

## Czech Toponyms of Foreign Origin as Witnesses of Multicultural Contacts in Central Europe

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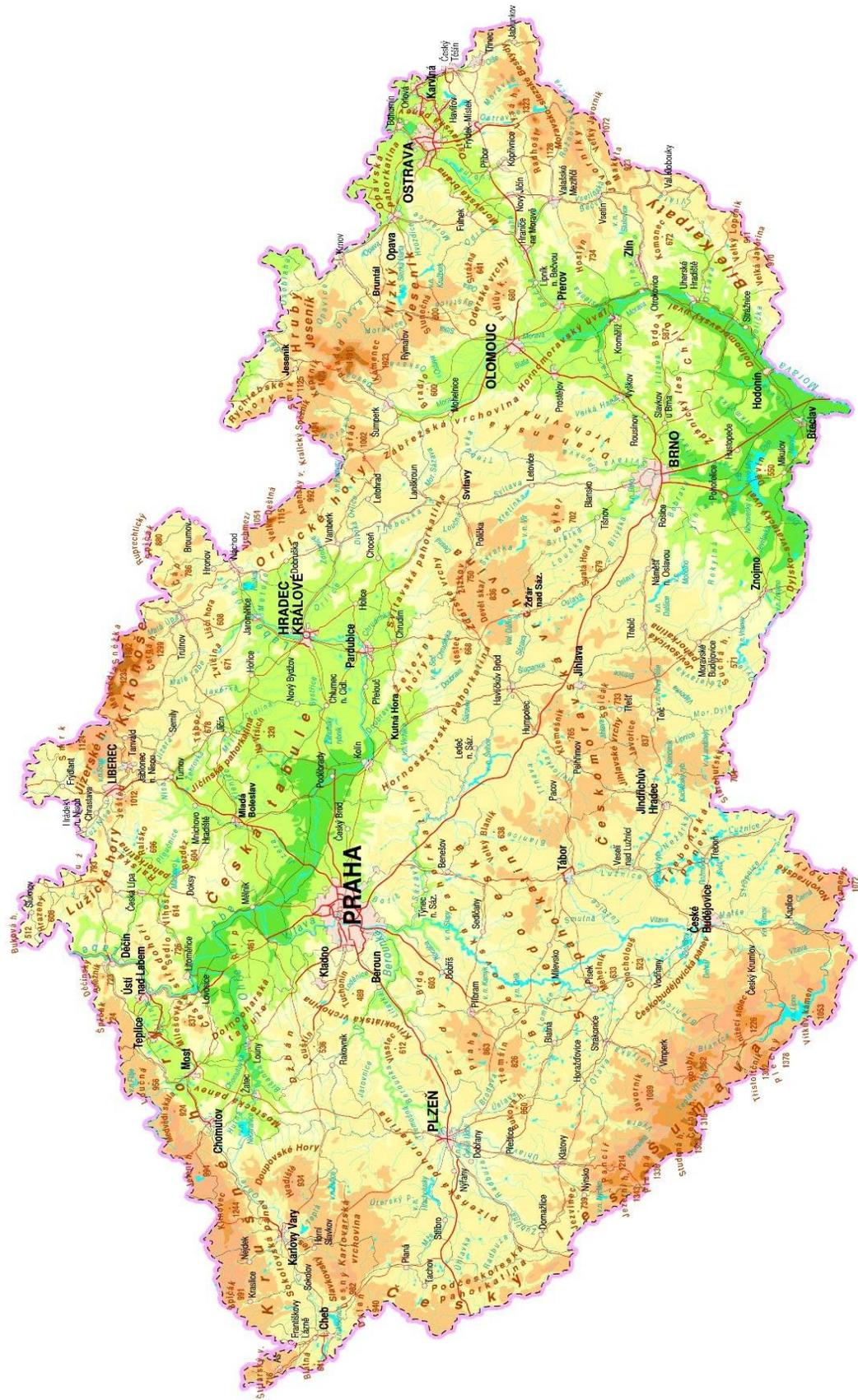
### Abstract

The fact that on the territory of the present Czech Republic different nations and ethnic groups came into close contact is also reflected in Czech toponymy where several layers of names of foreign origin can be distinguished. Besides the oldest toponyms (mostly hydronyms and oronyms) from the pre-Slavonic substrata (*Morava, Odra, Labe, Jizera; Říp, Oškobrň*) younger German names (adapted in various degree into Czech – e.g., *Varnsdorf, Frýdlant, Liberec*) occur often on the whole Czech territory. In the toponymy of the Eastern part of the Czech Republic (especially in Eastern Moravia in the Carpathians) names of Romanian (or more precisely Balkan) origin can be found (*Grúň*), which have been introduced there with the so-called Wallachian colonization. Czech toponymy has been considerably enriched with the geographical names borrowed from the Bible (*Tábor, Oreb, Sion, Jordán*) and with toponyms from remote regions (*Temešvár, Amerika, Habeš, Port Artur, Korea*) as well.

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The territory of the Czech Republic, i.e., Bohemia, Moravia and the Czech part of Silesia, has always been one of those areas where the members of different nations and ethnic groups meet. As shown primarily by the discoveries of archaeologists, the territory of today's Czech Republic has been inhabited for at least 300 thousand years, and approximately 30 thousand years ago this territory had one of the highest population densities in Europe. This fact is also reflected in Czech toponymy, where we can designate several layers of names of foreign origin (Lutterer – Šrámek 1997: 8–15).

On the territory of today's Czech Republic (cf. Map 1), which is distinguished in terms of European terrain relief by the striking four-sided mountainous Bohemia and mountain ellipse of the Western Carpathians (*Západní Karpaty*), the forest-steppe area of South Moravia was first inhabited, as were the lowlands of the Central Elbe (*Labe*) region in Bohemia, and forests and foothills were sought after for hunting and gathering. In the later Stone Age (i.e., 7,000 to 4,000 years ago) the number of agricultural inhabitants increased several fold in comparison with the preceding hunter-gatherer societies: inhabited areas became significantly denser and started to expand (approximately to places 350 metres above sea level). In this period settlements were established in Bohemia on a broad territory from today's Hradec Králové and Pardubice to Beroun, Žatec, Chomutov and Ústí nad Labem. Prehistoric man also settled in today's Plzeň Basin (*Plzeňská pánev*). In Moravia settlements were established gradually in a northern direction up to the line Mohelnice – Olomouc – Přerov and in Silesia along the rivers Odra and Opava up to the area of today's city of Opava.



In the Bronze Age (i.e., approximately 4,000 to 2,700 years ago), the inhabited area expanded primarily to include Southern Bohemia and the broader environs of the Plzeň Basin (Plzeňská pánev). The Moravian settlement area gradually reached the foothills of Jeseníky and the White Carpathians (Bílé Karpaty). At this time fenced settlements were also built on uplands, as were also known in the older iron age (i.e., 2,700 to 2,400 years ago), where the peak of settlement of main areas was reached for a long time. The Celtic oppidia from the last two centuries before Christ are often referred to as “prehistoric towns”. These were important centres for production and the political power of Celtic tribes. One of them, the famous Boii tribe, also left a permanent reminder in the shape of the original Germanic name of the later Bohemia, i.e., *Baiahaim* “the home of the Boii”, from which the Latin *Bohemia* and German *Böhmen* developed. In the last decades before Christ these oppidia became defensive points in the Celtic defence against the increasing pressure of the Germans. They were probably destroyed, and so before the arrival of the Slavs on the territory of today’s Czech Republic there remained only the ruins of the prehistoric oppidia. Not even the names of those ancient settlements have been preserved. It is only possible to very cautiously guess at the ethnicity of the oldest inhabitants of our homeland, if indeed it is at all possible, primarily from archaeological findings, and only in part from the oldest geographical names, in particular rivers and mountains.

The inhabitants who forced the Celts out of the territory of the later Czech Republic, and who for a time took over their settlements, were primarily two historically documented Germanic tribes: the Marcomanni (ancient Roman sources confirm their move from the area around the river Main to Bohemia in the period just before the birth of Christ) and the Quadi. For the first four centuries after Christ these two powerful tribes represented the main element of German and, to a certain extent, other (e.g., Dacian) settlement. After the collapse of the Roman Empire in the second half of the fifth century BC, the interest of the literate world in Central Europe (the land of the so-called Barbarians) dropped considerably; as a result there is little information about the migrations of the historical Slavs.

As is evident from the preceding explanation, from this period certain geographical Celtic and Germanic names have been preserved.

These substrate names denote rivers, and consequently the lands on which they lie, and less frequently do they describe settlements. The oldest old European names for water bodies with the original meaning ‘water, swamp’ also include the name *Morava*: the root *mar-* (cf. Czech *moře*, Latin *mare*, German *Meer*) was expanded by a second member of the compound *ahwa* ‘water, watercourse, river’. The component *ahwa* later became the suffix *-ava*, which then constituted the names of rivers and watercourses: *Vltava* (from the Germanic *wilth* ‘wild, swift’ and *ahwa*), and *Opava* (from IE *\*apa/\*opa* ‘water’).

The substrate hydronyms also include the names *Odra* (from IE *\*uodr/\*uedr* ‘water’), *Ohře* (from IE *\*Aga/\*Agira/\*Agara* ‘rapidly running, fast water’), *Metuje* (from IE *\*medh-* ‘central’, i.e., in view of the Úpa and Orlice), *Úpa* (from the Balto-Slavonic base, cf. Lith. *ūpe-* ‘course, river’), *Labe* (from the Germanic *\*Alba*, this being from the IE base *\*albh-* ‘white, bright, clean’), *Jizera* (from IE *\*eis/-ois-/\*is-* ‘flow rapidly’). The names derived from this base are documented in all the countries where Celts lived: the *Isar* in Bavaria, *Isère* in France, *Yser/Ijzer* in France/Belgium, etc. There are a few substrate place names that have a hydronymic origin: *Doksy* (from the Celtic *\*daks/doks* ‘water surface, wetlands, swamp’), *Duchcov* (same origin as *Doksy*, previously the settlement was called *Hrabišín* /from the Slavonic personal name *Hrabiša*/), *Přimda* (originally castle, this was named according to the location in the source area of the Bavarian river *Pfpreimd*, Czech *Přimda*; the name comes from the Celtic *\*Prī-muda* ‘secondary course, tributary’), *Křemže* (from the Celtic *\*Kremisa* ‘stream with garlic growth around’).

Substrate names are also used for mountains and consequently the settlements that were founded there, for example *Říp* (from the Germanic *\*rip-* ‘mountain, upland’) and *Oškobrh* (from the Germanic *\*aska* ‘ash tree’ and *berg* ‘mountain’).

The Slavs reached the territory of today’s Czech Republic in small groups from approximately the start of the sixth century AD in several migration waves: they came through Carpathian passes, the Moravian Gate (Moravská brána), and to Moravia also from the south from the Sub-Danubian region. In the oldest periods the Slavonic tribes in the western part of today’s Czech Republic primarily settled on the fertile lowlands in the Central Elbe (Labe) area, in the Lower Vltava area up to today’s Zbraslav, in the Slaný area, in the Central and Lower Ohře area, and in Moravia on the floodplain of the Morava and the lower reaches of the Bečva and also along the lower reaches of the main west Moravian rivers the Dyje, Jihlava, Oslava, Bobrava, Litava, Svratka and Svitava. Settlement progressed against the flow of the rivers, at first on the main rivers, later on their tributaries. In general it can be said that the process of colonization in the earlier Slavonic period expanded from the treeless but swamp-free flatlands along the rivers towards the forests and hills, where as yet uncultivated land was first farmed. Everywhere else it involved more or less merely a new relocation of inhabitants, which older inhabitants of non-Slavonic origin obviously contributed to.

The new Slavonic population on the territory of today’s Czech Republic ran into the remnants of the previous inhabitants, in particular the Germanic Lombards, but they assimilated them after several generations, so from the start of the 7<sup>th</sup> century one can describe the settlement of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia as having an exclusively Slavonic character (with the exception of Southern and Central Moravia, where the nomadic Avars penetrated temporarily). The Slavonic settlement in Moravia up to the start of the 11<sup>th</sup> century was concentrated primarily in those areas which had been inhabited previously by non-Slavonic tribes, but they left no traces in toponymy, apart from the names of several rivers and mountains and possibly also the place names *Znojmo* and *Olomouc*.

There was a significant increase in the density and expansion of settlement space from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> century; so-called internal colonization performed using domestic resources. In the course of internal domestic colonization, progress into less fertile places began. From the 13<sup>th</sup> century it was necessary to gain new agricultural land at the expense of forests and swamps in a terrain which was not infrequently mountainous and had extreme climatic conditions (for example on the Czech-Moravian Highlands /Českomoravská vrchovina/). This was performed with the great participation of foreign colonists, primarily villagers from the neighbouring German areas because the domestic Czech resources had been used up by the preceding intensive settlement. This so-called external German or Czech-German colonization, which was a direct continuation of the internal colonization, founded new villages according to new purchase rules. The German share of the colonization wave progressing, for example, from the territory of today’s Austria in the direction of Western and South Western Moravia, left its mark in names ending in *-ec*, having in the root a German personal name, for example *Arnolec*, *Herálec*, *Kadolec*. Their spread constitutes the northern protuberance of the area of these names in the north from the Danube. They were originally *Arnoldsdorf*, *Herihartsdorf*, and *Kadoltsdorf* and meant Arnold’s, Herihart’s, and Kadolt’s village.

Hand in hand with the village colonization, characterised from the start of the 13<sup>th</sup> century by the active cooperation of Germans, new towns were built either close to older fortress settlements or completely new ones. Their founder was generally the ruler himself, but along with the king other feudal ranks, temporal and clerical, also participated in colonization: they founded feudal towns. Naturally, they also invited to the country large numbers of German craftsmen, miners, builders, traders, officials, etc. And so, before the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, on the very eve of the Hussite Revolution, the settlement process in the Czech lands had reached its peak.

The Germans gave their settlements either names taken from Germany or names newly created. In addition to German names of localities, there often existed Czech names. Depending on the relationship between the Czech and German name, it is possible to classify several basic types of this coexistence:

- a) both names existing side by side without direct connection and created independently of each other – Czech *Jindřichův Hradec*, German *Neuhaus*, Czech *Třeboň*, German *Wittingau*;
- b) the German name is an adaption of the Czech one – Czech *Chomutov*, German *Komotau*;
- c) German name created through translation of Czech name – Czech *Most*, German *Brüx*;
- d) original German name adapted to Czech – German *Warnsdorf*, Czech *Varnsdorf*, German *Friedland*, Czech *Frýdlant*, German *Reichenberg*, Czech *Liberec*;
- e) original German name translated to Czech – German *Schönlinde*, Czech *Krásná Lípa*, German *Gottesgab*, Czech *Boží Dar*.

In addition to German colonization, Wallach colonization also contributed to today's system of Czech toponymy, although to a lesser extent. The Wallachs – primarily shepherds and cottagers from the Romanian Carpathians – migrated to the north from the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century and settled in North Eastern Moravia from the Moravian-Silesian Beskydy (Moravskoslezské Beskydy) region to the Vizovice Highlands (Vizovické vrchy). Their descendants today speak an Eastern Moravian dialect but they have retained certain special terms which have often been applied to geographical names, as is evidenced, for example, by the name of the mountain range *Beskydy* (probably of Thracian or Illyrian origin meaning 'mountain ridge') or the toponyms *Grůň*, *Gruň*, *Gruník*, *Grunisko* (from the Romanian *gruiu*, from the Latin *grunium* 'pig's snout', but in toponymy having the meaning 'hillside, slope; upland, hill').

Czech toponymy was greatly enriched by biblical names and the names from distant countries (cf. Olivová-Nezbedová 1999a, b).

A great number of the biblical names come from the period of the Hussites and the Reformation, i.e., from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Hussites gave settlements and natural features biblical names, and the Czech Brethren (one stream of the Czech religious reformation) continued in this. Some of the names created were the names of the hill and city *Tábor* (according to the biblical mountain *Thabor* near Nazareth in Palestine), the hill *Oreb* (from the hill *Choréb* in the Sinai foothills), the castle *Sion* (from part of Jerusalem), the lake *Jordán* (from the river in Israel) and the stream *Cedron* (from the valley and stream *Cedron*). After the issue of the Toleration Patent (issued by the emperor Joseph II in 1781, by which the Augsburg, Helvetian and Eastern Orthodox faiths were allowed in the Habsburg monarchy), the Czech Brethren founded their own settlements: *Betlém* (from the town of Bethlehem near Jerusalem), *Damašek*, (from the Czech name of the Syrian capital) and *Jeruzalém*.

Practically up to today the names of famous battles or distant countries or cities have been a significant source of inspiration, and these include *Budín* (after the castle in Hungarian Buda, today part of the Hungarian capital Budapest), *Temešvár* (after the Hungarian name for the now Romanian city of Timisoara, famous from the Turkish wars), *Port Artur* (according to the location of Port Arthur, famous from the Russo-Japanese War in 1904–1905), *Habeš* (after the obsolete Czech word for modern Ethiopia, according to the war in this country from 1935 to 1936), *Korea* (according to the war in Korea from 1950 to 1953), *Malvíny* (name taken from the British-Argentinean armed conflict for the Falkland Islands /Spanish Islas Malvinas/ in 1982). Evidently the most common Czech geographical name from a foreign toponym is *Amerika* – in Bohemia alone there are at least 900 recorded cases of these names referring to generally distant places, wild lands of excellent quality or hard to cultivate. This also involves the names of lands

whose owners had immigrated to America or returned from it. Even the name *Kanada* (Canada) is used in Czech toponymy, albeit unofficially, such as in the name “*Česká Kanada*” (Czech Canada), as a result of the alleged similarity of the local landscape to the Canadian landscape, which describes the territory of the southern Czech Republic on the historical border between Bohemia and Moravia along the state border with Austria.

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