

IMRE BOBA: FORTY YEARS OF SCHOLARSHIP

Imre Boba, a highly respected member of the Society for Slovene Studies and Professor of Central European History at the University of Washington, recently observed the fortieth anniversary of the beginning of his scholarly activity. We record this event with a brief assessment of his contributions to Central European and Slavic Medieval Studies.

The general outline of the ancient and early medieval history of the lands and peoples living to the north of the Mediterranean and Greek cultural zone and to the east of a line drawn roughly from the mouth of the Elbe/Laba to the mouth of the Isonzo/Soča, as described in synthesizing texts and offered in university courses all over the world, has remained essentially unchanged since the beginning of this century. The period of Slavic history from the recorded appearance of the Slavs to the definite establishment of individual Christian Slavic states, in particular, seems to be perceived by many late-20th century students of Slavic antiquity through the minds of their 19th and early-20th century predecessors. The fact that practically all the written sources for that period have been widely published and discussed in depth for two hundred years may be the reason why the scholarly community has neither sought nor welcomed interpretations that differ from those offered by the scholarly giants who have dealt with Slavic history, from the era of Josef Dobrovský to that of Francis Dvornik. For those of us who as graduate students in programs on Slavic Civilization were not completely convinced by the established traditions, the work of Imre Boba came as a fresh breeze in a stuffy room.

Professor Boba is eminently qualified by the circumstances of birth and education to be an authority on the medieval Slavs. Born of Polish-Hungarian parents in Győr, Hungary, he grew up in a culturally polyglot environment, where he freely spoke Hungarian, Polish and German and (of course) studied Latin and Greek. He was a doctoral candidate at the University of Budapest at the end of World War II. He thereupon shared the fate of many other East European intellectuals, migrating to the west. He obtained his doctorate from the University of Washington, Seattle, in 1962, with a dissertation entitled *Formation of the Kievan State*; he has been on staff there ever since.

Imre Boba's publications range across the length and breadth of Slavica. With his book *Northmen, Nomads and Slavs: Eastern Europe in the Ninth Century* (The Hague, 1967) he joined the large number of scholars who have been trying to throw light on the nature of the relations among the Slavic peoples, as sedentary agriculturalists, and their nomadic neighbors in the steppes and the various wandering Germanic tribes. Since the early 1970s Boba has been associated in the minds of the scholarly community with Great Moravia. The results of his research, especially his enquiry into the location of this State and his attempt to fix that location with precision, are incorporated into his *Moravia's History Reconsidered: A Reinterpretation of Medieval Sources* (The Hague, 1971). They have not met with unanimous scholarly approval: the present author, for one, does not agree with all of the points in Boba's *magnum opus*. It may however be stated with conviction that, having read this work with an open mind, it is difficult to continue to insist on the traditional location of the Moravian State. Whether Boba's views are destined to ultimately prevail or not, we

ought therefore to be grateful to him for having, through re-examination of the primary sources, shown us that the problem of Moravia's location can not be considered as solved.

Professor Boba continues to study and publish widely on a variety of problems in medieval Slavic and Hungarian history. For instance, the bishopric of Sermium, with its celebrated bishop St. Methodius and his tomb, are the subject of several of his articles published in the 1970s. Other articles of his treat the significance of the Cyrillo-Methodian mission for the various medieval Slavic polities. In all of his writings, he shows a commendable determination to get to the root of problems by examining and re-examining all the primary sources, including archeological findings. Since this is the only method by which we may ultimately build a more plausible structure for medieval Slavic history, we wish Imre Boba a long and productive life.

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