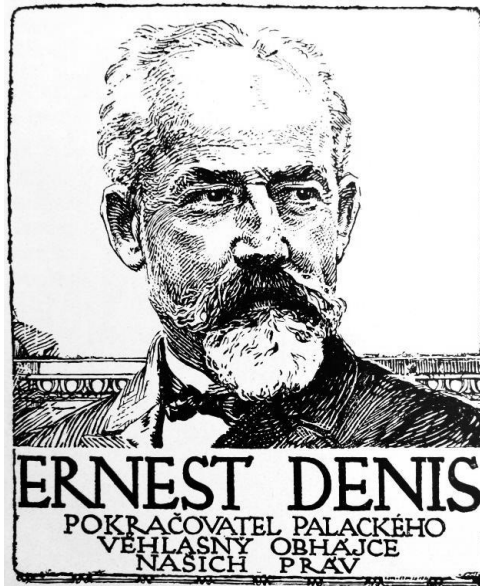


Ernest Denis (1849 – 1921)

Teacher's Guide Worksheet [Level B](#)



Source: VANČURA, J. *Arnošt Denis*. Praha: Zlatoroh, 1924, p. 153.

I. “Every Cloud Has a Silver Lining” or How the French Looked for New Allies after 1871

Young history student Ernest Denis was just finishing his college studies in Paris when the Franco-Prussian war broke out in 1870. Denis participated in the conflict and witnessed the first failures of the French army as a volunteer soldier in the 7th Infantry Battalion. The crushing defeat at Sedan (September 1870) shattered the French army. The French regions of Alsace and Lorraine were forcibly annexed to the newly established German Empire (1871). Denis, as well as his French contemporaries, were deeply marked by this war and desired revenge. The new French Republic literally opened a "window to Europe" – from France towards the East. France's primary goal was to enter into cooperation with the nations that could help France regain its lost territory.

DOC 1: French Interest in Central Europe¹

It was after the unfortunate war that nevertheless did France much good. The French found out what a mistake it was to be “too French” and not caring enough about the rest of the world – especially the one that lies to the east of them, starting with Germany. (...) The government itself sent young scholars to Germany. Denis went even further and chose Bohemia.

Source: GOLL, J. *Arnošt Denis*. Praha: Bursík a Kohout, 1904, p. 4.

¹ The author of this excerpt is Jaroslav Goll, leading Czech philosopher in the second half of the 19th century and a founder of the positivist method in Czech historical science.

DOC 2: Blank Map of Europe



Source: <http://www.zsfrymburk.cz> [10/15/2014].

- *Fill in the blank. Refer to the introductory text.*

In the year **1870** the so called Franco-Prussian War broke out, in which these two nations fought against each other: **France** and the future **Germany**. France suffered a hard defeat and in 1871, Prussia acquired the French provinces of **Alsace** and **Lorraine** for the future united Germany.

- *With the help of your historical atlas mark those two regions on the blank map DOC 2.*
- *Why does the author criticize the French authorities? How did their position change after the war?*

Jaroslav Goll criticized the self-centeredness of the French. As the descendants of Romanic nations the French considered themselves the most civilized in Europe and looked down on all the nations east of France. After Napoleon's III Empire fell in 1871, France opened up to new influences and upon receiving a heavy blow from the Germans, it started looking for collaboration with the Slavic nations, with the objective to weaken Germany and regain Alsace-Lorraine.

- *Explain in your own words, how is the saying "Every cloud has a silver lining" reflected in the text.*

The "cloud" was France's defeat by the Germans and the loss of two regions. That led to a change in French foreign policy in the spirit of republican liberalism and to a greater interest in the European nations (their culture and education) east of France.

II. Studies in Prague

What brought the young historian to Prague? Above all it was Denis's patriotic sense of "duty", i.e. to prepare a revenge for Alsace-Lorraine. He believed that learning about Slavic nations would facilitate a future diplomatic cooperation between these nations and France aimed against Germany. In 1872-75, Denis traveled to Prague with the objective to learn German and later also the Czech language. During this time, the Czech lands formed a part of Austria-Hungary where German was the official language.

DOC 3: From Denis's Scholarship Application for His Journey to Bohemia

I will be able to study the current situation in Bohemia and attempt to make known these nations in the north of Austria, which are the most intelligent, enlightened and energetic of the nations that inhabit Eastern Europe.

Source: Archives Nationales de la France, fond Ernest Denis F 1725754.

- *Which nations does Denis mean when he says "north of Austria"? Refer to the document.*

I will be able to study the current situation in Bohemia.

- *How does he describe these nations?*

Denis speaks about these nations in superlatives: "most intelligent, enlightened and energetic".

- *Is the geographical term "Eastern Europe" used appropriately in this case?*

Denis refers to Czechs as inhabitants of Eastern Europe. Even though Czechs occupy a territory east of France, from a geographical point of view the term "Central Europe" would be more accurate.

DOC 4: Denis's Arguments for Allocation of Scholarship Funds for his Study in Prague

He considered it important that during his stay he would learn the German language, without actually living in Germany. At the university he wanted to learn about new methods of teaching geography and about German higher education. However, as he emphasized, Prague is also a Czech city and – along with Moscow – one of major Slavic cities. Therefore, he would also study the Czech language and the history of the Czech nation.

Source: CHROBÁK, T. – OLŠÁKOVÁ, D. *Ernest Denis – život a doba*. Praha: Eva, Milan Nevole, 2004, p. 15–16.

- *What were Denis's arguments for his study abroad in Prague? List them in the order of importance, i.e. the order in which they are mentioned in the text.*

1. Learn German outside of the German Empire
 2. Learn about new methods of German education system
 3. Study the history of the Czech nation and one of the major Slavic cities
- *How was it possible that one could study German in Prague at that time?*

Prague was at the time of Denis's studies the provincial capital of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. German was the official and diplomatic language.

DOC 5: Vrchlický's Recollection of Tutoring Denis in the Czech Language (Máj, 1909)

It soon became clear that two hours a week was not enough. Denis (...) was a man of unwearied diligence and amazing endurance. He kept on adding time and soon we held tutoring sessions every single day. The teaching plan was as follows: Denis (...) read the National Newspaper² aloud from the initial article until the last local news. At the same time, what was read was translated into French. Then it was the turn for Palacký's history from which one chapter was read aloud and translated. At the end came literature – we read and translated novels, short stories and poems. (...) I used to be at Denis's not one, but several hours. I arrived at eight and I didn't leave my beloved disciple until after twelve.

Source: VANČURA, J. *Arnošt Denis*. Praha: Zlatoroh, 1924, p. 34–35.

- *What was the format of Denis's lesson plan? With what types of texts did he work and in developing what skills was he particularly interested? To master a foreign language, another skill that Vrchlický doesn't mention is necessary. Which one is it: reading, speaking or writing?*

Every day, Denis read the National Newspaper and translated it into French. Later he did applied the same method to more complex texts such as Palacký's *History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia*, novels, or poems by Vrchlický.

- *Find out from the text how many hours per day and week did Denis dedicate to the Czech language during the most intensive period.*

Denis spent more than four hours a day on the study of the Czech language.

- *In your opinion, why did two hours a week turned into several hours a day of intensive study? Find out from the text how did Denis approach his studies and what were his qualities.*

According to Vrchlický, Denis was very diligent and persistent. He had a strong will and pursued his goal.

² *The National Newspaper* was a daily published in Czech and reflecting the views of Czech liberal politicians (later known as Young Czechs). It was founded by Julius Grégr; among its editors were Jan Neruda, Karel Sladkovský, Karel Čapek, Jakub Arbes, and others. The newspaper was published between 1861 and 1941.

III. Czech History “from the Pen of a French Historian”

Denis’s primary interest – to collect data for his doctoral dissertation on John Huss – expanded significantly, which was unquestionably the consequence of his personal contacts and fondness for Czech politicians, writers and historians: F. L. Rieger, J. Vrchlický, F. Palacký, K. Jirečka, S. Pinkas and others. Interestingly, Denis – a foreigner – became the continuator of Palacký’s History of the Czech Nation, which he brought to the threshold of the 20th century.

DOC 7: Denis’s Letter to Ladislav Pinkas, the Son of Denis’s Good Friend Soběslav Pinkas; 1901

I never had a friend so faithful and so devoted like your father, and there is nobody of more honest heart and more noble and frank nature in the world. Therefore, the fondness I feel for him has been immeasurable and lasting. His illness brings me tremendous grief.

Source: VANČURA, J. Ibidem, p. 157–158.

- *Find in Denis’s biography information about Soběslav Pinkas. Why was he so important for Denis?*

Soběslav Pinkas, a well-known Prague Francophile, introduced Denis to Czech intellectuals (Rieger, Palacký, Tomek, etc.). Until his death, Pinkas corresponded with Denis on regular basis. They became very good friends.

- *Based on the excerpt you have just read, how does Denis describe Soběslav Pinkas and his feelings towards him?*

At the time when Pinkas was gravely ill, Denis wrote him a letter in which he thanks him for his long-standing friendship.

Denis was well aware of the shortcomings of his own historical research of the Czech lands, which benefited from the already existing literature, without having sought out new sources. Still, his endeavor was admirable, especially in its scope – from the Hussite period up the year 1900, in its narrative style, and the psychological portraits of outstanding historical figures. Indeed, no other historian in Bohemia was capable of continuing Palacký’s national history.

DOC 8: From Denis’s Letter to the People of Prague, 1907

I know better than anyone the imperfections and flaws in my work. Others will come after me, who will correct it and fill in the gaps. However, I believe that I can say that no one else will approach these studies with more sincere love for your noble country and your admirable city.

Source: VANČURA, J. Ibidem, p. 181.

- *What attitude does Denis assume towards his historical research? Does he cling to the invariability of his original writings? What does he suggest?*

Denis was aware of the shortcomings and flaws in his research of the Czech history. He encouraged future historians to examine and if need be, to revise his work.

- *What feelings does he confess in connection with his research about the Czech lands? Do you think that he – a Frenchman – liked the Czech lands?*

Denis expresses his affection for the Czech lands, especially for Prague. His “true love” probably went hand in hand with his desire to release France from its political isolation and arrange for its influence in the Slavic Central Europe.

IV. Denis’s Defense of Czechoslovakia during the Great War

*With France entering the war against the Germany in 1914, Denis’s Franco-Czech activities picked up on intensity and fully materialized: in 1915, together with T. G. Masaryk, E. Beneš and the French intellectuals, he founded the journal *The Czech Nation (La Nation Tchèque)* in order to defend the Czechs’ and other Slavic nations’ right for independence. These nations together with France (Allied Powers) should then resist a common enemy - the bellicose Germany and Austria-Hungary. In this way, Denis – as well as Masaryk and Beneš – tried to convince the French politicians and the French general public about the need to break up the Austro-Hungarian Empire.*

DOC 9: “The Revived Czech” – An Article Published on October 3, 1914 in Paris

The hour of national liberation has struck. Austrian Slavs canceled today an agreement made with the Habsburgs. Slovaks, Moravians, Silesians, Czechs! A new life begins for the oppressed. Again comes the day of glory for the descendants of Žižka’s warriors. A liberated Bohemia will unite all her sons scattered from the slopes of the Tatras to the Ore Mountains. They will take back their place among free nations, and will find again their role, which orders them to be the link connecting the civilizations of Western and Eastern Europe; they will become again the apostles of that gospel of freedom, justice and humanity, which Chelčický proclaimed already in the 15th century.

Source: DENIS, E. Vzkříšený Čech. In: *Nazdar* (periodical of the Czech colony in Paris). 1/1914.

- *In which periodical was published Denis’s article “The Revived Czech”? When (what month and year) was it published and to what important world event does it immediately respond?*

It was published in *Nazdar*, a periodical published by the Czech community in Paris. It is a reaction to the just initiated war; at this time (August 1914) “*Nazdar*” – the company of Czech volunteer soldiers – had already been founded. This group took the oath of allegiance to the French Republic and was supposed to serve in the French Foreign Legion.

- *What four historical nations is Denis addressing? Mark the area on the colored DOC 10 map. To which historical figure is he referring when he mentions the “descendants of [his] warriors”?*

Czechs, Moravians, Silesians and Slovaks are called the descendants of Žižka, Hussite warrior who was never defeated. During the time of WW1, Denis presents the general as a role model to the Czech people.

- *From whom should the Czechs break away? From what must they free themselves?*

They need to break away from the Habsburgs, i.e. Austria-Hungary.

- *What role do Czechs have in the fight for liberty? Whom does he mean by “all her sons” and what geographical area does he have in mind?*

According to Denis, Czech should lead the unification process and fight for independence. By “all her sons” he means Moravians, Silesians and Slovaks on the territory from the Oar to the Tatra Mountains (i.e. the territory of the future Czechoslovak state – present-day Czech Republic and Slovakia).

- *What role should the “liberated Bohemia” assume again in Europe?*

It should become the mediator or intermediary between Western and Eastern Europe.

- *Explain in your own words the meaning of the following statement: “they will become again the apostles of that gospel of freedom, justice and humanity”.*

To be an “apostle” means to announce good news, both through words and actions. In this case it means to create a democratic state founded on the principles of humanity.

DOC 10: Slavic Nations in the Austro-Hungarian Territory

Source: DENIS, E. Our Program. In: *La Nation Tchèque*, 1/1915, p. 8.





Source: Current Map Slavic Countries and Ethnic Groups. Website: http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slovan%C3%A9#mediaviewer/File:Slovanske_jazyky_cz.png. [10/15/2014].

- On Denis's B&W map of Austria-Hungary highlight in color where Czech, Slovak and Polish was spoken. How do we call this group of Slavic languages: West, South or East?

Student should be able to compare both maps and mark the indicated language communities on the virtually blank map of Austria-Hungary: Czech language in Bohemia, Slovak in Upper Hungary and Polish in Galicia (at that time a part of Poland). These three languages belong to the group of West Slavic Languages.

- Refer to DOC 9 – The Revived Czech – where Denis writes: “liberated Bohemia will unite all her sons scattered from the slopes of the Tatras to the Ore Mountains”. Mark this region on the map and write down which two countries occupy this territory today.

The Czech Republic and Slovakia occupy this territory today.

- What other Slavic languages were spoken in Austria-Hungary during Denis's era?

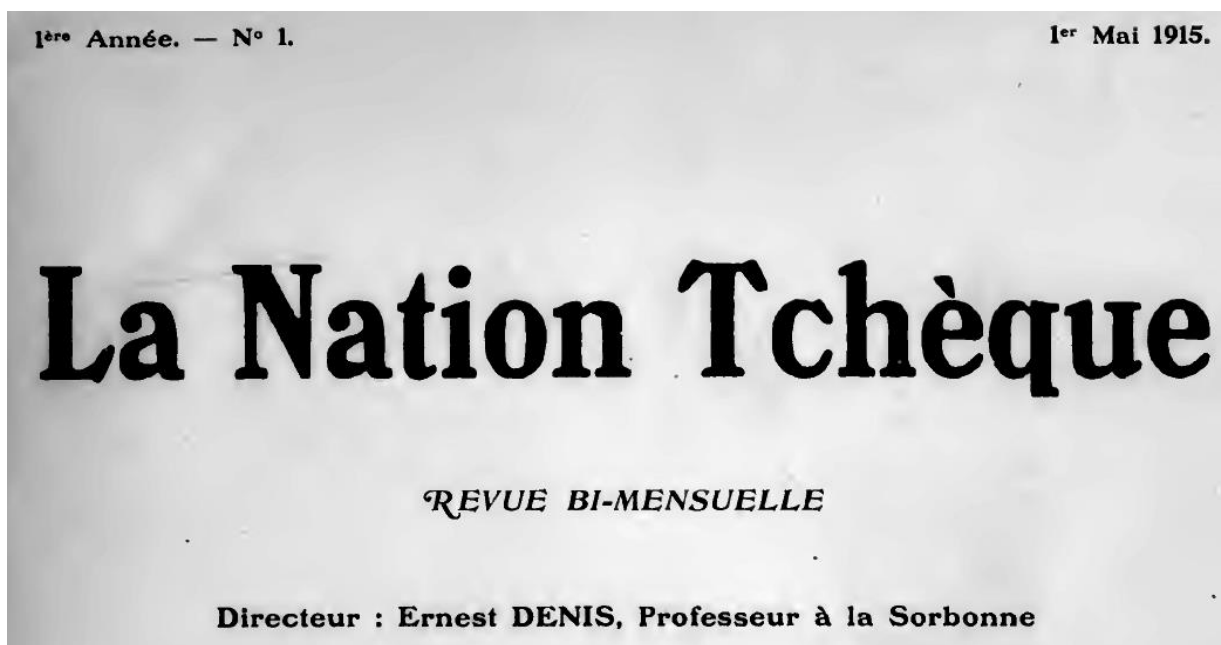
Student should be able to compare both maps and mark the indicated language communities on the virtually blank map of Austria-Hungary: Polish, Slovak, Ukrainian, Ruthenian, Slovenian, Croatian, Bosnian and Serbian.

- *Think about what or who was the common denominator for all Austro-Hungarian nations. It is clear that it was neither language nor cultural traditions. Explain why was Austria-Hungary called the “prison of nations”. Who do you think was the jailer or prisoner?*

The common denominator for all the nations of Austria-Hungary was the monarch, i.e. since 1848 the Emperor Franz Joseph I.

The liberal critics and nationalists used the term “the prison of nations” to describe Austria-Hungary, because the monarchy was not capable of creating a just political system for the Slavic nations.

DOC 11: A French Biweekly: *The Czech Nation*



Source: *La Nation Tchèque* (biweekly), Denis, E. (red.). Paris: rue Boissonade, 1915–1917.

- *When was the first issue published? Who was the editor?*

The first issue of the biweekly *The Czech Nation* was published on May 1, 1915. Ernest Denis became its editor.

DOC 12: The Goals and Tasks of *The Czech Nation*

This program is simple (...): the independence of Bohemia. I agreed to be their [Czech politicians' and writers'] interpreter [for the French and Allied politicians'], because I am convinced that by doing so I am also serving France. (...) The independence of Bohemia is of primary importance to us. It is one of the conditions of our security and one of the guarantees of our influence. (...) Southern Slavs and

Czechs will help us (...) tame the Hohenzollerns and the Hungarian landholders, who became the servants to Wilhelm II.

Source: DENIS, E. Our Program. In: *La Nation Tchèque*. 1/1915, p. 3.

- *For what type of program does Denis strive for in the journal The Czech Nation (La Nation Tchèque)?*

It deals with the independence of the Czech lands.

- *Whose opinions should the journal convey through Denis?*

The magazine should be the platform for Czech liberal politicians and writers.

- *Try to look at the question of the Czech nation through the eyes of a Frenchman – Ernest Denis. Why does he want to help Czech people?*

Denis, a French patriot, wants to ensure for his country a future influence in the independent Czech state. This will ensure France's security east of its borders, because Germany will be surrounded by France's allies.

- *How can Southern Slavs and Czechs help France? Along with France, they have – according to Denis – common adversaries in the war. Which ones?*

The common interest of these nations is to defeat the Germans and the Hungarians.

DOC 13: A French Biweekly: *The Czech Nation* since 1917



Source: *La Nation Tchèque* (biweekly), Beneš, E. (editor). Paris: 18, rue Bonaparte, 1915–1918.

- *Fill in:*

In June 1917, **Eduard Beneš** took over after Denis and became the editor (“directeur”) of the journal *The Czech Nation*. It occurred so that the magazine could promptly respond to the current needs of the Czecho-Slovak resistance. The editor’s name is known mainly from later years, when he held the office of Foreign Minister and became Czech President after T. G. Masaryk.

The Czech Nation was published between 1915 and 1918. E. Beneš, future Foreign Minister and President of Czechoslovakia, was the editor during the last two years.

- *Write down the address where the editorial office relocated (hint: observe the historical document). Use the Internet to find out the significance of the house No. 18 at this address.*

The publisher managed to obtain the home of the Czech colony in Paris: Bonaparte St. 18. Since 1916, it was the headquarters of the Czechoslovak provisional government led by T.G.M. Today the Czech Center, Czech Consulate, and the Czech School Without Borders in Paris reside here (as of 12/31/2014).

V. Postwar Glory and Success

In November of 1918 the fighting in Europe was over. The traditional Prussian, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman monarchies ceased to exist, and from their ruins emerged new states, mostly republics. Denis’s “National Program” as well as the efforts of Czech and Slovak politicians around T. G. Masaryk became reality. In October of 1920, the French historian traveled to Czechoslovakia; in Prague, he was warmly welcomed by the President and Prime Minister themselves; it was a reception worthy of government delegations. The people of Czechoslovakia celebrated Denis as their national historian. Denis himself was instrumental in establishing the Institute of Slavic Studies in Paris (1919). In 1920, the Ernest Denis Institute (today the French Institute) was founded in Prague. With the financial support from the Czech government, the Ernest Denis Department (today the Slavic Studies Center) was inaugurated at the Sorbonne in 1921, dedicated to the study of contemporary history of Slavic nations.

DOC 14: The Institute of Slavic Studies in Paris



Source: Institut d'études slaves – commemorative plaque. Photography by Jan Lorenc, 9/2/2014.

DOC 15: Ernest Denis Department, resp. Department of Contemporary Slavic History in Paris

[The Czechoslovak deputies] authorized one million francs to permanently honor Denis's memory and to promote academic relations with France, to establish a permanent department for the history of Slavs and their culture at the University of Paris, explicitly identified as Ernest Denis Chair (Chaire Ernest Denis), and to purchase the house No. 9 on Michelet Street in Paris for the purposes of this institution.

Source: VANČURA, J. *Arnošt Denis*. Praha: Zlatoroh, 1924, p. 281.

- *For what purpose did the Czech deputies authorize the sum of one million francs?*

The Czechoslovak state used this sum to purchase the building where the Ernest Denis Institute was founded. The Department of Contemporary Slavic Studies at the Sorbonne was established here.

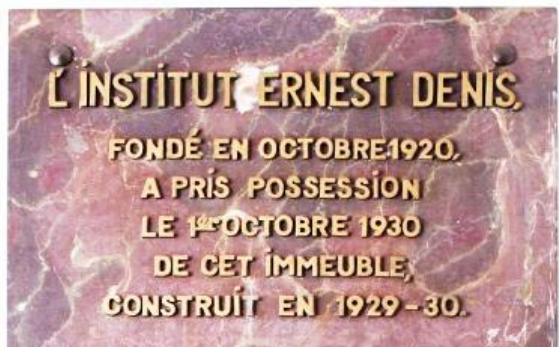
- *What was the name of the new "chair" or department at Paris University?*

It was named the "Ernest Denis Chair", i.e. the Department of Ernest Denis.

- *What is the address where the institute was founded and resides until today? Use the Internet to find out in which part of Paris is it located, whether at the city center or on the outskirts, near a well-known historic monument.*

The institute still resides at Michelet St. 9 in downtown Paris (6th district) near the famous Luxembourg Garden and the French Senate.

DOC 16: The French Institute in Prague



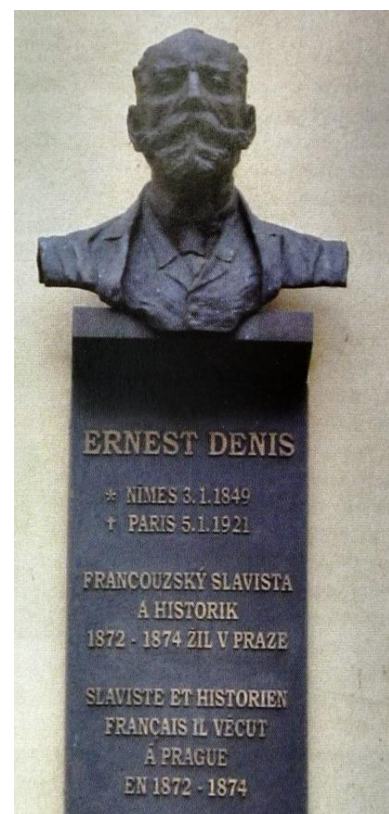
The Ernest Denis Institute, founded in October of 1920, relocated to this building in 1930, when it was completed (...) Louis Eisenmann became its director.

Source: The commemorative plaque located at the French Institute building. Available on the Web: <http://www.ifp.cz/local/cache-vignettes>. [10/15/2014].

- *At what occasion was the French Institute in Prague inaugurated (year, month, whose visit)? After what important personality was it named? See introduction to chapter 5.*

In connection with Ernest Denis's visit the Institute of Ernest Denis was inaugurated in Prague. Later, in 1930, it relocated to a new building at Štěpánská St. 35. Today it is known as the French Institute in Prague and it offers language, cultural and other educational seminars. It also features a library filled with not only French titles.

DOC 17: Statue of Ernest Denis by Karel Dvořák placed at the Lesser Town Square in Prague in 1928 (left) and a bust by Petr Roztočil from 2003, which replaced the original statue (right)



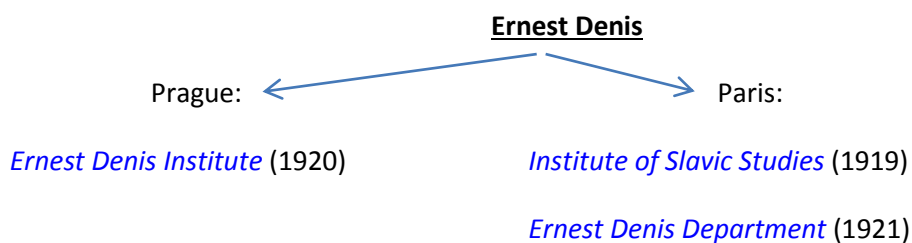
Source: MARÈS, A. *Lieux de mémoire en Europe centrale*. Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 2009, p. XIX–XXII.

- *How is professor Denis depicted? How do you feel about his sitting position and the book he holds in his hands (image on the left)?*

Dvořák's statue depicts Denis as a professor, i.e. teacher engaging in a conversation with book in his hands. The position gives the impression of calmness and ease.

VI. Summary

- *Fill in the names of the institutions connected with Denis's work or directly with his name (see the introductory text to Chapter 5).*



- *In 1919, Denis confides to his friend Ladislav Pinkas: "After all, the dream I dreamt my entire life became reality, we regained Alsace and defeated Germany."³ Look at the Czechoslovak-French friendship first from France's (Denis's) point of view and then from the point of view of the Czechs and Slovaks living at that time in the Austro-Hungarian "prison of nations". What was the common objective of this mutual friendship and what were the individual objectives of the French and the Czech nations. Fill in the following chart:*



³ VANČURA, J. *Arnošt Denis*. Praha: Zlatoroh, 1924, p. 274.

DOC 18: From a Letter to Masaryk about "his fate" (1920)

*If, however, my hope [of returning to Prague] would not materialize, I still would not have the right to complain about my fate. Institutions as the French Institute in Prague and the Institute of Slavic Studies in Paris now guarantee a steady development of the academic relations between France and Czechoslovakia. Now it is the younger generation **who must take over our work and complete and correct** it where necessary. Just like during the medieval times, the University of Paris and Prague will unite in **a joint effort** (...) of thought and progress.*

Source: VANČURA, J. *Arnošt Denis*. Praha: Zlatoroh, 1924, p. 280.

- *What are the responsibilities of future generations, according to Denis?*

Young Czechoslovaks and French should maintain the cooperation between both nations, and continue to complement and revise the information about the two nations.

- *What two universities should unite in their ideas? What should be their joint effort or program?*

The Paris and the Prague universities should unite in their joint intellectual effort, i.e. liberal and progressive research.



Ernest Denis (1849 – 1921)

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