

Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Czech – a little bit of linguistics

All these names are connected with my country. But how and when?

Bohemia, Čechy in Czech, Böhmen in German; Bohême in French and Bohemia in Latin is a historical region in Central Europe, occupying the western two-thirds of the traditional Czech Lands and the contemporary Czech Republic. In a broader meaning, it often refers to the entire Czech territory: Bohemia, Moravia and Czech Silesia which formed the Kingdom of Bohemia and present day Czech Republic where Moravia is its eastern part and Silesia its northeastern part.

The word of Bohemia came etymologically into being thanks to the Boii. The Boii were a tribe defeated by the Romans in northern Italy in the 2nd century BC - at the Battle of Placentia (194 BC) and the Battle of Mutina (193 BC). After this, many of the Boii retreated north across the Alps.

Roman authors, as Tacitus in his *Germania* at the end of the 1st century AD, refer to the area the Boii invaded as *Boihaemum*. The name appears to include the tribal name *Boi-* and the Germanic word **xaim-* "home". This *Boihaemum* included parts of southern Bohemia as well as parts of Bavaria (whose name also seems to derive from the tribal name Boii) and Austria.

Moravia, Morava in Czech, Mähren in German, Moravia in Latin takes his name after the Morava River an affluent of the Danube River.

The Czech name "Čechy" is derived from the name of the Slavic tribe of Czechs which settled in this area in the 6th or 7th century after Germanic people (1st century BC), Boii who migrated to the area of present day Switzerland and southeastern Gaul, and Marcomani renamed the Bavarians later who migrated to southwest. The area was never depopulated.

The territory was often crossed during the Migration Period by Germanic and major Slavic tribes, precursors of today's Czechs, though the exact amount of Slavic immigration is a subject of debate.

Why is the English version written Czech when its pronunciation is the same as check? There were two persons whom we have to thank for. The first one was Good Queen Anne (Anne of Bohemia), a member of the House of Luxembourg and the eldest daughter of Charles IV, Holy Roman Emperor, the most important Czech king. She became the English Queen after her marriage with Richard II (in 1381). She brought the word "Czech" written in this old form to England. The change from Cz... to č... was done by Jan Hus, a Czech priest, who replaced digraphs and trigraphs by characters with diacritic at the beginning of the 15th century. Ann was a very popular queen in England and a beloved king's wife and that was probably the reason why the word has stayed unchanged in England, the only country in Europe which does not use any diacritics.