**The Myth of Forefather Čech**

Many years ago along The River Vistula, lay Chrobatia, where many Slavic tribes were settled. It was a calm and peaceful land, but later there was struggle for territory and hinterland. Men were afraid for their lives. This struggle began to be unbearable for two brothers - Čech and Lech, because they wanted to live as they did before, cultivate the land and breed horses and cattle. So they decided to leave their land.

Duke Čech dreamt about finding a beautiful fertile land with unique scenery, so they did not stop at the first opportune place and continued their journey further and further. Their journey was hard and long. Slavs had to cross swamps, mountains and deep forests. When they reached the river Moldau, its surroundings fascinated them. They beheld a hill – Říp, which was visible from a long distance. They decided to rest under the hill. Next morning, Čech chose to look at the top of the mountain after waking up. He was enchanted by the view that greeted him at the top. Never ending fresh green forests, a crystal river casually snaking through the valley and birds singing merrily. It was even full of game.

Čech realised that this was the land he had been searching for. Duke led all his people to the top of the hill to look around. They found no reason why not to stay here. When they all gathered on the top of Říp, Čech said: “This is the promised land, full of animals and birds, rich with milk and honey. Now tell me, how shall this land be called?” And old man stepped out from the crowd and said: “By your name we shall call this land! Čechy!” The people agreed and so this land got its name. Czech people settled around Říp, began to build villages and cultivate the land.

After it was done, every family received their own land where they lived and worked on. And because they worked hard, they lived in prosperity. Forests were cut down, so there was more land for cultivation.

They spent long nights listening to stories from hunters returning from hunts and from elders, who remembered already bygone times. They did not forget their gods. They made sacrifices to both good gods and bad gods, because they loved the good ones and feared the bad ones, especially Perun who was a god of thunder and the ruler of all gods.

They worked hard, and when the days started to shorten and winter knocked on the door, they had their roofs secured, wood collected, and resources stored. Then they survived the gloomy cold days of winter in peace.

As the years passed, duke Čech died. His people grieved for him a lot. They kept him in their hearts as their father and his story lived on ever after.

And what happened to Lech – the brother of the duke Čech? It is said that Lech settled down in the north of Čech’s land and founded his own land – Poland.

**Forefather Čech – real or mythical?**

This man, although he is considered to be a legend, has his real prototype. Roman Titus Livius recorded that in the 6th century BC there had lived a Celtic king Ambigatus, whose two nephews went to the East. One of them was called Bellovesus. He settled down in the area of Padan Plains (in Italy). Conversely, his brother ventured into the Hercynian Forest (later our country). According to a roman chronicler, his journey progressed along the Ogara (Ohře), till he reached the Rif (Říp) mountain.

Kosmas in his Chronica Boemorum, written in the 12th century didn’t actually mention Forefather Čech. He mentions a man named Boemus, which was the Roman name for a Celtic tribe living in Central Europe. Kosmas generally often used Roman elements or specific whole passages in his chronicle. We can therefore find certain similarities with the aforementioned story about Bellovesus.

In the beginning of the 14th century, Dalimil – who was the first chronicler writing in the Czech language – mentioned Čech in his chronicles. The very presence of our myth in the chronicles of Dalimil indicates its importance. We can find another reference to the forefather Čech in the chronicles of Přibík Pulkava from Radenin. The tale was later developed by Václav Hájek from Libočany. This well-known reproduction can be found in “Ancient Bohemian Legends” by Alois Jirásek. The most recent transcription of the tale is featured in the work of Petr Piťha “Paměť a naděje” from the year 2003.

Even though chroniclers tended to manipulate the tale of forefather Čech, we can still find some indisputable facts. All versions speak of a lone hill, to which the fellowship arrived, and of lone regions spreading in all directions from the hill. From these facts, we can at least make an attempt to establish the truth. What is the answer to the question regarding the actual existence of Forefather Čech and his group? Did the Slavs really arrive here the way it is written in so many chronicles? Is it really true?

Probably not. The first Slavs who reached our land around the 6th century AD did not build any houses and did not keep animals in the vicinity of Říp and on the top of that, they were not even there. They settled down somewhere more southerly around Slaný, in the vicinity of Kralupy nad Vltavou and in Pražská kotlina. Podřipsko was inhabited much later, around the 9th century. Older settlements were here, although in far more ancient times, well before the arrival of the Slavs. Thus, not only does the location not correspond, but also, at the time when the group arrived there, Lombards and Markomans, were already well established -Germanic tribes who pushed away the original inhabitants of this land - the Celts. It appears, therefore, that we are presented with a new option - that the main protagonists of the story of Father Čech could be the Celts. This notion is re-enforced by the fact that many other names featured in our legends and mythology are very similar to Celtic. In addition, it is scientifically proven that we have 40% of our DNA in common with the Celts. Everything is in the stage of hypotheses and it's up to you what you want to believe.