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THE PRIVILEGE OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT FOR THE SLAVS

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During his stay in Prague, in 1592, Fynes Moryson saw in the church of Emaus an unusual document, a letter by which, supposedly, Alexander the Great granted to the Slavic peoples vast territories in Europe. The text copied by Moryson and translated from Latin read as follows:

Wee Alexander the Great of King Philip, the founder of the Grecian Empire, Conquerour of the Persians, Meades etc. and of the whole World, from the East to West, from North to South, sonne of great Jupiter, by etc. so called. To you the noble stocke of the Sclauonians, and to your language, because you have beene to me helpers, true in faith, and valiant in warre, I confirme all this tract from the North to the South parts of Italy, from me and my successours, to you and your posterity. If any other Nation be found there, let them be your slaues.

Dated in our City of Alexandria, newly founded by us upon the great Riuer of Nilus the twelfth of the Goddess Minerva; witnesses are Aethra and the 11 princes whom we appoint successours to us dying without heire.¹

¹ Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary...*, London 1617, part I, p. 15. — It is impossible to find out whether Moryson saw at Emaus a corrupted text of the letter or whether he copied what he saw engraved there carelessly and translated it, when writing his *Itinerary*, without any concern for accuracy or clearness. Other sources have better texts but none of them is faultless. Professor F. Pfister (see below note 5) attached to his study a reconstructed text (p. 340). With generous help of Professor Matthew Spinka I have translated it freely:

"We Alexander of King Philipp of Macedon, he-goat representing figuratively the monarchy [Daniel VIII, 21], founder of the empire of the Greeks, son of the great god Jupiter [Ammon], announced by Nectanebus, conversant with the Bragmans and with the trees of the Sun and Moon, conqueror of the kingdoms of the Persians and the Medes, lord of the world from the rising of the sun to its darkening, from the south to the north;

to the illustrious race of the Slavs and their nationality be grace, peace, and greeting from us and from our successors, who will succeed us in the rule of the world;

because you have always stood by us, truly faithful, valiant in arms as our warlike and strong helpers: we freely give and confer upon you in perpetuity the entire tract of land from the north to the confines of southern Italy; let no one dare to reside there or locate there unless those of your nation, and if some other

There are no details in Moryson's itinerary which would indicate at what time and by whom the letter was engraved and put on view for the benefit of curious visitors of the once famous Benedictine convent.

The Emaus copy was not the only, and certainly not the original version of the charter attributed to the renowned Macedonian. Several chroniclers or authors of learned treatises concerning the origin and early history of the Slavs inserted Alexander's privilege into their works without questioning its authenticity or endeavoring to reconstruct the circumstances under which it might have been produced.

Little time, indeed, is needed to ascertain that the putative charter could not be produced at the time and place mentioned in its final passage but that it sprang from the same unbounded admiration of the great warrior which inspired the authors of heroic poems and tales devoted to Alexander's military campaigns. No connection has been established between such well-known works as Gualther's de Castellione *Alexandreis*; it is doubtful that any direct link between the general descriptions of Alexander's life and his grant of land to the Slavs could be uncovered.² The purpose of the charter was not to enhance Alexander's prestige but to link early Slavic history with his name and deeds.

The charter is short and when the opening and closing formulas are separated from the kernel not more is left than two simple sentences providing for a partition of Europe in such a manner that its eastern portion stretching from the shores of the Arctic sea to southern Italy would go to the Slavs and remain forever in their possession. If other peoples were found in that vast area they would have to accept a subordinate position in relation to the dominant race. No detailed knowledge of practices prevailing in medieval chancelleries was required to produce a document

will be found remaining there, let him be your slave and afterward of your nation's posterity.

Given in the city of our new foundation, Alexandria, founded on the Nile, the great river of Egypt, in the twelfth year of your reign with benevolent consent of the great gods Jupiter, Mars, Pluto, and the great goddess Minerva.

The witnesses of this deed are Antiochus, our illustrious logothetes, and eleven other princes, to whom, as we are dying without descendants, we relinquish our heritage and the perpetual rule of the whole world."

² Not so long ago Bohumil Ryba published his own translation of the charter in *Výbor z české literatury doby husitské*, editors B. Havránek—Josef Hrabák—Jiří Daňhelka, vol. II, Prague, 1964, p. 140–1. In his commentary (p. 141), Ryba pointed to the *Life of Alexander of Macedonia* (Pseudo-Callisthenes) as the source in which the compiler of the charter found the story of Alexander's visit to a certain grove with the trees of the Sun and the Moon, and how he solicited from them an oracle concerning his future life and death. See the translation of the *Life of Alexander of Macedon* by Elizabeth H. Haight, New York, 1955, p. 106–7. — In Pseudocallisthenes the compiler could also find reference to Alexander's conversation with the Brachmanes — Brahmins (Haight, l. c., p. 101). It can be assumed that the compiler drew information either directly from Pseudo-Callisthenes or from a writing that was derived from the original version and was even more confused. Among the witnesses is listed in some versions Antiochus, illustris logothetes noster. Ryba has Anaklét, instead of Antiochus, and writes (p. 141) correctly that the term logothetēs for chancellor was used at the court of Byzantine emperors. This could be used in support of theory that the compiler lived in the Byzantine and not Roman orbit.

which, if genuine, would have marked the beginning of a glorious era in Slavic history.

Fynes Moryson was not the only author who was impressed by the letter and helped give it more publicity. A fairly long list of names could be compiled with the help of modern writings that are available. Three analytical studies should be mentioned in particular, as no new attempt to put the letter in its proper place could be made without adequate evaluation of their conclusions.

A Slovak scholar Rudo Brtáň has treated Alexander's privilege in connection with his broad survey of various aspects of the Baroque era in Slavic history.³ A succinct study from the pen of František M. Bartoš has been focussed on the most intriguing question, the authorship of the letter.⁴ Although unable to produce conclusive evidence, Bartoš expressed opinion that the letter came from the pen of the Hussite chronicler Vavřinec of Březová sometime before 1443. Not knowing of either Brtáň's book or of Bartoš' article a German scholar Friedrich Pfister approached the problem from another angle. His analysis of Alexander's charter supplemented a paper read at a symposium on the Renaissance and Humanism in Central and Eastern Europe, held at Wittenberg in 1959.⁵ Well versed in critical literature concerning both medieval Alexander romances and the products of humanistic scholarship, Pfister reconstructed the text of the charter in its two basic versions and brought to the attention of his readers both some manuscripts and books, unknown to other scholars. But his theory concerning the authorship is misleading because of his failure to consult the earlier Czech studies, especially Bartoš.

Following in the footsteps of Josef Dobrovský and of Antonín Polák Bartoš established the priority of a codex, once owned by J. P. Cerroni, a learned secretary of the Moravian Gubernium at Brno. Cerroni's codex is dated 1443, and thus far, no scholar succeeded in uncovering an earlier manuscript containing the charter. Bartoš knew of three other manuscripts but was able to consult only one of them, once kept in the Dietrichstein Library at Mikulov and now included in the MSS collection of the Provincial Archives of Moravia at Brno. F. Pfister has located four manuscripts. Two of them, Cod. Lat. Vindobonensis 3296, and Cod. Dresdensis F. 27, were known to Bartoš from the catalogues. Two others, Cod. Vindobonensis 6249 and Cod. Vindobonensis 9370, were traced by Pfister when he pursued his research in Alexander romances and tales. Pfister assigned priority to Cod. Lat. Vindob. 3296 in which the copy of Alexander's charter is dated 1516. Unaware of Bartoš' findings, Pfister accepted 1516 as the first reliable date at which the charter was recorded, and was misled by that assumption to erroneous conclusions concerning its author.

While there is no reason to question 1443 as the first date with which the emergence of the charter can safely be connected, it is by no means

³ Rudo Brtáň, *Barokový slavizmus*. Liptovský Sv. Mikuláš, 1939, p. 67-73.

⁴ F. M. Bartoš, *Zápis Alexandra Velikého Slovanům a jeho původce* in *Časopis Národního musea*, vol. 115, Prague 1946, p. 44-49.

⁵ Friedrich Pfister, *Das Privilegium Slavicum Alexanders des Großen*, *Zeitschrift für Slawistik*, vol. 6, Berlin 1961, p. 323-345.

necessary to assume that it was compiled in that year or thereabout. Nor is Bartoš' reference to Vavřines of Březová more than a brilliant conjecture. There is nothing in the short *narratio* to support Bartoš' hypothesis. The reference is not to the Czechs but to the Slavs in general, and the limits of the territory, granted supposedly to the Sclauonians (as Moryson has it) and their posterity, are described so vaguely that nobody could maintain with absolute certainty that Vavřinec's native Bohemia was included. Totally absent is reference to the Teutons against whom is directed an anonymous writing *Brief Compilation from Czech Chronicles as a Warning to Faithful Czechs*, which Bartoš considers to be Vavřinec's work and to which the copyist of Cerroni's manuscript appended Alexander's letter.⁶

Starting from his assumption that the oldest available copy of the charter dated from 1516, Pfister tried to find individuals interested, at that time, in the Slavic past and familiar enough with the classics to draw up a letter which could be presented as the expression of Alexander's desire to compensate his Slavic allies "true in faith and valiant in warre". Pfister believed to have found the clue in the work *Arcticae horulae succissivae de Latinocarniolana literatura*, published in 1584 at Wittenberg by a Slovene humanist Adam Bohorić (Bohorizh). At the end of his lengthy preface, Bohorić turned to young noblemen from Styria, Carinthia, and Carniola with an admonition to greater zeal in fostering patriotic endeavors, and extolled as shining examples Count Francis of Thurn (de Turri) and Sigismund Herberstein. Apart from other deeds, the two aristocrats had to their credit a systematic search of a copy of Alexander's charter which they eventually found in a Prague college.⁷

Pfister's analysis of Bohorić's testimony as well as of other sources culminated in an idea that Herberstein (or Thurn) composed the charter, in 1505–1510, and that they concocted a story of how they found it, to create the impression that it really had been issued by Alexander the Great and preserved in an ancient manuscript, at their time property of a college.⁸

⁶ The matter is rather complicated, and only essential points can be mentioned in this connection. *The Brief Compilation* (...*Krátké sebrání z kronik českých k výstraze věrných Čechův*) was published by Antonín Polák in *Věstník Královské české společnosti nauk*, Tř. 1, 1904, Prague 1905, no 3. Both its authorship and the date of composition are controversial. While Bartoš maintains that Vavřinec of Březová compiled it in 1438 to support the candidature to the throne of Bohemia of a Slavic prince against Sigismund's son-in-law Albrecht of Austria, Z. V. Tobolka, Rudolf Urbánek and other scholars are inclined to believe that the *Brief Compilation* was put into circulation in 1458 during the electoral campaign after the death of King Ladislaus Posthumus; at that time Vavřinec was no longer alive. It has to be said that Bartoš was able to support his idea that the *Brief Compilation* was written in 1438 by Vavřinec. His conjecture that the same author produced the charter and connected it with the *Brief Compilation* hangs in the air; instead of helping, it rather hinders the search for the place and time where the idea of Alexander's donation originated. — While in Brno, I was able to see Cerroni's manuscript in the Provincial Archives of Moravia (II, no. 108) and I gratefully acknowledge assistance given to me by members of the staff.

⁷ A. Bohorić, l. c. Praefatio (without pagination): *Sedulo rem investigarent, donec tandem in collegio Pragensi, res prius dubia, litteris non fallentibus ibi ita, ut est deprehensa, omnibus nota fieret typisque procuderetur.*

⁸ F. Pfister, l. c., p. 338.

The date 1505–1510 was suggested to harmonize the idea with Pfister's belief that the Viennese manuscript (Cod. Lat. 2396) has the oldest copy, dated 1516. Pfister's hypothesis loses validity automatically when confronted with the facts, known to Bartoš and other Czech scholars, especially the existence of Cerroni codex of 1443. Alexander's privilege was known in Bohemia, prior to Herberstein's birth in 1486, for some forty years.

No progress in elucidation of problems relating to the origin of the charter could be made without mentioning a Czech author Václav Hájek of Libočany and his chief work *Česká kronika* (*Czech chronicle*), which appeared in Prague in 1541. Hájek had that in common with many of his contemporaries, writing either in Latin or in the vernacular, that he did not reject colorful details found in other sources, and supplied exact dates for events which had occurred long before his birth. He knew e. g. that the chieftain of the Czechs settled with his people in Bohemia in 644, and wrote of many mythical figures as if they were historical personalities.

The year 1348 was rich in memorable events. One of them was the foundation by King-Emperor Charles IV of a Benedictine convent, dedicated to Saint Jerome and situated in the new Town of Prague. The new foundation was authorized by Pope Clement VI and it was destined to become the center of Slavic liturgy in the lands of the Crown of Bohemia. Charles invited to Prague monks from Dalmatia, familiar with the Church Slavonic language, and supported them generously. The convent came to be known as "At the Slavs" (*na Slovanech*). Another name, Emaus, originated in the fact that the church there was consecrated on Easter Monday 1372, on which day the Gospel recited at the mass speaks of the disciples proceeding from Jerusalem to Emaus (Luke, chapter XXIV). The convent was one of the places in Prague visited by Fynes Moryson in 1592.

Charles IV was no exception among his contemporaries in believing that St. Jerome, a native from Stridon, a town on the confines of Dalmatia and Pannonia, was of Slavic origin and that he produced a Slavic translation of the Bible. Dedication of the convent "At the Slavs" was a noble gesture for which parallels could be found in other sections of the Bohemian metropolis, such as the endowment of St. Ambrose's convent in which the Ambrosian rite was to be practiced, or the erection of St. Charles church for the Canons Regular of St. Augustine.

Hájek mentioned St. Jerome in his narrative but what followed was written in such a manner that the reader could assume that Alexander's privilege was known in Prague at the time of the foundation of the convent and that it served to justify the use of the Slavic tongue in divine services there. Hájek put in his chronicle a Czech version of Alexander's charter. It would be of little profit to speculate whether he copied the Czech text from another source or whether he had at his disposal a Latin text which he translated. His chronicle is the first source which connects Alexander's charter with the convent "At the Slavs".⁹

⁹ Albert Pražák, *Staročeská báseň o Alexandru Velikém*, Praha 1945, p. 263, maintains that Abbot Petr Šmolka put Alexander's charter in the convent's register as early as 1396. There is an edition of the register by L. Helmling and Ad. Horcicka, *Das vollständige Registrum Slavorum*, Prague 1904, but Alex-

Eight years later than Hájek a learned Greek living in Venice, Domminic Cyllenius, reprinted Alexander's charter in his treatise *De vetere et recentiore scientia militari*, dedicated to Emanuel Philibert, Duke of Savoy.¹⁰ Cyllenius presented the document as a translation from Greek. It is not very likely that Cyllenius really possessed a charter in Greek. Knowing that at least some readers of his book would presume that Greek, not Latin, was used at Alexander's court, he presented the Latin version as a translation. Cyllenius did not reveal the place in which he found such an unusual document. The sentence referring not to the Slavs in general but to the Southern group¹¹ points in the direction of the Kingdom of Croatia of which Dalmatia was a province. It is far less likely that Cyllenius obtained by some ways and means a copy from Bohemia which had less intensive connection with Venice than the Southern Slavic lands. Bartoš does not exclude the possibility that somebody took a copy of such unusual document from Bohemia to Venice, and that it eventually came into Cyllenius' hands. But what he says is no more than a conjecture, the main purpose of which is to support his belief that a Czech, Vavřinec of Březová, compiled the letter.¹²

It is not surprising that the knowledge of the charter in Poland was promoted by frequent contacts between the Czechs and the Poles. The first evidence which can be fixed chronologically is not too remote from the date of appearance of Hájek's chronicle. In 1551 Marcin Bielski (1500?–1575) published his *Kronika polska* and in it he quoted Alexander's letter. He mentioned a Czech chronicle as his source of information.¹³ Even if the name was not given, the reference was obviously to Hájek.

Publication of such an unusual document as Alexander's letter called forth lively reactions. Despite remarkable progress of classical scholarship many authors were willing to accept the letter as authentic and gave it prominence in their outlines of Slavic history. But as early as 1555 a negative comment could be read in the book of Martin Kromer (1512–1589) entitled *De origine et rebus gestis Polonorum*. The learned bishop of Varmia

ander's charter is not included in it. One of the editors, Leander Helmling, published a history of the convent under a simple title *Emaus*, Prague 1903, but he does not refer to Alexander's charter. Pražák's remark is probably just a slip of memory. The same is most likely true of Pražák's assertion that Aeneas Silvius commented sarcastically on Alexander's privilege. In Aeneas' *Historia Bohemica* (ed. 1475), which Pražák quotes, no reference could be found to that charter. Thus Hájek's chronicle remains the only testimony linking the charter with the convent "At the Slavs" right at its foundation in 1348.

¹⁰ Ad Emanueleum Philibertum... Sabaudiae ducem etc. Dominici Cyllenii Graeci *De vetere et recentiore scientia militari*, Venice, 1559, fol. 66.

¹¹ ...illustri prosapiae Illyricorum populorum Dalmatiae, Lyburniae ceterarumque eiusdem idiomatis et linguae gentium.

¹² F. M. Bartoš, l. c., p. 46. — The priority in bringing Cyllenius in connection with the problem of authorship of Alexander's charter belongs to Wilhelm Wostry who mentioned *De vetere et recentiore scientia militari* in his study *Ein deutschfeindliches Pamphlet aus Böhmen aus dem 14. Jahrhundert* in MVGD, vol. 53, 1915, p. 206.

¹³ I was able to consult in the British Museum Library the 4th edition of 1597 prepared by Bielski's son Joachim. The letter is there on p. 15 — For Bielski's short biography see *Polski słownik biograficzny*, vol. II, Cracow, 1936, p. 64–66.

was critical in his evaluation not only of Alexander's letter but also of other details found in the works of his predecessors. He did not accept without sceptical comment Hájek's dating of the Czech migration to Bohemia (A. D. 644) and treated with a high dose of criticism a description of Alexander's invasion of Poland as contained in the chronicle of Vincent Kadłubek.¹⁴

Kromer made no deep impression on Polish historians writing in the second half of the sixteenth century. They were fascinated with Hájek and with other works which were not too solidly supported by critical evaluation of sources. While in the Czech orbit no reputable chronicler reprinted Alexander's letter, several Polish authors either simply followed Hájek or published additional material, the origin of which cannot always be traced to the primary source.

Stanisław Orzechowski (1513–1566) who wrote his annals at approximately the same time as Kromer was completing his chronicle, drew most likely information from Hájek and wrote concerning Alexander's letter as if it were a trustworthy document.¹⁵ Not content with a mechanical insertion of the letter into his work, Orzechowski presented three brothers, Čech, Lech, and Roxolan, the progenitors of the Czechs, Lechs i. e. Poles, and Russians, as war leaders in Alexander's service.¹⁶

While Hájek, Bielski, and Orzechowski did not go too far in their conjectures, Stanisław Sarnicki (1532–1597) whose *Annales* appeared in 1587, discussed the problem of Alexander's relations with the Slavs at a considerable length. The title of the second book of the *Annales de temporibus Magni Alexandri* indicates that he did not treat Alexander's connection with the Slavs as a mere episode. Sarnicki knew not one but two charters, identical in some points but different in concrete stipulations. By one Alexander transferred to the Sarmatians (*genti Sarmaticae*, i. e. to the Slavs) the territory between the rivers Dnjeper (Borysthenes) and Danube (Ister). He maintains that the charter was kept first in the archives of the Kingdom of Bohemia, and later in a convent near Cracow. In another connection he referred to a very old Czech chronicle in which the letter was included.¹⁷

¹⁴ In a later edition of Kromer's book, Cologne, 1589, the passage relating to early Slavic history appeared on p. 14–15. The passage concerning the letter reads as follows: "Diploma vero illud Alexandri Boemicum fictitium ac supposititium esse non levibus conjecturis convinci potest. Regis quidem illius tempore nondum notum erat, aut etiam natum Slavorum et Slavinorum nomen; quod incognitum fuisse Graecis iuxta et Latinis ante Justiniani Imperatoris tempora, amplius mille annis post Alexandrum, superius a nobis ostensum est". — Kadłubek's story was included in the first book of his *Chronica Polonorum*; see its edition by Alex. Przędziecki, Cracow, 1862, p. 14–17.

¹⁵ I believe that Pfister, l. c. P., 331 is too cautious in his interpretation of O-s reference to "annalibus Bohemorum vetustis"; taking those words literally, Pfister is inclined to believe that O. meant a much older historical narrative than Hájek. But it can also be surmised that O. deliberately obscured his source of information to create the impression that he found the letter in a very old chronicle.

¹⁶ In a later edition of the *Annales*, Gdańsk, 1643, the relevant passage appeared on p. 5.

¹⁷ Sarnicki's *Annales sive de origine et rebus gestis Polonorum et Lituanorum libri octo* appeared in Cracow in 1587. — Pfister has assigned to Sarnicki a more

The other charter was, according to Sarnicki, in the possession of the Bulgarians and Croats. Written on parchment in gold letters it had an enormous value but came into Turkish hands during the conquest by Mohammed II of Constantinople. Sarnicki believed that ever since the priceless document was part of the sultan's treasure. Sarnicki reprinted the text from Cyllenius,¹⁸ believing that what the Greek scholar presented as a translation from Greek agreed with the sumptuous but inaccessible original.¹⁹

Two Polish authors from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century contributed to the popularity of Alexander's letter. They both spent part of their life in Prague and had contacts with the Czechs. Bartolomew Paprocki of Głogół and Paprocka Wola (1543–1614), whose chief occupation was genealogy and heraldry, treated Alexander's letter in the same manner as charters of medieval princes, not pausing even for awhile to reflect on its origin and contents. He quoted it in his writings which had wider circulation than Latin works of many of his learned contemporaries, especially among the gentry. Three of Paprocki's books can be mentioned as examples of his keen interest in Alexander's donation: *Zrcadlo slavného margkrabství moravského* (1593), *Ogród królewsky* (1599), and *Diadochos* (1602).

There is only a paraphrase of the letter in the preface to *Zrcadlo*, addressed to King-Emperor Rudolph II, organizing at that time an expedition against the Turks.²⁰ In *Ogród królewsky* Paprocki reprinted the Latin text, having mentioned first the existence of the Greek original.²¹ In the fourth chapter of *Diadochos*, entitled Concerning the exit of brothers Čech and Lech from the land of Croatia, Paprocki first referred approvingly to Hájek's date of Čech's arrival in Bohemia (A. D. 644), and to Kadłubek's story of Alexander's expedition to Poland; he then reproduced the Latin version of Alexander's charter to show that Hájek and Kadłubek could be trusted.²²

Paprocki's contemporary, Christopher Warszawicki (1543–1603), wrote and published in Rome, in 1601, a dialogue on the origin of the Poles and of their language. In it he assigned a prominent place to Alexander's letter

prominent place than to other Polish authors and has devoted more space to discussion of his views.

¹⁸ *Annales*, p. 44–47.

¹⁹ It would be interesting but probably not too fruitful to speculate what Sarnicki actually meant when using such terms as "archivum Boemorum regni", "monasterium quoddam non admodum procul a Cracovia", or "pervetustus liber chronicarum Bohemicarum", which latter term reminds us of Orzechowski's reference to "annalibus bohemorum vetustis". — Another intriguing question is from what source sprang the story of the capture of the sumptuous document by the Turks and its preservation in the sultan's residence. Pfister, l. c., p. 334, is inclined to believe that "archivum Boemorum regni" was just a more impressive reference to the convent "At the Slavs"; the monastery in the vicinity of Cracow was most likely the Benedictine convent at Kleparz, known for its close connection with the Prague convent "At the Slavs".

²⁰ L. c., preface without pagination.

²¹ L. c., p. 147v.

²² L. c., p. 5–6.

and dissociated himself from the critical Kromer. He apparently knew the text from Cyllenius, and repeated the story of the capture of the document by the Turks. This information he probably had from a different source than Sarnicki, or if he had used Sarnicki, he changed the story arbitrarily. According to Warszewicki, the Poles had in their possession the original in golden letters and lost it along with other documents at the battle of Varna, 1444.²³

The latter part of the sixteenth and the early seventeenth century was the period in which Alexander's letter was given more publicity than ever before or after. Authors living and producing at that time were guided by other principles than the critical schools of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In their endeavors to trace the origin of their people as far back as possible they had little, or no sensitivity for anachronism and adjusted historical or geographical data to their taste. The differences in the description of the territory, granted to the Slavs by Alexander should not be treated too seriously, as in no version the limits were outlined accurately. While most of the available texts mention the seas, one of the copies which was known to Sarnicki, had the names of two rivers Dnjeper and Danube. Such a description appealed better to the Poles than a vague reference to the lands stretching from the north to the southern boundary of Italy.²⁴

In the latter part of the seventeenth century the atmosphere changed considerably, though not at once and thoroughly. Expressions of scepticism multiplied but did not prevail. The lofty vision of the Slavdom, deriving its vast territories in Eastern Europe from Alexander's privilege, was no incentive to criticism and misled even those who otherwise proceeded cautiously when confronted with documents of that kind.

A leading Czech scholar of the Baroque period, Bohuslav Balbín, of the Society of Jesus, acquired the knowledge of the charter from various sources and considered seriously its value. But he remained irresolute and neither accepted it unreservedly, nor rejected it as resolutely as Bishop Kromer at a much earlier date.

One of the sources in which Balbín found the Latin text was a legal treatise *De monarchia et sacra corona regni Hungariae*, written by a Hungarian nobleman Peter Révay (Petrus de Rewa) and published at Augsburg in 1613.²⁵ Balbín, of course, read also Hájek's chronicle and knew that

²³ See Christophori Varsevicii C. C. *De origine generis et nominis Poloni Dialogus*, Rome 1601, p. 36–37. W. described the territory granted as follows: "Est autem ejusmodi, quo a Baltico ad mare Adriaticum regiones et provincias omnes, fidei et victoriae ergo, Slavorum genti tamquam comiti et adiutrici tribuuntur".

²⁴ In the fourth chapter of his study Pfister compared carefully all texts he was able to locate and put in systematic order both the points common to them and the differences. The most striking deviation from the standard type is the copy in D (Cod. Vindob. 9370), written in the seventeenth cent. Its contents relate mostly to Russia; see Pfister l. c., p. 343. — The connection of this text with versions circulating among the Western and Southern Slavs is tenuous and it is not clear enough, through whose mediation the knowledge of Alexander's letter reached Russia. In the Russian version the territory is described as stretching "a mari Waregho ad Caspium". — From Brtán's book, p. 68–9 it can be deduced that Jurij Križanić, while staying in Russia, saw the version of Alexander's letter as contained in cod. D but rejected it as a mere fable.

²⁵ In the second edition of Révay's work of 1659 Alexander's letter occurs on p. 147.

Hájek was familiar with the letter. But he was apparently aware of Hájek's defects and was more impressed by Révay's judgement. Writing a fiery defense of the Slavic and especially Czech language, at the time when it was in general retreat from its once dominant position in the kingdom of Bohemia, Balbín was searching for historical documents by which he could support his campaign; he hesitated to dismiss the charter as a mere fabrication.²⁶

When collecting information concerning the history of Bohemia, Balbín came across a treatise on the origin of the Czechs whose autor was another Jesuit Andrew Středovský (Stredonius). Balbín incorporated it into the second book of his *Miscellanea*. Středovský knew of Alexander's letter from Paprocki's *Ogród* and reproduced it from there. But he submitted it to a penetrating analysis and grouped his objections under five headings. As Balbín added no comment, it can be concluded that he accepted Středovský's point of view and overcame his initial hesitation.²⁷

In 1817 Count Joseph Max. Ossoliński was collecting material for his study of Vincent Kadłubek. When analyzing Kadłubek's chronicle, he came across the story of Alexander's campaign in Poland. In that connection he also paid attention to the king's charter for the Slavs. He sensed that it was not authentic but wanted to have opinion of other scholars. He wrote to Bartolomew Kopitar who, in turn, approached the greatest living authority in Slavic matters, Joseph Dobrovský.

Writing in his country home at Trmice, Dobrovský had a limited access to books but replied promptly.²⁸ He knew the charter from Cerroni's manuscript and was convinced that it was fictitious. The problem for Dobrovský was not whether the letter was authentic or not, but when and where it was produced. Without making a thorough search, Dobrovský concluded that the letter was fabricated in Croatia in the fourteenth century and that the Slavic Benedictines brought a copy of it to Prague.²⁹

There is no explicit testimony which could be quoted to corroborate Dobrovský's opinion. But none of the authors who wrote recently on the subject produced evidence to the contrary. Pfister would not have thought of Herberstein, or his friend Thurn, as the fabricator of the letter, if he had known from either Bartoš' article or from another source of the existence of Cerroni's codex, dated reliably 1443.

Some remarks have to be made on the margin of Bartoš' attempt to solve the intriguing problem of authorship. Bartoš knew of Dobrovský's answer

²⁶ Balbín wrote his *Dissertatio* around 1672 but it was published only in 1775, when the censor's practice became milder. In that edition p. 62, we read as follows: "Alexander Macedo... literas dedit, quas ibi Reva recitat et longe antea in Bohemorum annalibus recitavit Hagecius; quae postrema nec mihi refellere mens est nec probare, maxime si chronologiae ratio ineatur; prudentis lectoris arbitrio haec relinquo."

²⁷ See B. Balbinus, *Miscellanea historica regni Bohemiae*, Prague, 1679, lib. II, cap. XXIII, 8.

²⁸ Kopitar wrote from Vienna on Aug. 20, 1817, Dobrovský replied on August 27; see Vatroslav Jagić, *Briefwechsel zwischen Dobrovský und Kopitar, 1808-1828*, Berlin, 1885, nos 106 and 107, p. 431, ff.

²⁹ "...Apud Croatas saec. XIV confictum diploma hocce mihi verisimile est"; see Jagić l. c., p. 433.

to Kopitar but treated it rather lightly, attributing the lack of solid support of the views expressed in the letter to the absence of a large library at Trmice. It can be admitted, though there is no direct evidence, that Dobrovský came across the charter before Kopitar had sounded him, and he could, therefore, give his opinion without too much search for corroborating evidence.

Bartoš pointed out correctly that no source, prior to Hájek, connected Alexander's letter with the convent "At the Slavs". It is a well known fact that Hájek was not scrupulous in verifying his dates and that he often substituted invented stories for the missing links. But the assumption that Alexander's charter was compiled by a Southern Slav, not by a Czech, does not hang only on such a thin thread as Hájek's testimony. When considered from various angles, it looks more plausible than Bartoš' hypothesis that a Czech, Vavřinec of Březová, was the author.

Alexander's personality and deeds fascinated all peoples that came in the Middle Ages under the influence of both biblical and classical ideas and narratives. Bishop Vincent, writing his chronicle at Cracow, was fascinated by Alexander tales as early as the opening decade of the thirteenth century. In Bohemia two sources were available to those seeking information: Ulrich von Etzenbach composed a romance in German for those members of the court of Přemysl Otakar II who came to Bohemia from the Alpine provinces and served the "Iron King" both in peace and war efforts. At a somewhat later date a Czech *Alexandreis*, following to a large extent Gualter's of Castello heroic poem came into existence.³⁰ Its anonymous author attempted to bridge over the gap between his own time and Alexander's era by details which a modern reader would eschew as unbearable anachronisms.³¹ Otherwise, he followed the leading authorities on Alexander and his time, classical and medieval. It can be assumed that the *Life of Alexander* (Pseudo-Calisthenes) was also known among learned Czechs of that time.³² Interest in Alexander the Great, once awakened, remained alive throughout the fourteenth century, as the available manuscripts of the *Alexandreis* show,³³ but was declining steadily when, with the advent of the Reform movement, religious problems gained in importance.

It is permissible to believe that Vavřinec of Březová, like many of his contemporaries, was familiar with Alexander tales and romances, but no concrete evidence of his active contribution to the knowledge of Alexander's amazing career has been produced. Bartoš' idea that he compiled the privilege for the Slavs is a brilliant conjecture but only conjecture.

In the Southern Slavic areas the atmosphere was different from Bohemia

³⁰ It has been published several times. The most recent edition was prepared by the late Václav Vážný: it appeared with an *apparatus criticus* and introduction by František Svejkský, under the title *Alexandreida*, Prague, 1963. — What is left of the Czech *Alexandreis*, are fragments, not more than two fifths of the original composition.

³¹ E. g. some members of Alexander's entourage were given such Czech names as Radvan, Mladota, and Radota; see *Alexandreida*, p. 75.

³² See above note 2.

³³ *Alexandreida*, p. 207–210.

and Poland. The territories inhabited by the Bulgarians, Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were included, in ancient times, in political units organized either by the Greeks or the Romans. Despite successive military campaigns, political and social upheavals which were frequent in those areas, the continuity of intellectual endeavors was not totally interrupted. The Slavic peoples were late arrivals. At the time of their coming the administrative system, built laboriously by Roman emperors, was falling apart. The ethnic difference of the Slavic settlers from the earlier inhabitants was an undeniable fact. But they were not ejected from their new homes and the process of assimilation was accelerated by their conversion to Christianity.

After some time — not decades but centuries — the knowledge of conditions existing in the Balkans, and along the lower Danube became so obscured that the peoples living there in ancient times and known from the works of Greek and Latin authors began to be identified with the Slavic tribes. In this manner the Slavic peoples were assigned roles which they could never perform, or places in the set up of the ancient world which they could not occupy. From that atmosphere sprang the belief that St. Jerome, one of the Church fathers, was of Slavic origin and that he made the Holy Writ accessible to his compatriots. This bold thesis was only later transplanted to the Slavic North and then it got its monumental expression in the Prague convent "At the Slavs" of which Jerome was the patron saint.

Conditions prevailing among the Southern Slavs were the fertile ground for emergence and rapid development of stories relating to King Philipp and his successor Alexander. As the two rulers were born in Macedonia, and large portions of Macedonia were at certain times taken over by Slavic tribes, credence was easily given to tales concerning their Slavic origin. And not only the two valiant kings, but also Aristotle, a native from Macedonian Stagira, was represented not as a Greek but as a Slav.³⁴ Stories of that kind traveled fast and were accepted without hesitation by northern Slavic scholars.³⁵

Summing up his data for Kopitar, Dobrovský observed pithily: *Auctoris nomen vix licebit cuique*, and he was, undoubtedly, right in believing that the author's name will hardly ever be known. Alexander's privilege is a short composition in which there is very little, indeed, that could help in searching for the name of its fabricator. Whoever he was, he could not attach his name to the product of his fantasy but he had to pretend to

³⁴ To get an idea how bold were these theories and combinations, one has to consult books like *De origine successibusque Slavorum* by a learned Dominican Vinko Pribojević (Vincentius Priboevius); it appeared in a modern edition with an introduction by Gr g a N o v a k, Zagreb, 1951.

³⁵ As an example can serve the following excerpt from Matthiae de Michovia *Chronica Polonorum* (2nd edition in *Polonicae historiae corpus*, Basel, 1582, tomus 2, p. 4): "Hi autem sunt Slavi, gens perpetua in Macedonia, Dalmatia, Histria, Croacia et caeteris Slavorum terris. In urbibus siquidem Macedoniae, Philippopoli, Scopia, Sophia, Ragusio, in vicis et villis usque versus Thessaliam lingua Slavorum semper viguit et viget. Gloriantur Philippopolenses Philippum regem fundatorem eorum et Alexandrum Macedonem ipsius filium origine Slavos fuisse, quamvis propter imperium in Graecos Graecum expedite sonabant... veracissime in sancto Hieronymo et Martino comprobatur, qui genere et lingua Slavi fuerunt".

have "found" it in an old manuscript, or else the letter would not be treated as authentic.

If the search turns in another direction, and if its final objective is the area in which the legend of a close alliance of Alexander the Great with the Slavic warriors could have originated, then the Southern Slavic territory appears to be the most likely place. To the Balkans, more than to either Bohemia or Poland, also points the identification of the southern boundary of the territories granted to the Slavs with "the South parts of Italy" to quote from Moryson's clumsy translation of the text found by him in the convent "At the Slavs".