

Archbishop Theotmar of Salzburg's Letter to Pope John IX. A Forgery of Bishop Pilgrim of Passau?

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An unusually long letter, addressed to an unnamed pope, whom modern scholars have identified as John IX (898–900), and purportedly written by Archbishop Theotmar of Salzburg (873–907) and signed by all of his Bavarian suffragans¹, protested against a legation that had been dispatched by that pontiff from Italy “into the land of the Slavs who are called *Maravi*”² in order to establish there an archiepiscopal organization. Theotmar’s letter claims that the *Maravi* were lawfully under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the bishop of Passau. The archbishop complains that the canons explicitly forbade legates, in this case an Archbishop named John, and two bishops, Benedict and Daniel, from venturing without permission into the diocese of his suffragan, Bishop Richar of Passau, for such a purpose. Students of central Europe in the ninth century consider this letter important because it contains information about the political, military, and ecclesiastical situation in the middle Danubian basin at the end of the Carol-

¹ The letter is now available in an up-to-date, fully annotated edition with German translation and commentary, *Die Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum und der Brief des Erzbischofs Theotmar von Salzburg*. Ed. Fritz LOŠEK. Hannover 1997 (Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Studien und Texte, 15). This publication is an edition of two documents with extensive commentary. Both are considered fundamentally important for the relationship between the East Frankish kingdom and its Slavic neighbors to the east. The first, *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*, 90–137, is available in numerous editions. The second, allegedly Theotmar’s letter, 138–157, has been published several times but no definitive edition existed until now. For Lošek’s commentary on the *Conversio*, see, 5–53; for his commentary on Theotmar’s letter, see, 55–87. As a matter of convenience I shall refer to the entire work simply as LOŠEK, *Conversio* (cf. also my review in this volume of the *SOF*). Theotmar’s letter has been translated into German, Ernst DÜMLER, Über die südöstlichen Marken des fränkischen Reiches unter den Karolingern (795–907), *Archiv für Kunde österreichischer Geschichtsquellen* 10 (1853), 59–63, and into Czech by Lubomir HAVLÍK, *Diplomata, epistolaris, textus historici varii*. Ed. IDEM. Brno 1971 (Magnae Moraviae fontes historici, 3), 32–35. An English translation is also found in Charles R. BOWLUS, *Franks, Moravians, and Magyars. The Struggle for the Middle Danube, 788–907*. Philadelphia 1995, Appendix 2, 337–339.

² LOŠEK, *Conversio*, 140: *in terram Sclauorum, qui Maravi dicuntur*.

ingian era, a poorly documented period, when the region was being occupied by the Hungarians, who were in the process of destroying the Slavic polity generally known as the 'Great Moravian Empire', allegedly the state of the *Maravi*. This document is especially precious for students of the bishopric of Passau, for it is the only source confirming the widely held view that this episcopal see was responsible for mission efforts in Moravia.

The original letter has not survived, but there are several extant copies, all undated³. The best is in a Viennese codex containing some notorious forgeries, those of Bishop Pilgrim of Passau (971–991)⁴ – very dubious company indeed. Nevertheless, the Theotmar letter is generally considered genuine, and, assuming its authenticity, scholars also presume that it was composed in the year 900⁵. From the contents of the epistle it is apparent that the East Frankish king and Roman emperor Arnulf of Carinthia (887–899) was already dead, leaving an infant son, Louis (the Child), who is mentioned in the text⁶. Since Arnulf died on December 8, and since the missive was allegedly addressed to Pope John IX, whose demise came in mid-year 900, a date for its composition sometime between April and July seems reasonable.

In spite of the proximity of Theotmar's letter to the forgeries of Pilgrim of Passau, in 1910 Harry Bresslau, a prestigious editor for the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, pronounced it genuine⁷, and, since then, the authenticity of the document has rarely been questioned. Without really discussing it in detail, Bresslau simply used this 'authentic' document *to prove* the spurious nature of another letter, one contained in the same codex and allegedly authored by Archbishop Hatto of Mainz⁸. The contents of Theotmar's letter and the specific

³ The most important extant manuscript is in the Austrian National Library (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna). Fragments are also in Cologne and elsewhere. For what follows see LOŠEK, *Conversio*, 60–69.

⁴ The pioneering work on Pilgrim's fabrications, also known as the Lorch Forgeries, was done by Ernst DÜMMLER, *Pilgrim von Passau und das Erzbistum Lorch*. Leipzig 1854. Valuable recent work has been contributed by Franz-Reiner ERKENS, *Die Ursprünge der Lorcher Tradition im Lichte archäologischer, historiographischer und urkundlicher Zeugnisse*, in: *Das Christentum im bairischen Raum. Von den Anfängen bis ins 11. Jahrhundert*. Ed. Egon BOSHOFF/Hartmut WOLFF. Köln, Wien, Weimar 1994 (*Passauer historische Forschungen*, 8), 423–459.

⁵ Perhaps at the provincial synod of Riesbach in July 900. Cf. Wilfried HARTMANN, *Die Synoden der Karolingerzeit im Frankenreich und in Italien*. Paderborn 1989, 372.

⁶ LOŠEK, *Conversio*, 146–147.

⁷ Harry BRESSLAU, *Der angebliche Brief des Erzbischofs Hatto von Mainz an Papst Johann IX*, in: *Historische Aufsätze Karl ZEUMER zum sechzigsten Geburtstag als Festgabe dargebracht von Freunden und Schülern*. Weimar 1910, 9–30.

⁸ BRESSLAU, *Ibidem.*, did publish the texts of both letters in his article. Until Lošek's edition, his remained the primary one, although his text was reprinted elsewhere several times. Curiously until now, no edition has been printed in the MGH. For the various editions and translations, see LOŠEK, *Conversio*, 70–73. Hatto's letter, which also contains some information concerning Frankish-Moravian relations, may not be a forgery after all, for Bresslau's views on this epistle have been challenged by Horst

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context in which it was composed have not (until very recently) been subjected to close scrutiny⁹. What follows is an exploration of the relationship between this letter, purportedly written by Theotmar, and Pilgrim of Passau's well known forgeries. But first some essential background.

The 'Great Moravian Empire', 'the land of the Moravians', the 'Moravian principality', or whatever modern historians have chosen to call it, has become in recent years the subject of intense scholarly discussion¹⁰. In 1971 Imre Boba argued that ninth century Moravia was located not in the modern Czech and Slovak republics, as most scholars have assumed, but in modern Serbia in the vicinity of the Roman provincial capital of Sirmium (now Sremska Mitrovica)¹¹. In the 1970s, however, his hypothesis attracted little support, but rather some bitter condemnation and much stony silence. Nationalism and Communist solidarity conspired in curious ways with Roman Catholicism and vested scholarly interests to prevent a real debate over the issues raised by Boba. His thesis, however, is finally attracting the attention that it deserves. In the last decade Martin Eggers and I have published books and articles supporting the general thrust of Boba's arguments¹². These studies are currently being read, reviewed, and debated¹³.

FUHRMANN, *Der angebliche Brief des Erzbischofs Hatto von Mainz an Papst Johannes IX, Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 78 (1970), 51–62.

⁹ Egon BOSHOFF, *Das Schreiben der bayerischen Bischöfe an einen Papst Johannes – eine Fälschung Prigrims?*, in: *Papstgeschichte und Landesgeschichte. Festschrift für Hermann JAKOBS zum 65. Geburtstag*. Ed. Joachim DAHLHAUS/Armin KOHNLE. Köln 1995 (Beihefte zum Archiv für Kulturgeschichte, 39), 37–67. IDEM, *Das ostfränkische Reich und die Slawenmission im 9. Jahrhundert: die Rolle Passaus*, in: *Mönchtum – Kirche – Herrschaft. 750–1000*. Ed. Dieter R. BAUER, et al. Sigmaringen 1998, 51–76. Prior to Boshoff's articles, only Heinrich KOLLER, *Quellenlage und Stand der Forschung zur Landnahme der Ungarn aus der Sicht des Abendlandes*, in: *Baiern, Ungarn und Slawen im Donauraum*. Ed. Willibald KATZINGER/Gerhart MARCKGOTT. Linz 1991 (*Forschungen zur Geschichte der Städte und Märkte Österreichs*, 4), 77–93, expressed significant doubts concerning the authenticity of Theotmar's letter.

¹⁰ For the recent works on this subject, see LOŠEK, *Conversio*, 1–4.

¹¹ Imre BOBA, *Moravia's History Reconsidered. A Reinterpretation of the Medieval Sources*. The Hague 1971.

¹² Martin EGGERS, *Das „Großmährische Reich“. Realität oder Fiktion? Eine Neuinterpretation der Quellen zur Geschichte des mittleren Donauraumes im 9. Jahrhundert*. Stuttgart 1995 (*Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters*, 40). IDEM, *Das Erzbistum des Method. Lage, Wirkung und Nachleben der kyrillomethodianischen Mission*. München 1996 (*Slavistische Beiträge*, 339). BOWLUS, *Franks*. IDEM, *Die militärische Organisation des karolingischen Südostens (791–907)*, *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 31 (1997), 46–69. A recent defense of the traditional view is Herwig WOLFRAM, *Salzburg, Bayern, Österreich. Die Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum und die Quellen ihrer Zeit*. Wien 1995 (*Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, supp. 31), see especially, 87–100.

¹³ For a thorough discussion of the current state of the question, cf., Martin EG-

Ninth-century Moravia was the scene of much religious conflict, as Carolingian, Byzantine, and Roman missionaries struggled against one another to convert the region and to organize it ecclesiastically¹⁴. One of Moravia's rulers, Rastislav, was the Slavic prince who invited the Greek brothers and missionaries Constantine and Methodius into central Europe in 863. Their activities there were vigorously opposed by the Bavarian bishops of the East Frankish kingdom under the archbishop of Salzburg, who claimed ecclesiastical jurisdiction over much of the middle Danubian basin. Using a Greek-based Slavic alphabet, the brothers translated scripture and liturgy, creating in the process (to the horror of the Latin clergy) a Slavic Biblical and liturgical language. Driven from Moravia and the middle Danube by Frankish armies, the Greek missionaries escaped to Rome, where Constantine became a monk, took on the name of Cyril, and died shortly thereafter. Methodius, however, returned to the region, first as a Roman legate and finally as a papally appointed archbishop to the see of St. Andronicus, which can only refer to the ancient Roman provincial capital of Sirmium, which Boba believed was the principal locality in Moravia. In 870, however, Methodius was captured and incarcerated by the Franks, who were compelled to release him two and one-half years later, after their armies had suffered dramatic military reversals at the hands of Prince Zwentibald, Rastislav's nephew. Methodius returned to the middle Danubian region where he served as archbishop until his death in 885.

However, the relationship between Methodius and Zwentibald was not a good one. The Moravian prince seems to have favored the Latin rite as it was practiced by the Frankish/Bavarian clergy. In 880, at Zwentibald's insistence, a Frankish priest, a certain Wiching¹⁵, was ordained as Methodius' suffragan bishop of the *ecclesia Nitrensis*, generally assumed to have been Nitra in modern Slovakia¹⁶. Subsequently, Methodius and Wiching became rivals. At Wiching's instigation priests trained in the Slavic liturgy were expelled from Moravia following Methodius' death.

As for Prince Zwentibald, he enjoyed much worldly success during the years 871–891, when his armies conquered most of the middle Danubian basin, previously under Frankish hegemony¹⁷. In the 890s, however, his luck ran out, as

GERS, „Moravia“ oder „Grossmähren“? Ein Diskussionsbeitrag, *Bohemia* 39 (1998), 351–370.

¹⁴ The literature on this subject is vast. For an excellent summary from the traditional point of view, see Francis DVORNIK, *Byzantine Missions among the Slavs*, New Brunswick 1970.

¹⁵ For a discussion of Wiching, see Erwin HERRMANN, *Slawisch-Germanische Beziehungen im südostdeutschen Raum von der Spätantike bis zum Ungarnsturm. Ein Quellenbuch mit Erläuterungen*. München 1965 (Veröffentlichungen des Collegium Carolinum, 17), Exkurs, 209–212.

¹⁶ *Epistolae Karolini aevi*. Vol. 5. Ed. Erich CASPAR, et al. Hannover 1928 (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae* 7) Nr. 225, 222.

¹⁷ For the military aspects of Moravian expansion, see BOWLUS, *Franks*, 173–216.

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Arnulf of Carinthia established himself as an effective late Carolingian king and an able military leader¹⁸. Moreover, Arnulf did not hesitate to employ Hungarian horsemen against Zwentibald's realm¹⁹. When the Moravian leader died in 894, his principality, already greatly reduced in size, was divided among his sons, who soon quarreled, further endangering the realm's stability. By 906 at the latest, Moravia succumbed to Hungarian domination.

Bishop Wiching deserted Zwentibald as the duke's fortunes waned, leaving his court and returning to East Francia, where he served as Arnulf's chancellor during his wars against the Moravians²⁰. In 899 this ruler attempted to reward Wiching for his loyal service by installing him bishop of Passau²¹. The appointment, however, miscarried because of the objections of Archbishop Theotmar and the other Bavarian bishops who pointed out that "he had previously been sent by the pope to the Moravians as a bishop"²². Since it was against the canons for a single individual to hold two episcopal appointments, Wiching was removed as bishop of Passau and Richar was ordained against the king's will²³.

Both Richar²⁴ and Wiching²⁵ appear in Theotmar's letter. As we have seen, Richar presided over the ecclesiastical see (Passau) which, according to the Bavarian bishops, had ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the lands of the Moravians. Theotmar's letter protested that the pope had dispatched a legation of bishops to the land of the Moravians to install an archbishop with three suffragans.²⁶ This territory belonged to the diocese of Passau, the letter states time again. It is against the canons, Theotmar wrote, to send bishops into the jurisdiction of another bishop "without the knowledge of his archbishop and without the consent of the bishop in whose diocese they were [trespassing]"²⁷. Thus Bishop

¹⁸ Charles R. BOWLUS, Imre Boba's Reconsiderations of Moravia's Early History and Arnulf of Carinthia's „Ostpolitik“ (887–892), *Speculum* 62 (1987), 552–574.

¹⁹ *Annales Fuldenses sive Annales regni Francorum orientalis*. Ed. Friedrich KURZE. Hannover 1891 (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum*, 7), 121. Liudprandi Episcopi Cremonensis opera. Ed. Joseph BECKER. Hannover 1915 (*Ibidem*, 41), 15. Widukindi monachi Corbeiensis Res gestae Saxonicae. Ed. Paul HIRSCH/Hans-Eberhard LOHMANN. Hannover 1935 (*Ibidem*, 60), 29.

²⁰ Joseph FLECKENSTEIN, Die Hofkapelle der deutschen Könige. Stuttgart 1959 (*Schriften der Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, 16/1), 202–205, and HERRMANN, Slawisch-Germanische Beziehungen, 209–212.

²¹ Franz-Reiner ERKENS, Die ältesten Passauer Bischofsurkunden, *Zeitschrift für Bayerische Landesgeschichte* 46 (1983), 480.

²² *Annales Fuldenses*, 133.

²³ Sebastian SCHOLZ, Transmigration und Translation. Studien zum Bistumswechsel der Bischöfe von der Spätantike bis zum Hohen Mittelalter. Köln 1992 (*Kölner Historische Abhandlungen*, 37), 165–170.

²⁴ LOŠEK, *Conversio*, 138, as *Richarius Patauiensis ecclesie episcopus*.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 144.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 140–142.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 142: *Intrantes autem predicti in nomine vestro, ut ipsi dixerunt, episcopi ordinaverunt in uno eodemque episcopatu unum archiepiscopum, si in alterius episco-*

Richar and his jurisdiction in Moravia constitute the central theme of Theotmar's epistle.

In contrast, Wiching is mentioned only incidentally. To quote from the letter, "Your predecessor [presumably John VIII] ordained Wiching bishop at the request of Duke Zwentibald. However, he never sent him into the ancient bishopric of Passau but to a newly baptized people (*gens*) whom the duke had defeated in war and converted from paganism to Christianity."²⁸ The ordination of Wiching was permissible, the letter argues, for it involved no trespass on Passau's jurisdiction. In other words, the see over which Wiching presided was *not* within the original land of the Moravians that had already been organized by Passau. Although Wiching's see is not mentioned by name, from a papal letter dated 880, scholars believe that it was Nitra, north of the Danube in modern Slovakia²⁹. If this is true, however, the Theotmar letter contradicts one of the most cherished assumptions of the traditional (northern) Moravian hypothesis; that is that the region around Nitra had already been integrated into the 'Great Moravian Empire' by Duke Moimar (822–845) very early in its history, c. 830 at the very latest³⁰. In contrast, if Theotmar's letter is to be believed, it was only conquered by a Moravian ruler c. 871 when Zwentibald became the undisputed ruler of the Moravians. Theotmar's letter is, on the other hand, consistent with my view that the Moravians managed for the first time to dominate the region north of the Danube only after 871, when Duke Zwentibald administered a crushing defeat on the Franks in Pannonia, clearing the deck for a series of rapid conquests that permitted the Moravian ruler to expand his power over most of the middle Danubian basin³¹.

In two recent articles, however, Egon Boshof has issued a vigorous and seemingly plausible challenge to the authenticity of Theotmar's letter³². Noting that copies of this epistle are bound together with Pilgrim's forgeries, Boshof argues that Theotmar's letter is also one of the fabrications concocted by Pilgrim between 971 and 990. He rests his argument on three main points. 1). There are obvious stylistic similarities between Theotmar's letter and Pilgrim's forgeries. 2). Although the letter objects to the creation of an archiepiscopal see in the land of the Moravians, it never mentions Methodius who had already been sent into

patu archiepiscopium esse potest, et tres episcopos eius suffraganeos absque scientia archiepiscopi et consensu episcopi, in cuius fuerunt diocesi.

²⁸ Ibidem, 144: *Antecessor vester Zuentibaldo duce impetrante Wichingum consecravit episcopum, et nequaquam in illum antiquum Patauiensem episcopatum eum transmisit, sed in quandam neophitam gentem, quam ipse dux bello domuit et ex paganis christianos esse patravit.*

²⁹ Epistolae Karolini aevi, Nr. 225, 222.

³⁰ See, for example, BOSHOFF, *Das ostfränkische Reich*, 63: „Etwa um 830 wurde Priwina von Neutra durch Moimir aus seinem Herrschaftsbereich um Neutra vertrieben.“

³¹ BOWLUS, *Franks*, 173–185.

³² BOSHOFF, *Das Schreiben*; IDEM, *Das ostfränkische Reich*.

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this region as archbishop in 870 by Pope Hadrian II. 3). The letter does mention Wiching, but it states (erroneously in Boshof's opinion) that Wiching became the bishop of a previously pagan people, whom *Zwentibald* (not Moimar) had conquered³³. Nevertheless, in spite of their apparent plausibilities, Boshof's arguments cannot stand. My reasons are as follows.

While there are indeed marked stylistic similarities between Theotmar's letter and Pilgrim's spurious texts, it is impossible to state with any certainty that Pilgrim actually wrote the former or that it was formulated under his supervision³⁴. As we shall see momentarily, there are good reasons to believe that Theotmar's letter was contrary to the interests that Pilgrim was promoting in his forgeries. It is plausible, on the other hand, that Pilgrim used Theotmar's authentic letter as a basis for his concoctions. Pilgrim was no ordinary bungling forger. He was a master of his craft. In fact, his fabrications were so artfully done that they were considered genuine until Ernst Dümmler finally unmasked them in the mid-nineteenth century³⁵. Before becoming bishop, Pilgrim served his uncle, Archbishop Frederick of Salzburg. In the latter's service, Pilgrim had access to Salzburg's rich archival sources, whose style he later imitated³⁶. This is a fact that has been noted by many able scholars. It is therefore not surprising that a letter, purportedly written by Archbishop Theotmar c. 900, is stylistically similar to Pilgrim's fabrications. The style of both is that of the Salzburg chancellery.

Secondly Boshof emphasizes the failure of Theotmar's letter to mention Methodius, the first papally appointed archbishop in Moravia, implying that the Salzburg prelate would have used this opportunity to protest the earlier appointment as well³⁷. This implication, however, does withstand careful scrutiny. Only one East Frankish document dating from the ninth century ever mentions Methodius. This document, the so-called *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*, makes only a passing reference to Methodius, as a certain Greek philosopher, who was at large in Pannonia, preaching *nova doctrina*³⁸. The *Conversio* says nothing about Methodius being a papally appointed archbishop. The East Frankish clergy practiced a conspiracy of silence against Methodius³⁹. In the voluminous modern historical literature on the Byzantine and papal missions to the Slavs, the East Frankish kingdom, and the 'Great Moravian Empire', one frequently encounters the statement that Methodius was hauled before a tribunal of bishops in Regensburg where he was tried and convicted of trespassing on Bavarian mission terri-

³³ See especially, IDEM, *Das ostfränkische Reich*, 71–72.

³⁴ LOŠEK, *Conversio*, 74–81, has in fact carefully compared the text of Theotmar's letter with Pilgrim's forgeries, concluding that there are marked linguistic and stylistic differences.

³⁵ DÜMMLER, *Pilgrim von Passau*.

³⁶ Heinrich FICHTENAU, *Zu den Urkundenfälschungen Pilgrims von Passau*, *Mitteilungen des Oberösterreichischen Landesarchivs* 8 (1964), 81–100.

³⁷ BOSHOFF, *Das ostfränkische Reich*, 73.

³⁸ LOŠEK, *Conversio*, 130.

³⁹ BOWLUS, *Franks*, 165–173.

tories⁴⁰. This, however, is not an incontestable statement of fact, but an inference based on a passage in the *Annales Fuldenses*, which states that Rastislav, then Moravian duke, was brought in heavy chains before King Louis the German in Bavaria, where he was found guilty of treason and blinded⁴¹. Scholars assume that Methodius was with Rastislav at that time, but no source ever mentions him. The Bavarian episcopate steadfastly refused to recognize Methodius' very existence, much less his archiepiscopal claims. If, under papal pressure, they ever did recognize Methodius' claims, they must have destroyed or erased the documents later. The point is simply this: It is characteristic of East Frankish sources of that time to avoid any recognition of Methodius. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that Theotmar's letter mentions neither the archbishop, who had died fifteenth years earlier, nor his claims.

Finally Boshof notes that Archbishop Theotmar's letter is confused about the geographical situation of Moravia in that he seems to be saying that Nitra, Wiching's episcopal see, was not within the boundaries of the original Moravian polity, but was a pagan region conquered by Zwentibald⁴². Boshof remarks, matter of factly, that every scholar knows that Moimar drove another Slavic leader, a certain Priwina, out of Nitra (German, Neutra) c. 830, thereby creating the 'Great Moravian Empire'. This statement is also not an incontestable matter of fact, but an inference based, in this instance, upon a misreading of the *Conversio*, which reports that Moimar, duke of the Moravians, drove Priwina *supra Danubium*, not that he expelled him from Nitra⁴³. The locality whence Priwina came is never mentioned in the original text. While some of the extant manuscripts of the *Conversio* do indeed contain the statement that Archbishop Adalram of Salzburg (824–836) consecrated Priwina's church in a locality called *Nitrava*, all recent editors of the *Conversio* acknowledge that this passage is totally out of context, disturbing the continuity of the text⁴⁴. Editors assume that it was a gloss that

⁴⁰ For an intelligent discussion of the problems involved in the so-called „Methodius trial“, see S. SAKAĆ, Bemerkungen zum Methodiusprozess in Bayern, 870, *Orientalia Christiana periodica* 20 (1954), 175–180.

⁴¹ *Annales Fuldenses*, 70.

⁴² BOSHOFF, *Das ostfränkische Reich*, 72–73.

⁴³ LOŠEK, *Conversio*, 120: *In cuius spacio temporis quidam Priwina exulatus a Moimaro duce Maravorum supra Danubium venit ad Ratbodum*. For the great variety of possible translations for this passage, see Charles R. BOWLUS: Where was Ninth Century Moravia? Toward a Structural Analysis of Frankish Sources, *Die Slawischen Sprachen* 10 (1986), 5–36.

⁴⁴ LOŠEK, *Conversio*, 122: [*Cui quondam Adalrammus archiepiscopus ultra Danubium in sua proprietate loco vocato Nitrava consecravit ecclesiam*]. To demonstrate that this passage is out of context, the editor has bracketed this passage. See also, *ibidem.*, nr. 130, 123, „Offensichtlich eine ursprüngliche Randglosse, die in den erhaltenen Handschriften in den Text übernommen worden ist, diesen aber inhaltlich wie formal stört.“ It must also be said that there are linguistic reasons to doubt that *Nitrava* is today's Nitra in Slovakia. See, Gy. DÉCSY, N(y)itra as a River, City, County and Personal Name, *Ural-Altäische Jahrbücher* 57 (1985), 33–39.

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eventually found its way into extant manuscripts. In fact, of the eleven surviving manuscripts of the *Conversio* only three (the earliest dating from the twelfth century) contain this passage⁴⁵. The sentence concerning a church in *Nitrava* is, therefore, a weak foundation for assertions concerning the centrality of Nitra to the Moravian polity in the ninth century⁴⁶. Once it is recognized that there is no compelling reason to believe that Moimar annexed Nitra in the process of forming the 'Great Moravian Empire' c. 830, then there can be no source-based objection to the implication in Theotmar's letter that Zwentibald conquered the region north of the Danube in Slovakia after 870, forty years following Moimar's conflict with Priwina. Hence, this apparent inconsistency between Theotmar's epistle and the *Conversio* can be dismissed.

There is, however, an even better reason for rejecting Boshof's conclusions. Pilgrim concocted his skillful forgeries for the sole purpose of establishing a documentary basis for claiming that his see was the successor of the ancient archbishopric of Lorch, today in Upper Austria on the Danube. If he could win acceptance for his spurious documents, Pilgrim could lay claim to the rank of archbishop, giving him primacy over his uncle Frederick of Salzburg, whose archbishopric was a "Johnny-Come-Lately", a creation of Charlemagne. It is not surprising that Pilgrim and Frederick fell out when the Bishop of Passau began to press his claims. Frederick's chancellery in fact began to crank out forgeries to defend his see against his nephew⁴⁷. Taking into consideration that Pilgrim's purpose was to establish archiepiscopal claims for his see, it is inconceivable that he forged the letter attributed to Theotmar, which states unequivocally that Bishop Richar of Passau was a suffragan of Salzburg⁴⁸. Pilgrim wanted to create a documentary basis for his independence from Salzburg. Theotmar's letter clearly indicates that Passau was subordinate to the see on the Salzach.

Theotmar's letter and Pilgrim's forgeries do, however, have a common feature: Both support the conclusion that the Moravian heartland in the ninth century was not north of the Danube in the modern Slovak Republic. At the end of the

⁴⁵ For a discussion of the various manuscripts, see LOŠEK, *Conversio*, 8–16. Only manuscripts W3, W4, and W5, which Lošek believes descend from a common source, contain this passage. The best extant manuscript, W1, portions of which date from the tenth century, is missing a page containing most of chapter 11, including the place where, if the traditionalists are correct, the statement „Nitrava ultra Danubium“ might be expected.

⁴⁶ Nevertheless, it is generally cited as if there were no doubt that it belongs in the original text. See, for example, Gerhard BIRKFELLNER, Methodius archiepiscopus Superioris (Magna) Moraviae, in: Studien zum internationalen Slavistenkongreß in Preßburg/Bratislava. Ed. Karl GUTSCHMIDT/Helmut KEIPERT/Hans ROTHE. Köln 1993 (Bausteine zur Slavischen Philologie und Kulturgeschichte, Reihe A: Slavische Forschungen. Neue Folge, 11/71), 37.

⁴⁷ BOSHOFF, *Das ostfränkische Reich*, 53.

⁴⁸ LOŠEK, *Conversio*, 142. Note also, p. 139, that Richar of Passau's name comes last in the list of Bavarian bishops. For additional arguments for the authenticity of Theotmar's letter, see Lošek's commentary, *ibidem.*, 82–87.

tenth century the competition between Salzburg and Passau was not just for primacy in Bavaria, but for ecclesiastical jurisdiction over territories in the middle Danubian basin, which the Hungarians had occupied and where they were settling down and beginning to accept Christianity⁴⁹. Pilgrim's forgeries assert Passau's rights to four bishoprics in Moravia, and they unequivocally situate Moravia in southeastern Pannonia and in Moesia, far from a northern Moravia⁵⁰. No modern authority contests this fact, but the traditionalists insist that, simply because they are later forgeries, Pilgrim's location of Moravia cannot be taken seriously⁵¹. However, in the complete absence of evidence that Passau had any jurisdictional claims north of the Danube, there is no reason to dismiss Pilgrim's geographic definition of Moravia. Surely it must have represented where the bishop of Passau *thought* that Moravia had been situated less than a century earlier. Can we honestly say that modern historians have a better sense of geographic realities in the ninth century than did tenth century bishops who were struggling to defend and enlarge their ecclesiastical jurisdictions?

To conclude we must return to Theotmar's letter. Although most scholars assume that Passau's ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the ninth century included Moravia, this letter is the only document written before Pilgrim's forgeries that unequivocally makes such a claim⁵². It is significant, however, that it explicitly excludes the region around Nitra north of the Danube. This exclusion of Nitra and western Slovakia from Passau's jurisdiction probably means that the original center of the Moravian realm was not north of the Danube at all, but to the south or southeast. If the Theotmar epistle is not a forgery, it may be considered additional evidence against the traditional location of ninth-century Moravia. Fritz Lošek, who believes that the letter is authentic, also acknowledges that it does indeed state unequivocally that Wiching's diocese was situated in a formerly pagan region which lay outside of the original Moravian realm until Zwentibold conquered it⁵³. Nevertheless, he attempts to explain away this „historisch unrichtige Aussage“, arguing that it is a rhetorical device⁵⁴. In my view, if one accepts the authenticity of Theotmar's letter, one cannot so easily brush aside this matter-of-fact statement concerning Wiching's diocese. On the other hand, although there is no compelling reason to suspect that Theotmar's letter is a

⁴⁹ For the opportunities that were opened up for missions in the latter half of the tenth century, see Franz-Reiner ERKENS, *Pilgrim, Bischof von Passau (971–991). Versuch einer Würdigung (anlässlich des 1000. Todestages)*, *Ostbairische Grenzmarken* 34 (1992), 25–37, especially, 31–34.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the location of Moravia in Pilgrim's Forgeries, see, EGGERS, *Das Erzbistum des Method*, 35–41.

⁵¹ For example, Karl BRUNNER, *Herzogtümer und Marken. Vom Ungarnsturm bis ins 12. Jahrhundert. Österreichische Geschichte 907–1156*. Wien 1994, 93.

⁵² BOSHOFF, *Das ostfränkische Reich*, 75. Of course he interprets this fact to prove that the Theotmar letter is a forgery.

⁵³ LOŠEK, *Conversio*, 86, admits that the statement is „nicht anfechtbar“.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem.*, note nr. 29, 145.

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forgery, it must be admitted that we cannot completely exclude that possibility. But if it is a forgery, whose was it? The letter surely cannot be one of Pilgrim's fabrications, for he attempted "to prove" that his see was the successor to the ancient archdiocese of Lorch and was, therefore, independent of Salzburg, whereas Theotmar's letter states unequivocally that the bishop of Passau was a suffragan of Salzburg. The simplest explanation is that this letter was one of many authentic documents collected by Pilgrim to be used in concocting his notorious forgeries. The only other possibility, one that cannot be completely dismissed, is that Theotmar's letter was fabricated, not by Pilgrim, but rather by his uncle, Archbishop Frederick, whose interests were actually better served by it, since it emphasizes the supremacy of Salzburg in the eastern missions.