk as a historical figure based on existing sources and available metahistorical texts. During his reign, the first Moravian archbishopric and bishopric in Nitra were established. At the same time, a network of church administration was created, and Christianity gained significant ground in the rest of Europe, which had been pagan until then. This expansion was made possible by internal (political and economic stabilization of his personal power) and external factors, the most important of which was Svätopluk's pragmatic policy towards the East Frankish rulers. This brought him not only multiple recognition of his de facto rule, but also acceptance into the wider Carolingian family. However, the most important recognition came from the papacy of the time, which accepted him (and with him his empire) as its only son – *unicus filius* – under its patronage. This was a historical precedent for the creation of what we now call Central Europe, and in the plans of the popes of the time, it was contrasted with the *Regnum Teutonicorum* and called the Kingdom of the Slavs – *Regnum Sclavorum*. However, these bold plans suffered in the last two years of Svätopluk's reign when he allowed himself to be drawn into a military confrontation with his *compater* Arnulf, the East Frankish ruler. The unexpected death of Svätopluk I, the subsequent unfortunate reign of his sons, as well as the

©2025 STUDIA UBB HISTORIA. Published by Babeş-Bolyai University.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

SUBB Historia, Volume 70, Number 2, December 2025

doi: 10.24193/subbhist.2025.2.01

6 Martin Homza

invasions of the Old Hungarian tribal confederation and the Bavarians, brought about the temporary collapse of this project. The restoration of the kingdom on the Middle Danube under the patronage of St. Peter, this time with a new dynasty, came around the year 1000.

Keywords: Svätopluk, Imperium Christianum, Papacy, Moravia, Regnum Sclavorum, Central Europe

Rezumat: Articolul este parte dintr-o monografie mai mare, în pregătire, despre Svätopluk I. Lucrarea îl urmărește pe Svätopluk I ca personalitate istorică, analizează istoriografia despre cel mai de succes stăpânitor al slavilor apuseni, respectiv urmărește imaginea lui, așa cum au conturat-o retrospectiv scrierile medievale din Europa. În acest studiu, pe baza surselor și a textelor metaistorice avute la dispoziție, autorul se concentrează asupra prezentării lui Svätopluk ca personalitate istorică. În timpul stăpânirii sale a luat naștere prima arhiepiscopie a Moraviei și episcopia de la Nitra. În același timp, s-a constituit o rețea a administrației ecleziastice, iar creștinismul s-a impus într-o mare măsură într-o parte, până atunci păgână, a Europei. Această expansiune a fost posibilă datorită unor factori interni (stabilizarea politică și economică a puterii sale personale) și externi; dintre aceștia din urmă, cel mai important factor a fost politica pragmatică a lui Svätopluk față de regii franci de răsărit. Această politică i-a adus recunoașterea de câteva ori a guvernării sale, dar și primirea în familia în sens larg a Carolingienilor. Oricum, cea mai importantă apreciere a venit din partea Papalității, care l-a luat pe domnitor (și împreună cu acesta întregul său imperiu) sub patronajul său în calitate de unic fiu – *unicus filius*. Acesta a fost un precedent istoric pentru crearea a ceea ce astăzi numim Europa Centrală; în planurile papale, era numit Regatul Slavilor – *Regnum Sclavorum*, în contrast cu *Regnum Teutonicorum*. Aceste proiecte curajoase au avut de suferit în ultimii doi ani de domnie ai lui Svätopluk, atunci când s-a lăsat antrenat într-o confruntare militară cu *compater*-ul său Arnulf, stăpânitorul franc de răsărit. Moartea neașteptată a lui Svätopluk I, domnia nefericită a fiilor săi, precum și atacurile uniunii de triburi ale vechilor maghiari și ale bavarezilor au dus la prăbușirea temporară a acestui proiect. Restaurarea proiectului regatului de la Dunărea de mijloc, sub patronajul Sfântului Petru, dar sub o nouă dinastie, s-a produs în jurul anului 1000.

Cuvinte-cheie: Svätopluk, Imperium Christianum, Papalitate, Moravia, Regnum Sclavorum, Europa Centrală.

Svätopluk I, as the most prominent member of the Moravian Moimirids dynasty and certainly the most important representative of the political representation of the Western Slavs at the end of the ninth century, has no representative monograph in contemporary European historiography. Several attempts have been made to produce such a work, they have not reached the level they could and should have reached.¹ Thus, the topic of Svätopluk I remained scattered among a number of scholarly articles and commentaries in individual editions on sources from the ninth and later centuries.² The aim of this text is therefore to reconstruct the historical figure of Svätopluk I on the basis of existing contemporary and retrospective sources.³ Understandably, this cannot be done without referring to the current state of knowledge about this ruler.⁴

Svätopluk appears for the first time in the *Frankish royal annals* at the end of the 60s of the ninth century. *The Annals of Fulda* gives relatively accurate information on the exact place Svätopluk occupies within the Moimirid dynasty. They mention Rastislav as being his *avunculus*, i.e. uncle. This means that most possibly Rastislav's brother must have been one of Svätopluk's parents. The name of his possible father *Saramirus* / *Zsaramirus* / *Zuanimirus* / *Satimir* / *Satimerus* (Svätomir?), is mentioned in a single source, in the ninth

¹ See Lubomír E. Havlík, *Svätopluk. Veliký král Moravanů a Slovanů* (Brno: Jota, 1994); Witold Chrzanowski, *Świętopelk I Wielki król Wielkomorawski ok. 844–894* (Kraków: Avalon, 2010) and Matuš Kučera, *Kráľ Svätopluk 830?–846–894* (Martin: Matica slovenská, 2010).

² For instance Ján Steinhübel, *The Nitrian Principality: The Beginnings of Medieval Slovakia*, trans. David McLean (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020), see chapter "Svätopluk's Realm," 210–238.

³ See the summary overview of sources on Svätopluk in the article Lubomír Ďurina, "Svätopluk v stredovekých písomných prameňoch 9.–16. storočia podľa vydania *Magnae Moraviae Fontes Historici* štatistiky," in Martin Homza et al., *Svätopluk v európskom písomníctve: Štúdie z dejín Svätoplukovskej legendy* (Bratislava: Post Scriptum, 2014), 567–648.

⁴ See my recent articles: Martin Homza, "Svätopluk v anglo- a nemeckojazyčnej historickej spisbe posledného obdobia," in *Vita historiae dedicata. Zborník štúdií venovaný životnému jubileu prof. PhDr. Júliusa Bartla, CSc.*, ed. Miriam Viršínská (Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave, 2018), 166–176; id., "The Image and Interpretation of Svätopluk in the Eyes of Slovak Historians over the last Hundred Years and Short Remark at the End," in *Constantine Letters*, 15, no. 2 (2022): 1–19; id., "Svätopluk in Czech and Czech-written Historiography. A Few Critical Remarks: Part One: Up to the 1960s," *Constantine Letters*, 17, no. 2 (2024): 98–112; id., "Svätopluk in Czech and Czech-written Historiography. A Few Critical Remarks: Part Two: From the 1960s to the 1990th," *Constantine Letters*, 18, no. 2 (2025): 1–15; id., "Svätopluk in Czech and Czech-written historiography. A few critical remarks: Part Three: From the late 1990s to the present day," in print.

chapter of the *Gesta Regum Sclavorum* (hereafter *GRS*).⁵ Although this source was later contaminated by several cultural layers of the western Balkans traditions, the transcription of the name in the form of Svätomir is logical in view of the theme *-svēt*. The same theme is not only found in the names of his son Svätopluk, but is also apparently the basis for the personal name Svätožizna. Since the time of Václav Novotný († 1932), the view that Svätožizna was the first wife of Svätopluk I has become firmly established in historiography.⁶ Svätožizna as a name emerges in two contemporary sources. However, it is not explicitly clear from either of them that she was Svätopluk's wife.⁷ On the contrary, the priority of the theme *-svēt* is identical to that of the same theme in the first name Svätopluk. This repetition follows certain principles

⁵ *Gesta Regum Sclavorum* (hereafter *GRS*), vol. 1, ed., trans. and comment. Dragana Kunčer (Beograd: Institut za Istoriju Ostrog Manastir, 2009), columns 30–33a.

⁶ This theory was introduced, not without reason, into historiography by Václav Novotný, *České dějiny*, vol. 1/1 (Praha: Nákladem Jana Laichtera na Král. Vinohradech, 1913), 352–354.

⁷ The first is *the Book of Brotherhood of St. Peter's Abbey in Salzburg*. See *Das Verbrüderungsbuch von St. Peter in Salzburg: vollständige Faksimile-Ausgabe im Originalformat der Handschrift A1 aus dem Archiv von St. Peter in Salzburg*, ed. Karl Forstner (Graz: Akadem. Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1974), 32. Here, the name Svätožizna in the form *...uuengizigna* appears immediately after the name Svätopluk *Zuuentibald* and before one other name, which could theoretically be understood as the name Wiching, in the form *Uuihi(n?)gh pr(esbiter)*. See Herwig Wolfram, ed., trans. and comment., *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum: das Weißbuch der Salzburger Kirche über die erfolgreiche Mission in Karantainen und Pannonien mit Zusätzen und Ergänzungen* (Ljubljana: Litera Picta, 2012), 292–293. Unfortunately, it is not possible to agree with Wolfram's interpretation that this is Svätopluk's wife. The placement of this information under the heading *Ordo ducum vivorum cum coniugibus et liberis* ("List of living dukes with their wives and children") may at first glance suggest such a solution, but it also refutes it, since the column where the rulers' wives are to be placed also contains the name of the aforementioned priest Wiching. See also edition and commentaries in "*Liber confraternitatum sahsburgensis vetustior Ordo ducum vavorum cum coniugibus et tiberis*/Kniha salzburského bratrstva starší," in *Magna Moraviae Fontes Historici* (hereafter *MMFH*), vol. 3: *Diplomata, epistolae, textus historici varii*, eds. Dagmar Bartoňková and Radoslav Večerka, the 2nd, rev. and expand. ed. (Praha: Koniasch Latin Press, 2011), 295. The second source mentioning Svätožizna is *the Gospel of Cividale (Codex Foroiulensis)*. See "Die Evangelienhandschrift zu Cividale," ed. Conrad Ludwig Bethmann, in *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichte*, vol. 2 (Hannover: Hahn'sche Buchhandlung, 1877), 120. On the fol. 4, there are three names *szuentiepidc. szuentezizna predezlaus*, preceded by *luiching pbr.*, apparently (U)uiching p(res)b(ite)r, i.e. Wiching, priest. See Wolfram, ed. trans. and comment., *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*, 292–293 and "*Evangelium de Cividale*/Evangelium z Cividale," in *MMFH*, vol. 3, eds. Bartoňková and Večerka, 292.

of mnemonic construction of a system of dynastic names typical for one and the same dynasty. Its inner meaning is to emphasize the heredity and legitimacy of the power of a given family in a given community.⁸ The use of the same principle in two names therefore completely rules out the possibility that they were a married couple. The hypothesis about blood relation between Svätopluk and Svätožizna would also be confirmed by the probable spelling of the name Svätomir, supposed father of Svätopluk according to *GRS*, with the same theme *-svet*, on the first place. Last but not least, the same name Svätomir of the imaginary father of Svätopluk I also connects, through its second theme *-mir*, the historically documented Moravian ruler Moimir I, who was most probably the grandfather of Svätopluk I with Moimir II, the eldest son of Svätopluk I. He also has a son Svätopluk (II) with his second wife, who will be discussed below. This second son was named, unusually, after his living father.⁹ There is still much speculation in historiography about a third possible son of Svätopluk, mentioned only by Constantine Porphyrogenitus in his work,¹⁰ whose name may have been Predslav. It is not known whether these were all of Svätopluk's descendants. *GRS* mentions that Svätopluk "gave life to sons and daughters" (*genuitque filios et filias*). Their names have not been preserved. However, this does not diminish their importance in history. It must be assumed that, as in the case of their better-known female relatives from the Carolingian dynasty, it was they who secured the royal bloodline for the new dynasties, which was so necessary for the contemporary idea of the legitimacy of power.

Where and when Svätopluk was born or how his political career actually began it is not clear from the sources. However, some available data indicate that in 845–846, after the Treaty of Verdun, a great "castling" took place on Louis the German's eastern border. Most probably, when Rastislav was designated to the central Moravian throne, Svätopluk was also appointed to the vacant throne of Nitrian principality. It could happen in the year 846.

⁸ Anna Litvina and Fjodor Uspenskij, "Dynastic Power and Name-Giving Principles in Kievan and Muscovite Rus' (10th–16th Centuries)," *Micrologus*, 25 (2017): 95.

⁹ *GRS*, vol. 1, column 62. "Presbyteri Diocleatis Regnum Sclavorum/Letopis Popa Dukljanina Kralovství Slovanů", in *Magnae Moraviae fontes historici* (hereafter *MMFH*), vol. 1: *Annales et chronicae*, eds. Dagmar Bartoňková and comp. the 3rd ed. (Praha: KLP, 2019), 245.

¹⁰ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Gyula Moravcsyk and transl. Romilly James Heald Jenkins, 2nd edition (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967), 181.

A much-discussed source *Gesta regum Sclavorum* could indirectly testify to such a beginning of his political career. According to the text of this source, Svätopluk ruled for forty years and four months.¹¹ If this time is subtracted from the known date of Svätopluk's death in 894, then the beginning of his political career can most likely be dated to the mid-fifties of the ninth century.

Another issue is, where did Svätopluk's realm actually begin? There is no precise historical data on this, but most likely, the urban agglomeration of Nitra really was the center of Svätopluk's power.¹² Due to the latter written tradition given by Bohemian (Czech) chronicler Cosmas of Prague, one can assume it was the place Svätopluk would stay more permanently. In other words, Nitra might be his capital. The assumption that Nitra was the center of his power could also be confirmed by the fact that the city was also the seat of Wiching, a Swabian Benedictine, the first bishop of Nitra and Svätopluk's long-time confidant.

In 869, Svätopluk entered the scene of history by his own name when the Frankish annalists made note of him as a significant political figure.

In August King Louis gathered his troops and divided the army into three parts. The first he sent under his namesake [Louis the Younger] with the Thuringians and Saxons to crush the presumption of the Sorbs. He ordered the Bavarians to assist Carloman, who wished to fight against Zwentibald [Svätopluk], the nephew of Rastiz [Rastislav]. He himself kept the Franks and Alemans with him to fight against Rastiz. When it was already time to set out he fell ill, and was compelled to leave the leadership of the army to Charles, his youngest son and commend the outcome to God. Charles, when he came with the army with which he had been entrusted to Rastiz's huge fortification, quite unlike any built in olden times, with God's help burnt with fire all the walled fortifications of the region, seized and carried off the treasures which had been hidden in the woods or buried in the fields, and killed or put to flight all who came against him. Carloman also laid waste the territory [regnum / realm] of Zwentibald, Rastiz's nephew, with fire and war. When the whole region had been laid waste the brothers Charles and Carloman came together and

¹¹ *GRS*, vol. 1, column 60. "Presbyteri Diocleatis Regnum Sclavorum", 245.

¹² Dušan Třeštík, *Počátky Přemyslovců: Vstup Čechů do dějin (530–935)* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 1997), 279: "We do not know exactly where Svätopluk's regnum was located. The Nitra Principality is usually thought of in this respect, but it is not certain." On the other hand, he writes: "However, we can locate Rastislav's regnum relatively precisely."

congratulated each other on the victories bestowed by heaven. Meanwhile, Louis, their brother, came against the Sorbs, and after he had killed a few, forced the rest to turn and run. Many of them were killed, and the Bohemians, whom the Sorbs had brought to fight for pay, were partly killed, partly forced to return to their homes with dishonor, and the remainder surrendered.¹³

It is in connection with a large expedition Louis the German undertakes against misbehaving Rastislav (*Rastiz*). The south wing of this expedition was entrusted to the eldest son of Louis II the German, Carloman. Prefect and Duke of Carantania. Carloman attacked Svätopluk's *regnum* from this direction. There are not many possibilities he could have attacked from other than the south, i.e. from the friendly part of the empire, where another Slavic prince Kocel of Pannonia was still active at that time. As is well known, the Principality of Pannonia was created by removing it from the political jurisdiction of the Duchy of Carinthia.¹⁴ Moreover, this Pannonian ruler Kocel, cannot be said to have been friendly to the Moimirids. If only because the Moravians killed his father Pribina in 860.¹⁵ This also clearly shows that the *Regnum Zuentibaldi* which Carolman invaded was located north of the Danube and east of the Small and White Carpathians (*Malé Karpaty*, *Biele Karpaty*) and can be reliably identified with the Principality of Nitra.¹⁶ The same source (*the Annals of Fulda*) subsequently in the year 870 even implies what competencies there Svätopluk had about him.

¹³ *The Annals of Fulda: Ninth-Century History*, vol. II, trans. and ed. Timothy Reuter (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1992), 60. “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*”, in *MMFH*, vol. 1, eds. Bartoňková and comp., 67–112 (here p. 82–83).

¹⁴ Matej Klika, “Pannonia as a Space and the Importance of Pribina in the Integration Process of the Pannonian Area into the Frankish Empire”, in *Slovakia and Croatia, vol. I: Historical Parallels and Connections until 1780*, eds. Martin Homza, Ján Lukačka and Neven Budak (Bratislava and Zagreb: Department of Slovak History, 2013), 49–59 and older text by Charles R. Bowlus, “The Military Organisation of Carinthia and Pannonia (818–846)”, in *Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Festschrift für Karl Bosl zum 80. Geburtstag*, vol. 1, ed. Ferdinand Seibt (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1988), 168–178.

¹⁵ “The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians,” trans. John Eldevik. https://www.academia.edu/37973825/The_Conversion_of_the_Bavarians_and_Carinthians.docx (accessed: November 9, 2025). For a deeper insight into this issue, see Wolfram, ed., trans. and comment., *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*, 320.

¹⁶ Steinhübel, *The Nitrian Principality*, 186–188. The author even considers Svätopluk as a co-ruler of Rastislav in Great Moravia.

12 Martin Homza

Zwentibald [Svätopluk], Rastiz's [Rastislav's] nephew, took thought for his own interests, and commended himself and the kingdom he held to Carloman.¹⁷

There must be an understanding that in connection with this expedition Svätopluk concludes a separate peace agreement with Carloman. It is also understandable, Rastislav reproaches Svätopluk for having concluded that separate peace. It resulted in the mentioned internal conflict between them, which ended up with Svätopluk handing over Rastislav to the East-Frankish King Louis the German. How this came about is described in one of the most adventurous stories ever told in *The Annals of Fulda* by the year 870. It is therefore worth quoting it here.

Rastiz [Rastislav] was furious at this and laid ambushes in secret for his nephew [Svätopluk]; he plotted to strangle him at a banquet when he was not suspecting any attack. But by the grace of God he was freed from the peril of death. For before those who were to kill him had entered the house, he was warned by one who knew of the plot, and set out as if to go hawking, and so evaded the ambush laid for him. Rastiz saw that his plot was revealed and followed after his nephew with soldiers to capture him. But by the just judgement of God he was caught in the snare he had set, for he was captured by his nephew, bound and brought to Carloman, who sent him under a guard of soldiers to Bavaria lest he should escape and had him kept in prison until he could be brought to the king's [Louis the German] presence.¹⁸

What the Conclusion of a Separate Peace Between Svätopluk and Carloman Reveals

Reality that Svätopluk made a separate peace first of all proves he had the authority to do so. This also speaks of the relationship between Nitria and Moravia. To describe it, let me quote the eternal "enfant terrible" of Slovak historiography of the last third of the nineteenth century, Jonáš Záborský († 1876). Záborský whose relations of the Nitrian principality to

¹⁷ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 62 and "Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské," 84.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

the Morava principality compared to Poland's relationship with Russia in his time, i.e. "a never ending and incurable ulcer that torments the body".¹⁹

Imprisonment of Svätopluk I. and Ascension to the Central Princely Seat of the Moravians

In the same year 870 Rastislav was sentenced to death, but after the pardon granted by the East-Frankish king Louis the German himself, the prince of Moravia was blinded and confined in a monastery.²⁰ But also Svätopluk was imprisoned. The situation in Moravia becomes very opaque. For new administrators, new imperial margraves arrived. One of them was William I, the other Engelschalk I. Both brothers came from the influential Bavarian Wilhelminers kindred, which was apparently related by blood to the Pribinas.²¹ The duplication of offices once more indicates the dual character of Great Moravia. Otherwise, one would have been enough. Moreover, as it was Kocel who should have been given Nitria for it was his original property because of his father Pribina's heritage. The fact that he did not, highlights something else: The East-Frankish Empire had learned that strengthening one party – Moravia – at the expense of the other – Nitria – could easily backfire. So, the East-Franks made a Solomonic decision. That solution was, indeed, sending William and Engelschalk I who most probably were not only related to Kocel,²²

¹⁹ Jonáš Záborský, *Dejiny Kráľovstva Uhorského od počiatku do časov Žigmundových*, ed. Timotej Kubiš. (Bratislava: Slovart, 2012), 24.

²⁰ *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe: The Chronicle of Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg*, trans. and ed. Simon MacLean (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2009), 170: "[Louis the German] ordered him [Rastislav] to be blinded and put into a monastery".

²¹ Hans Dieter Tönsmeier, "[...] *in castro Chezilonis noviter Mosapurc vocato* [...]": Die Beziehungen des pannonischen Fürsten Kozel zu Bayern und der Beginn der Ethnogenese der Slowaken," *Zeitschrift für Bayerische Kirchengeschichte*, 76 (2007): 37–77 and id., "Die Fürsten von Nitra und ihre Beziehungen zur bayerischen Hauptstadt Regensburg im 8. und 9. Jahrhundert: eine frühe Manifestation der Ethnogenese der Slowaken," *Zeitschrift für bayerische Kirchengeschichte*, 90 (2021), 1–28.

²² For more details see Hans Dieter Tönsmeier, "[...] *in castro Chezilonis noviter Mosapurc vocato* [...]": 37–77 and id., "Die Fürsten von Nitra und ihre Beziehungen zur bayerischen Hauptstadt Regensburg": 1–28. Recently see: Florin Curta and Sébastien Rossignol, *Medieval East Central and East Europe* (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 2025), 47.

but they also represented his policy. This assumption about the cooperation between Carloman's line of Carolingians and representatives of the Pribinas and Wilhelminers is also supported by other information from a later period. Namely, in the 880s, when Kocel was most possibly already dead and Arnulf son of Carloman was in possession of all Carantanian principality, Arnulf appointed the sons of William II and Engelschalk II as the new administrators of Pannonian Transdanubia. The situation in Moravia itself looked grim from the perspective of the Moravian Slavs in 870. There was no potential successor to Moimirids. In the difficult situation in which the Moravians found themselves, a man named Slavomir (*Sclagamar*) appeared. Slavomir was a priest. He was ordained before St. Constantine and Methodius arrived or before both of Slavic missionaries went to Rome. Therefore, he was one of those Franco-Slavic clergymen, like St. Gorazd and others. Being a priest, Slavomir was asked by the Moravians – to rise up against the ruling Frankish power. Slavomir concocted a huge uprising, which forced the East-Frankish king to release Svätopluk. With this new circumstance in the year 871, Carloman went with Svätopluk to straighten things out in Moravia. What happened next? Svätopluk defected from the side of the Franks to the side of the Moravians. Here, too, the testimony of *the Annals of Fulda* is very telling:

Immediately he [Svätopluk] denied his fidelity and forgot his oath, in Slavic fashion, and turned his thought and his powers not to driving out Sclagamar [Slavomir] but to revenging the injury which Carloman had done him. Then he attacked in great force the Bavarians' camp – they suspected no evil and had were not keeping a sharp watch. He took many alive as prisoners, and killed the rest, except for a few who had prudently left the camp beforehand.²³

The First Slavic Alliances of Svätopluk I

Subsequently Svätopluk sided with the Moravians and became their ruler. On the one hand, the Moravians choose him among themselves to be their prince (*knieža* / *кѣнѣзѣ*). On the other hand, however, the *Pax Francorum* / *Pax*

²³ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 65–66 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*,” 86–87.

Francica (the Frankish Peace)²⁴ makes it necessary for elected princes – and this applies also to the Moimirids – to be recognized by the empire as well. It was not so easy for Svätopluk to gain such recognition.

In an attempt to restore the previous *status quo*, the East-Franks first undertook a series of military expeditions. First of all, the Czechs (Bohemians) took part in them in coalition with the Moravians. This could point to some close Moravian-Bohemian relations. In this respect, *The Royal Frankish Annals* mention a “a wedding” among the Moravian Slavs sometimes around the end of autumn 871. The bride was to be “the daughter of a Bohemian dux”.²⁵

The question has been thematized in historiography, especially in the nineteenth/twentieth century. Although there is no evidence that this was the marriage of Moravian Svätopluk and Czech Svätožizna, this idea has taken hold in historiography, as I pointed out above. There are scientists even today, who not only find it obvious that this was the case, but build further nonsensical conclusions on this whole fanciful hypothesis.²⁶ Thus, the Czechs sided with Svätopluk in 872. And it is also known that even in the following years Svätopluk remained victorious in the military confrontation with Carloman. Later, still in the first half of 874, also the Lusatian Serbs and another Polabian Slavic tribe – the *Siusli* (Suselci) rebelled against the East Franconian Empire, which in all likelihood was due to the previous military successes of Svätopluk.²⁷

Looking at the situation Louis the German had with his sons – Louis the Younger, Carloman and Charles – as well as with other centrifugal forces he had to face, it is obvious that at one point Louis the German had no choice but to make peace with Svätopluk. Interestingly, a foreigner, priest (*presbyter*) John of Venice (*Johannes de Venetiis*) – apparently in the service of the Pope –

²⁴ For some general idea of the Carolingian world order, see Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes and Simon MacLean, *The Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), chapter “Inventing the Carolingian Empire: Politics and Government, 800–840”.

²⁵ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 66–67 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*,” 88.

²⁶ Steinhübel, *The Nitrian Principality*, 210–211. The author not only knows that this bride was Svätožizna, but also that she came from the family of the Premyslids and her brother was the first baptized Bohemian prince, the semi-legendary Borivoj. Against this bold assertion, however, are the *Annals of Fulda* themselves, which in their ninth-century archetype do not recognize any Borivoj. See English translation of this source, which by the year 872 mentions the following Bohemian princes *Zwentislan*, *Witislán*, *Heriman*, *Spoitimar*, and *Moyslan* as five Bohemian *duces* and allies of Svätopluk (*The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 68).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 68–73 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*,” 89–91.

is given the task to negotiate this peace. The same man supposedly managed to get St. Methodius out of prison in Bavaria a year earlier. St. Methodius subsequently took over his Pannonian archbishopric and Svätopluk and his Moravians "...entrusted to him all the churches and clergy in all the towns."²⁸

The Treaty of Forchheim in 874: the Recognition of Svätopluk as a Prince of the Moravians by King Louis the German

The conclusion of the Forchheim contract determined not only the rule of Svätopluk, but also the development of Central Europe for centuries to come.²⁹

[King Louis II the German] spoke with Carloman and Louis [III the Younger/ the Saxon] his sons in the villa of Forchheim and there he received the ambassadors of Zwentibald [Svätopluk] who sought peace and promised fidelity. The head of the embassy was John, a priest of Venice, who even confirmed whatever he said with an oath so that the king might have all doubt removed and believe what he said, namely that Zwentibald would remain faithful to the king all the days of his life and would pay the tribute ordained by the king annually, if he were only allowed to live peacefully and rule quietly. The king also heard the messengers of the Bohemians and gave them leave to depart, and after this he took himself to Bavaria.³⁰

Despite the fact that there is a relatively extensive amount of secondary literature,³¹ regarding the issue of the peace treaty between Louis II the German and Svätopluk, I will take the liberty of simplifying the matter. Svätopluk, represented by John of Venice, formally promised to submit his *regnum* to Louis

²⁸ "The Life of Methodius," in *Medieval Slavic Lives of Saints and Princes*, ed. and trans. Marvin Kantor (Michigan [MI]: Michigan University Press, 1983), 119 and "Žitije Mefodija/Život Metodějův", in *MMFH*, vol. 2, the 2nd edition, ed. Dagmar Bartoňková and Radoslav Večerka (Praha: KLP, 2010), 133.

²⁹ Lubomír E. Havlík, "The Relationship between the Great Moravian Empire and the Papal Court in the Years 880–885," *Byzantinoslavica*, 26, no. 1 (1965): 100–122.

³⁰ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 75 and "Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské," 91 (here also other secondary literature to the topic of the Treaty of Forchheim).

³¹ See Havlík, "Velká Morava a Franská říše," *Historické štúdie*, 8 (1963): 129–180 and footnote no. 543 in the "Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské," 91–92.

the German, which was confirmed with a pledge to pay annual tribute³² to the East Frankish Empire. It is precisely this treaty (which promised Svätopluk's personal fidelity³³) – which guarantees an East-Frankish ruler stability on his eastern border up to his death and the same treaty which enables Svätopluk to attack the areas that are not considered to be part of the empire. Svätopluk apparently preferred to exchange peace in the west for continued expansion in the east. In the end, he was not alone. Roughly only eight decades later, the same pattern would be followed by Boleslav I the Cruel of the Premysl dynasty. Another sixty years later, Boleslav I the Brave of the Piast dynasty would follow in their footsteps. And so, this scenario was repeated by the kings of Hungary and later on in Polish history.³⁴ There was a plan to spread Poland to the east made by Marshal Józef Piłsudski in the Polish-Soviet War (1918–1923). A stable border with the Frankish Empire allowed Svätopluk to gain control over “no man's land” in the north, northeast, and southeast of his empire. Some sentences from *The Life of St. Methodius* well characterizes a new quality of the period that came after the Treaty of Forchheim according to the optics of the Moravians:

And Prince Svätopluk and all the Moravians received him [St. Methodius]. They entrusted to him all the churches and clergy in all the towns. And from that day forth, God's teachings grew greatly and the clergy multiplied in all the towns. And for that reason the Moravians began to grow and multiply, and the pagans to believe in the true God, casting aside their lies. And the Province of Moravia began to expand much more into all lands and to defeat its enemies successfully, as they themselves are always relating.³⁵

³² The issue of the payment of tribute by the Czechs to the Frankish Empire was last discussed by Dušan Třeštík. See Třeštík, *Počátky Přemyslovců*, 69–73.

³³ *Fidelitas* (“fidelity”) is a key term that can help understand how the Carolingian monarchy functioned in the ninth century. In the truest sense of the word: “personal fidelity was seen as the social glue that would hold the empire together.” See: Costambeys, Innes and MacLean, *The Carolingian World*, 185: “Fidelity was seen as the social glue that would hold the empire together.” See also Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 31–38.

³⁴ See my study on this subject: Martin Homza, “O niekoľkých prienikoch *Haličsko-volynskej kroniky* s uhorskou a poľskou kronikárskou spisbou 13. storočia,” in *Haličsko-volynská kronika: Neznáme rozprávanie o rodine kráľov a kniežat východo-strednej Európy*, ed. and trans. Martin Homza a Nora Malinová (Martin: Libri Historiae and Matica slovenská, 2019), 23–50.

³⁵ “The Life of Methodius,” in *Medieval Slavic Lives*, ed. and trans. Marvin Kantor, 119 and “*Žitije Metodija/Život Metodějův*,” in *MMFH*, vol. 2, ed. Bartoňková and Večerka, 133.

There must be an understanding that any war needs to have some legal basis – today and back then. The official justification for this massive campaign, as in the case of Charlemagne, was the spread of Christianity. One can say that in Forchheim, Svätopluk was given the Carolingian rights to spread Christianity to areas where Christianity had not yet been permanently rooted. From *The Life of St. Methodius* it is possible to deduce what precise areas these were. The given description corroborates expansion of Svätopluk I after 874:

A very powerful pagan prince settled on the Vistula and began mocking the Christians and doing evil. Communicating with him, Methodius said: 'My son, it would be better for you to be baptized of your own will in your own land, so that you will not have to be baptized against your will as a prisoner in a foreign land; and remember me. And so it came to pass'.³⁶

There are some scientists who question the conquest of the Vistulian principality by Svätopluk's Moravians after 874. Indeed, the text contained in *The Life of Saint Methodius* is not entirely precise in this regard. However, a number of other indirect pieces of evidence and indications confirm that this did happen.³⁷ In the first place, archaeological research has found Great Moravian imports in Transnistria, at the Dnipro River Valley in Ukraine and even along the Upper Volga and Oka valleys.³⁸ Which confirms the presence of the Moravians on these territories in the late ninth century or at least

³⁶ "The Life of Methodius," in *Medieval Slavic Lives*, ed. and trans. Marvin Kantor, 121 and "Žitije Mefodija/Život Metodějův", in *MMFH*, vol. 2, ed. Bartoňková and Večerka, 134. Wording of the source clearly shows that the Moravians already had their own oral tradition and talked about their glorious victories.

³⁷ Jacek Poleski, "Contacts between the Great Moravian Empire and the tribes of Lesser Poland – a short episode or common roots?," in *The Cyril and Methodius Mission and Europe – 1150 Years Since the Arrival of the Thessaloniki Brothers in Great Moravia*, ed. Pavel Kouřil (Brno: Archeologický ústav Akademie věd ČR, 2014/2015), 182–199 (the summary to the discussion see p. 182). A separate issue that cannot be addressed here due to space constraints is the spread of rotunda-type church buildings. See László Daragó, Balázs Máté and Géza Varga, "Analysis of Medieval Rotundas in the Former Kingdom of Hungary Considering Central European Corresponding Monuments," in *Periodica Polytechnica Architecture*, 51, no. 2 (2020): 124–141. However, I provisionally assume that their earliest layer of spreading is related to the expansionist and Christianization policy of Svätopluk I and St. Methodius. It would be a materialization of their current power.

³⁸ Svetlana Rjabceva, "The Contact of Great Moravia with Eastern Europe," 162–169.

confirm some cultural and commercial contacts with the Moravians. Cracow, Wiślica, the region of the future Chervyen / Červenské (Red Ruthenian) castles, is a quite logical direction for Svätopluk's expansion in the first stage of his reign, which can be framed by the years 874–882.

From an economic point of view, this area was particularly interesting to the Moravians as a source of slaves, furs, etc. That means for Svätopluk to gain his share of trade on the route later by the historians identified as “trade route between Europe (Cordoba / Regensburg) and the Abbasid Caliphate passed via the Khazar Khaganate”.³⁹ It is a large part of the Silk Road, which goes to Baghdad and continues further to China.⁴⁰ Of course, Svätopluk also wanted to have a share of this route to himself and the Treaty of Forchheim gave him the rights he needed to do so.⁴¹

As an alternative to Svätopluk's expansion to the northeast, there is the direction of the Tisa River basin. These areas were also still unbaptized. However, the ruler of the Moravian Slavs may also have been attracted by the salt reserves there. By gaining control over its extraction, Svätopluk could free himself from economic dependence on the East Frankish Empire, as salt was one of the strategic raw materials of the world at that time and Salzburg strictly guarded its salt monopoly on the Danube route. However, penetrating the eastern slopes of the Carpathian Mountains threatened potential conflict with the first Bulgarian tsardom.⁴² Today's science basically has no doubt that the Moravians eventually gained some form of control over certain areas of present-day Transylvania. However, the chronology and the scope of this

³⁹ For the significance of this trade, see Thomas S. Noonan, “Some Observations on the Economy of the Khazar Khaganate,” in *The World of the Khazars: New Perspectives: Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium hosted by the Ben Zvi Institute*, ed. Peter B. Golden, Haggai Ben-Shammai and András Róna-Tas (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007), 207–244.

⁴⁰ See Ibn-Khordadbeh, “Książka dróg i prowincji (Kitāb al Masālik w'al Mamālik),” in *Źródła arabskie do dziejów Słowiańszczyzny*, vol. 1, ed. Tadeusz Lewicki and Franciszek Kupfer (Wrocław/Warszawa/Kraków: Ossolineum, 1956), 77, where you can find a detailed analysis of the entire journey from Spain to China.

⁴¹ Ján Pauliny, ed., trans. and comment., *Arabské správy o Slovanoch (9.–12. storočie)* (Bratislava: Veda, 1999), 8. (See especially the account by Ibn-Khordadbeh, *The Book of Roads and Kingdoms*, 92–96.)

⁴² Peter Ratkoš, “K otázke hraníc Veľkej Moravy a Bulharska,” *Historický časopis*, 3 (1955): 206–218 and Matúš Kučera, “Veľká Morava a Bulharský štát (k politicko-teritoriálnym vzťahom),” *Historica: Zborník Filozofickej fakulty Univerzity Komenského*, 37, (1981): 15–45.

dominance remains unclear. The exact border between Bulgaria and the then Moimirids monarchy is not clear. Whether the Moravian Slavs managed to control any of the salt mines (Turda, Ocna Mureș, Praid, Dej) it is not clear. However, it is likely that they at least controlled the lower reaches of the Mureș and Criș rivers. The border would then be the Bihor Mountains, also known as the Apuseni.⁴³

The Meaning and Functions of the first Archbishopric of the Slavs

Peace between Louis II the German and Svätopluk I was mediated by the Papal curia. The representation of Svätopluk's side by papal legate John of Venice during negotiations in Forchheim testifies to Moravian ruler's positive relationship with the Papacy. It materialized in the form of a special ecclesiastical province. The fact that Svätopluk obtained his own archbishopric indicates that he fulfilled all the conditions necessary for him and his *regnum* to be considered part of the great Latin and Christian world – *Imperium Christianum*. The other mutual benefits of this alliance were to become apparent in a short time.

Establishing the first Slavic Church metropolis was in opposition to previous imperial ecclesiastical Christian policy in this part of the world. The author of *The Life of St. Methodius* put it in a single sentence, which St. Methodius is said to have uttered in his defense at the memorable trial conducted against him by the Bavarian bishops. When they offended him: “‘You are teaching in our territory.’ St. Methodius answered: ‘If I had known it was yours, I would have remained far away; but it is Saint Peter’s.’”⁴⁴ The first Archbishop of the Slavs here spoke in accordance with the contemporary idea of Roman policy whose main aim in Central Europe was the restoration of the former Ecclesiastical Province of Illyricum.⁴⁵

⁴³ Alexandru Madgearu, “Salt Trade and Warfare: The Rise of the Romanian-Slavic Military Organization in Early Medieval Transylvania,” in *East Central & Eastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Florin Curta (Ann Arbor [MI]: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 103–120.

⁴⁴ “The Life of Methodius,” in *Medieval Slavic Lives*, ed. and trans. Marvin Kantor, 117 and “*Žitije Metodija/Život Metodějův*,” in *MMFH*, vol. 2, ed. Bartoňková and Večerka, 131.

⁴⁵ See for instance František Dvorník, “Metodova diecéza a boj o Illyricum,” in *Ríša Vel'komoravská: Sborník vedeckých prác*, ed. Ján Stanislav (Praha: Leopold Mazáč, 1933), 162–225.

The other unmistakable aspect of the new quality in Central Europe, which can be dated from the release of St. Methodius from Bavarian internment in 873 to his death in 885, is that the Illyrian province was restored by Rome in a new guise. This was the recognition of the use of Old Church Slavonic in the Holy Liturgy. For a certain period of time, this aspect significantly distinguished Svätopluk's *regnum* culturally from the unifying tendencies of the Latin West. Old Church Slavonic proved to be not only a successful tool for evangelization, but also for political and Church integration and over all a symbol of specific Slavic cultural identity. The cooperation between the Slavic ruler and the archbishop confirmed by the Holy See will set a precedent for other Slavic rulers willing to follow the example of Svätopluk and St. Methodius in the years and centuries to come.

A few words about Pope John VIII's bull *Industriae Tuae*

The successes of Svätopluk I in the military-political sphere and in spreading Christianity did not go unnoticed by the successors of St. Peter in Rome. The best evidence of this is a letter known as *Industriae Tuae*, i.e. "Your zeal", which Pope John VIII wrote to Svätopluk in 880.⁴⁶ I devote myself to a detailed analysis of this letter, which has several levels, elsewhere.⁴⁷ Here, I will only mention that this text, in the history of the Papacy up to that point, unusually evaluates Svätopluk's achievements by accepting him as his "beloved" (*dilectus*) and even "the sole son" (*unicus filius*) under the special papal patronage of St. Peter. John VIII does not ignore the fact that this happened only after Svätopluk "despised the rulers of this world." This was undoubtedly a mutually beneficial interaction.⁴⁸ The newly established alliance with the Holy See meant the definitive integration of the Danube Slavs into

⁴⁶ *Codex diplomaticus et epistolaris Slovaciae* (thereafter *CDSI*), vol. 1, ed. Richard Marsina (Bratislava: Veda, 1974), no. 30, 23–24. The best recent analysis of this letter see Madallena Betti, *The Making of Christian Moravia (858–882): Papal Power and Political Reality* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 185–191. (p. 191: "John VIII's innovative and courageous choice enhanced the political authority of the new Slavic ruler, making his prerogatives equal to those of the Carolingian kings.")

⁴⁷ Martin Homza, "Vznik strednej Európy: pápežstvo a Svätopluk I.," *Slovenský časopis historický*, 5, no. 1 (2025): 3–43.

⁴⁸ Lubomír E. Havlík, "The Roman Privilege 'Industriae tuae' for Moravia," *Cyrrilomethodianum*, 7 (1983): 23–37.

the union of contemporary European *Christianitas*. For Svätopluk and his people, however, this meant nothing more and nothing less than that he was beginning to free himself from political dependence on the East Frankish Empire. Although Svätopluk always expressed a favorable attitude towards the East Frankish Empire, he derived his legal rights from the Papacy.

At the same time Rome's policy towards Svätopluk was not so unusual in the ninth century. The popes acted similarly in the case of the Bulgarian king Boris⁴⁹ and the Croatian prince Branimir,⁵⁰ but also in the case of Alfred the Great of England.⁵¹ In short, this relationship of patronage is not exclusive. But within the *Imperium Christianum*, it does give preference to the authority of the pope over that of the emperor.

Although there are certain differences between the privileges mentioned, it is clear that they form part of a longer-term strategy in papal policy. This was already evident in the document *Dagome iudex*, in which the Polish prince Mieszko I received papal protection over the emerging Poland.⁵² It is not entirely clear how, at the beginning of the eleventh century, the restored kingdom in the middle Danube, known as the Kingdom of Pannonia (Hungary), came under the patronage of the Holy See. However, I consider it certain that without the legal precedent of the letter *Industriae Tuae* to Svätopluk I, this would never have happened. Thanks to this document, at the end of the ninth century, a new respected Christian ruler and with him a new Slavic monarchy took root on the map of Europe. As I have attempted to indicate in brief above,

⁴⁹ Havlík, "The Slavic Balkan States in the 9th Century – The Foreign Political Situation of Croatia and Bulgaria between Byzantium, the Papacy and the Franks," in *Rapports et rapp. tchecoslovaques pour le IV^e Congres de l'Assoc. Internat. d'etudes du sud-est europeen*, ed. Karel Herman and Jozef Vladár (Praha: Ústav československých a světových dějin ČSAV, 1979), 93–105.

⁵⁰ John Van Antwerp Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century* (Michigan [MI]: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 261. See also Mate Zekan, "Branimir's Croatia in the Letters of Pope John VIII (Fragment of a Study)," *Most*, no. 1–2, (1990): 276–281. See also Betti, *The Making of Christian Moravia*, 130–131.

⁵¹ *The Anglo-Saxons Chronicle*, trans. James Ingram (London: 1823), according *The Project Gutenberg Etext of The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, AD 883*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/657/pg657-images.html> (accessed February 20, 2025). See also Richard Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (London and New York: Longman, 1998), 395 pages (here 176–193 and 190–91).

⁵² Przemysław Urbańczyk, *Mieszko Pierwszy Tajemniczy* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2012), 369–386.

this had a decisive historical and legal significance for the development of Europe.⁵³

Getting back to Svätopluk, the same policy has allowed him to reach a stable balance between the West and the South, or/and East. In other words, on the one hand he remained part of the Western Latin universe, but on the other hand he derived the legitimacy of his royal power from the Roman Holy See in Rome, not from Imperial Aachen.⁵⁴

Svätopluk and the East-Frankish Kingdom

In order to maintain this balance, Svätopluk had to strictly adhere to the provisions of the Forchheim treaty. And indeed, while Louis the German lived – he died in 876 – Svätopluk complied with the terms of their agreement. In the same year 876 Carloman, son of Louis II, ascended the throne of the East Frankish Empire. Under his sovereign rule, according to the *Chronicle by Reginon of Prüm* representing the thinking of the contemporary Frankish Empire, – Bohemia, Moravia, Carinthia, and Pannonia were to belong to the East Frankish Empire.⁵⁵ Carloman did not live long. He died in 880. *The Royal Frankish Annals* mention that when Carloman marched against his relative and emperor Charles the Bald to Italy in 877, there were Bavarians and “various Slav peoples” in his army.⁵⁶ It is likely that his army consisted mainly of Slavs from their own Moravian and Nitrian principalities.

Svätopluk Becomes a Member of the Carolingian Kindred

Such a scenario could be justified by the newly established family ties between Svätopluk and Carloman. Many may find it strange and surprising

⁵³ Betti, *The Making of Christian Moravia*, 190–191: “John VIII’s innovative and courageous choice enhanced the political authority of the new Slavic ruler, making his prerogatives equal to those of the Carolingian kings.”

⁵⁴ Havlík, “Velká Morava a Franská říše,” 129–180 and Havlík, “The Relationship between the Great Moravian Empire and the Papal Court,” 100–122.

⁵⁵ *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe*, 177 and “Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon / Kronika průmskeho opata Reginona,” in *MMFH*, vol. 1, eds. Bartoňková and comp., 120.

⁵⁶ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 82–83 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*,” 92.

to call Svätopluk – one of the Moimirids – a Carolingian. This could be seen particularly in the complex relationships with the Duke of Carinthia, later King of East Francia and Emperor Arnulf, son of Carloman. The familiar relationship between Svätopluk and Arnulf can be documented at a minimum in two and maximum three ways.⁵⁷

The first and the second can be found in the testimony of Regino of Prüm, a chronicler of the late Frankish Empire:

In fact, he [Svätopluk I] raised from the holy font Arnulf's son, who was born to him by a concubine, and named him Zwentibald after him.⁵⁸

The ruler of the Moravian Slavs was to become the godfather of the eldest son of the Duke of Carinthia. The boy was even given a baptismal name – Zwentibold, which is a Germanized form of the Slavic prince's personal name Svätopluk. In this case, one can speak about spiritual family relationships arising from baptism (*spiritualis cognatio*) between them. This resulted in an “adoptive” integration of Svätopluk into the spiritual kindred of the Eastern Carolingians, which had legal and social consequences. Svätopluk became a spiritual relative of Arnulf, which symbolically elevated his status to that of other Carolingians. So, he was not a Carolingian by birth, but through this spiritual bond and political gesture, he was elevated to the level of their closest allies.

It is quite telling that no one⁵⁹ did not sufficiently assess the significance and solemnity of this ecclesiastical-legal act, and even Simon MacLean, the

⁵⁷ See Heinz Dopsch, “Arnolf und der Südosten – Karantaniern, Mähren, Ungarn,” in *Kaiser Arnolf. Das ostfränkische Reich am ende des 9. Jahrhundert*, eds. Franz Fuchs and Peter Schmid (München: Beck, 2002), 143–186 and Herwig Wolfram, *Arnulf von Kärnten. Eine biographische Skizze* (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2024), 19–26.

⁵⁸ *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe*, 207 and “Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon,” 123.

⁵⁹ German historiography has focused more on the fact that this was the first instance of a godfather's name being transferred to his godchild in the Western Church. This custom was previously known only in the Eastern Christian tradition. See Michael Mitterauer, *Traditionen der Namengebung: Namenkunde als interdisziplinäres Forschungsgebiet* (Wien/Köln/Weimar: Böhlau, 2011), 39 and 106. See also Gerd Althoff, “Zur Bedeutung der Bündnisse Svatopluku von Mähren mit Franken,” in *Symposium Methodianum: Beiträge der internationalen Tagung in Regensburg (17. bis 24. April 1985) zum Gedenken an den 1100. Todestag des Hl. Method*, eds. Klaus Trost, Ekkehard Völkl and Erwin Wedel (Neuried: Hieronymus, 1988), 13–21.

latest translator of Regino into English, primarily focused his commentary on the second relation between Arnulf and Svätopluk. It is included in the same passage of Reginon's chronicle: "... he [Arnulf] had been joined to Zwentibald in close friendship,"⁶⁰ i.e. on *gratia familiaritatis*, "the grace of familiarity" between them. It is not entirely clear which of these two bonds was stronger. However, in accordance with Gerd Althoff's opinion, it seems that friendship was enhanced by spiritual kinship also in this case. It seems that one strengthened the other.⁶¹

In addition, historiography or better yet, historical tradition has also preserved a third connection between the Carolingians and the Moimirids, according to which Svätopluk was to marry Arnulf's sister. Whether this really happened is unclear. The only thing that is certain is that the given marriage can be read about relatively late, namely in the first chronicle written in Czech at the beginning of the fourteenth century, also known as the *Chronicle of Dalimil*. It is texted as follows: "*Král moravský cesařovu sestru za sobú jmějieše*" (The Moravian king married the emperor's sister).⁶² It can be said the third bond between Carolingian and Moimirid is possibly just a part of a later fable. But there are some other indications which could prove this relation. The first is included in the Bavarian tradition. The earlier mention of Gisyla, Arnulf's sister, appears in the *Notes on the Bishops of Passau* from the mid-fourteenth century.⁶³ Later *Bavarian Annals* written by humanist historian Johannes Aventinus († 1534). Accordingly this also has Svätopluk to be the husband of Arnulf's sister: "Svätopluk takes a wife Arnulf's sister Gisela."⁶⁴ The second one came from the fact that Arnulf's eldest son took the name of his godfather at his baptism. On the one hand thus, the one and only Slavic princely bithematic name entered the closed system of personal names of the Carolingians. (It seems that this extraordinary event also

⁶⁰ *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe*, 207.

⁶¹ Gerd Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers: Political and Social Bonds in Medieval Europe*, trans. Christopher Carroll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 84.

⁶² "Kronika takřečeného Dalimila," in *MMFH*, vol. 1, eds. and trans. Bartoňková and comp., 295.

⁶³ See "*Notae de episcopis Pataviensibus/Záznamy o pasovských biskupech*," in *MMFH*, vol. 1, eds. Bartoňková and comp., 261: "... cui [to Svätopluk] imperator Arnulfus sororem suam Gysilam matrimonio legali coniunxerat."

⁶⁴ Aventini "*Annales ducum Boiorum*," in *MMFH*, vol. 1, eds. and trans. Bartoňková and comp., 409.

contributed to the later spread of this name in Western Europe.⁶⁵) On the other hand, Svätopluk I also had a son who was given the baptismal name Svätopluk (II). The situation in which any male descendant in any Slavic dynasty from the ninth to the twelfth century was named after his still-living ancestor, in this case his living father, is unsystematic.⁶⁶ However, it was normal among the Carolingians of the ninth century.⁶⁷ Finally, there are several references in the *Fulda Annals* to the cruel fratricidal war between Moimir II of Moravia and his brother Svätopuk II, which culminated in this event in 899:

Not long after this the Bavarians again confidently invaded the lands of the Moravians and plundered and laid waste wherever they could, and rescued the boy Zwentopulk, the son of the old dux Zwentopulk, from the dungeon of the city in which he was held with his men, set fire to the city, and brought him out of pity back into their own country.⁶⁸

Although the anonymous author does not write about the reasons that Emperor Arnulf had for intervening on behalf of Moimir's younger brother, it is perhaps reasonable to assume that the fate of his potential blood relative (Arnulf's nephew?) may also have played a role.

The question that bears asking is when did such a strong bond between Arnulf and Svätopluk become established? Historians consider two crucial dates. The first one is around the year 876.⁶⁹ The latter, which led to

⁶⁵ Eduard Hlawitschka, "Die Verbreitung des Namens Zwentibold in frühdeutscher Zeit. Personengeschichtliche Beobachtungen und Erwägungen," in *Festschrift für Herbert Kolb zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Klaus Matzel and Hans Gert Roloff (Bern: Peter Lang, 1989), 264–292.

⁶⁶ See for instance Litvina and Uspenskij, "Dynastic Power and Name-Giving Principles," 89. Here also other literature to the topic. For more on the issue of giving personal names, see the here chapter "The Semantic Power of the Name Svätopluk as the Basis for The Legend of Svätopluk".

⁶⁷ Charlemagne did this when he named his second son after himself. See Mitterauer, *Traditionen der Namengebung*, 74.

⁶⁸ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 139 and "*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*," 108.

⁶⁹ Austrian professor Herwig Wolfram assumes in several of his texts that this happened as early as 870. See Wolfram, ed., trans. and comment., *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*, 294.

the formally recognized annexation of Bohemia, is around 889–890. I am more inclined to accept the first option. As already mentioned, in the same year it is supposed the army of Svätopluk helped Carloman during his military campaign in Italy in 876.

The Political Relationship of Svätopluk and Arnulf of Carinthia

Although it may seem exaggerated to some, the relationship between Arnulf and Svätopluk contributed significantly to how Europe is divided today. For this reason, it is necessary to discuss it in all its complexity and contradictions. While they lived in peace, the whole territory thrived. But when they went into conflict, it ultimately brought destruction to both sides.

It is likely that when Carloman became the *de facto* and *de jure* sovereign ruler of the East Frankish Empire in 876, his eldest son Arnulf acquired the territories previously administered by his father, namely Carinthia and part of Pannonia. It can be said that he began his political career as the Duke of Carinthia and the southwestern neighbor of Svätopluk. In the same year, as I wrote above, one can also assume the beginning of the first phase of their political ties, which, thanks to the family and friendly relationship, can also be characterized as cordial.

It can also be said that between 876 and Carloman's death in 880, the political interests of the two rulers had significantly different priorities. They gained new momentum just after the death of Carloman, when yet another son of Louis the German, Charles III the Fat, ascended to the East Frankish throne. Soon, even became crowned and anointed (*consecratus*) emperor.⁷⁰ The new political situation led Charles III the Fat to seek closer cooperation with Svätopluk in order to weaken his nephew's political aspirations. On the contrary, this indicated Arnulf to seek new allies against Svätopluk.⁷¹ The mutual hostility that resulted from the new balance of power around the middle

⁷⁰ "Annales Bertiniani," ed. Georgius Waitz, in *Monumenta Germaniæ Historica: Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in Usum Scholarum Separatim Editi* (thereafter *SS rer. Germ*), vol. 5 (Hannoveræ: Typis Culemannorum, 1883), 151. *The Annals of St. Bertin: Ninth Century Histories*, vol. 1, trans. and annot. Janet L. Nelson (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1991), 222.

⁷¹ Simon MacLean, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century: Charles the Fat and the End of the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 124–128. Herbert Schutz, *The Carolingians in Central Europe, Their History, Arts, and Architecture: Cultural History of Central Europe, 750–900* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004), 125–130.

Danube was logically reflected in the domestic matters and foreign affairs of new rivals.

Pannonia ultimately became the bone of contention between the former close (family) friends. The conflict, which finally broke out in 882 and went down in history as the Wilhelminer War, can also be characterized as a struggle between forces representing the politics of Christian universalism and the diverse particularistic interests of powerful families on the eastern periphery of the empire founded at that time in *illo tempore* by Charlemagne and his successors. Svätopluk and Arnulf can be considered major players in this game, as they possessed what in Frankish terminology could be described as special *regna*. However, smaller but influential figures such as Margrave (*comes terminalis*) Aribo and his son Isanrich, or their original relatives and later greatest opponents Wilhelm II and Entgelschalk II, who held the same position, also moved on the chessboard. Svätopluk joined one or the other side in this game according to his own needs and interests.

Charles III the Fat was the last of the Carolingians who managed to renew Charlemagne's dream of a unified Latin power collaborating with Papal Rome – the restored Christian Roman Empire – *Imperium Christianum*. Opposite him stood the particularist-oriented Arnulf, Charles the Fat's nephew. It was him whom after 876, when Kocel, the last member of Pribina dynasty, disappeared from the historical scene, was given privilege to rule also over Pannonian Principality. In this way he became a neighbor of the Bulgarians. The relationship with Bulgaria is, of course, another great concern to Svätopluk himself, for he also had a common border with the Bulgarian Empire somewhere in the Tisa Valley. Therefore, the further development of Svätopluk's policy now also depended on Arnulf's moves in the southeast direction.

The Wilhelminer War and the Incorporation of Pannonia into Svätopluk's *Regnum*

At the beginning of the last third of January 882, Louis the Younger, King of East Francia, died. This death objectively strengthened the position of Charles III the Fat, the last of the living sons of Louis II the German, who also became King of East-Frankish Kingdom. The Carolingians' dream of unifying the empire came true. With the strange man, but at least for a short time.

Around 882, the original balance of power between Svätopluk and Arnulf came to an end. With it, peace in the central Danube region also ended. In that year, Arnulf entrusted the Pannonian March or Eastern March (*Marcha Orientalis*) to Wilhelm II and Engelschalk II. The new margraves came from the Wilhelminer's kindred. As I have already mentioned, the same Wilhelminers were apparently relatives of the Pribina dynasty, mortal enemies of the Moimirids. From the point of view of Svätopluk, who fought against their fathers, coincidentally with the same names Wilhelm and Engelschalk, as the administrator of Moravia during its liberation in 871, such a policy was considered as hostile.⁷² With the same move, Arnulf also took the Pannonian March away from Aribo, who had the support of Charles III the Fat. In this situation, Aribo turned to Svätopluk for help and support and gave him his son Isanrich as a hostage. However, Svätopluk's military operations against the Wilhelminers did not begin immediately. His envoys had to return from the Worms Diet, where they were heard by the emperor in November 882. Here they negotiated legal authorization to begin military activities against the Wilhelminers. The results of Svätopluk's operation must have been drastic. So much so that the anonymous author of the *Annals of Fulda* lamented the fate of that part of the Pannonian March in verse. The surviving members of the clan subsequently sought refuge with Arnulf and became his people (*homines Arnolfi*).⁷³ This was the beginning of the first phase of the Wilhelminer War (882–884), in which Svätopluk earned a reputation, not without reason, as an exceptionally feared but also cruel military leader. *The Annals of Fulda* provide a fairly reliable account of the course of this war. Above all, they state the causes of the second phase of war very precisely. It sounds unbelievable, but among other things, they were also personal in nature and once more concerned the relationship between Svätopluk and Arnulf:

‘You [Arnulf] support my enemies; if you do not send them away, you will not be at peace with me either.’ He [Svätopluk] also made another accusation against him: ‘Your people have treacherously conspired against my life and

⁷² Lubomír Havlík, *Slovanské státní útvary raného středověku politické postavení, společenská a vládní organizace státních útvarů ve východní, střední a jihovýchodní Evropě od 8. do 11. století* (Praha: Academia, 1987), 89.

⁷³ *Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*,” 95–96. Parts of these events are missing in the English translation of the *Annals of Fulda*, trans. by Timothy Reuter.

also against my dominion [regnum] with the Bulgarians, who ravaged his kingdom the previous year. I want you to swear to me that this is not true.⁷⁴

Arnulf's potential alliance with the Bulgarians,⁷⁵ together with the attempted assassination of Svätopluk described in the *Annals of Fulda*, finally led Svätopluk to launch one of the largest military efforts that a Slavic ruler ever led in the ninth century. It took place in two stages, the first of which:

On this the dux [Svätopluk] collected troops from all the Slav lands in a short time and invaded Pannonia with a large army, killing cruelly and inhumanly like a wolf, and destroying and consuming with fire and sword a great part of it...

In the second one:

But in the same year that we set down these things the dux [Svätopluk] again gathered a multitude and brought a hostile army into Pannonia, so that if anything remained from the year before he could now swallow it up completely in his wolf's mouth. For he brought such a multitude on that expedition that in one place his army was seen to pass from the rising to the setting of the sun. He remained with an army of this size in Arnulf's kingdom for twelve days, plundering; then, just as he wished, returned safely, and afterwards also sent some of his army across the Danube.⁷⁶

There are various estimates of how many troops Svätopluk managed to gather for his first campaign against Pannonia.⁷⁷ However, I find the information provided by an anonymous author of the *Fulda Annals* about their origin

⁷⁴ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 109–10 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*,” 96–97.

⁷⁵ Peter Ratkoš, “Východné oblasti Veľkej Moravy a starí Maďari,” in *Konferencia o Veľkej Morave a Byzantskej misii: Brno–Nitra 1.–4. X. 1963* (Nitra: Archeologický ústav Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1963), 105–107.

⁷⁶ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 110 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*,” 96–97.

⁷⁷ Alexander Ruttkay, “Warfare in Great Moravia,” in *The Cyril and Methodius Mission and Europe – 1150 Years Since the Arrival of the Thessaloniki Brothers*, 77: “The mention of Svätopluk's army in Pannonia, which ‘was seen passing through the same place from dawn till dusk’ can also be used with caution as a hypothetical base for calculation of the total size of the armed retinue and the reserve: up to 5,000 equestrians and 15–20,000 foot soldiers.”

“from all regions of the Slavs” (*omni partes Sclavorum*) to be far more important, as it points that Svätopluk became an integrating figure among the Slavic-speaking military elites with a supra-regional character. In the glory that his victories brought him, one must seek one of the sources of the later development of the memory of this ruler.

Svätopluk and the Emperor Charles III the Fat: The Restoration of the Roman Christian Western Universe: the New Construction of Europe

The final result of all these two and half years of ongoing campaigns by Svätopluk was the formal annexation of Pannonia. Up to this point, Svätopluk had always directed his expansion forces into territories beyond the empire. This time, however, he attacks Pannonia, a territory with a long and complex historical, legal and Church tradition, at the moment considered as a part of the East-Frankish Kingdom. The conquest of Pannonia therefore must be seen as a significant violation of the Peace Treaty of Forchheim. It must therefore be reiterated that without the permission of the eldest of the Carolingians, Emperor Charles III the Fat, it could not have happened. Svätopluk met with Emperor Charles III the Fat in Kaumberg, at the place known as *Mons Comianus* to discuss this matter in November 884. The emperor confirmed the territorial gains of the Great Moravian Empire.

The emperor [Charles III the Fat] set out through Bavaria to the east, and coming to the River Tullnbach, had a meeting at Mons Comianus [the Kaumberg near Tulln]. To this there came among others the dux Zwentibald [Svätopluk] with his nobles and became by joining of hands, as is the custom, the emperor's vassal. He swore fidelity to him with an oath that as long as Charles should live he [Svätopluk] would never come into his kingdom with a hostile army.⁷⁸

Even an impartial observer will notice in the fragment “as long as Charles should live he [Svätopluk] would never come into his kingdom with a hostile army” complete accord with the Forchheim agreement (“[Zwentibald] would remain faithful to the king [Louis II German] all the days of his life”).

⁷⁸ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 110 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldké*,” 98.

This time without any promise of paying annual tribute. However, also the other differences between these two legal acts would not go unnoticed. In Forchheim, Svätopluk, initially concerned for his own safety, was represented by the papal legate John of Venice. At the negotiations in Kaumberg, Svätopluk himself was right away in the presence of the emperor. Even more, the emperor “*sicut mos est, per manus imperatoris efficitur, contestatus illi fidelitatem iuramento.*” Svätopluk became the emperor’s man.⁷⁹ In other words, there was no longer anyone between him and the highest secular authority of his time. In the Western hierarchy, this meant that Svätopluk rose to the level of other Christian rulers of Europe, who were entitled to the title of *rex* – king – in the political nomenclature of the time. Svätopluk’s *commendatio* in Tulln was therefore not only an act of subordination, but more a diplomatic confirmation of partnership within the Carolingian order by the system of fidelity (*fidelitas*). From that time political status of Svätopluk’s *regnum* can be compared with *regna* of the other kings within Frankish Empire, i.e. East Franconia, Lorraine and West Franconia. I am not the only or the first one to see this encounter as Svätopluk being promoted to the rank of king and recognized by the highest secular authority of the then world, the emperor of the restored Roman Empire.⁸⁰

Svätopluk and the Pope Stephen V: Svätopluk Proclaimed *Rex Sclavorum*

The years 884–885 appear to have been decisive for the reign of Svätopluk I. Not only did Svätopluk gain Pannonia *de jure*, but his personal ranking at that moment surpassed the status of Arnulf, who for logical reasons could not be *homo imperatoris*. Under pressure from described events at the end of 885, Arnulf finally concluded peace with Svätopluk in the presence of the Bavarian nobility.⁸¹ However, the practical consequence of the previous war was that Svätopluk’s controlled territories came into close proximity to

⁷⁹ For a better understanding of the terms *fideles, homines, suis, vassi/vassalli*, see Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals*, 23.

⁸⁰ See for instance Idzi Panic, *Ostatnie lata Wielkich Moraw* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2000), 36 and ff. Havlík, “King Sventopluk’s of Moravia image in the Middle Ages,” *Critica storica*, 28, (1991): 172–173 and id., “The Relationship between the Great Moravian Empire and the Papal Court:” 100–122.

⁸¹ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 111 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*,” 99.

ancient Italy. “The sole son” (*unicus filius*) of Rome, as Pope John VIII called Svätopluk, also brought the borders of his empire closer to the sphere of interest of the Papacy.

Prospective relations with the Roman Curia were disrupted by the death of St. Methodius, Archbishop of Pannonia and Moravia, on April 6, 885. With the accession of the new Pope Stephen V, in addition to the question of St. Methodius’s succession, other issues concerning the young Slavic Church also needed to be resolved. Among them were, in particular, the compatibility of the new Latin understanding of the Holy Trinity and the use of Old Church Slavonic in the liturgical practice of the Church in Great Moravia.

Even in resolving these complex issues, Svätopluk proved to be a pragmatic ruler. His reward was the new Pope Stephen V confirmed Svätopluk’s papal patronage, recognized him as King of the Slavs *de jure*, and, by the will of eternal divine authority, established the Kingdom of the Slavs. These certainties are confirmed by Pope Stephen V’s letter to Svätopluk, known in historiography as *Quia te zelo fidei* (“For in zeal for the faith”). The letter is best known for Pope Stephen V’s harsh reaction to the legacy of St. Constantine the Philosopher and his brother Methodius. For now, I would prefer to focus on something else in relation to Svätopluk.

Stephen, bishop, servant of the servants of God to Zuentopolco [Svätopluk], king of the Slavs. For in zeal for the faith thou hast consecrated thyself with all devotion to the prince of the holy Apostles, that is, to Peter, the key-bearer of the kingdom of heaven, and thou hast chosen his deputy before all the princes of this world to be thy chief patron, and thou hast at the same time, with the great men and the people of [thy] country, given thyself up to his protection, by unceasing prayers we beseech God, the giver of all good things, in whose hand rest all the rights of kingdoms, to strengthen thee with his favor...⁸²

In my opinion, these lines reflect the most crucial geopolitical event that in the Middle Danube territory saw in the ninth century. Maddalena Betti describes it as follows: “The comes, who enjoyed the royal prerogatives in John VIII’s correspondence, became a rex who ruled a regnum in Stephen V’s correspondence.”⁸³ On the other hand, it is the deciding voice in the debate

⁸² *CDSI* 1, ed. Marsina, no. 35, 27–29.

⁸³ Betti, *The Making of Christian Moravia*, 189.

among historians related to whether the concept of *Regnum Sclavorum* was an original Ottonian invention or a renewed concept from the Carolingian era.⁸⁴ Personally, I am convinced that the political imagination of the Kingdom of the Slavs is a product of the ninth century.

The author of the letter recognized Svätopluk into the rank of a king both ways directly – *expressis verbis* calling him *rex Sclavorum* and indirectly by the content of the letter itself. In doing so, the letter clearly emphasizes that the things of the (Slavic) kingdom come from God, the Giver of all goods, “in whose hand rest all the rights of kingdoms” (*in cuius manu sunt omnia iura regnorum*).

Kings and kingdoms are fundamentally two different things. A royal title is conferred *ad personam*. Its exercise belongs to a category limited by the time of its bearer’s life. Kings can be easily deposited. A kingdom whose rights derive from God is, by contrast, unlimited in time, that is, eternal.⁸⁵ Simply put, a kingdom, by the nature of its origin, exists even though it has no designed kings. In medieval political discourse, however, this means that, by God’s will, a Christian monarchy arose in the Middle Danube region, whose name was derived from the endonym of its dominant element – *Regnum Sclavorum*. This was undoubtedly a qualitatively higher level of political organization compared to Svätopluk’s *Regnum*, which was limited in time and space. The potential of this political concept came to fruition around the year 1000 in the restored Kingdom of Pannonia (Hungary).

⁸⁴ The topic of transmission between the end of the Carolingian dynasty and the beginning of the Liudolfing-Otto dynasty is quite often discussed in Western historiography. See for example Richard E. Sullivan, “The Carolingian Age: Reflections on Its Place in the History of the Middle Ages”, *Speculum*, 64, no. 2 (1989): 267–306 or Simon MacLean, “The Carolingian Past in Post-Carolingian Europe,” in *The Making of Europe: Essays in Honour of Robert Barlett*, eds. John G. H. Hudson and Sally Crumplin (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1–14.

However, this discourse almost completely lacks any consideration of the extent to which the mechanisms of historical processes were transferred to the eastern edges of the Frankish Empire, or rather to the Kingdom of the Slavs. The exception that proves the rule is the still underappreciated work of Matúš Kučera, *Slovensko po páde Veľkej Moravy* (Bratislava: Veda, 1974).

⁸⁵ Ildar H. Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language of Authority in the Carolingian World (c. 751–877)*. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008), 102.

The same legal concept also bridges the dynastic instability that began to be visible in the Christian universe of the Latin West in the last decades of the ninth century. The Carolingians were no longer able to maintain their hereditary monopoly for royal and imperial power.⁸⁶ Instead, new families, more or less related to the Carolingians through the female line, came forward with ambitions to replace them in the royal office.⁸⁷ In the West Frankish Empire, they were represented already by Boso I and his son Louis III the Blind and in Italy king Berengar.⁸⁸ On the eastern edge of the more and more imaginary Western empire, it was Svätopluk. Ensuring the continued existence of the Christian monarchy therefore had to become a matter for the Papacy. Stephen V's formulation of the origin of the kingdom in God must be understood in this spirit.

The Pope's words about the divine origin of the kingdom, as will be discussed, have serious implications for the restoration of the kingdom on the Danube around the year 1000. Between the years 885/886 the *Imperium Christianum* consisted of four main provinces/kingdoms West Franconia, Lotharingia, East Franconia and Sclavinia.

⁸⁶ MacLean, "The Carolingian Past in Post-Carolingian Europe," 7.

⁸⁷ Existing historiographical frameworks often fail to adequately address the transitional period between the Moimirids and the dynasties that came to power in Central and East-Central Europe around the middle of the tenth century. See the sample methodological book on an analogical situation in the East Frankish Empire after the extinction of the Carolingians. Simon Groth, *In regnum successit. "Karolinger" und "Ottonen" oder "Ostfrankische Reich"?* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2017). See the methodological introduction "Zwischen "Karolinger" und "Ottonen": Das "Ostfrankische Reich", 1–30.

⁸⁸ More about these kings and emperors see Martin Homza. "The 'Realm of the Slavs' and the Coronation of Svätopluk King of the Slavs: Historical Fiction or Fact? A Few Sentences on the Origins of the Political Imagination of *Regnum Sclavorum*," *Hiperborea*, 11, no. 2 (2024): 127–150.



Christian Latin Universe around 884-885, map by Daniel Gurňák and Martin Homza

And this was the model Emperor Otto III would eventually get back to when he tried to renew the great universalistic program of the Carolingians and – resuming the political program *Renovatio Imperii Romanorum* – acknowledged that it would consist of four equal Christian provinces – kingdoms: Gallia, Roma, Germania and Sclavinia.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Johannes Fried, *Otton III i Bolesław Chrobry*, trans. Elżbieta Kaźmierczak and Witold Leder (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 2000), *passim*. German original Johannes Fried, *Otton III. und Boleslaw Chrobry: Das Widmungsbild des Aachener Evangeliers, der „Akt von Gnesen“ und das frühe polnische und ungarische Königtum: Eine Bildanalyse und ihre historischen Folgen: Frankfurter Historische Abhandlungen*, 30 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1989), a second revised edition of this work was published in Stuttgart in 2001.

Deterioration of Relations between Svätopluk I King of the Slavs and Arnulf, King of the East Franks

In the decade after 885, Svätopluk reached the peak of his power. On the other side it can be said that this period of his reign was also most determined by his relationship with Arnulf. As is well known, Arnulf did not become emperor until 896, two years after Svätopluk's death. It is not entirely clear what role Svätopluk ultimately played in the dethronement of Charles III from the East Frankish throne and his replacement by Arnulf in 887. *The Fulda Annals* only mention that Arnulf was helped to the East Frankish throne by the "Norici" and the "Sclavi".⁹⁰ The following information from the same source (*Regensburg continuations*) sheds more light on the matter. Namely that after his election as East Frankish king in 887, Arnulf celebrated Christmas and then Easter in 888 in Regensburg with the participation of *principes (...) magna parte Sclavanorum*, i.e., "nobles (...) great part of the Slavs".⁹¹ It is not entirely certain, but given the peace concluded between Arnulf and Svätopluk in 885, as well as their past friendship, it can be assumed that the unspecified Slavs who helped Arnulf to the throne were military reinforcements of the Moravian Slavs sent by Svätopluk. The most prominent among them then celebrated Arnulf's previous successes with him in Regensburg. This hypothesis would ultimately be confirmed by the peace between Svätopluk and Arnulf concluded in 890.

The meeting of Svätopluk and Arnulf on Mount Omuntesperch

The second period of good relations between Svätopluk and Arnulf culminated in a meeting between the two representatives of the decisive powers of the emerging Central Europe on Mount Omuntesperch.⁹² This period lasted from 885 to 892 and was characterized primarily by a pragmatic approach resulting from the mutual benefits of such relations. Svätopluk essentially continued the policy he had established towards his western neighbor in

⁹⁰ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 103 and "*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*," 93.

⁹¹ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 115 and "*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*," 99.

⁹² *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 119–120 and "*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*," 99–100.

Forchheim. It was advantageous for him mainly because it allowed him to continue his expansion into the unbaptized parts of northeastern Europe. In domestic politics, it helped him consolidate his power and build political and ecclesiastical structures of his realm. Arnulf needed good relations with Svätopluk because of the never-ending Norman invasions and also because of his undisguised ambitions to become the first among the living Carolingians.

In mid-Lent [March] the king [Arnulf] set out for Pannonia and held a general assembly with the dux Zwentibald in the place which is called Omuntesperch in the common tongue. There among other things the said dux, [Svätopluk] at the request of the pope, asked the king urgently that he should visit the church of St. Peter in the town of Rome, and should deign to rescue the Italian kingdom from the evildoing of Christians [Wido] and the threats of the pagans, and hold it for his own use to control it.⁹³

The assembly of the two rulers on Mount Omuntesperch, which took place sometime in the fasting time in early spring of 890, had several aspects. The most important ones to mention are ritual and political.⁹⁴ The author of this part of *the Fulda Annals* does his best to downplay the significance of this meeting. He calls Svätopluk a duke (*dux*). However, from the context of the source itself and complementary information known from the *Regino's of Prüm Chronicle*, it is clear that the assembly was a political meeting of equal partners – two kings. None of the sources mention anything about Svätopluk renewing his oath of fidelity to Arnulf. After all, there was nothing to restore, since no contemporary information about Svätopluk's oath to Arnulf. In essence, it was a qualitatively different meeting than the previous one with Emperor Charles III the Fat also on a hill, Mons Comianum, in 884. Even more, the newest meeting most probably took place on a mountain whose German name was derived from Saint Amand († 679). Although the identification of this place is the subject of lengthy debate, Ján Dekan assumed that it was probably the original name of the hill Pannonhalma⁹⁵ and I completely agree with this solution. Since ancient times, a meeting between two important

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Gerd Althoff, "Zur Bedeutung symbolischer Kommunikation für das Verständnis des Mittelalters," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 31 (1997): 370–389.

⁹⁵ Ján Dekan, *Slovenské dejiny*, vol. 2: *Začiatky slovenských dejín a Ríša veľkomoravská* (Bratislava: Slovenská akadémia vied a umení, 1951), 174.

political players on a hill has been a ritual act of political communication at the highest level. The congregation on the hill, which was not accidentally named after St. Amand († 679), the famous missionary among the Germanic-speaking peoples of the Frankish Empire and the first preacher of the Gospel among the Slavs. The choice had more than a symbolic character. In addition, it could also be seen as somewhat disadvantageous for the king of Easter Franconia. Arnulf had to cross the River Ráb and entered the territory of Svätopluk in the Transdanubian region.

Such an explanation would not be illogical. Arnulf needed something from Svätopluk. His minimum requirement was compliance with the terms of the Peace of Forchheim. The maximum demand could have been open military assistance from Svätopluk's Slavic army against the Normans. However, the *Fulda Annals* are silent on all this. Instead, they convey other information that is also important.

Namely the annals once more emphasize the Roman dimension of Svätopluk's politics. Svätopluk acts here as an intermediary for Pope Stephen V. His task is to convince Arnulf to get involved in the affairs of the Roman Curia in at least two respects. In taking decisive action against the King of Italy, Guy III of Spoleto, and in the fight against the Saracens. In return, although this is not explicitly stated in the text, it is likely that Arnulf was to receive the imperial title from the Pope. Nevertheless, Arnulf ultimately gave priority to resolving the Norman threat. And it was in this matter that he needed Svätopluk's help.

Svätopluk apparently did not send auxiliary military forces to Arnulf against the repeated destructive raids of the Normans. Instead, he apparently undertook to support his ally's summer military campaign materially. However, the question here is how to imagine it? An interesting opinion considering this was offered by the author of an article analyzing Aribo's letter to his "most pious king" Arnulf.⁹⁶ Recently it was translated and commented into

⁹⁶ This almost forgotten letter was brought to attention again by Hansmartin Schwarzmaier, "Ein Brief des Markgrafen Aribo an König Arnulf über die Verhältnisse in Mähren," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 6 (1972): 55–66. See also the modern edition of the letter *Epistolae Karolini aevi*, vol. VII: *Epistolae variorum 798–923* (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Epistolae*, vol. 9), ed. Isolde Schröder (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2022), no. 84, 196–198. The letter itself has been the subject of some peculiar speculation in recent years by Miroslav Lysý, "Právnická osoba v stredovekom práve platnom na území Slovenska," *Historia et theoria iuris*, 14 (2022): 97. The author translates the Latin *pecora* as swine and confuses it with cattle.

English in the *Word Press*.⁹⁷ From reading the above text, it appears that Svätopluk's assistance to Arnulf in his planned military campaign against the Northmen may have consisted in providing a significant number of cattle. It will sound strange, but in the words of the author of the mentioned article, they were to be used pulling "a military baggage train". If anyone would like to understand what such a "military baggage train" looked like in practice, they should read another online article by Jonathan Jarrett.⁹⁸ Like the author of the first mentioned paper, I find the idea of the Moravians delivering a large number of cattle to Arnulf for military purposes not only possible but also probable. Moreover, it is indirectly confirmed by the words of Abbot Regino of Prüm, who clearly states that in the battle by Aachen in the days before June 24, 991, the Northmen "... encountered and captured many wagons and carts in which provisions."⁹⁹

In addition, I would like to support this opinion with a few more considerations that arise from the wording of the letter itself.

We make it known to your ears that our representatives came from the eastern regions last Sunday and told us that all the Moravians together had ordered the cattle into the kind of service owed by their own serfs, and they are all joined together in friendship and give themselves to your service with no lordship due to any of the nobles.

My lord [Arnulf], they received Bishop Wiching and your other messenger with joy and they denied what had been told of them.

And everything [...] they [the Moravians] were in observation and every day they gather them [cattle] for your service.¹⁰⁰

Firstly, Wiching acts as the supervisor of the proper execution of the agreement from Ommuntensperch (Amandsberg?) as King Arnulf's representative. The same Wiching who was still the Bishop of Nitra at the time

⁹⁷ [s.a.], "Slavs and East Franks Love It So: Aribo's Letter to King Arnulf (891)", in *The Historians' Sketchpad*, <https://salutemundo.wordpress.com/2022/03/01/slavs-and-east-franks-love-it-so-aribos-letter-to-king-arnulf-891/>.

⁹⁸ Jonathan Jarret, "Carrying Things to War in Frankish Gaul", in *A Corner of Tenth-Century Europe: Early Medievalist's Thoughts and Ponderings*, <https://tenthmedieval.wordpress.com/2022/01/23/carrying-things-to-war-in-frankish-gaul/>.

⁹⁹ *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe*, 210.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted from [s.a.], "Slavs and East Franks Love It So...", [s.p.].

and, after the death of St. Methodius, the administrator of Svätopluk's Slavic archbishopric. At first glance, this may seem unusual, but it is understandable, given that Wiching still enjoyed the trust of both rulers at that time, and it was crucial for Arnulf and Svätopluk to have a single neutral person in this position who would guarantee the successful execution of the entire operation. Indeed, there was a lot at stake. One can imagine a joint Northman-Slavic attack would undoubtedly have devastating effects on the East Frankish Empire. Secondly, the significance of the whole event for Arnulf is only reinforced by the fact that the other level of control of the Frankish mission among the Moravians was exercised by Margrave Aribo. The same Aribo, who was considered as an expert on the situation in Svätopluk's kingdom. The fact that the mission proceeded according to plan is evidenced by the following lines from the letter, in which Aribo informed his king that his fears that the Moravians might betray him during his Northmen campaign are unfounded: "they denied what had been told of them." On the contrary, with all their vehemence and every day "they [the Moravians] gather them [cattle] for your service." It is difficult to assess the extent to which Arnulf's suspicions of Svätopluk's potential betrayal during his planned campaign against the Northmen were justified. The fact is that this letter, written sometime in the spring of 991, not only confirms the previous agreement from Ommuntesperch (Amandsberg?), but also adds other more than valid details.

As is clear from the above lines, the Moravians were providing *servicium* to Arnulf, not *tributum pacis*.¹⁰¹ Svätopluk never paid Arnulf a tribute. On the other hand, the difference between Arnulf's maximum demands (the participation of Svätopluk's Slavs in Arnulf's expedition) and the actual material assistance that Svätopluk ultimately provided to the East Frankish king, may have been the beginning of deeper misunderstandings between the two most powerful rulers of Central Europe at the end of the ninth century.

¹⁰¹ Peter Ratkoš, based on an incorrect reading of this letter, introduced into historiography the idea that Svätopluk and his Moravians were paying a regular *tributum pacis*. See Peter Ratkoš, "Cenný prírastok k prameňom o Veľkej Morave," *Slovenská archivistika*, 11 (1976): 177–179 and id., "Význam listu grófa Ariba kráľovi Arnulfovi z r. 891," in *Československé příspěvky pro VIII. mezinárodní sjezd slavistů Záhřeb 1978*, ed. Bohuslav Havránek (Praha: Academia, 1978), 209–217. Id., "Die Bedeutung des Graf-Aribo-Briefes an König Arnulf aus dem Jahre 891," *Studia historica Slovaca*, 12 (1982): 11–16. Some of Ratkoš's readings were later corrected by Ondřej Zavadil, "Dopis markrabího Ariba králi Arnulfovi," *Mediaevalia Historica Bohemica*, 11 (2007): 7–21.

The Fulda Annals, as an official source, remain silent on all these matters due to their usual bias against Svätopluk. Even more, in his description of the events of 891, their anonymous author (intentionally?) misinterpreted the inspection visit of Bishop Wiching and the second envoy, whose name is unknown, to the Moravians, sometimes in the spring of 991, with the subsequent information about a diplomatic mission aimed at negotiating new peace terms between Moravians and East Franks.¹⁰² Since the peace between them of 885 and 890 had not been broken in any way, the purpose of the new Frankish mission in spring 891 must have been about something else. Even more, the new peace conditions in the east did not make sense before Arnulf defeated the Normans in the northwest.¹⁰³ Only after this famous victory, which significantly strengthened the position of the East Frankish ruler on the domestic and foreign political scene, it is logical that Arnulf also wanted to reorganize relations with Svätopluk on a new level. Given the subsequent course of events, it can be assumed that the new specification of peace set by Arnulf for Svätopluk occurred just in early 892. They were not favorable to him. The King of the Slavs not only rejected them, but in the same year began to cause his opponent military concern.

This interpretation of the sequence of events is also consistent with the account of Regino of Prüm, which significantly supplements the information known from *the Fulda Annals*. The military unrest between Arnulf and Svätopluk started, according to him, just after June 26, 891. It was on this day that the victory battle between the East Frankish troops and the army of the Northmen took place.¹⁰⁴ Based on the above, it can be concluded that after resolving the most pressing problems in the north-west, the East Frankish king turned his attention to the east. It could happen just in the second half of 891.

¹⁰² *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 121 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*,” 100.

¹⁰³ In 891, Arnulf managed to defeat the Normans (Danes). Two of their kings were killed. The victor sent sixteenth captured banners to Regensburg. *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 123.

¹⁰⁴ *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe*, 211 and “*Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon*,” 123. The same author refers to the beginning of Svätopluk’s rebellion against Arnulf as early as 890. However, this account must be taken in the context of the previous text, in which Reginon describes Arnulf’s recognition of Bohemia under Svätopluk’s rule. More on this below.

This is where the final period of relations between the two major protagonists of Central European history at the end of the ninth century begins. It can safely be called the last great confrontation between them.

The Second War between Arnulf and Svätopluk 891–894

For a better understanding of the causes of Arnulf's second and final war with Svätopluk, it is necessary the last time to return to the circumstances of the peace between the East Frankish king and the king of the Slavs from Ommuntesperch (Amandsberg?), which has not been given much attention here so far. It is the second fundamental text that from aside reflects this extremely important event. The report from the *Chronicle of Abbot Regino of Prüm* sounds:

In the year of the Lord's incarnation 890, King Arnulf gave the command [ducatu] of the Bohemians to King Zwentibald [Svätopluk] of the Moravian Slavs. Hitherto, the Bohemians had rulers from among their own kind and people, and had kept the fidelity they promised to the kings of the Franks by inviolable agreement. Arnulf did this because, before he had been raised to the throne of the kingdom, he had been joined to Zwentibald in close friendship. In fact, he raised from the holy font Arnulf's son, who was born to him by a concubine, and named him Zwentibald after him. This matter [the granting of Bohemia to Zwentibald of Moravia] provided a considerable stimulus for discord and defections. For the Bohemians, on the one hand, withdrew the fealty that they had long kept, and Zwentibald, on the other, believing himself to have gained considerable strength through the acquisition of another realm and puffed up with the arrogance of pride, rebelled against Arnulf.¹⁰⁵

The information preserved by Regino, abbot of Prüm, is invaluable for defining the relationship between the two Central European monarchs, as well as Svätopluk's place in the power structure of the late Carolingians. Some of this has already been mentioned (the name of Arnulf's eldest son, Svätopluk as his godfather, and the *gratia familiaritatis* between Arnulf and

¹⁰⁵ *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe*, 207 and "Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon," 122–123.

Svätopluk). I also indicated above that Regino says nothing about the relationship of vassalage or fidelity between the East Frankish king and the ruler of the Slavs on the Middle Danube.

However, his account sheds light on the terms of the peace that were agreed upon at Ommuntesperch. The price that Svätopluk demanded from his former friend and relative for peace, or eventually support of Arnulf's campaign against the Northmen, was the legalization of Svätopluk's previous possession of the Duchy of Bohemia.¹⁰⁶ Svätopluk's legal instinct is also evident in this step. The territories of those he conquered in the east simply belonged to him by virtue of his military control. In contrast, however, he had the annexation of countries that already had their own older legal status and formally belonged to the East Frankish Empire legally approved by the persons to whom they had previously formally and legally belonged. The seizure of the Transdanube region was thus legalized by Charles III the Fat during a meeting at Mons Comianus and by Arnulf of Bohemia on Mount Ommuntesperch. Based on a tradition preserved by the later Saxon chronicler Thietmar of Merseburg († 1018):

At one time, during the reign of Duke Swentepolk [Svätopluk] the Bohemians [Moravians] were our rulers. Indeed, our ancestors paid an annual tribute to the duke and he had bishops in his land, which is called Moravia.¹⁰⁷

It can be assumed that, at the same time as the Czech principality, the Lusatian Sorbs also entered into an alliance with Svätopluk. However, there are no sources documenting how long this alliance lasted or whether Arnulf also approved Svätopluk's annexation of this principality on Ommuntesperch (Amandberg?) Hill. However, this cannot be ruled out. In any case, around 890–891, Svätopluk's Slavic kingdom reached its greatest territorial extent (see map).

¹⁰⁶ Dušan Třeštík, for example, believed that Svätopluk had already conquered Bohemia around 884, and that in 890 Arnulf merely legitimized this claim. In alliance with the Moravians, they were to last only twelve years. See Dušan Třeštík, *Mysliti dějiny* (Litomyšl: Paseka, 1999), 140.

¹⁰⁷ English translation see *Ottonian Germany. The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, trans. David A. Warner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 303. "Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi Chronicon/Kronika Detmara biskupa merseburského," in *MMFH*, vol. 1, eds. Bartoňková and comp., 150–151.

Epilogue

All of Svätopluk's territorial gains must have deeply troubled Arnulf. Therefore, his subsequent reactions are not surprising. The question is just whether his decisions were correct. One thing is certain, since he did not have the military potential to defeat Svätopluk, he called in a third force to the new level of the "Game of Thrones" – the Old Hungarian tribal confederation.

This act later led to the emergence of the black legend of Arnulf. According to this legend, articulated mainly in the chronicles of the eleventh century, the blame for the collapse of Charlemagne's dream of a unified Latin Christian empire fell on Arnulf. The reason for this was his invitation to the pagan Old Hungarian tribal confederation to fight against the Christian ruler of Moravia, Svätopluk.¹⁰⁸ It is not clear today which of the protagonists in this dangerous game for the achievements of Carolingian civilization ultimately made more mistakes. However, it is further known from *the Fulda Annals* that in January 892, Arnulf sent new envoys to Svätopluk, inviting him to another personal meeting. Svätopluk refused. The anonymous author did not state the reason why he did so. Instead, he accused Duke (*dux*) Svätopluk of "betraying his fidelity" to the king "in his fashion".¹⁰⁹

As early as 1963, Lubomír E. Havlík pointed out that historical science has no source that would prove Svätopluk's promise of loyalty to Arnulf.¹¹⁰ Therefore, the stylization of *the Fulda Annals* rather reveals Arnulf's political intentions in the east after his victorious war with the Northmen. It was the formal subjugation of Svätopluk, which, if possible, would also lead to the weakening of Svätopluk's real power. This is not surprising. Arnulf, now the sovereign ruler of the East Frankish Empire, after five years of his reign, was finally able to enforce against Svätopluk the authority that Svätopluk had been bound to his predecessors on the East Frankish throne since the time of Louis the German. As I have mentioned above, the more objective Regino of Prüm assesses the initial relations between Svätopluk and Arnulf as *gratia familiaritas*. With regard to the previous relations between the East Frankish

¹⁰⁸ Stefan Albrecht, "Das großmährische Reich in der Historiographie des römisch-deutschen Reiches," in *The Great Moravian Tradition and Memory of Great Moravia in the Medieval Central and Eastern Europe*, eds. Robert Antonín et al. (Opava: Slezská univerzita, 2014), 46–49.

¹⁰⁹ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 122–23 and "*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*," 100–101.

¹¹⁰ Havlík, "Velká Morava a Franská říše," 171.

kings and Svätopluk, he also speaks of Svätopluk's rebellion against Arnulf. Nevertheless, it is only possible to rebel against a superior entity. From Svätopluk's point of view, however, Arnulf was not his superior. He had already the political recognition of both sacral and earthly authority – the pope and the emperor. Assuming that his coronation and anointing by the papal legate “according to the custom of Roman kings” did indeed take place in the autumn of 885, as claimed in Chapter IX of *Gesta Regum Sclavorum*,¹¹¹ and as vaguely recalled by Reginon of Prüm, “he [most possibly Svätopluk] had been raised to the throne of the kingdom”¹¹²; his political status was equal to that of Arnulf. Therefore, it is not surprising that Svätopluk simply did not bother to attend the meeting with Arnulf, which was apparently planned to take place on Arnulf's territory this time.

So much for the reasons that led to the final epilogue. It ended with the death of Svätopluk I in 894. Before that, however, Svätopluk dealt his opponent several painful blows. But first things first. According to *the Fulda Annals*, from the moment Svätopluk rejected his offer for a planned meeting, Arnulf prepared an extensive military coalition against him. This also included certain elements of economic diversion. The logical ally number one was Braslav, Duke of the Posavian Principality. However, the strategic force that was supposed to break Svätopluk's power in the middle Danube was to be the Old Hungarian tribal confederation. In addition to the traditional forces of the Frankish Empire, which included the Franks, Bavarians, and Alemanni, Arnulf apparently also relied on the help of the Bulgarians. This probably did not happen, and it is questionable whether the Frankish mission ultimately succeeded in persuading the Bulgarian Tsar Vladimir to block salt supplies to Svätopluk from Transylvania. *The Fulda Annals* are very vague on this subject. In any case, the effect of these military preparations was ultimately open warfare, which Svätopluk faced from three directions, according to the traditional pattern of Frankish invasions into the Middle Danube region. The fourth front was then created by the newly coming nomadic confederation of the old Hungarians. Military operations of this kind were subsequently repeated in 893. History records that Svätopluk had lived, and his army emerged undefeated.

¹¹¹ See Martin Homza, “The ‘Realm of the Slavs’ and the Coronation of Svätopluk,” 127–150.

¹¹² *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe*, 207 and “Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon,” 122.

Svätopluk I died unexpectedly in 984. The exact date is unknown. *Gesta regum Sclavorum* states that the most holy King (*rex sanctissimus*) Svätopluk took to eternity on March 17.¹¹³ A diametrically different opinion was expressed in his report on the death of Svätopluk by the anonymous author of *the Fulda Annals*. He described the Moravian duke (*dux*) as “the source of all treachery” (*vagina totius perfidiae*).¹¹⁴ Ultimately, these two radically different opinions laid the foundations for the creation of the *Black* and *White Legends of Svätopluk*, as I will refer to the system of positive and negative narratives about Svätopluk.¹¹⁵ The same discrepancy in the assessment of Svätopluk’s reign continues to this day.

Svätopluk apparently died without being aware of the fact that his lifelong work will see destruction shortly afterwards. Moimir II, the oldest son of Svätopluk and successor on the Moravian throne died around 906 and after him the Moimirid dynasty perished by the sword. About five years later Louis the Child, son of Arnulf became extinct, and with him disappeared the dynasty of the East-Frankish Carolingians.

¹¹³ *GRS*, vol. 1, ed., trans. and comment. Kunčer, column 62. “*Presbyteri Diocleatis Regnum Sclavorum*,” 245. Strange enough the editor of *MMFH*, vol. 1 translated the idiom *Rex sanctissimus* as “the most venerable king”.

¹¹⁴ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 129 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*,” 103.

¹¹⁵ Martin Homza, “Stredoveké korene Svätoplukovskej tradície u Slovákov (čierna a biela Svätoplukovská legenda),” in *Sloboda a vlasť*, vol. 1: *Jubilejník na počesť Jozefa M. Rydlu, člena Slovenského ústavu*, eds. Viliam Jablonický and Ladislav Vančo (Bratislava: Libri Historiæ, 2025), 455–541.