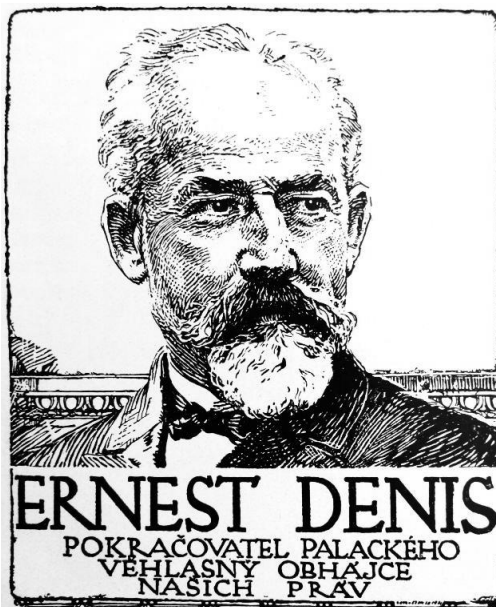


Ernest Denis (1849 – 1921)

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, the so called Franco-Prussian War broke out, in which these two nations fought against each other: and the future France suffered a hard defeat and in 1871, Prussia acquired the French provinces of and 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?*
- *Explain in your own words, how is the saying “Every cloud has a silver lining” reflected in the text.*

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.*
- *How does he describe these nations?*
- *Is the geographical term "Eastern Europe" used appropriately in this case?*

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. ...
2. ...
3. ...

- *How was it possible that one could study German in Prague at that time?*

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

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

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?*

- *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?*

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

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

DOC 10: Slavic Nations in the Austro-Hungarian Territory



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

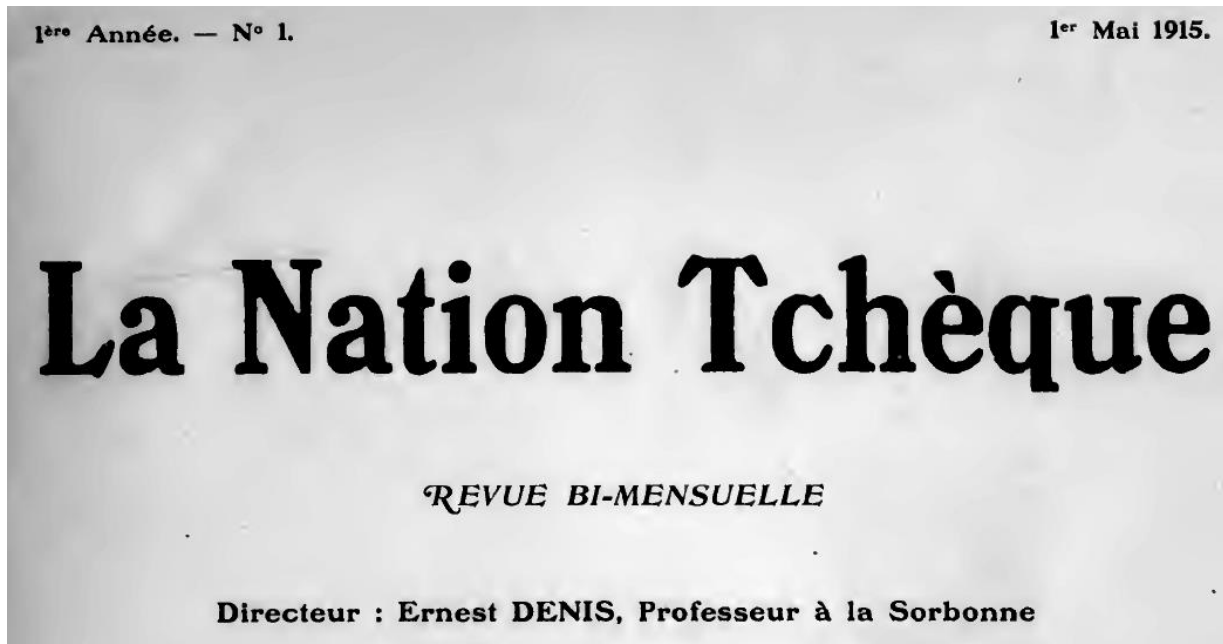


Source: Current Map Slavic Countries and Ethnic Groups. Website: http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slovan%C3%A9#mediaviewer/File:Slovanske_jazyky_cz.png. [10/15/2014].

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

- 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?

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?

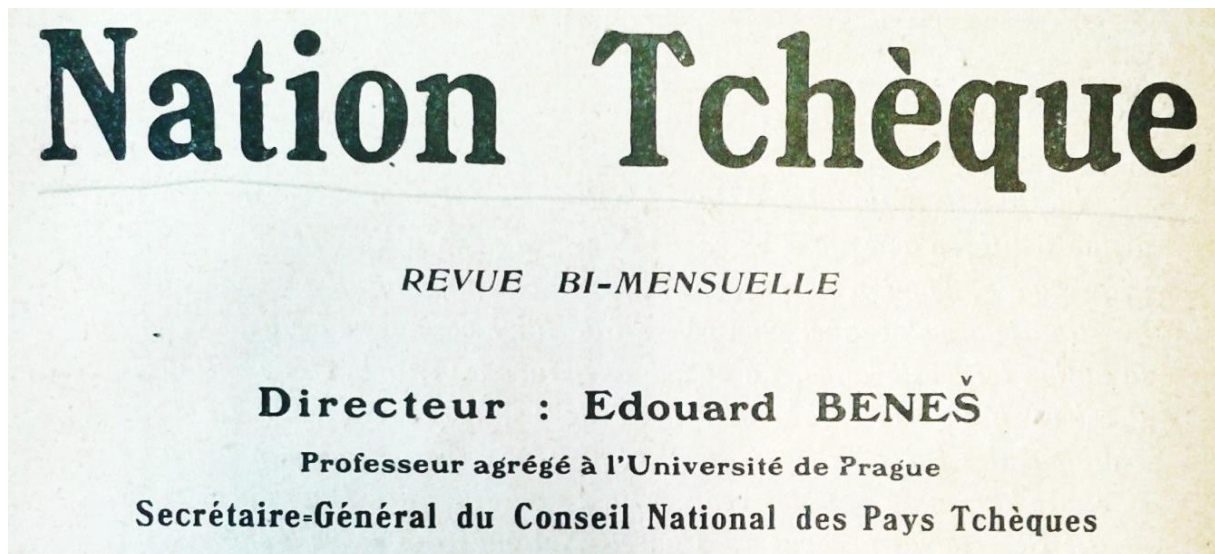
DOC 12: The Goals and Tasks of *The Czech Nation*

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

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, took over after Denis as 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.

- 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.

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.

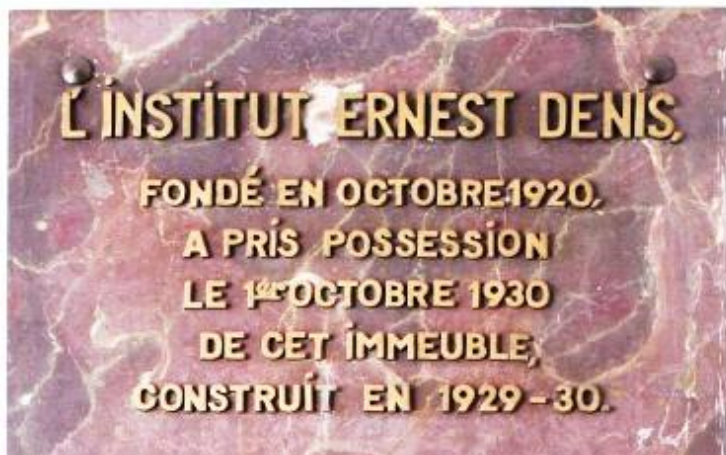
DOC 15: Ernest Denis Department, resp. Department of Contemporary Slavic History in Paris

[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?*
- *What was the name of the new “chair” or department at Paris University?*
- *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.*

DOC 16: The French Institute in Prague

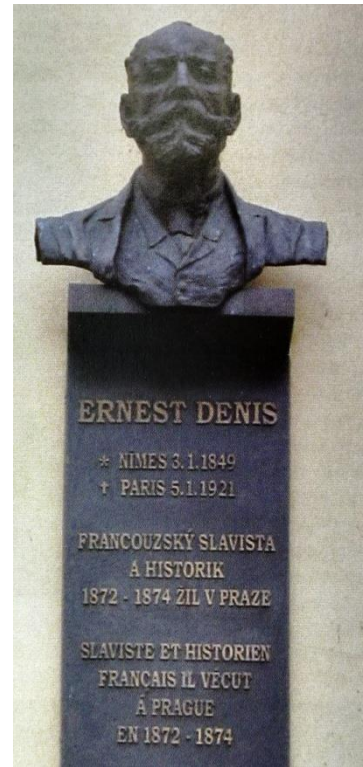
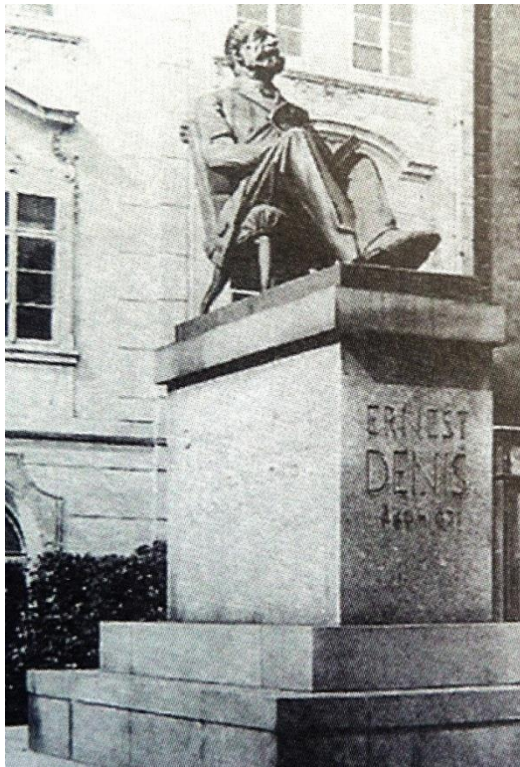


The Ernest Denis Institute, founded in October of 1920, relocated to this building in 1930, when it was completed (...) Louis Eisenmann became its director.

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.*

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)

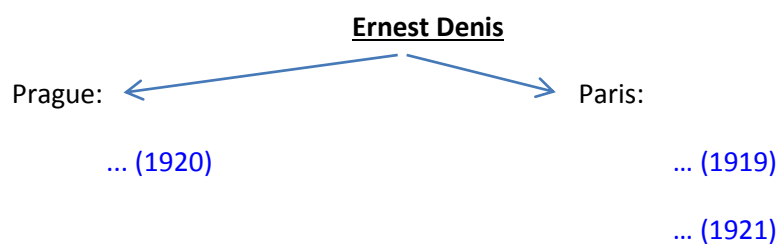


Source: MARÈS, A. *Lieux de mémoire en Europe centrale*. Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 2009, p. XIX–XXII.

- *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)?*

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:*



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



Ernest Denis (1849 – 1921)

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