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This year is the 1150th anniversary of the arrival of the missionary brothers, Saints Cyril and Methodius, to Great Moravia. Does their cult still live in any other country in Europe and does the legacy of the Slavic brothers still appeal to historians? Mgr. Marek Junek, Ph.D., Head of the Department of Central European Studies, CUFA, explains.



How would you summarize the importance that the personalities of Cyril and Methodius have had for us?

Constantine, who took the name Cyril upon becoming a monk in Rome, and Methodius were invited to come to Great Moravia in the 9th century, bringing Christianity with them. However, the word *bring* is rather imprecise as Christianization had begun in Central Europe before they arrived, having spread to us from what was then the East Franks Empire. The Christianity that they brought was in a language that the people inhabiting Great Moravia understood. This made them the founders of Slavic literature.

Their translations of religious texts as well as writings on the law left their mark on the Czech Lands but also on the whole of Slavic Europe. This influence was later built upon during, among other periods, the 19th century National Revival;

the introduction to the oldest Slavic poem known as Proglas, for instance, says how important it is to speak a national language.

It was Thessaloniki that the brothers came from. Today, however, Czechs hardly understand Macedonians...

It was not until later that Slavic languages became differentiated. The brothers, therefore, were able to take as their point of departure a dialect spoken in the region of Thessaloniki, creating a Slavic alphabet which they would later use in Great Moravia. Languages in those days were very close indeed.

Could you specify how much Great Moravia expanded in the ninth century?

Great Moravia was located primarily in parts of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Slovakia, Hungary and in parts of Austria. In the ninth century, Great Moravia was, alongside the Byzantine and Franks Empires, a prominent centre of power.

Could we have a little bit of speculation? What direction would our country have taken if Cyril and Methodius had not arrived?

I think the development would have been the same. You could say that the arrival of the brothers was no more than an instrument of power which would serve Great Moravia to reduce its dependence on the East Franks Empire. What they did is naturally beyond any doubt, but Great Moravia would have perished under the raids of Hungarians anyway. What we know from what happened later is that the centre of power under Great Moravia would later shift westwards to what is now Bohemia; Czech culture has no direct links to Moravian culture because Slavic literature only had a marginal position in history.

Do other countries commemorate Cyril and Methodius as strongly as we do?

The cult of the brothers is very widespread in other Slavic countries. Dividing the Czech Republic into Bohemia and Moravia makes it more transparent that the cult is much stronger in Moravia. The brothers also have a prominent position in Slovakia; it was the cultural tradition dating back to Great Moravia that served as a crucial stimulus during the rise of the Slovak national movement in the 19th century. Unlike Czechs, Slovaks had no sovereignty to rely on, taking Cyril and Methodius as a basis instead. And it was Slovaks who created one of the most important works related to the cult – an epos entitled Cyrilometodiána, one of the founding stones of 19th century Slovak literature, written by Ján Hollý, an expert on the work of Slovak linguist Anton Bernolák,

The cult is equally strong in Bulgaria as it was the Balkans that the disciples of Cyril and Methodius moved to. The influence of Cyril and Methodius lives on in the Orthodox Church and this is why the brothers' legacies are strongly commemorated in Ukraine and Russia.

Their importance has been acknowledged, among others, by the European Union which adopted the brothers as its patrons. The importance of Cyril and Methodius is truly international rather than relating to one nation, which is the case with the Czech patrons, Saint Wenceslas (Václav) and Saint Agnes (Anežka).

Do Cyril and Methodius still appeal to historians?

The issue has not been closed; for instance, the place where Methodius is buried is still to be found. It is known that he died somewhere in Great Moravia, with several locations claiming to be his burial site. Archaeological research is still ongoing, and linguists are busy researching the language. Another issue of interest is the influence which the brothers had on the national movements of the 19th century and what their role is in contemporary churches etc.