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ŘÍP MOUNTAIN AND THE BEGINNINGS OF CZECH ARCHAEOLOGY

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There exist two types of archaeological localities: some are examined following accidental finds, while the examination of the other type is motivated by the assumption, that the place is likely to be rich in findings. In the history of archaeology, the oldest sites of that latter type are often places that are well-known from the earliest written history of countries and nations, including their founding myths and legends. To these places came the "antiquarians" in the hope of finding tangible proofs or informations, which for centuries had been passed on and received without question. In many countries, this is how archaeological investigations began, as early as the Middle Ages. The first event of this kind was probably the excavation led (according to legend) by the Byzantine Christian missionaries Constantine and Method in 861 at Crimea, in the hope of finding the grave of Saint Clement.

A similar role was played in Czech archaeology by Říp Mountain – a prominent basalt outcrop shaped in the form of a neat copula visible from afar (*Fig. 1*). The name is possibly of Germanic origin, but its original form was lost and in historical times the German inhabitants of northwestern Bohemia called this mountain Georgsberg – St. George's Mountain – with reference to the consecrated chapel on its summit (*Fig. 2*).

Fig. 1: Říp Mountain from the southeast, as seen from Ctiněves village.

Formed by volcanic activities, Říp towers over the flatlands where the rivers Vltava and Ohře meet Labe, the biggest Czech river, northwest of Prague. And precisely the prominence of this formation could have conditioned its extraordinary status already in the antiquity.

The major part of the finds at this place belongs to the Late or Latest Bronze Age, when the cultic importance of prominent hilltops is well recorded. Its exceptional importance for early mediaeval Czechs is attested by the Romanesque chapel on the top of the hill (*Fig. 3*). This chapel, reconstructed on an older one, probably made of wood but possibly of stone, was built by decree of the Czech prince Soběslav I in 1126, after his victory over the German troops of king Lothar III. We cannot exclude however the possibility that the foundation of the former shrine was connected with the christianization of the originally important pagan cult site.

It is difficult to estimate to what degree the relations of the Early Medieval Slavic people were affected by some pre-Slavic tradition. As this people colonized the land in the vicinity of the mountain in the 6th century A.D. and adopted its Germanic name, they could also have taken some older concepts concerning its importance. Certainly, already by the first compilation of Czech history – the Czech Chronicle (*Chronica Bohemorum*) written by the Prague deacon Kosmas early in the 12th century – it was firmly implanted in the consciousness of all Czechs

Fig. 2: Říp Mountain – aerial photography.

that Říp Mountain was the first place in this country where the "Forefather Čech" came with his Slavic people, climbed the summit, looked down on the fertile land, and decided to settle there forever.

It was not important for the future whether Kosmas took the personage of the "forefather" from some older tradition, or whether he created it according to some literary patterns of his period. Up to the historians of the 19th century, all the later Czech chroniclers reproduced this story, which since Renaissance times they placed somewhere in the 7th century A.D., and gradually furnished it with more and more details. The Czech Chronicle of Václav Hájek of Libočany, printed in 1541 (*Fig. 4*), particularly excelled in these developments. And so, step by step, was created the picture of Říp and its immediate surroundings as a "national mountain" and sacred land of the Czech nation. The Chronicle of Hájek brought not only the first pictures of this mountain, but, for the first time, some rather tangible details on the Forefather Czech's seat and on his grave in Ctiněves Village at the foot of the mountain (*Fig. 5*). This precise localization originated only in the mind of its creator, on the basis of the false, unqualified etymology of this village; nevertheless, it exhorted others to search for traces and remnants from early Czechs times.

Once archaeological interest was born during Renaissance Europe, it was only a matter of time before it reached this country. This interest could not have been stimulated by megalithic relics, big barrows or monuments of classical antiquity; therefore, the crucial role belonged to places associated with mythic stories from the dawn of national history, or with legends concerning Czech saints. For example, the first Czech archaeological locality depicted in 1668, was the early medieval fortified settlement (burgwall) of Libice, as the birthplace of Saint Vojtěch (Adalbert) (*Fig. 6*). In Moravia such interest was aroused by the question of Velehrad, the first historically documented but unlocalised center of early medieval Great Moravian Empire. In the case of Říp Mountain, it is interesting to note, that under the impact of Hájek's chronicle, of all the villages surrounding the slopes of the mountain, attention centered only on Ctiněves village; no rival legend originated.

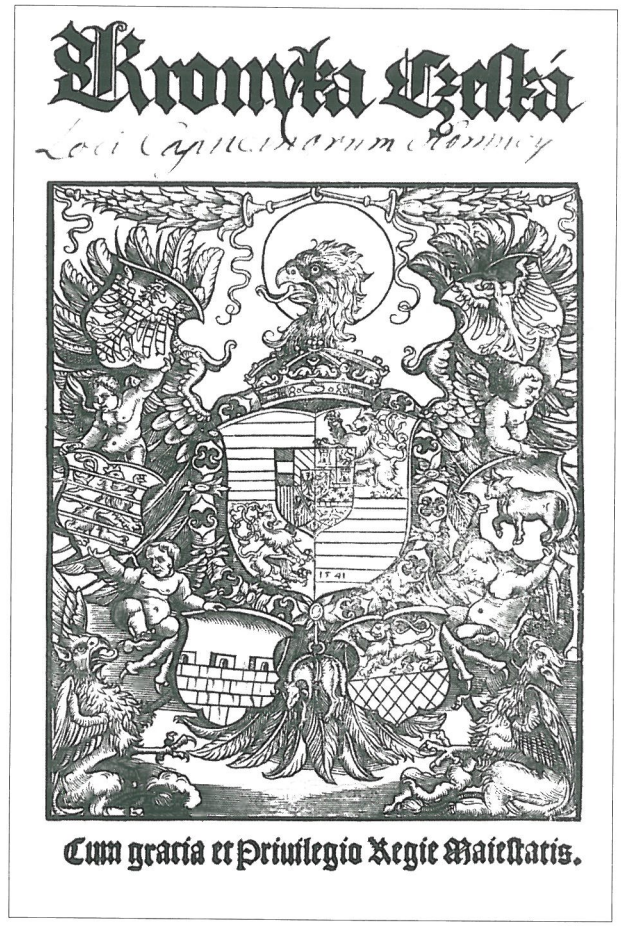
The finding of ancient settlement under ground was not, however, within the scope of an incipient archaeology that lacked practice in such undertakings.

Fig. 3: The Romanesque rotunda on the summit of the hill originated by reconstruction of an older shrine in 1126.

Small wonder, given that the main interest centered on searching for graves of important personages, in relation to medieval burial customs. Renaissance and Baroque antiquaries mainly saught above ground tombs (mausoleums) or underground vaults, located mainly within ecclesiastical areas. Barrows were comparatively small in this country, and so they escaped attention utill they became favored targetd of survey during the 19th century Romantic period.

This search for above ground monument derived from some account in the 14th century Chronicle of Pulkava (whose copy is no longer in existence). This report, probably added later on the manuscript, indicates that Bohuslav Balbín (the major Czech scholar of 17th century; *Fig. 7*) and other people have been searching in and around Ctiněves for the grave of Forefather Čech, looking for a memorial arch, an elevated place, or a burial chamber or vault - but without success.

More important was the other approach, that can already be labeled as archaeological in the narrower meaning of the word. The Chronicle of Jan Beckovský, printed in Prague in the year 1700, narrates that yet before Ctiněves village became the possession of the ducal family of Lobkovic, some "lovers of antiquities" made an attempt to find Czech's grave by digging under the floor of local St. Matthew church (*Fig. 8*) - where, according to old tradition, it should have been located. Interestingly, nobody seems to have realized that the "pagan" ruler would hardly be buried in a Christian church - that was moreover built much later. After they removed the brick floor the searchers cleared away large quantity of soil, but the sought-after grave was not found. If this information is reliable, as seems to be the case, this constitutes the first deliberate archaeological research recorded in the Czech country.



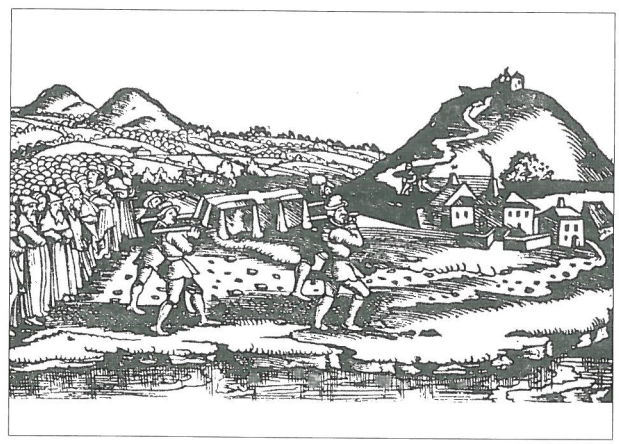


Fig. 4, 5: Two xylographs by Pavel Severin from 1540 (the "Czech Chronicle" by Václav Hájek of Libočany, Praha 1541) depicting the burials of Forefather Čech (above) and his successor Krok (below) at Ctiněves. According to some details it could be discerned that the author depicted the mountain realistically and it is interesting how he gave a true picture of the land's history: on the first picture, the land is heavily forested (correctly by leafy wood), on the second one, there is already settled agricultural land.

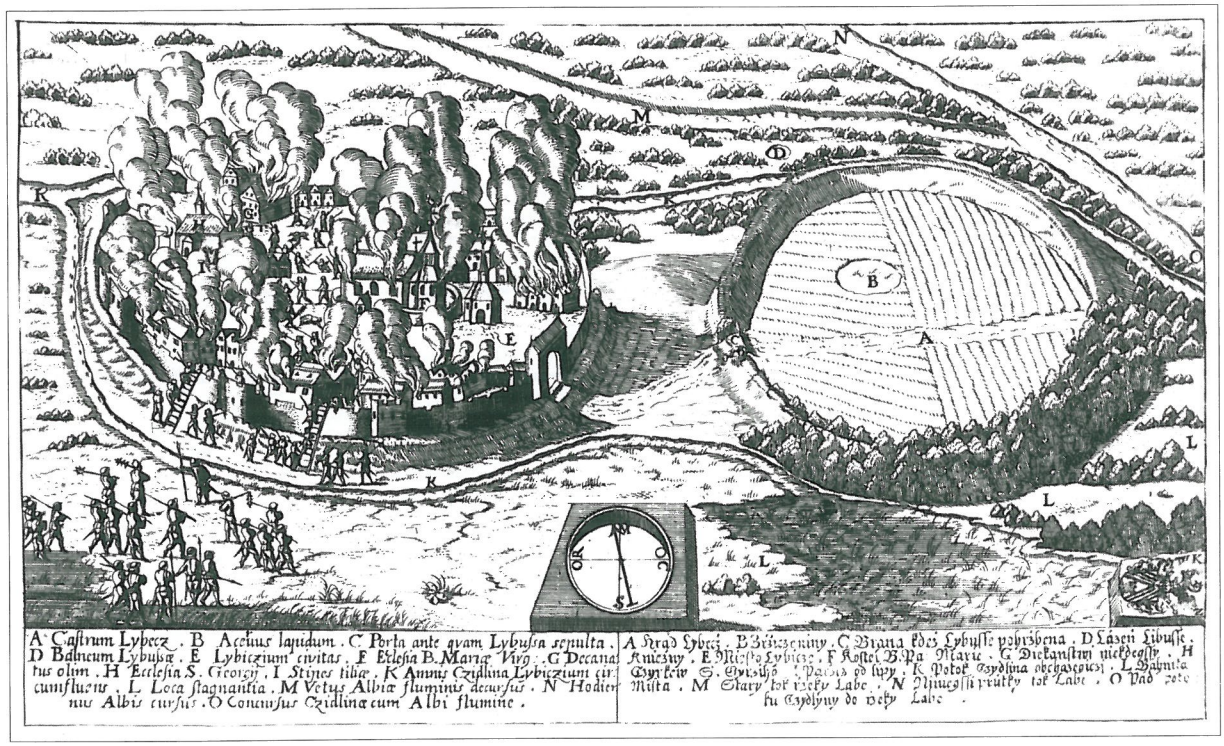


Fig. 6: The oldest picture of an archaeological field monument in Bohemia: Early Medieval fortified seat (burgwall) at Libice (M. B. Bolelucký: Rosa Boëmica, Prague 1668).

Unfortunately, the source does not specify the year of this attempt. The Lobkovic family acquired Ctiněves village twice: once in 1609, and later (permanently) from 1671 on. As the former date seems to be too early, we could speculate about the middle of 17th century.

The same source indicates furthermore that the new owner was informed about another tradition, that the grave was located at an elevated locality called "Želiv" in the vicinity of Ctiněves. There a monastry once supposedly stood, and its foundations sometimes hindered the tillage. The Duke of Lobkovic allegedly instructed larger scale excavations to be made on the spot, but once more no grave was found.

The third attempt, also of date unknown, was according to other source undertaken by the subsequent owner of the domain, Duke Philip Hyacint of Lobkovic, who died in 1734. This project was probably the same as that mentioned in the book of the first Czech scientific topographer Jaroslav Schaller in the year 1785, who stated that it occurred about forty years ago. Though those excavations were also carried out at a place referred to by some traditions (we do not know exactly where), the attempt also failed.

All these attemps illustrate rather well the above proposition whereby the first deliberate excavations (not brought about by previous findings or by the existence of some archaeological monument) were motivated by traditional legends and myths concerning sites and graves from the antiquity of the nation. These attempts were undertaken regardless of the historical validity of these legends, and were moreover limited not only by inadequate archaeological methods and practice, but also by a lack of clear notion of the finds sought after.

Advance beyond this blind alley came with a change of paradigm, brought into archaeology by Romanticism. The prominent bearer of this change was the first real field archaeologist in Czech lands, priest Václav Krolmus (*Fig. 9*), who, especially in the mid- 19th century carried out many exploratory voyages from Prague to various parts of the country.

In 1853 he visited Ctiněves under Říp to look for Čech´s grave. Whereas some 18th century authors have depicted it as a tomb marked by a great stone, Krolmus already supposed that Čech, as an early Slav, had to be buried by cremation under the tumulus. And so Krolmus viewed the whole country with different eyes; in the already known area in eastern neigbourhood of the church he discerned a barrow which he identified as Čech´s burial mound. By such 'surface survey' he was able to find on the spot a stone battle-axe (*Fig. 10*), attributable to the Corded Ware culture of the Late Stone (or Eneolithic) Age. According to brief notes in Krolmus's field diary (*Fig. 11*), it seems most probable that its findspot was an Eneolithic barrow with stone core, strongly disrupted by modern tillage and reuse of stones. It cannot be ruled-out that this place is the Želiv location (*Fig. 12*) which cannot be identified today. As well, stones from this barrow could have been considered as the remainders of the monastery or the ruined vault of some old crypt. In this location, however, the only underground finds known (in the absence of modern archaeological excavations) testify to settlements of Late od Latest Bronze Age. Merely two years after Krolmus's find, another stone battle-axe of the Corded Ware culture was found somewhere near Ctiněves.

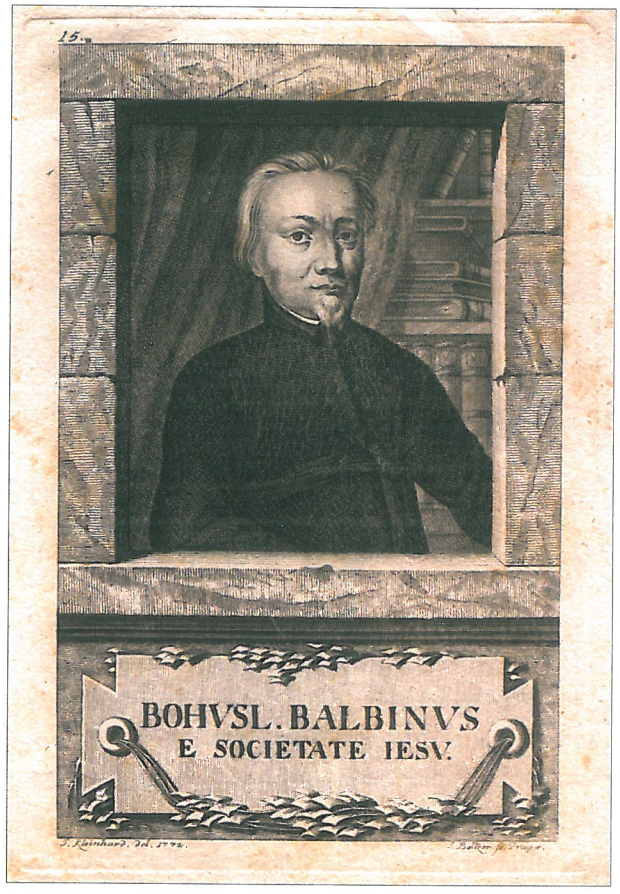


Fig. 7: Bohuslav Balbín, the foremost Czech scholar of the Baroque times. In his book *Miscellanea historica Regni Bohemiae* (I., Prague 1679) he described, among other, several archaeological sites and findings.

The fact is that Krolmus's romantic discovery came a bit late, at a time when the myth of Forefather Čech was no more taken as historical reality, and so it did not arouse much attention. Moreover, this finding was in no way as spectacular as could be expected of Čech´s tomb. It is true that the Romantics were ready to interprete folk tales in a practical way, as they held them to be the product of Slav antiquity maintained for centuries by folk tradition. The mythological image of Říp was at a more popular level essential for the ideological armory of 19th century Czech nationalists, but the finds made by Krolmus proved to be meager and unobtrusive, compared with presumed splendour of the Forefather Čech (*Fig. 13*).

This proved important for the fate of the finds made on Říp mountain by its first archaeologist Václav Krolmus. Incidentally, it was not long after that the idea originated of building on Říp a monument for Czech historical heroes, as the obverse of the German Walhalla just opened near Regensburg at Bavaria – and in the revolutionary year 1848 Říp became the scene of a great nationalistic political mass meeting. Krolmus was the first in Czech

Fig. 8: The St. Matthew church at the highest place in Ctiněves (view from the east – from the place where later the "discovery" of Čech´s grave mound was made).

lands who duly appreciated the significance of ceramic potsherds (though naturally he was not yet well versed with them) and alsoof field survey. The results he achived drew the admiration of is contemporaries. In the same year of 1853 he climbed Říp mountain and rapidly identified on its summit and slopes vestiges of prehistoric localities. Besides potsherds and animal bones, he also collected there some polished stone implements and fragments, as well as some bronze objects. Since he duly handed his finds to the National Museum in Prague, some have been preserved and attest nowadays to human presence on Říp as early as the Neolithic and Eneolithic Ages, as well as in the later half of the Bronze Age. This was precisely the period, when many mountain summits, in northwest Bohemia and beyond, showed evidence of defensive or non-profane use. Similar discoveries were also made by Krolmus at various places at the base of the mountain. Due to the low level of archaeological knowledge, it was not difficult for him and his contemporaries to ascribe all these finds to "Old Czechs" from Early Medieval Ages, and thus to strengthen their trust in the veracity of the legends. These archaeological aspects, however, did not raise any general interest.

Paradoxically, while these finds of the year 1853 generated little interest, more striking "discoveries" still lingered in folktales concerning the land under Říp. In 1765, within the debate on the oldest Czech history, an "Inscription on the tomb of Forefather Čech" was published (*Fig. 14*). According to the book in which it appeared, it was contained in some immemorial manuscript found under romantic circumstances. The obverse of the manuscript recorded folk narrative concerning stone slabs previously positioned in some building at Ctiněves. It is difficult to say if this rather ridiculous fake – combining naive conceptions on such an inscription, on the old Slavic language and on would-be runic script – was only depicted in the above-mentioned book, or whether it was really created. In any case all of this was soon rejected by Gelasius Dobner, the foremost Czech historian of Enlightenment times, and subsequently never professionally dealt with.

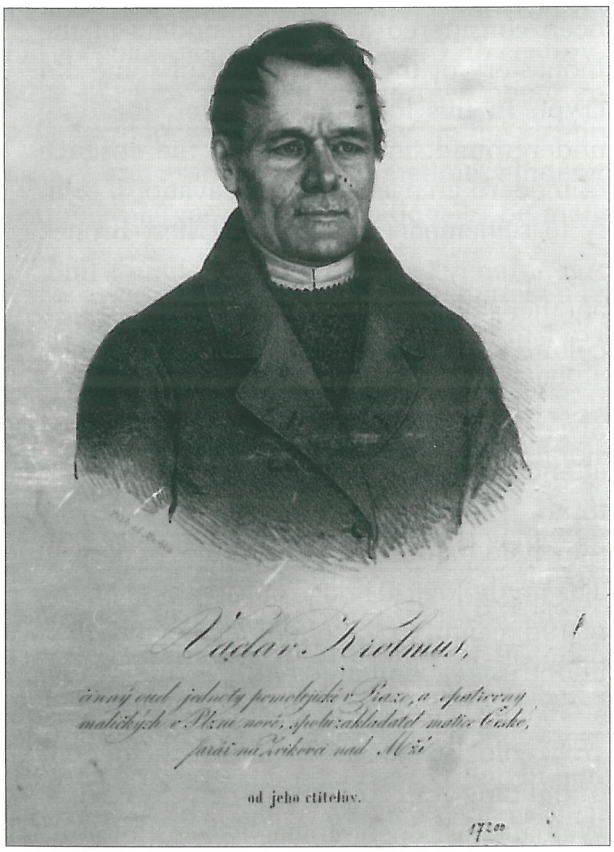
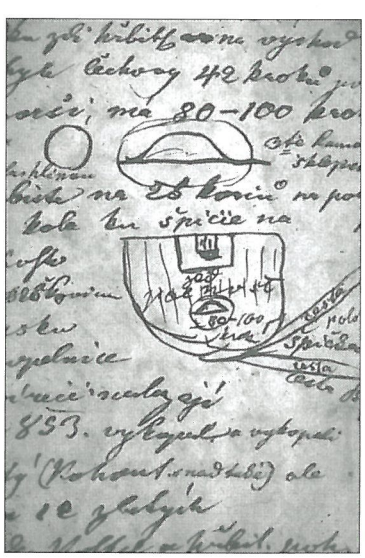


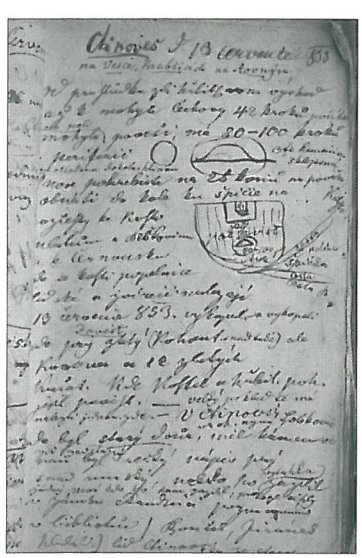
Fig. 9: Václav Krolmus, catholic priest and the first important practical field archaeologist in Bohemia.

Fig. 10: The stone facetted battle-axe of the Corded Ware culture (Late Eneolithic), found by Krolmus at Ctiněves in 1853.

Finally, it is noteworthy that Duke Philip of Lobkovic intended to build some kind of monument – memorial or cross – at the excavations site, but that his untimely death prevented it. Had it been build, it would have been the oldest memorial of archaeological survey, and not only in this country. In 1900, the community of Ctiněves again considered the building of a monument at the site of "Čech´s grave mound" in accordance with Krolmus's find, that is on the east of the church; but also this project did not come to fruition.

This is actually a pity, because this monument would have recalled not only the primeval traditions and lost hopes of finding the grave of the mythic forefather, but also confirmed the stimulating role played by this locality, associated as it is with national mythology, in the beginnings of the strictly speaking archaeological survey of Bohemia. This whole episode indicates that the history of archaeology should not be reconstructed only from the positive findings and their publication, but also from the unknown archival sources and texts of non-archaeological character. Sometimes these sources can articulate, much better than straightforward archaeological reports, the various interests of the period, the different conceptions and priorities which have served as the impetus for the first archaeological explorations of the land.





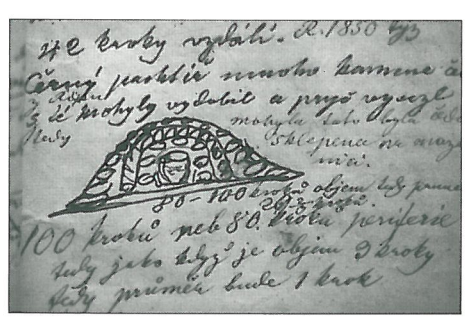


Fig. 11: Schema of the location of Čech´s tumulus in the field diary of Václav Krolmus from 1853: as it was with majority of archaeologists-amateurs of the period, his documentation was rather flimsy from our point of view.

Fig. 12: This place east of the church is possibly the same as the today unknown Želiv location.

Fig. 13: Forefather Čech climbing the Říp Mountain in the fantasy of a historical painter at the beginning of the 19th century (V. Markovský, 1820). At that time the "ancient Czechs" were – under the influence of the theory of Indo-European origin which was modern in that period – visualized in "Persian costumes", as if Čech had brought his people directly from the far-away East.

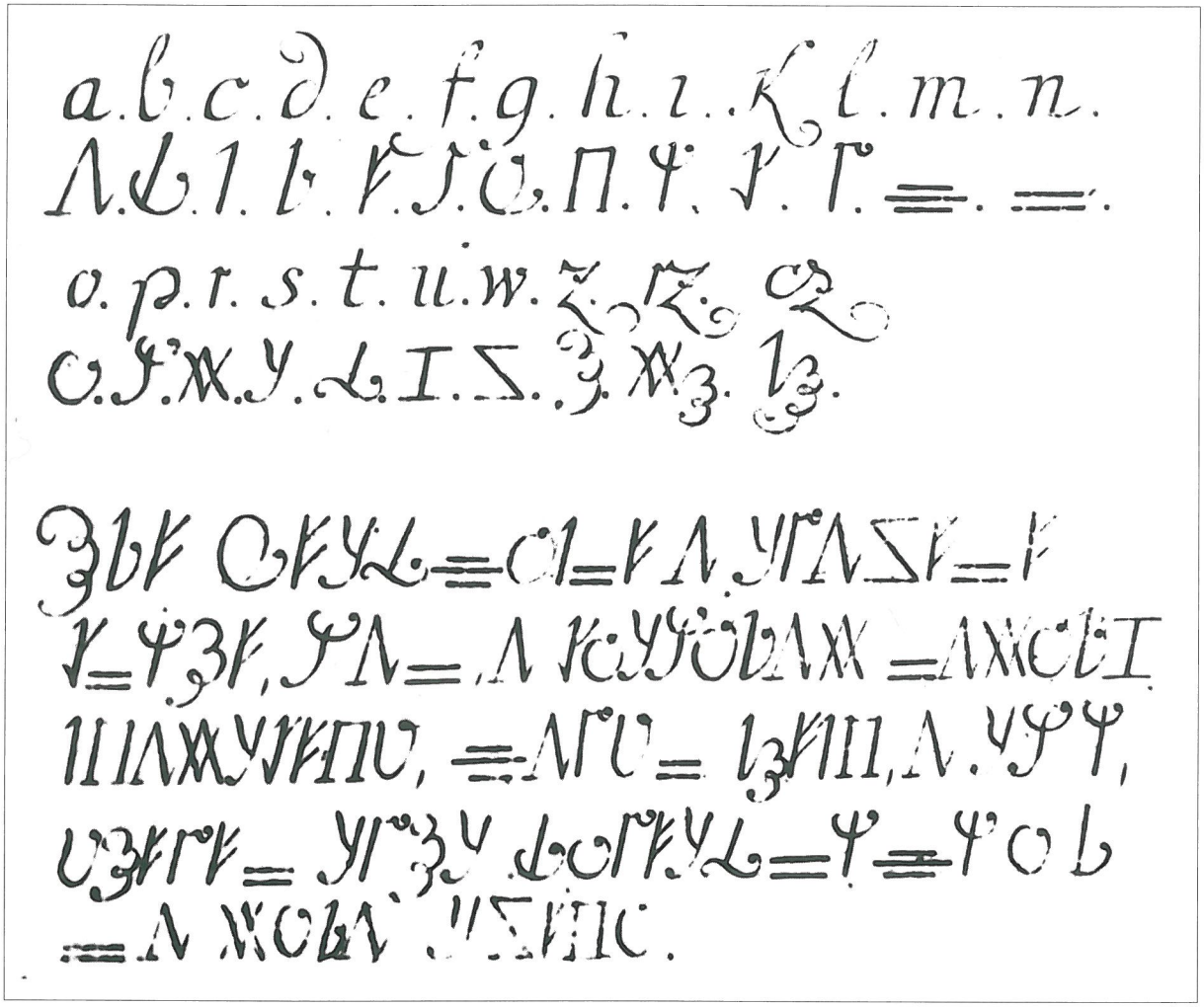


Fig. 14: Such was the appearance of the tombstone inscription of Forefather Čech and its "runic" alphabet according to the book of V. P. Duchovský *"Lucifer lucens"* (Prague 1765): the author was either mystified by foreign fake or he falsified himself to strengthen his opinion in historians' dispute concerning the oldest Czech history.