
MISSION OF SAINTS CYRIL AND METHODIUS AND THEIR CONTACTS WITH KOCEL, DUKE OF PANNONIA

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Abstract

The main topic field of this study is a scientific view of the little-known destinies of the Pannonian duke Kocel, the son of Pribina from Nitra. Author more closely presents a summary of political, military and religious relations that were developed in the area of a far-reaching foreign and domestic politics of Kocel from the beginning of his reign until the peak of his power. In the late 60's of the 9th century, his court became an important centre of mission of Saints Cyril and Methodius, as evidenced by written and archaeological sources. The attractiveness of topic mainly consists in boosting of professional discussion in recent years.

Keywords: mission, Saints Cyril and Methodius, duke Kocel, Christianization, Pannonia

1. Introduction

Cultural and spiritual dimension of the Saints Cyril and Methodius mission is currently getting a deserved attention in many countries [1]. The mission in Great Moravia in 863 did not arise at random. As it is known, one of the main reasons of their arrival in the territory of Great Moravia was an effort of the Moravian duke Rastislav to extricate from political or Church-political dependence of Frankish Empire, a neighbouring great power.

From the second half of the 8th century, two principalities were formed in the territory of today's Slovakia and Moravia – Moravian Principality and Nitra Principality [2]. The Nitra Principality, and particularly its centre Nitra, are first mentioned in connection with the first church built in the territory of Central Europe. The first well-known duke residing in Nitra was Pribina. The mentions of his life and consecration of the church in Nitra – with no specific dating – can be found in the polemic script *De Conversione Bagoariorum et Carantanorum* (hereinafter *Conversio*) [2, p. 253-283]. Currently, it is assumed that the consecration of a church in Pribina's seat could have taken place in 828 [3]. This ruler invited Adalram, Archbishop of Salzburg, to consecrate the church.

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The Latin sources include the volume *Conversio*. This unique chronicle was written from the initiative of Archbishop Adalwin of Salzburg in 871 and it contains background information on the Christianization of the Pannonian Slavs and Bavarians. It also mentions the destiny of duke Pribina and his son Kocel after the expulsion from their native Nitrava in 833. It also briefly portrays the public activity of Methodius as a missionary and bishop. The fact that these comments are less than flattering is not surprising since from the author's point of view, it was an "enemy service" of the Byzantines opposing the interest of the Frankish clergy [4].

The other important sources include mainly Moravian-Pannonian Legend, also dubbed *The Life of Constantine* [5] and *The Life of Methodius* [5, p. 114-140], because it has a key importance in understanding the significance of the indelible work of the Thessaloniki brothers. The destinies of mission of Saints Cyril and Methodius are also illustrated in the papal letters and documents – a letter of Hadrian II called *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, which has been preserved only in the transcripts, the letters of Pope John VIII to Louis the German, Carloman, Archbishop Adalwin of Salzburg, to Bishop Hermanrich of Passau, to Bishop Anno of Freising and the instruction of John VIII to a papal legate - Bishop Paul of Ancona. Several narrative sources complement our idea of the then political background [6]. In addition to written annals, the latest testament of Constantine and Methodius' work in Pannonia include a pottery with the oldest Glagolitic inscription discovered in the archaeological research. This inscription might come from 867 or from later activities of Methodius [7].

2. Pribina and Kocel as the rulers of the Principality of Pannonia

Around 830, the relations between the Moravian and Nitra Principality became very tense. *Conversio* tells us that Moravian Mojmir I expelled the Nitra Duke Pribina to the other side of the Danube to Ratbod, who administered the Eastern March of the Frankish Empire [2, p. 141]. By annexing the Nitra Principality, the Great Moravian state was formed.

Pribina was forced to leave the country and escape together with his military group to the Eastern March of the Frankish Empire. As Pribina finally won, Louis II the German himself over and after not such long stays at the Bulgarians and the Croats, at the end of the 40's of 9th century he was granted a part of Lower Pannonia (lands around the Zala River, westward from Lake Balaton in present-day Hungary) as a feud to his ownership. Pribina's and later Kocel's authority stretched to Ptuj County, Dudleb County and Etgar Principality [8].

Already at this stage, we can see a major difference in the relation of Great Moravia and Pannonia to the Frankish Empire. Even though Louis II the German tried to intervene in the events in Great Moravia, he mainly did not achieve a success. The progress in Pannonia, however, was radically different – it was an imperial principality since the defeat of the Bulgarians by the Franks in 828 [9] and the governor of Pannonia was appointed by the king. In case of

Pribina, as well as his son Kocel, it happened without any problems [4, p. 142-143].

Pribina built a large fortress as his seat of power in the territory of modern Zalavár (*Blatnograd, Mosapurc*) surrounded by forests and swamps. He gained many supporters there and soon obtained a significant position. In the inner fortification of his seat, he built the church dedicated to Saint Mary that was on January 24th in 850 consecrated by Liupram, Archbishop of Salzburg and appointed Pribina's priest Dominic as a presbyter. There were several Slavic and Bavarian magnates present during the consecration. Other churches were consecrated as well – the Church of the Mother Good, Saint Hadrian's Church, Sain. John's the Baptist Church, the Church of Priest Sandrat and the Church of Priest Ermpert in its vicinity, Saint Rupert's Church in Zalabér and more than 13 others in the territory liable to Pribina [9, p. 36]. They were also given proprieties from Pribina and his son. A living Pribina is mentioned in the records dated in 860 for the last time. It is assumed that he must have been killed in a battle with the Moravians in the same year. His son Kocel was installed as the ruler – a duke of Lower Pannonia [10].

The main tool of Frankish power expansion in the Slavic territories were the ecclesiastical organisations that were supposed to strengthen their dependence on the empire. It was customary to constitute archpresbyterates in the missionary territories where Christianization reached a certain level. An archpresbyter was a deputy of a bishop who appointed him for this post and all the priests within this territory were liable to him. The clergy were obliged to follow Bavarian hierarchy. Mainly Bavarian priests could act on influential Slavic magnates in order not to take any hostile actions against the king of the East Francia and thereby influenced the politics of princes who were significantly tied to an agreement and support of their magnates [11].

Within the Church – administrative jurisdiction, Great Moravia came under the influence sphere of the Diocese of Passau, Pannonia belonged to the Diocese of Salzburg [12]. Even before 862, missionaries from several countries worked in the territory of Great Moravia. Archpresbyterate was founded here sometime between 833 and 838 [13]. The evidence of this is the kind of decorated copper gold-plated plaques in Bojná that may have been a part of a portable altar [14]. In the 60's, Rastislav – a duke of Great Moravia could have benefited from the unpleasant situation on the episcopal seat in Passau. Due to several factors – lack of priests [15], economic problems, medical complications of bishop Hartvig [16], the Christianization activities of Passau were considerably weakened. After he expelled the Bavarian missionaries, he did not even allow bishop of Passau himself to access territory of Moravia. This fact is later mentioned in a tendency letter of the Bavarian bishops to the Pope John IX. As it is known, in such an environment, Rastislav could have successfully asked for his own church officials [17].

Unlike Passau, Salzburg Archbishopric prospered in that time thanks to active work of archbishops Liupram and Adalwin who personally participated in the Christianization of the Principality of Pannonia. At the beginning of the 60's,

Archbishop of Salzburg set up an archipresbyterial administration in this territory [18]. At the end of 865 and probably in 866, Adalwin even stayed with Kocel in order to consecrate at least twelve churches there. For each of these churches, an archbishop appointed his own priest [3, p. 272-277, 280-282]. Since the majority of these churches were built by Kocel's mates - mainly the Bavarians, it was a system of proprietary churches characteristic of the Frankish Empire in that period [19]. According to *Conversio*, there was also a suffragan bishop appointed for this territory [3, p. 305]. It is not excluded that the pastoral way of Salzburg dignitary was motivated by the actions of Constantine and Methodius who stayed in the territory of neighbouring Moravia since 863.

In 862, the Great Moravian duke Rastislav turned to the Byzantine emperor Michael III with the request to send a bishop and a teacher to proclaim the true Christian faith in the Slavic language. Rastislav also requested someone who would settle the law. Mostly for strategic reasons, the emperor decided to grant his request, but not fully – he agreed with the mission, but did not send a bishop. He entrusted the mission to Constantine and his brother Methodius. They speak the Slavic language, belonged to the clergy and had served in various administrative posts and had experience with missions [20].

When the brothers were entrusted with leading the Great Moravian mission [21], they first had to solve one very serious problem: if they wanted to proclaim the Word of God in the Slavic language, they had to do so also in a written and comprehensible form. All such attempts had not been successful. However, Constantine managed to carry out this daring deed in the history of thought and spirit even before the departure to Great Moravia. The creation of an alphabet (Glagolitic) and the translation of liturgical texts required a well-learned world-class thinker – Constantine was undoubtedly one [22]. The missionary journey to Moravia could then start and reached the country most likely in 863 [23]. The brothers spent approximately 40 months there, teaching the disciples appointed by Rastislav. Constantine definitely did not waste his time, which is evidenced by numerous translations of liturgical books. It was only a matter of time before he got into conflict with the trilingualists proclaiming – irrespective of the Pope's verdict – that God can be praised only in Hebrew, Greek and Latin (these were mostly Frankish priests) [20, p. 48-49].

In order for the mission to succeed, the strenuous preparatory phase had to be followed by other actions. Constantine and Methodius needed to have their disciples consecrated as priests in order to independently keep up with Christianization. Around summer 867 Constantine and Methodius left Great Moravia and headed for Venice, which was under the Byzantine rule at the time [24].

En route to Venice, they visited the Blatnograd duke Kocel. It was the first recorded visit of Byzantine missionaries to Kocel mentioned in *The Life of Constantine*. Even though Methodius is not mentioned here, it is not surprising since we assume that he was not alive in the time of the source. According to this legend, Kocel's attitude towards the mission was very friendly and he even entrusted Constantine with other "disciples to be educated" [5, p. 84-85]. The

same information was taken over by the author of more recent source of Bulgarian origin called *The Death of St. Cyril (Uspenije Kirilla)* [5, p. 224]. Kocel even learnt the Glagolitic alphabet. As good hosts, both Kocel and Rastislav intended to reward the brothers for their services, but they declined the offered gold, silver, and other gifts. Much to the surprise of the then community, the brothers instead asked for 900 prisoners, who were generously released. The brothers of Thessaloniki probably did not stay there for longer than three months [19, p. 143].

In fall 867, the delegation finally reached Venice. It remains questionable, what was to be the next stop of the brothers. Did they intend to travel to Constantinople, or to Rome [25]? Coincidentally, that year saw a change in the political situation on the Byzantine imperial court. Michael III was murdered and succeeded by Basil I. One of the new emperor's first steps was the deposition of Photius, the Patriarch of Constantinople and patron of Constantine and Methodius. Another important factor in deciding on the destination of their journey was the fact that in Venice the brothers received the invitation from another Christian centre. Having learned about their stay in northern Italy, The Pope Nicholas I did not hesitate to invite the deputation: towards the end of 867, the brothers set off to Rome. However, Nicholas I died on November 14, 867 after a long service, and was succeeded by Adrian II. The new Pope decided to go to meet the Thessaloniki brothers together with Romans to greet them in person. The reason for this courteous invitation were the relics of the fourth Pope Saint Clement brought by the brothers from Kherson, where this Pope had been martyred around the year 100 [26]. The Pope's affection to the Thessaloniki brothers was also demonstrated in an extraordinary act that affected the spiritual history of a number of nations. The Holy Father studied and approved the Slavic liturgical books, consecrated them and deposited them in the Church of Saint Mary, where liturgy was also served. The Solemn Masses were also held in other churches, including Saint Peter's Basilica. Adrian II ordered that Methodius and other three Slavic disciples be ordained priests (other two disciples received minor orders). Constantine, the head of the mission, was accepted in Rome with great reverence and he received many curious visitors for open discussions. However, the Philosopher soon fell ill and he entered the monastery. Shortly after having received the name Cyril, he died on February 14, 869. The Pope – after consulting with the Roman bishops – decided to bury him symbolically in the Basilica of Saint Clement in Rome [23, p. 119-142].

Around spring 869, Kocel „asked the Pope to return Methodius, [...] a blessed teacher” to his court in Pannonia. The highest pontifical agreed. Methodius was appointed a teacher and a papal legate for the Slavic countries. „Kocel received Methodius with reverence”, however, according to *The Life of Methodius* after a short period of time „he sent him and twenty of his noblemen back to Rome, where Methodius was to become a bishop in Pannonia” [5, p. 127, 130]. This would have allowed the creation of a Church province like Great Moravia, providing more spiritual and political independence. As mentioned before, the request to have their own bishop was not an unusual one in the 9th

century – Rastislav himself had proceeded the same way before he appealed to Byzantium. Kocel, however, based on information in *The Life of Methodius*, did not ask the bishop but he appealed directly to Methodius. It is highly likely that he expected Methodius to have been ordained as a bishop what is also documented in his ‘return’ to the Pope for consecration. If Kocel only asked for institution of the bishopric in Pannonia, it is likely that a Pannonian archpriest Riphald (or anyone else enforced by the Frankish clergy) would be promoted to a post of bishop [27]. The prerequisite for such a move would be the facts stated in *Conversio*: “*Slavonic people were administered by bishop Oswald just as it was administered [...] before by (other) bishops subordinated to the bishops of Salzburg*” [3, p. 269].

This attempt was successful and Methodius returned in 870 to Pannonia as a bishop and a papal legate. Pope Hadrian II conceived a papal letter *Gloria in excelsis Deo* which has been preserved only in the form of transcription in *The Life of Methodius*. It was addressed to Slavic dukes Rastislav, Svatopluk and Kocel. They were informed about the decision to restore the Pannonian bishopric [5, p. 127], which once existed with its headquarters in the ancient town of Sirmium (today’s Sremska Mitrovica) [18, p. 104-106].

In the current historiography, we can see the speculations whether Methodius was already a bishop or an archbishop in that time. Panegyric *A Praising Word to Cyril and Methodius* [5, p. 144-150], written a little later probably by Clement of Ohrid that also contains a transcript of Hadrian II’s letter, informs about Methodius’s being consecrated an archbishop. It is therefore questionable, whether there are two transcripts of the same letter or two separate letters, or whether it is a genuine letter [20, p. 57-59]. Pope John VIII used the title bishop for Methodius in his letters in 873 (apart from the letter to bishop Anno of Freising where he is described as archbishop of Pannonia) [12, p. 15-20].

Even though there is no direct evidence of an open enmity between Principality of Pannonia and Principality of Great Moravia during the reign of Kocel [9, p. 42, 50] it can be assumed that their relations could have been quite strained. The Moravians expelled his father from native Nitra and killed him. Moreover, the Principality of Lower Pannonia was patronized by the Frankish Empire in the political and military sphere that conducted regular military operations against the Moravians in the 50’s and 60’s. Nevertheless, it needs to be emphasized that the stops of Thessaloniki brothers in Pannonia (it also concerns the stop of ‘the orphan’ Methodius in 869 and 870) helped to restore Methodius’s activities in Great Moravia. The stops of the scholars could have caused a partial reversal in Kocel’s attitude towards a northern neighbour. An evident certain type of cooperation between the dukes appointed by Hadrian II was fabled to the extent that the younger medieval sources pushed the bond “*Rastislav, Svatopluk and Kocel*” to 862–863, and were therefore identified as three initiators of the whole Byzantine mission [28]. Their real cooperation could only lie in a common effort to accomplish an autonomous ecclesiastical province.

Conversio, which was established in Salzburg in about 871 (about a year after Methodius's activities in Pannonia), tells about his action from the enemy position [2, p. 139]. According to its author, Christianization in this territory was developed without any problems until "a Greek Methodius [...] following the philosophers underestimating Latin language, Roman learning [...] (did not cause) caused that masses and Gospels, [...] served in Latin, partially lost their seriousness for all the people". In this period, the post of Pannonian archpriest was performed by Riphald who returned to Salzburg disgusted and was complaining about Methodius's activities [3, p. 277-280]. The chronicle also highlights right of Salzburg archbishops to Pannonia: "since the reign [...] of Emperor Charles [...] it started to be administered by Salzburg pontiffs [...] no other bishop except of the one of Salzburg had an ecclesiastical power in this border area. In addition, no other bishop (who would come from elsewhere) had dared to act longer than three months before presenting his letter of absolution to the bishop". This condition "was maintained here until a philosopher Methodius started with the new doctrines" [3, p. 283].

However, there were problems from the very beginning of Methodius's service in the new office. In 870 there was a clash between the ruler and Svatopluk in Great Moravia; Rastislav was captured and taken to Regensburg where he got convicted and blinded. Methodius did not evade imprisonment and trial either. The Bavarian bishops accused him of preaching in the Frankish missionary regions. He got imprisoned in the Pannonian Principality, Kocel probably informed papal mansion only. Subsequently, Methodius got imprisoned for two and a half years in Bavaria [20, p. 56-64]. Sometime in 873 the new Pope John VIII ordered that Methodius be released and he punished the Salzburg, Passau and Freising Bishop [12, p. 17-20] for wilfully judging the papal envoy Methodius. He entrusted a papal legate Paul with the task to ensure the deliverance of Methodius and his departure from Bavaria [12, p. 17]. In addition to the letters addressed to the highest representatives of the Bavarian clergy, the Pope tried to improve the situation with Methodius in further correspondence, as well – in the letters addressed to Louis the German defending the claims of the Holy See to Pannonia and their superiority to the claims of Salzburg, and to Carloman - the administrator of Bavarian marches in order to enable Methodius to perform his duties in the Pannonian Diocese [12, p. 14-15].

The Pope appointed Methodius as archbishop in the newly created Diocese of Moravia and Pannonia and he proclaimed him the Rome's ambassador to Great Moravia. Methodius could have claimed his powers but he could not return to Kocel. Threads of Bavarian clergy after releasing Methodius were specified in *The Life of Methodius* in the sense that Kocel will keep "this man, he will not get rid of [...] them in the good" [5, p. 132]. In terms of Kocel, Methodius's imprisonment brought his concept to a dead point, or it showed the failure of his attempt to extricate from the dependence of other great powers. The road to independence was in fact determined by several levels in which the events were taking place – whether it was an international political level,

military, legal or internal one. In this sense, Kocel's position was much more unfavourable than the position of Rastislav and later Svatopluk.

Kocel's failure was contributed by two most significant geopolitical reasons related to suggestion of the Frankish Empire and by ecclesiastical-political circumstances. The Pope Nicholas I, who had already tried to assert superiority of a mansion over all other world authorities during his strong pontificate (858–867), was looking for a tight and efficient alliance. He primarily found it with the emperor Louis the German. At that time in Rome, they aimed for Church universalism and a mansion needed a strong support of Louis the German because of its political intentions in the Frankish Empire (towards the East Frankish sovereigns and episcopate) where the power of the individual bishops grew on the expense of Rome, and also against the claims of the Patriarchate of Constantinople [29]. Finally, the Pope declined the initial request of the Moravians from the beginning of the 60's for a bishop because of strategic reasons. The other bishops continued in an attempt to enforce their interests, as well. They knew that a bishop needed support of the representatives of temporal power in order to strengthen his position. Thus, Kocel's plea for a bishop (for Methodius) could have also been seen by Hadrian II as a background offer for his representative and Methodius imprisonment as a proof that a Pannonian duke was not independent enough from the East Frankish Empire to provide such a background [27, p. 117].

Since the duke of Blatnograd met with considerable resistance from the Bavarian clergy, after his release in 873, Methodius got back to Great Moravia where he worked until his death in 885. Methodius's release from prison was probably chronologically preceded by Svatopluk's requests of the Moravians to the Pope to send Methodius (as an archbishop and a teacher) to Moravia which is stated in *The Life of Methodius* [5, p. 133]. In this context, some historians interpret an unsuccessful negotiation of Svatopluk with Louis the German of 873, written in *Annales Fuldenses* [6, p. 86-132], as a reason why the duke of Great Moravia appealed to the Pope in an attempt to free Methodius. They even believe that it was a joint effort with Kocel [30]. Svatopluk, after consolidation of his power in the victory over the Bavarians in 872, became a powerful protector of Methodius. In the context of papal policy, he provided him with powerful background for his Christianization activities. Even though Methodius remained in the post of Pannonian archbishop after 873, he moved his domicile to Great Moravia.

According to two documents of Pope John VIII from 873, Kocel apparently found himself not only in disgrace of Frankish clergy but also in disgrace of the Pope. In his eyes, he was no longer a guarantee of protection of Methodius and was also criticized for the state of 'morality' in his principality and was accused of resumption of pagan customs in his territory [12, p. 16, 17]. It is possible that such a state resulted from a slander on the part of Bavarian priests. Afterwards, Kocel obediently performed his obligations towards Louis the German and Carloman. It is assumed that he died during a Bavarian host against the Croats in 867. His post of an administrator of Pannonia was taken

over by Arnulf – Carloman's son which was the sign of influence settlement of East Frankish Empire [9, p. 56-59]. Perhaps in this regard, in 880 Pope John VIII set up an independent Moravian archbishopric and the Bishopric of Nitra by a bull *Industriae Tuae* [12, p. 23-25]. The fact that Pannonia remained in the Moravian archbishopric was used by Svatopluk as one of many factors in its conquest in the years 883–884.

3. Conclusions

Sometime in 860 Pribina dies in a battle with the Moravians. Since then, his son Kocel appears in the written sources alone. A little later, his court in Pannonia became an important centre of Saints Cyril and Methodius' mission.

While being on their famous journey to Rome in 867, the scholars remained in the residence of a Pannonian administrator for about three months. They also ingratiate a prince of Blatnograd who got familiar with their activities and he even allocated 50 disciples for them. They inspired him insomuch that he became a political guarantor of Methodius's activities for at least a short time. Kocel's intention to have Methodius in his territory was a declaration of his attempt to become independent from the East Frankish Empire. History of several European nations shows many common features in their diversity. One of the intersection points is also personality of Kocel. It is questionable whether Kocel was able to enforce his will in solving his prior interests as he was countering objections from many sides. Despite of that, this ruler remains an extremely remarkable figure not only as a soldier, a diplomat or a politician but also as a supporter of evangelization. Although current political systems of countries try to work on neutral moral principles and standards in order to be fair, they are naturally influenced by certain shared ethical or moral values of particular society or community [31-33]. When looking for an analogy of this idea with Kocel's attempts at skilful political behaviour we can say that the ruler was aware of responsibility for his actions, he was acquainted with the art of debate and he respected the views of the opponents. The seriousness of his personality primarily lies in the fact that he enabled Methodius to return from Rome to Central Europe, and not to his birthplace. This return was a bit later crowned by the establishment of a separate ecclesiastical province in Great Moravia.

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