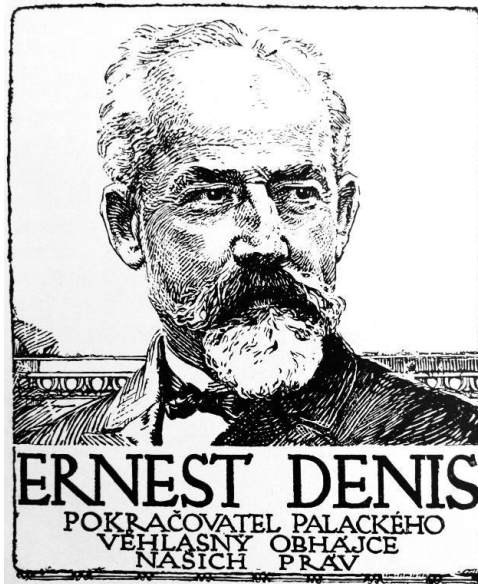


Ernest Denis (1849 – 1921)

Worksheet level C



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 finishing his studies at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris when the French Emperor Napoleon III declared war on Germany (1870). Denis, a dedicated republican and humanist, 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 Prussians captured Emperor Napoleon III and France entered into a period of chaos. 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 costly peace treaty (Versailles, 1871) and desired revenge. The empire fell, the Commune fell, and a republic (i.e. French Third Republic; Constitution of 1875) was established. The new regime 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 weaken the power of and retaliate against Germany for the lost territory.

DOC 1: French Interest in Central Europe

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.

- To which “unfortunate war” is the document referring? In the introductory text or the biography, find answers to following questions: who fought in this war, when did it take place, and what were its consequences for France.
- Why does the author criticize the French authorities? How has 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.

DOC 2: Memorandum or Protest of Czech Deputies at the Austrian Reichsrat against Violence Against Frenchmen, December 8, 1870

« Enlever à la France, disaient-ils, une province dont les habitants se sentent français et veulent rester français, ce serait violer le droit des peuples de disposer librement de leur propre destinée et mettre la force à la place du droit. La nation tchèque ne peut pas ne pas exprimer sa plus ardente sympathie à cette noble France qui défend aujourd’hui le sol de la patrie; elle n’oublie pas les services si nombreux qu’elle a rendus à la civilisation; elle n’oublie pas ses mérites éminents dans la défense de l’humanité et de la liberté... Le peuple tchèque est

If the German Nation, said [Czech deputies], removes a province whose inhabitants feel French and want to remain French, it would violate the right of the people to freely dispose of their own destiny and would put force in the place of law. The Czech nation cannot but express its ardent sympathy to the noble French nation who fights

today for the right to govern and to defend her land, a nation that was instrumental in the defense and progress of the principles of humanity and freedom.

The Czech Nation holds a believe that such humiliation which is forced onto a nation – characterized by great pride and a fighting spirit – by consuming a part its territory, will only lead to new wars and consequently new barriers to the interests of humanity and education.

Source: DENIS, E. Notre programme. In: *La nation tchèque*. 1/1915, p. 5. Translation: Vančura, J. *Články a úvahy z La nation tchèque*. Praha: Šolc a Šimáček, 1915, p. 12.

- What does F. L. Rieger together with the Czech Deputies mean by “force in the place of law”? Who are the enforcer and the victim? What French provinces were removed? Refer to the introductory text or use a history atlas.

- *How do Czech people feel about the French (their character and contributions to civilization)?*
- *According to the Czech deputies, what sort of danger is threatening mankind if “militant” France loses control over a part of its territory?*

II. Studies in Prague

What brought the young historian to Prague? Above all it was Denis’s patriotic sense of “duty”, i.e. prepare a revenge for Alsace-Lorraine. He believed that learning about Slavic nations, their history and character, would facilitate a future diplomatic cooperation between these nations and France. Denis, who became familiar with Mister Jan Huss during his studies in Paris (e.g. through George Sand’s novel Consuelo), followed the recommendation of his professor Desjardins to embark on a study abroad in Prague in 1872-1875 – in order to learn German.

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”?*
- *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. ...

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 Newspaper*¹ 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?*

¹ *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.

- 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.

III. Czech History the “French Way”

*Denis’s primary interest – to collect data for his doctoral dissertation on John Huss – expanded to the period before and after the Battle of White Mountain, 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. Upon the publication of *The End of Bohemian Independence (1890)* and *Bohemia after the White Mountain (1903)*, Denis – a foreigner- became the continuator of Palacký’s *History of the Czech Nation*.*

DOC 6: Importance of the Czech Nation during the Hussite Period (E. Denis: *Huss and the Hussite Wars*, 1878)

The debilitated Middle Ages refused to die; she [the Czech Nation] inflicted a mortal wound upon it. She put the rights of conscience before authority. She was the first to call for freedom (...). Back then it truly was a nation of civilization.

Source: VANČURA, J. Ibidem, p. 57.

- Explain in your own words the meaning of the expression “the Middle Ages refused to die”.
- Explain the meaning of the sentence: „She put the rights of conscience before authority”. Who specifically defended the truth according to his conscience to such degree, that it cost him his life? Whom exactly (what institution) do we mean by “authority”? Hint: see the title of DOC 6.

DOC 7: The Contribution of the Czech Nation in European History (E. Denis: *Huss and the Hussite Wars*, 1878)

If the nations of Europe were ever called before the judgment seat of history, to report what they have contributed to the common effort, many (...) would reply: France would boast about crusades and revolutions, Italy would speak of Renaissance, (...) amongst the flock, Bohemia would have the right to demand a glorious place and Huss would precede Luther.

Source: VANČURA, J. Ibidem, p. 57–58.

- *How did the Czech nation influence European history, according to Denis? How does Denis within his French conception perceive the personality of Jan Huss – as a heretic or as a religious reformer and a predecessor to the Protestant movement? Explain why would Huss precede Luther.*
- *According to Denis, how significantly has France affected the course of European history?*

DOC 8: 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?*

In his work Bohemia after the White Mountain (1903), Denis also deals with the question of the authenticity of the Manuscripts. Denis stands by the scientific opinion of Gebauer and Masaryk, who called their authenticity into question. His backing of Masaryk's opinion was based on the values they both shared: science – truth – conscience. 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 9: T. G. Masaryk in the Dispute about the Manuscripts (E. Denis: *Bohemia after the White Mountain, 1903*)

[Masaryk] put science against tradition and truth against patriotism gone astray, he was a true son of the nation; he led public life onto a new path, stood up against orthodoxy, which was turning into a sacred dogma; he returned to Czechs what was their glory in the past and what is the guarantee of their future – the respect of conscience.

Source: VANČURA, J. *Ibidem*, p. 171.

- *Which words are used as the opposites of “tradition” and “patriotism gone astray”?*
- *According to Denis, what exactly is the “past glory” and “guarantee of the future” that Masaryk brought back to the Czech nation?*
- *To what “glorious past”, respectively to what historical figure is he referring to with the term “respect of conscience”? Compare with DOC 6.*

DOC 10: 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?*

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

*With France entering the war against the Dual Alliance, 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 Hohenzollern Germany and its allies. 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 and also about the necessity of a total defeat of the Austro-German coalition (without the possibility of a separate peace), so that lasting peace could be restored in a newly rearranged Europe.*

DOC 11: "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? 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”.*
- *Why does Denis make references to General Jan Žižka and the writer / religious reformer Petr Chelčický? Why did their legacy become current again?*

DOC 12: Slavic Nations in the Austro-Hungarian Territory

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



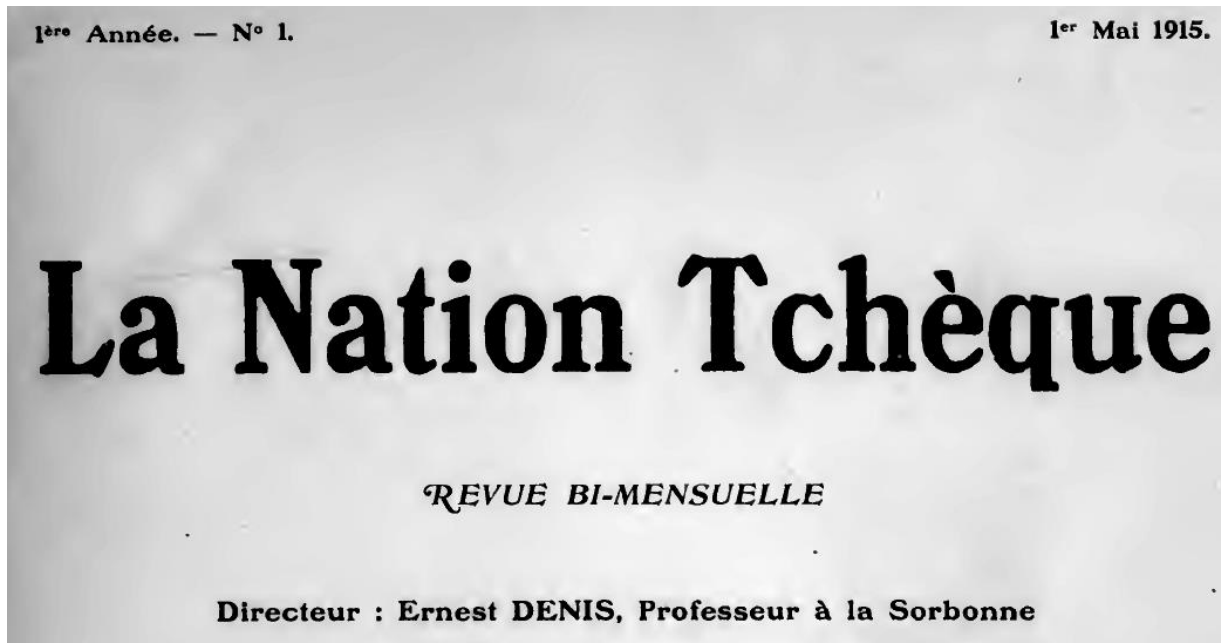


Source: Current Map Slavic Countries and Ethnic Groups. Website: http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slovan%C3%A9#mediaviewer/File:Slovanske_jazyky_cz.png, [10/15/2014].

- *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?*
- *Refer to DOC 11 – 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”.

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



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

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

DOC 14: 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. Our national program, which emerges from the Declaration of Human Rights² and calls for the right to live for every nation (...) fully and truly regardless of its population, demands the independence of Bohemia.

² In 1989, revolutionary France adopted the Declaration of Human and Civic Rights, the predecessor of today's Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms.

We are implacably committed to not sign another agreement than the agreement we will consider adequate, in order to prevent the resumption of the heinous insidiousness, to which mankind fell a victim in the month of August in 1914. Whatever may come, we will never succeed in suppressing the eighty million Germans who fill the center of Europe, not to mention the nine million Hungarians who under a sinful infatuation tied their fate to the fate of Prussia. (...) 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? To whom will he help at the same time? Why would a Frenchman consider the Czech independence a priority?*
- *From which document stems the French national program and therefore also the demand for the independence of Bohemia?*
- *What “heinous insidiousness” from August 1914 is Denis talking about? Use your history book or the Internet.*
- *According to Denis, wartime France does not intend to sign a separate peace treaty with any of its enemies, and it is determined to defeat all those who are “filling the center of Europe”. Use a quote from the document to proof this statement.*

- *What two countries are listed in the document as enemies of France?*
- *How can Southern Slavs and Czechs help France? Along with France, they have – according to Denis – common adversaries in the war. Which ones?*
- *Compare the style of this article with the excerpts from Denis’s work about the Czech history (DOC 6, 7, 9). Did the war leave any kind of mark on the nature and style of Denis’s writing? Write the following terms in the appropriate column:*

Independent historical research – agitation – seditious campaign – propaganda – identification of enemies – scientific knowledge over national interest

War Years (1914-1918)

Pre-war Period

...

...

...

...

DOC 15: A French Biweekly: *The Czech Nation* since 1917



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

- *Who became the editor of the journal in June 1917? From where do you know his name? If you don't, look it up in the index in your history textbook or on the Internet.*
- *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 – 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 16: The Institute of Slavic Studies in Paris



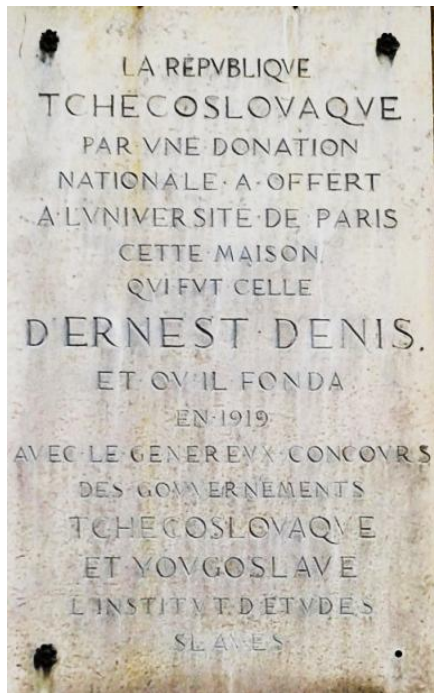
Source: Institut d'études slaves – commemorative plaque. Photography by Jan Lorenc, 9/2/2014.

DOC 17: 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.

DOC 18: Institute of Slavic Studies in Paris

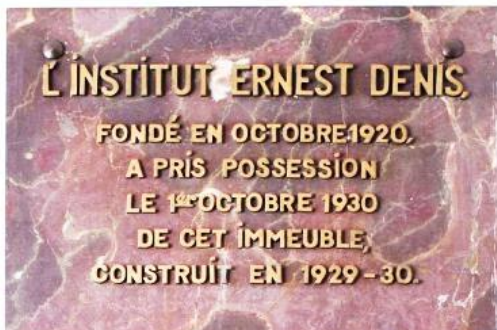


The Czechoslovak Republic donated this house, where Ernest Denis lived, to the University of Paris as a gift from the Czechoslovak nation. In 1919 Ernest Denis, in collaboration with the Czech and Yugoslav governments, founded the Institute of Slavic Studies here.

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

- *Who dedicated the house No. 9 on Michelet Street to the Paris University?*
- *What institute was established here in 1919? Who founded it and what nationalities contributed to its creation and later had their own research departments here? Refer to the document.*

DOC 19: The French Institute in Prague



On October 1, 1930 the Ernest Denis Institute, founded in October of 1920, relocated to this building (Štěpánská 35 in Prague) built between 1929 and 1930.

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.*

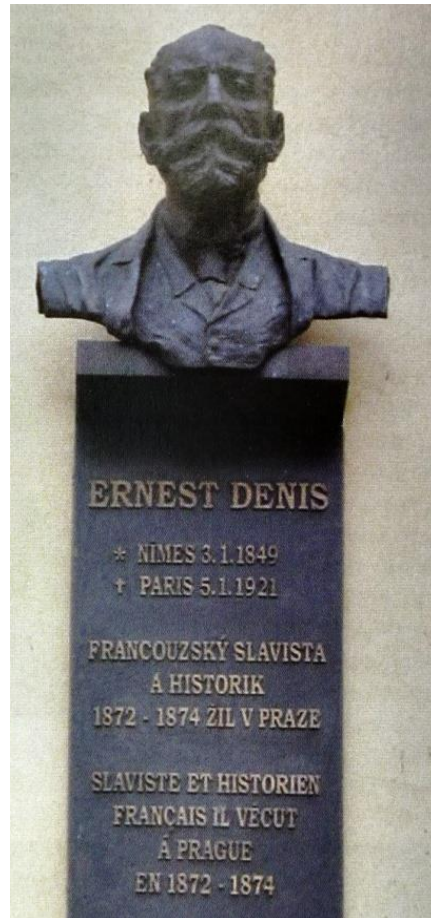
DOC 20: From a Letter to Masaryk about "his fate" (1920)

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. But the current generation can only be predecessors, outlining the program and setting the guidelines. 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 and will be able to subdue powers dark and violent.

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

- *What is for Denis his major lifetime achievement? Provide the names of both institutions.*
- *What is the purpose of both institutions? What should they nurture?*
- *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?*

DOC 21: The Statue of Ernest Denis by Karel Dvořák placed at the Lesser Town Square in Prague in 1928 (left) and the bust by Petr Roztočil from 2003, which replaced the original statue (right)

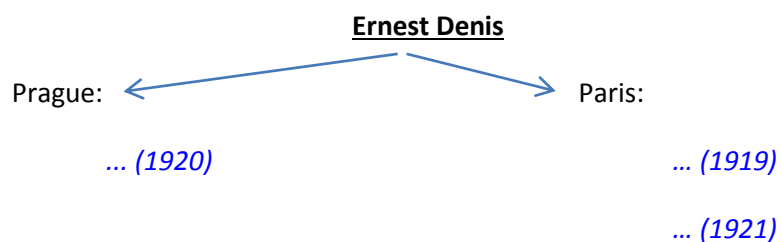


Source: MARÈS, A. *Lieux de mémoire en Europe centrale*. Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 2009, p. XIX–XXII.

- How is professor Denis depicted? How do you feel about his sitting position and the object 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.



- 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 20: From Denis’s Introduction to the Publication *Prague* by J. Hantich (1905)

*I dreamed about Czechs, who first experienced **religious freedom**⁴ and taught people that there is no need to kill each other only because they don’t use the same **symbols** to interpret their **shared anxiety** and **common desires** – even in the future can Czechs give the world a great and beneficial example of national **tolerance**, of consensus between nations united in their **effort to achieve justice and equality in the world.***

Source: HANTICH, J. *Prague* (2nd Ed.). Praha: F. Topič, 1910, p. X.

- *After reading Denis’s quote, write a reflection essay about how would you imagine the role of the Czech (Central-European) nation today in its quest for national (ethnic) tolerance and in its effort to achieve justice in the world. (React to the current political and military conflicts in the world).*
- *Or write an informative essay on the following topic: “What symbols have people used in the past to express their identity and what symbols do we use today? Why were they important in the past and what is their role today?”*



Ernest Denis (1849 – 1921)

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

⁴ The author is referring to the Poděbrady period (after the Council of Basel in 1436), when two religions – Catholic and Ultraquist (Hussite) – coexisted side by side in Bohemia.