
Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec**The Great Moravian Empire**

Did you know that the vast majority of Czech immigrants to the Silver Lake area were from the region of Moravia, i.e. in the East/Southeast portion of the nowadays Czech Republic? Although you may think of yourself as “Bohemian”, perhaps “Moravian” would be a better adjective. What is the history of Moravia and what does it mean to be Moravian?

Only fragments remain of what was once the “Great Moravian Empire”, but they speak of a culture that flourished long ago. In a land bounded by four rivers—the Danube, the Morava, the Elbe, and the Tisza—that covers part of present-day Czech Republic, Moravia existed between the time of the great Slavic migration (A.D. 450-550) and the annexation of the territory by the Bohemian Empire (A.D. 973). Thus the Moravian Empire was in existence for a period of time that was more than two times the age of our American Republic!



Map of Great Moravia at its height under the leader Svatopluk I and the only surviving building of Great Moravia, the Church of St. Margaret, located in Kopčany, Slovakia.

Although nothing but foundations are left of its architecture and mere pieces of its wall paintings survive, numerous examples of its handicrafts are extant. These latter artifacts show a remarkable maturity and technical expertise.

During the great Slavic migration, which lasted for a full century, it was not uncommon for whole towns and tribes to move from place to place. Thus it should come as no surprise that many of the Moravian artifacts found to date bear the stamps of several cultures—some of which the Moravians encountered directly, and some of which they learned about in other ways ([Moravia Magna; The Great Moravian Empire, Its Art and Times](#), Jan Dekan)

The inhabitants of Great Moravia were designated *Slovene*, which is an old Slavic word meaning the “Slavs”. The same name was used by the ancestors of Slovaks, Slovenes and Slavonians at that time and

the present-day native names of these nations (for example Slovensko, the Slovak name of Slovakia) are still derived from the root Slovene. People of Great Moravia were sometimes referred to as "Moravian peoples" by Slavic texts, and "Sclavi" (i.e. the Slavs), "Winidi" (another name for the Slavs), "Moravian Slavs" or "Moravians" by Latin texts.

As in all medieval states, life in Great Moravia was difficult compared to the modern standards: 40 percent of men and 60 percent of women died before reaching the age of 40. However, Great Moravian cemeteries also document rich nutrition and advanced health care. Inhabitants of Great Moravia even had better teeth than people today: a third of the examined skeletons had no caries (cavities) or lost teeth.

Muslim geographers, when describing the inhabitants of Great Moravia, mentioned that:

“They are a numerous people and their dress resembles that of the Arabs, consisting of turban and shirt and overcoat. They have cultivated lands and seeds and vineyards (...). They state that their number is greater than that of the Rum (Rûm, also Roum or Rhum, a very indefinite term used at different times in the Muslim world to refer to the Balkans) and that they are a separate nation. The greater part of their trade is with Arabia.” (—Ahmad ibn Rustah, 10th Century Persian explorer)

Today, the Moravians are considered a Slavic ethnic group who speak various dialects of Czech. Some Moravians regard themselves as an ethnically distinct group; others consider themselves to be ethnically Czech. In the census of 1991, 1,362,000 (13.2%) of the Czech population described themselves as being of Moravian nationality. In the census of 2001, this number had decreased to 380,000 (3.7% of the population). Moravia historically had a huge minority of ethnic Germans, although they were largely expelled after World War II (www.wikipedia.org).

Notable people from Moravia include:

- Anton Pilgram (1450–1516), architect, sculptor and woodcarver
- Jan Ámos Komenský (Comenius) (1592–1670), educator and theologian
- Georgius Prochaska (1749–1820), ophthalmologist and physiologist
- František Palacký (1798–1876), historian and politician, "The Father of the Nation"
- Hirsch Bär Fassel (1802–1883), pioneer of Reform Judaism
- Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst (1814–1865), violinist
- Gregor Mendel (1822–1884), biologist, father of genetics
- Ernst Mach (1838–1916), physicist and philosopher
- Tomáš Masaryk (1850–1937), philosopher and politician, first president of Czechoslovakia
- Leoš Janáček (1854–1928), composer
- Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), father of psychoanalysis
- Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), philosopher
- Alfons Mucha (1860–1939), painter
- Jan "Eskymo" Welzl (1868–1948), globetrotter and gold-digger, chief of the Siberian Eskimos
- Karl Renner (1870–1950), politician, co-founder of Friends of Nature movement
- Tomáš Baťa (1876–1932), entrepreneur, founder of Bata Shoes company
- Joseph Schumpeter (1883–1950), economist and political scientist
- George Placzek (1905–1955), physicist, participant in Manhattan Project
- Kurt Gödel (1906–1978), theoretical mathematician

- Milan Kundera (1929–), writer (author of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*)
- Peter Sís (1949–), illustrator, animator, and writer

Mluvíte Český? Do You Speak Czech?

Bez peněz do hospody nelez (Don't go to the pub without money)

As a rule, you should always stress the first syllable of a Czech word!

If you have any contributions or suggestions for topics for future columns, please contact me by email: tkadlec@gmail.com or call me: (651) 271-0422 or send your letters to my attention: 1408 Fairmount Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105. Thanks! Tony Kadlec