

## Book Review

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**BOOK REVIEWED:** MADDALENA BETTI, *THE MAKING OF CHRISTIAN MORAVIA (858-882): PAPAL POWER AND POLITICAL REALITY* (LEIDEN: BRILL, 2014): 266 PP. ISBN 978-90-0421-187-2.

In her book, Maddalena Betti attempts to chart the fate of the Methodian mission in Great Moravia and the establishment of *Sancta ecclesia Marabensis* in Moravian territory in the second half of the ninth century. While this topic has been treated previously, she has chosen to look at the formation of ecclesiastical hierarchies in Great Moravia from the perspective of papal policies. For this reason, Betti has studied in detail papal correspondence pertinent to matters of the Moravian mission, especially the letters of John VIII, whose correspondence is particularly concerned with the Moravian mission. Her study is an extremely valuable addition to previous research into Great Moravian Christian culture, as it provides a well-rounded and erudite picture of the papal position on the Methodian mission in Great Moravia. Besides, Betti's study also contributes to other scholarly inquiries connected with the Moravian state, such as its geographical location.

In the first chapter, Betti provides an overview of the diverse forms of interest in the Moravian mission throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, including by the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, by nationalist groups in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and in the modern national states of Central Europe. As for the scholarly community, Betti shows that both the leading historians writing about Great Moravia in the nineteenth century, Pavel Josef Šafářík and František Palacký, proposed that Great Moravia lay in the territory north of the Danube. This thesis,

supported by the excavation made in 1950s and 1960s in Czechoslovakia, is favored also by Betti. She rejects the theses of Imre Boba, who placed Great Moravia south of the Danube, and of Martin Eggers, who located Great Moravia east of the Danube. Both scholars gave a prominent place to ancient Sirmium (modern Sremska Mitrovica) as the episcopal see of Methodius, a thesis accepted also by Dvorník who considered the ecclesiastical province of Methodius to encompass territories both north and south of Danube.

In chapter two, Betti examines the history of the Moravian mission during the pontificates of Nicholas I (858-67) and Hadrian II (867-72). Her comparison of the two Slavonic vitae of Constantine and of Methodius with the papal letters and other Roman sources reveals discrepancies that reflect the different perspectives and interests of the parties involved in composing the two sets of evidence, particularly with respect to the role of the two popes in the Moravian mission and their reasons for support of the Methodian enterprise. Betti points out that none of the Slavonic sources mention the involvement of John VIII in the establishment of the ecclesia Marabensis. In contrast, they credit either Nicholas I or Hadrian II with the consecration of Methodius as an archbishop of the Moravian diocese and with the approval of the Slavonic liturgy. She believes that it is likely that both Nicholas I and Hadrian II interacted with the Great Moravian elites and with the Moravian missionaries, but it was only John VIII who had a clear stance towards the issue of the establishment of the Moravian Church. Moreover, Betti shows that the Roman sources pay little to no attention to the appointment of Methodius as a head of the newly established ecclesiastical province or to the endorsement of the Slavonic liturgy - matters central to the Slavonic sources - but rather focus on the *translatio* of the relics of St. Clement to Rome by Constantine. Betti concludes that this was because the papal involvement in Central Europe was an open issue in the times of Nicholas I and Hadrian II, a project which was contrary to the interests of East Francia, a key papal ally at the time.

The third chapter is devoted entirely to the analysis of the correspondence of John VIII. Betti divides the chapter between several topics, such as the pope's rhetoric in his 'Moravian correspondence', Methodius' place in the context of the missions sponsored by Rome, the changes in perception of the mission and the addressees evident from the papal correspondence, as well as the 'Sirmian question'. Betti's most important argument is the shift in papal policy between 873, the year Methodius was freed from imprisonment by the Bavarian clergy, and 880, the year when John VIII addressed his bull *Industriae tuae* to Svatopluk, the ruler of Great Moravia. In 873, John VIII designated Methodius as an archbishop of Pannonia; while in 880, Methodius was reaffirmed as an archbishop of Ecclesia Marabensis. This change in papal rhetoric reflected the papacy's changing attitudes towards the missionary activity of Methodius. Originally, John VIII's strategy was to advocate the re-establishment of the previously extant diocese of Pannonia, which justified papal involvement in the territory with a strong presence of Bavarian, Frankish missionaries without alienating the East Franks, papal allies in the Christianization of Bulgaria. However, the growing

power of Great Moravia under Svatopluk and the failure of the Bulgarian mission by 880 encouraged John VIII to focus on the establishment of a strong and independent diocese in the Moravian territory, without considering the Franks. John VIII was, moreover, willing to acknowledge Svatopluk's supremacy in Central Europe in 880, and in return expected Svatopluk to serve as a sole protector of the missionary project (rather than seeking multiple guarantors as in 873). Betti also shows that John VIII's policies fell in line with the strategies of the previous Roman missions of Augustine, Willibrord and Boniface. Finally, Betti provides convincing arguments against the notion that Methodius' see was located at Sirmium. Not only was the antique city of Sirmium of little importance by the ninth century, but it was also removed from the Moravian territory north of the Danube. Betti's strongest argument is, however, that the association of Methodius with the See of St. Andronicus - which supposedly points to Sirmium - is a result of the influence of later Cyrillo-Methodian liturgy, in which Paul and his apocryphal disciple were invoked as the typi of Constantine and Methodius, and has little to no connection with Sirmium. Rather, Methodius was not a bishop with a fixed see, but an itinerant bishop whose task was to establish his diocese gradually.

Betti's arguments are well-founded and convincing and thanks to a historiographic introduction accessible even to non-specialist reader. If there is anything missing in her book, it is a more thorough discussion of the sources referred to in the book. Although Betti refers to Frankish, Byzantine and even Anglo-Saxon texts, beside the Roman and Slavonic sources, she does not provide similar background to them as she does for the latter. Also, it is a bit of a pity that most of the overview of historiography in the first chapter is focused only on the question of the geographical location of Great Moravia. However, these are just minor details and overall Betti's study of the Ecclesia Marabensis is invaluable for its compelling conclusions about the role of the papacy in the Methodian mission in Great Moravia.