

**A SLAVIC EXCURSUS AND A LITTLE
MORE: PROCOPIUS IN CZECH AND
SLOVAK HISTORIOGRAPHY
AND ARCHAEOLOGY**

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‘For these nations, the Sclavenoi and Antae, are not ruled by one man, but have lived from of old under a democracy’ (*Wars* 7.14.22, tr. Dewing). With these words—probably the most reflected upon passage (within Czech and Slovak historiography) of this significant historian of late antiquity—the so-called Slavic excursus of Procopius begins.¹ This fact is not surprising, given that—as with the historians and archaeologists of other Slavic nations—Czech and Slovak researchers could not afford to ignore the information provided by Procopius regarding the religion, army, clothing, language, appearance, way of life, character traits, and ancient history

¹ In our historiographic overview we focus on those works published in Czech and Slovak, which, considering how limited knowledge of these languages is, cannot have been reflected upon sufficiently by other writers concerned with the works Procopius. The research for this paper was financially supported by VEGA 1/0814/18; KEGA 042UK-4/2018 and KEGA 004UKF-4/2018. The finalisation of this paper was supported by an internal grant of the Faculty of Philosophy of Comenius University (Bratislava) n. FG08/2017. In this regard, we would like to thank our colleagues Dr Vladimír Vavřínek, Dr Lubomíra Havlíková and Dr Vladimír Turčan for information regarding the works of Czech and the Slovak authors who have reflected on the work of Procopius.

of the Sclavenoi and Antae.² Procopius' reports of Slavic invasions and their cruelty have served as proof against the concept of the 'dove-like' peaceful nature of the Slavs,³ while his references to Slavic democracy have encouraged thought about the nature of early Slavic society and its political organisation.⁴ The informative value of the excursus has also become an object of research, while typically attracting the interest of Byzantinists rather than national historians. Well-known Czech researcher Bohumila Zástěrová, who has addressed this issue on a large scale, considers the excursus of Procopius as a semi-historical topos and to a certain extent conceived in the form of predetermined aspects and traditional ethnographical patterns, which are also related analogically to the tribes of Procopius' time and previous periods.⁵ According to her, this excursus was a separate literary unit inserted into an interesting narrative about the fictitious Chilbudius, which Procopius wrote in the form of a short story and added into his fourth book of the *Wars*. Drawing on what is known about the Slavs from Byzantine sources in general, she concludes that writers of that period cared more about literary effect than about reporting historical facts. Whether any actual facts are buried in these

² On Procopius' reports regarding the history of the Slavs, see chiefly the following works of classical Czech and Slovak writers: Šafařík (1837) Šafařík (1862); Niederle (1902); Niederle (1904); Niederle (1906); Niederle (1919); Niederle (1924a); Niederle (1924b). For more recent works, see mainly Štefanovičová (1989); Chropovský (1989), 26–8; Múcska–Daniš–Ševčíková (2006) 76–81; Klanica (2009) 25–6; Ivanič (2011) 24–5; Homza (2014) 21–37 and Mesiarkin (2107) 65–8. Regarding religion, see Beranová (1988) 216–17; Váňa (1990) 27, 39, 49, 63, 70–1, 105, 110, 126, 128, 201; Profantová and Profant (2000) 15, 182; Pitro and Vokač (2002) 91, 171–2, 174. Regarding military history: Beranová (1988) 9–15; Klein–Ruttikay–Marsina (1993) 60–1; Klučina P. et al. (1985) 35–7; and others.

³ From among the most recent works, e.g. Beranová (1988) 9–11, Beranová (2000) 10–12; Chropovský (2000) 18; Dvořák (2004) 17.

⁴ Dekan (1951) 13, Havlik (1974) 182; Dvořák (1978) 12; Havlík (1987) 40, Steinhübel (1998) 380, Kučera (2008) 52 and others.

⁵ Zástěrová (1968) 190–1.

references can be discovered only by comparison with other historical sources.⁶

If we leave aside the context of Procopius' excursus on the Slavs—reflection on which is understandable given the connection of both nations with the wider Slavic family—there are not many more points of contact for Czech and Slovak researchers with the work of this Greek historian. In both countries, interest in Byzantine culture and heritage is based particularly on the tradition of Cyril and Methodius and the legacy of these two brothers from Thessalonica. From the geographical point of view, the events described by Procopius in his historical works are to a certain extent removed from the region of central Europe. The same can be said about the actual locations mentioned by him, since they belong mainly to the world of the Eastern Roman Empire and to the countries that are its territorial heirs. Obviously, the work of Procopius cannot be omitted or ignored as a source by those historians who are concerned with the period of the migration of the nations,⁷ the history of the Byzantine empire,⁸ or more specifically the rule of the emperor Justinian.⁹ It is understandable that it is the historical facts left by Procopius that are at the forefront of their interest, rather than his life, opinions or the nature of his works preserved.¹⁰

⁶ Zástěrová (1968) 192.

⁷ Mainly Bednaříková (2003); Bednaříková–Homola–Měřinský (2006); Bystrický (2008). For the most recent ones see Husár–Ivanič–Hetényi (2015).

⁸ Havlík (1971); Havlík (1979); Zástěrová et al. (1992); Dostálová (1994); Hurbanič (2009), (2010), and (2016).

⁹ Niederle (1905); Bystrický (2003); Hurbanič (2010); Bystrický (2014); Hurbanič (2016); Gogola (2016) 61–88 and (2017) 111–15.

¹⁰ Short notes on the life of Procopius and particular works are obviously among the guidebooks to antique and Byzantine historiography, and to the history of Byzantine in general. Müller (1929) 44; Macůrek (1946) 135–6; Dostálová and Hrochová (1990) 9–10; Vavřínek (1975) 511–12; Vavřínek (2006) 452; Vavřínek (2011) 401–2. For a short reflection on the work of Procopius see Dostálová (1990) and (2003) 134–6.

Through All the Tribes of the Sclavenoi
(Wars 6.15.1–4)

Despite these limitations, Procopius' work has, to some extent, found a deeper reflection and commentary within the Czech and Slovak scientific community. More precisely, there are a couple of references that local writers consider essential to the exploration of the ethnogenesis of Slavic tribes in the areas of current Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia. The first of these is a piece of information about part of the Heruli returning from the middle Danube region into the area of Denmark and current Scandinavia 'through all the tribes of the Sclavenoi' (6.15.2). In the 19th century, the idea was established—by a leading Slavonic scholar of Slovak origin, Pavol Jozef Šafárik, and a Czech historian and politician, František Palacký—that the Heruli returned to their original settlements through current day Moravia and Bohemia, presumably confirming the older existence of Slavic settlements in that period. They both dated this reference to the year 495.¹¹

In the early twentieth century, before publishing his major work on *Slavic Antiquities*, another significant Slavist, Lubor Niederle, provided a more detailed commentary on this report in a separate study published in *The Czech Historical Review*. He rejected the argument proposed by Šafárik and Palacký that the Heruli passed through Bohemian territory to the Elbe. According to him, the only natural route, and the shortest one, to the north for the Heruli was along the Danube or Tisza towards the Carpathian Mountains, and from there to the Vistula or diverting to the west to the valley of the Morava and to the north to the Oder—where not even the Lombards, whose estimated arrival to Pannonia was after the year 512, would be an obstacle. In his view, Procopius' report may have referenced Moravia, but definitely not Bohemia, and therefore, unlike Šafárik and Palacký, he does not regard this as the earliest explicit source on the Slavs in Bohemia.¹²

¹¹ Šafárik (1837) 764–5; Palacký (1848) 93.

¹² Niederle (1900) 213–14.

Niederle's critical remarks were also reflected in the key synthesis of Czech history penned by Václav Novotný, who similarly inclined to the suggested route through the valleys of the Morava and the Oder, not excluding Bohemia completely, but considering this thesis to be highly improbable.¹³

These conclusions are in essence shared by Czech archaeologist Emanuel Šimek, who also rejected the view that this may have been the earliest source to mention the presence of Slavs in the territory of current Bohemia. In his view, the Heruli must have returned either through the territory of current Slovakia and the Carpathian mountains or detoured through Moravia into the areas between the Oder and the Vistula, which, according to him, must have been densely populated in those times.¹⁴

Reflections of local writers on the aforementioned reference (*Wars* vi.15.1–4) began to occur more frequently only after the end of World War II.¹⁵ Slovak archaeologist and historian Ján Dekan used it as evidence for the existence of Slavic settlements in the Oder and Morava river basins, as well as in the wider area of the Devín gate.¹⁶ An expert on the history of Great Moravia, Lubomír Havlík, argued that the Heruli set off for their old homeland probably from the current Danube basin in Austria, and their route from there to the north may have led also through Moravia and the Oder river basin.¹⁷ Czech archaeologist Jan Eisner assumed that their journey led rather east from Moravia, either through the Váh river

¹³ Novotný (1912) 198–200.

¹⁴ Šimek (1923) 222–3; Šimek (1947) 16.

¹⁵ In one of his older papers ((1947) 47), Czech archaeologist Jozef Poulík evaluates this reference with a certain amount of caution; later ((1960) 28), however, he writes that the journey of the Heruli to the north led through the Váh basin and the Moravian gate, or from the Devín gate directly through the Morava river valley. A more sceptical view on the issue was held by historian and archaeologist Rudolf Turek ((1963) 9).

¹⁶ Dekan (1951) 10–11.

¹⁷ Havlík (1964) 174.

basin or through passes in the Eastern Beskids—excluding Moravia, since at that time it was in the power of the victorious Lombards.¹⁸ Czech Slavist and historian of law Hynek Bulín, on the contrary, adopted a sceptical opinion,



¹⁸ Eisner (1966) 92.

claiming that Procopius' testimony about the Heruli cannot be considered reliable proof of the existence of Slavs in Moravia, and even less so in Bohemia. According to Bulín, Procopius' report does not include more precise geographical information about this route. Despite this, however, he considers it important from the perspective of Czech and Slovak history, since with the departure of the Heruli, space opened up for the penetration of the Slavs into the area of the central Danube.¹⁹

Despite these cautious formulations, an effort to define this route more specifically can be observed in Czech and Slovak historiography. Slovak archaeologist Bohuslav Chropovský assumed that the Heruli travelled through the area of current Slovakia, particularly through the Váh basin or the Devín gate area, and along the Morava river to the north.²⁰ A significant Slovak medievalist, Matúš Kučera, expressed his position on Procopius' report in two separate studies. Citing the work of Polish historian Henryk Łowmiański, he mentions three possible routes that the Heruli could have used to return to their original settlements. The first of these leads through the river basins of eastern Slovakia towards the Carpathian passes, on to the region of Spiš, and into the area of current Poland. The second passes through the mountains of Matra and Bukové hory to Esztergom and from there to western Slovakia, through the Váh valley or the area of Záhorie to Moravia, and to the north through the Moravian gate. The third is based on the possibility that the Heruli moved in a western direction through the area of present-day Bohemia. Since each of these routes necessarily passes through the current borders of Slovakia, Kučera argues that Procopius' reference is the first historically documented source evidence mentioning the existence of a Slavic settlement in the territory of present-day Slovakia.²¹ A similar opinion

¹⁹ Bulín (1968) 178.

²⁰ Chropovský (1970) 11; Chropovský (1989) 19.

²¹ Kučera (1979) 865; Kučera (1985) 169. Information on the Heruli crossing the territory of Slovakia appears also in Marsina et al. (1986) 63, a representative collective synthesis on Slovak history. This

was reached also by Slovak archaeologist Vladimír Mináč, who remarks, however, that if the Heruli travelled to their new homeland through the territory north of the Danube (i.e. through south-west Slovakia) the route would have been to a certain extent problematic, considering that they would have had to cross the territory of their enemies the Lombards, who not only ruled Rugiland and southern Moravia but also part of south-west Slovakia.²²

Probably the best known Slovak Byzantinist, Alexander Avenarius, takes a critical view of Procopius' reference. In the first of his two commentaries, he argues that this reference cannot be presented as indisputable proof of the existence of Slavs in the area of Slovakia, as is often done, because it only represents one of the possible alternatives.²³ Sometime later he returns to the reference in more detail, focusing on Procopius' statement that a portion of the Heruli settled down on the margins of the populated world. Avenarius argues that this must point to somewhere away from the settlements of the Gepids, and indeed emphasises that the starting point of the Heruli's route should be sought not in the neighbourhood of the Gepids, but rather on the edge of the populated world, as Procopius mentions. He is convinced, however, that what we have here is clearly a topos of Greek historiography, which, since the days of Plutarch, has placed events about which reliable information is lacking in uninhabited regions. With this in mind, he argues that Procopius' statements as to the beginning of the Herulian *anabasis* do not offer big opportunities for the reconstruction of their overall travelling route. He assumes that Procopius' reference to the edge of the populated world represents a division separating the historian's knowledge of particular events from reports that were the products of mere imagination.²⁴

reference is considered with more caution by Slovak archaeologist Tatiana Štefanovičová (1989) 25.

²² Mináč (1985) 119.

²³ Avenarius (1986) 23.

²⁴ Avenarius (1992) 9.

Avenarius considers the edge of the populated world—the unpopulated areas—to be rather the territories lying north of the settlements of the Gepids, reaching to the areas of present-day eastern Slovakia. Consequently, the settlements of the Slavs through which the Heruli travelled were located beyond the Carpathian passes. The existence of Slavic settlements lying north of the Carpathians would, according to Avenarius, correspond to other contemporaneous information gained from both ancient and Byzantine writers regarding Slavic settlements between the Vistula/Oder and Dnieper rivers.²⁵

Avenarius' undoubtedly interesting commentary on Procopius' report was, however, largely relativised by an important Czech medievalist, Dušan Třeštík, in his two contributions on the beginnings of Czech history. In the first of these, and in response to Avenarius' contribution, Třeštík points out that what is described as the most remote place of the inhabited world was not the starting point, but rather the destination of the Herulian *anabasis*, and that it relates to what Procopius says about the island of Thule.²⁶ Třeštík comments on the previously proposed routes of the Heruli crossing the regions of the Slavs, and, after a careful analysis taking into account the overall political situation in the Carpathian basin during that period, he finally rejects the speculations concerning the transit of the Heruli through the territories both of Bohemia and Moravia. According to him, the Heruli would have had to pass through the enemy territory of the Lombards, who, according to his own conclusions, controlled the majority of the territory of Moravia at that time.²⁷ A number of renowned Czech and Slovak writers have subsequently been associated with his sceptical line,²⁸ although some of them have continued to regard areas of current-day

²⁵ Avenarius (1992) 9; his conclusions were accepted by G. Fusek (1994) 120.

²⁶ Třeštík (1996) 263 n. 120.

²⁷ Třeštík (1996) 263–4; Třeštík (1997) 34.

²⁸ Bláhova–Frolík–Profantová (1999) 149 and 53; Bednařiková (2003) 28; Bednařiková–Homola–Měřinský (2006).

Slovakia as possible routes for the transit of the conquered Heruli to the north.²⁹

Ildiges' Stay with the Slavs (Wars 7.35.13–17)

The second reference to Procopius with which Czech and Slovak historians have been concerned is his excursus regarding the escape of Ildiges, a candidate for the Lombard throne, to the Slavs. It must be said that compared with the previously discussed reference, this one has remained marginalised by local historians. To some extent this is due to the oldest authorities in the area of Slavic studies assuming the impossibility of locating Ildiges' Slavs in the area of the middle Danube. Šafářík assumed that the Slavic regions to which Ildiges escaped were in the area of present-day Bulgaria,³⁰ while Niederle places the event in the context of the history of the southern Slavs.³¹

Only in the late 1960s was interest in this reference of Procopius' revitalised by the aforementioned Hynek Bulín, who rightly points to its being underestimated by local writers. From the context of the whole excursus on Ildiges, two conclusions can be drawn, according to Bulín. The first of these is the actual alliance of the Slavs with Ildiges, while

²⁹ Bednaříková (2003) 307. The current Slovak archaeologists G. Fusek and Zábajník ((2003) 328) note, on the one hand, that this reference is considered one of the earliest written sources for the Slavic settlement of the northern periphery of the Carpathian basin—hence Slovakia; but on the other hand, they also indicate that there are at least four routes of the Heruli *anabasis* and not all of them passed through the northern region of the Carpathian basin. Slovak historian P. Bystrický ((2003) 388 with n. 7 and (2008) 147) writes that this reference is of little informative value. If the Heruli wanted to avoid the Lombards, they would have to have detoured around current Austria, Moravia and Bohemia, and crossed through western Slovakia; or, if they went up the Tisa river, through eastern Slovakia. According to Bystrický, the more important fact is that after the defeat of the Heruli empire, the Lombards did not settle in areas on the Slovakian side of the Danube. For the most recent comment see Mesiarkin (2017) 65–6.

³⁰ Šafářík (1837) 564.

³¹ Niederle (1906) 197.

the second is the claim that these Slavs must have settled north of the Danube, as in that period no continuous Slavic settlement existed south of this river. Moreover, Bulín rejected the view that these Slavs were located in distant areas of the Carpathians, regarding the areas of southern Moravia, parts of lower Austria, and southern Slovakia as their most probable locations.³²

Kučera is likewise inclined to believe that the Slavs to whom Ildiges escaped were from the area of present-day Slovakia and Moravia, while to a certain extent regarding Ildiges as a kind of predecessor to that later unifier of the Slavs, the Frankish merchant Samo. According to Kučera, it is clear from Procopius' report that Ildiges formed an alliance with a solid and probably also well-organised group of Slavs.³³ Since, in his view, these Slavs lived on the edge of the ancient world and away from its political power, their development could have led to a higher form of political organisation that benefited from the achievements of the civilisation of late antiquity, especially in the agrarian sector.³⁴ Czech archaeologist Zdeněk Klanica likewise regarded current southwestern Slovakia as the place where the Slavs received the exiled Ildiges, while also noting Procopius' reports as evidence of the military organisation of the Slavs.³⁵ Slovak archaeologist Tatiana Štefanovičová holds a similar view, pointing to the territory of present-day western Slovakia and Moravia. According to her, such a region is suggested also by Ildiges' expedition to northern Italy, from where he returned to the area of the Slavs. This journey most probably would have been undertaken from western Slovakia and Moravia through the territory of Noricum—if it had been more to the east, Ildiges' army would have met with resistance from the Lombards. Štefanovičová considers the information provided by Procopius to be very important for the additional reason that it

³² Bulín (1968) 178–9.

³³ Kučera (1979) 865–6; Kučera (1985) 170.

³⁴ Kučera (1979) 866.

³⁵ Klanica (1986) 35.

comes from the first half of the sixth century and thus documents the settlements of the Slavs in the area of the middle Danube before the arrival of the Avars.³⁶

According to Avenarius, from Procopius' excursus on Ildiges two conclusions can be drawn. The first of these is geographical: after his return from Italy, Ildiges must have crossed the Danube to reach the Slavs. Avenarius, however, considers this piece of information too vague to determine more precisely the route of his return. The second conclusion is a political one: the Slavs must have been independent of the Lombards if Ildiges sought refuge there. As with the first reference of Procopius discussed above (these being the two most discussed references of his within Czech and Slovak historiography), the excursus on Ildiges does not carry any particular informative value from the perspective of determining the location of the Slavic settlements where this pretender to the Lombard throne might have stayed.³⁷

Two years after Avenarius' article, Slovak archaeologist Gabriel Fusek also contemplated the value of Procopius' report. Regarding the second return of Ildiges to the Slavs, he remarks that on the way from Venice, Ildiges' division must have detoured around the area of the Lombards including the province of Pannonia Superior. According to him, the only route to Italy went through Noricum, which was also partially occupied by the Lombards—who were concentrated, however, in the old urban centres, whereas the rest of the province remained abandoned. He also assumes that the Slavs to whom Ildiges went were present only within the area of current-day Moravia and Slovakia.³⁸

The most attention given by a Czech or Slovak historian to addressing this excursus comes, again, from Třeštík, according to whom it is undoubtedly the first reference to the presence of Slavs in the wider area of the middle Danube. Třeštík considers Ildiges' escape to the Slavs

³⁶ Štefanovičová (1989) 25.

³⁷ Avenarius (1992) 10.

³⁸ Fusek (1994) 120; Fusek (2008) 218–19, 221.

logical, since the other neighbours of the Lombards, and of king Vach, were his allies. Based on a detailed analysis and interpretation of Jordanes' report on the settlements of the Slavs, Třeštík argues that the Slavs among whom Ildiges found refuge were settled at the foot of the Carpathians from Moravia to the upper Tisza basin, and that it was these Slavs that actively participated in the invasions against the East Roman Empire in the years 548–551. He acknowledges, however, that amongst them also could have been their fellow tribesmen from the area of the lower Danube or from beyond the Carpathians. The central element of Třeštík's hypothesis is Procopius' report, according to which Ildiges, after returning from the area of Venice, crossed the Danube and returned to the Slavs. Třeštík rejects, however, the story of the crossing of the Danube, arguing that this is a case of a classic rhetorical device of Byzantine historiography, in which writers used to end their reports on the invasions of the Barbarians with the crossing of the Danube. In his view, since they were allies with the Gepids at that time, the Slavs would typically pass through the territory of the empire using the main strategic base of the Gepids at Sirmium, lying on the river Sava.³⁹

With regard to specific areas, Třeštík points out that in the region of eastern Moravia and south-western Slovakia, the existence of a Slavic settlement in that period is archaeologically established, while for the upper reaches of the Tisza river the evidence of such a settlement is absent, but equally findings of Germanic provenance are also absent. Třeštík therefore considers the eastern region of Moravia and south-western Slovakia, where Ildiges took refuge in 535, to be the most likely location of Slavic settlements. He maintains that a new elite, probably a council of chiefs, existed in those territories conducting the military activities of the Slavs, while refusing to consider Ildiges as a kind of a forerunner of the Frankish merchant Samo.⁴⁰

³⁹ Třeštík (1996) 275–7; Třeštík (1997) 48–9.

⁴⁰ Třeštík (1996) 276–7; Třeštík (1997) 48–9.

Třeštík's conclusions have, to a large extent, become the *communis opinio* in Czech and Slovak historiography, as is shown by the work of current medievalists and archaeologists. According to current-day Slovak medievalist Ján Steinhübel, the north-western part of the Carpathian basin—the territory of Slovakia—belonged to the Slavs of Ildiges, but as of yet he has not spoken of it as an early principality of these Slavs.⁴¹ In a representative synthesis on Czech history, authored by Marie Bláhová, Jan Frolík and Naďa Profantová, they state—based on the context of Procopius' report—that in that period the Slavic tribes were settled in the northern part of the Carpathian basin, i.e. the territory of Slovakia, Subcarpathia and probably also Moravia. The Slavs among whom Ildiges sought refuge could already have represented a sort of power base. Its core, according to the authors, was probably situated in the areas of northern and eastern Moravia and south-western Slovakia, given the direction of Slavic attacks and the fact that the Slavs passed through the territories of the Gepids and the Lombards.⁴² Magdalena Beranová and Michal Lutovský are inclined to the view that it was situated in the area of northern Moravia and south-western Slovakia,⁴³ while Zdeněk Měřínský inclines to the wider region of the middle Danube.⁴⁴

This overview clearly shows that the majority of Czech and Slovak historians and archaeologists have connected the vague geographical information given in the two references of Procopius to the territory of present-day Moravia and south-western Slovakia. Accordingly, they regard these references as a basic source information

⁴¹ Steinhübel (1998) 379–80 and (2004) 25–6.

⁴² Bláhová–Frolík–Profantová (1999) 149–50.

⁴³ Beranová and Lutovský (2009) 16.

⁴⁴ Měřínský (2002) 54; also Bednaříková–Homola–Měřínský (2006)

confirming the existence of the Slavs in the territories concerned, at least from the first half of the sixth century.⁴⁵

In 2008, however, a recognized expert on the early history of Eastern Europe, Florin Curta, published his contribution in the Czech language on the question of the early Slavic settlement in Bohemia and Moravia. His polemic on the two references of Procopius mentioned above was focused mainly against the conclusions of Dušan Třeštík. Unlike him, Curta takes a sceptical position on the historicity of the Herulian *anabasis* dated to the year 512. In particular, he points to the fact that the credibility of these reports must be determined by whether Procopius himself had detailed knowledge of the countries on the northern bank of the Danube, and by whether his ethnographic interest in the indigenous barbarians was not burdened by traditional prejudice. In his view, however, this is just the sort of thing that is absent in Procopius, illustrating the vagueness of his knowledge by examining a passage containing geographical details of the Herulian *anabasis*.⁴⁶ The position he adopts on the hypothesis of the use of local historians regarding Ildiges' stay with the Slavs in the area of the middle Danube is equally sceptical. He understands Procopius' reference mentioning Ildiges' crossing of the Danube to mean that the Lombard leader had no need to continue further in order to find himself in the region of the Slavs; he did not have to travel through the territory of the Gepids or through that of the Lombards, as was assumed by most Czech and Slovak writers. According to Curta, the territories that were occupied by Slavs were neither in Moravia nor in Slovakia, but rather in the area of the lower Danube.⁴⁷

Curta's conclusions, questioning not only the theses of Třeštík but practically the whole of Czech and Slovak historiography and archaeology, were not left without

⁴⁵ In one case, together with other testimonies, this is even considered to be evidence for the Slavs being autochthonous in the territory. See Chropovský (2000) 27.

⁴⁶ Curta (2008) 662–3.

⁴⁷ Curta (2008) 663.

response. Already in the following year, three responses to his contribution appeared,⁴⁸ one of them being that of the already mentioned Czech archaeologist Naďa Profantová, who had concerned herself with this topic. According to her, Procopius' mention of Ildiges crossing the Danube allows for two different interpretations. According to the first, Ildiges crossed the Danube and in so doing returned to the Slavs, who at that time had their settlements immediately on the left bank of the Danube. In the second interpretation, Ildiges returned to the Slavs and somewhere along the way crossed the Danube. Profantová argues that in the first case, the army of the Slavs would have had to pass through territory that was controlled by the empire, but that Procopius does not mention anything like that.⁴⁹

However, she also admits the weakness of Trešník's argument, because if Ildiges had crossed the Danube somewhere close to Sirmium, why would the Gepids then be letting him through their territory if they had already concluded peace with the Lombards? In other words, she asks, since Ildiges presented a threat to the Lombard king, why would the Gepids risk the recently concluded peace with their rivals in such way?⁵⁰

Curta responded, this time in an article published in English, commenting mainly on Profantová's critique. Curta considers the second interpretation proposed by Profantová to be an extreme one, understanding it to mean that Ildiges would have first reached the Slavs and only then crossed the Danube. In such a case he would have had to first pass through the imperial territory of the north-western Balkans, which Procopius, however, does not mention in his report.⁵¹ What Profantová might have had in mind when considering this interpretation was that when Procopius was returning to the Slavs, *on* this route he crossed the Danube. When read in this way, it does not necessarily mean there

⁴⁸ Pleterski (2009) Biermann (2009).

⁴⁹ Profantová (2009) 311.

⁵⁰ Profantová (2009) 311–12.

⁵¹ Curta (2009) 734.

were settlements of the Slavs located immediately after the crossing of the Danube. There is, however, another more significant matter mentioned by Curta, noting a major weakness of Třeštík, and consequently also of Profantová—namely, that Procopius mentions Ildiges' crossing of the *Danube*, and not of the Sava where the Gepids' Sirmium lay.⁵² With this, Třeštík's argument loses its power; moreover, can we really be so sure that Procopius knew where the Barbarians, led by the Lombard pretender, crossed the territory of the Empire? This is especially questionable when we accept Curta's argument concerning the Byzantine historian's lack of interest in the geography of those territories located outside the borders of the Eastern Roman Empire.

When evaluating both of Procopius' references, we need to avoid biased conclusions. After all, even Profantová admits that there are no historical sources that would indirectly confirm or refute the presence of Slavs in Bohemia in the sixth century.⁵³ Such sceptical opinions can also be observed in the most recent entry on the subject written by Eduard Droberjar. According to him, there are no written reports or archaeological discoveries supporting the presence of Slavs in Bohemia (or Slovakia). This includes Procopius' report on Ildiges, given that at the time of his escape to the Slavs, south Moravia and south-western Slovakia were still populated by the Lombards.⁵⁴

It can be stated generally, in this regard, that in connection with the analysis of geographical reports regarding the beginnings of the history of nations—and particularly reports that allow for multiple interpretations—most national historians incline to those interpretations that take into account the geographical areas of the countries in question. Critical observations by foreign opponents may spur discussion, but rarely change received opinions. It is obvious enough that it is local rather than international

⁵² Curta (2009) 735.

⁵³ Profantová (2009) 312.

⁵⁴ Droberjar (2005) 206.

writers that establish the historical knowledge and self-awareness of a nation. If these thoughts are applied to the two mentioned reports of Procopius, it must be said that despite reservations they remain a solid part of the oldest reports on the Slavs in the middle Danube region of the Czech and Slovak areas, and it is clear that they will continue to be reflected upon in the work of local writers.⁵⁵

Geographic and Ethnographic Marginalia on the Work of Procopius

Although the works of Procopius contain an abundance of topographic and ethnographic data, apart from the Slavic excursus and the two mentioned reports, separate commentaries on the areas mentioned are scarce in Czech and Slovak scholarly writings. There have been two studies concerning topographical aspects, the first of which was published between the two world wars by the classical philologist, Antonín Salač, who reflects upon the form of the name used for Pautalia city (Ulpia Pautalia) in Procopius' Buildings. Salač notes that in his work *De Aedificiis* Procopius uses the modified form Pantalia or Pantaleia, while elsewhere in this work the correct form is also used, albeit in a shortened version—Pauta. He is convinced that the form Pautalia should have been used throughout, as well as in IV.1.31 of the text. The form Pantalia he considers a pure corruption, which, according to him, was created by folk etymology from a word resembling the Greek form *panta*.⁵⁶

The author of the second study is a current historian of antiquity, Stanislav Doležal. The subject of his analysis is Procopius' reference to the island of Thule, which he compares with what Jordanes says about the island of Scandza, and examines whether the different names used

⁵⁵ E.g. Škvarna (1999) 17; Dvořák (2004) 16–17; most recently Homza (2014) 38–40, who mentions this episode, but does not locate the territories of Ildiges' Slavs more specifically.

⁵⁶ Salač (1931) 392–5 (here 395).

by the two historians could be linked to the same geographical area. According to Doležal, it is questionable whether Procopius first heard the name of Thule from his own sources of information, since Thule was a well-known topographical location described by ancient writers. According to Doležal, the description Procopius received from his sources roughly coincided with that which was known from literary sources—unlike the accounts of Jordanes or Cassiodorus, who respected the historiography of antiquity but not to such an extent as Procopius, and therefore indicated the name of the island merely as they had heard it from their sources. Doležal therefore believes that both writers have the same geographical area in mind and explains the difference in the names in terms of Procopius being unwilling to abandon the established, traditional name of Thule, or to label it by another name not found in the testimony of the preserved literature.⁵⁷ Doležal also demonstrates that it is highly probable that Jordanes did not know the work of Procopius, explaining the similarity between the two writers in another way—namely, that each used his own unique resources independently, these sources being oral rather than literary. He thus inclines to the view that Jordanes did not need to question the captured Goths or Heruli to gain information about northern Europe, as Procopius did, because Jordanes himself lived and belonged to the socio-cultural environment located on the border between the Roman and barbarian worlds. The report on Scandza, therefore, could have been available to him long before he came across Cassiodorus' paper on the Goths, which he used as a resource.⁵⁸

An ethnographically orientated article by Avenarius—who was interested in the analysis of the occurrences of the name Bulgar in the sources of the sixth and seventh centuries—was likewise based on a comparison of the works of Procopius and Jordanes. He compares source

⁵⁷ Doležal (2011) 287–92.

⁵⁸ Doležal (2011) 301–6.

information on the tribes residing in the area of Great Scythia, and seeks reasons for the occurrence (Jordanes) or absence (Procopius) of the name Bulgar in these texts. He points to the fact that Procopius' Utigurs are geographically identical to Jordanes' Bulgars, which is also confirmed by a report of the Syrian historian Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor, who mentions the Bulgars as being among the tribes of the Sabirs and the Kutrigurs. Avenarius thus disagrees with the thesis that the name Bulgar served as a collective name for the two similar tribes of the Kutrigurs and the Utigurs. According to him, in the sixth century there was a particular tribe hiding under the name Bulgars—the Utigurs—whereas the name Bulgar acquired a different meaning and spread to other tribes during the period of Kubrat's Great Bulgaria.⁵⁹

Translations of the Works of Procopius

Let us move on to the last area of interest in the work of Procopius within Czech and Slovak historiography—to the actual translations of his works into local languages. The first translation of selected parts of Procopius' work can be found as early as the classical work of Pavol Jozef Šafařík, *Slavonic Antiquities*.⁶⁰ In the late nineteenth century, Czech classical philologist František Lepař undertook the translation of Procopius' works, which he worked on for more than eight years, finishing the draft of the text in 1899. Lepař had originally intended to translate only some samples of Procopius, but ultimately translated the *Wars* as well as the *Secret History*. Unfortunately, following a sudden stroke, he died just before the translated text, particularly Book 7 of Procopius' *Wars*, was to be reviewed. Representa-

⁵⁹ Avenarius (1965) 185–203.

⁶⁰ Šafařík (1837) II.965–7 published a Greek text and a Latin translation by Claudius Maltret of two short passages of Procopius' *Wars* (3.14, 4.4.3). In the second edition of Šafařík's documents (1863), along with these texts (II.692–4) there appears also a Czech translation of the Slavic excursus (II.746–7).

tives of the Czech scientific community subsequently commissioned the famous Czech Slavist Konstantin Jireček, who was at that time working in Vienna, to attach to the work a historical introduction and notes to the text. In the end, Jireček refused to work on finalising Procopius' works, arguing that for the needs of Czech science it would be quite sufficient to select the most important portions of these texts and include them in a selective anthology.⁶¹ Despite efforts, the work was not published, even in the context of the centenary of the birth of Lepař in 1931, and the translation finally ended up in the Manuscript Department of the Library of the National Museum.⁶² From the nature of the preserved literary remains, it is clear that it contains not only a complete translation of Procopius' *Wars* and the *Secret History*, but also other biographical excerpts and translations of early Byzantine historians. The study of this manuscript was undertaken by Professor Růžena Dostálová, who evaluated the translation as being thorough, even meticulous, with regard to the Greek original, and containing only some minor errors and inaccuracies. In conclusion she raised the question of whether it would not be useful to have Procopius' translations published, in particular with regard to their connection with the earliest history of the Slavs.⁶³ This proposal was partially fulfilled in the 1980s, with the only difference being that it was not Lepař's text that was edited, but rather a completely new translation of Procopius' *Wars* that was produced. The *Gothic Wars* was translated by Pavel Beneš⁶⁴ in cooperation

⁶¹ Dostálová (1954) 6–12.

⁶² *Prokopia Caesarejského dějepis doby Justiniánovy* (*The Histories of Justinian by Procopius of Caesarea*). Currently the manuscripts of František Lepař are stored in the Museum of Czech Literature (To the writers of Byzantine history. Manuscript of the translation of Procopius, 7 books, nr. 583 II; Translation of Procopius, clean copy. Manuscript, nr. 244 II; Writers of Byzantine history. Manuscript The translation of Menander and Procopius, 1 book, nr. 105 II). Manuscript stored under sign. MSS XVIII A 4 (concept MSS XVIII B 2). We would like to thank our colleague Dr. Vlastimil Drbal for providing this information.

⁶³ Dostálová (1954) 111.

⁶⁴ Beneš, (1985).

with leading Czech Byzantinist Vladimír Vavřínek, who supplemented the translation with basic information on the life and work of Procopius.⁶⁵ The authors of the translation of the *Vandal Wars* and the *Persian Wars* were classical philologist Antonín Hartmann and translator Květa Rubešová.⁶⁶

The *Wars* therefore remain the only work of Procopius of which there is a comprehensive translation into the Czech language. As part of wider work on sixth-century history, shorter excerpts from the *Wars* had earlier been published from time to time, especially as evidence for the earliest history of the Slavs,⁶⁷ and—in a wider academic context—in relation to the history of the Slovaks,⁶⁸ and also in rare instances for the needs of selective anthologies of Byzantine history.⁶⁹

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⁶⁵ Vavřínek (1985) 416–38.

⁶⁶ Hartmann and Rubešová (1985).

⁶⁷ Havlík (1987) 39–42.

⁶⁸ Ratkoš (1968) 31–40. Procopius' portions were translated by the classical Slovak philologist P. Kuklica; Marsina et al. (1999) 80–95; Segeš and Šedřová (2010) 130–41; Rábik–Labanc–Tibenský (2013) 5–14.

⁶⁹ Hrochová (1974) 50–5.

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