



University of Hradec Králové  
Philosophical Faculty

## Diploma Thesis

University of Hradec Králové  
Philosophical Faculty

# The Geographical Influence on the Development of Early Slavic Culture and Society

Diploma thesis

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## Zadání diplomové práce

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### **Anotace:**

Why are some countries in the modern world blessed with prosperity and technological advancement while other are cursed with oppressive regimes and a lack basic necessities? He claims that the history of a certain group is formed more by local geography than the people themselves. There are many reasons for why a country developed the way it did and the variables are ultimately beyond counting. In my thesis I would like to take single group of people and see how they react and adapt to different geographies, in order to understand how a people can be shaped by their environment. The slavic people are a perfect candidate. They are a single indo european linguistic group that migrated into Europe in the early middle ages. They spread and populated different countries in different climates and environments. We will take this single group and compare how each adapted to their environment.

Garantující pracoviště: Historický ústav,  
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## Declaration

I declare that I wrote this Diploma thesis on my own under the supervision of the supervisor of the Diploma thesis and stated all employed sources and literature.

In Hradec Králové 23.7. 2018

Signature

## Annotation

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In my thesis I will explain how geography has affects a society and a people. In order to do this, I will use the methodology of Jared Diamond to compare and contrast the Slavic Societies after they migrated. The Slavs were once united by culture and language but when they migrated to different environments their societies began to change. By examining how their societies changed we can see what impact Geography had on their development.

Keywords: Early Slavic Societies, geography, culture, Bohemia, East Slavs, West Slavs, South Slavs

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# 1 Introduction

How does the local environment affect a society and its people? The modern world is very globalized and the differences between societies are disappearing. I am drinking coffee from Ethiopia, wearing clothes made in India, while using a computer made in China, while sitting at a table made in Poland, while sitting in a chair made in Slovakia. This hasn't always been the case: globalization is relatively recent.

Today we have the internet that can connect two people instantly. Before that there was the phone, before that there was the car, before that there was the horse and before there was the foot. People used to be entrapped in their environment - molded by it. Geography used to influence the way people lived and behaved more so than today's globalized world.

What was the influence of geography in society? How did it affect its development? To answer this question, we will take the Slavic people, a people who lived together for a thousand years, united by a common language and a common culture and examine how their society changed when they split and migrated into different environments. The Slavic society split into the west, east and south Slavs when they migrated away from each other. We will examine how the new geographies in each of the west, south and east Slavic territories changed their society from what it had been before they migrated.

Jared Diamond in his book "Guns, Germs and Steel" does something very similar. We will use his methodology to compare and contrast the west, east, and south Slav societies.

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Methodological background

Jared Diamond, Professor of Geography at UCLA claims that geography was the deciding factor between a developed and prosperous country from a backwater, underdeveloped and corrupt nation. As he himself says,

*“Authors are regularly asked by journalists to summarize a long book in one sentence. For this book, here is such a sentence: “History followed different courses for different peoples because of differences among peoples’ environments, not because of biological differences among peoples themselves.”* (Diamond, 1997)

To prove his point on the importance of geography he takes a single people, a Polynesian society that *“shared essentially the same culture, language, technology, and set of domesticated plants and animals”* (Diamond, 1997) and examines what happens when they were divided into different geographies. He examines the societies of the Maori and the Moriori. The Maori came from a densely populated agricultural society with a strong leader and the Moriori were a hunter gatherer society, with no leader and simple technology. Both are descendants of a Polynesian society. The reason for the difference is that they both settled onto different islands with different geographical environments. (Diamond, 1997)

Jared Diamond gives a list of 6 environmental factors that contribute to the development of a people, (Diamond, 1997)

- Island climate
- Geological type,
- Marine resources,
- Area,
- Terrain fragmentation
- Isolation

He uses these variables and sees how each one affected the Maori and the Morior. The Morior settled in the small and isolated Chatham Islands. The islands were too cold for their tropical crops to grow and so they had to hunt and fish to

survive - and since they could not grow food surplus everybody had to gather food and the society was able to develop nonhunting craft specialists like trained fighters, skilled craftsmen or political leaders. Their area of habitation was small and so they were not able to form a society more than 2000 hunter and gathers. This forced them to resolve all conflicts peacefully. The animals that they hunted were easily hunted and didn't require any special form of technology. Without any incentive to develop more advanced technology, the technology stayed simple. (Diamond, 1997)

The Maori settled in the northern and warmer island of New Zealand. Because the climate was suitable for their tropical crops they were able to grow more food. It was a large island and the population was able to grow to more than 100000 people. They were able to grow dense populations. There was a greater food surplus which allowed non-farmer craft specialists to develop, like soldiers and artists and leaders. Their large population also allowed them split off into other groups which than they fought with. There was then incentive to develop better weapons. (Diamond, 1997)

We can see how each of these variables affected the Maori and the Maori. To summarize here is the list of the variables and their effects on society.

- The climate and the resources

A cold or hot, wet or dry climate determines the ability of the people to develop agriculture. The resources as well reflect the amount of food the society has access to. (Diamond, 1997)

- The geological type

This refers to the kind of island the settlers settled on, ranging from volcanic to coral to limestone. It can affect the amount of freshwater available and the quality of food that they can grow. The marine resources are the amount of seafood available. (Diamond, 1997)

All of these geographical variables decide and influence the agriculture and available food of society.

- The area

Area is the size of the habitable area. It can control how the people are organized. In the case of the Morior they lived in a very small area and were forced to resolve all conflict peacefully while the Maori lived in a much larger area making it possible for them to settle conflicts violently. (Diamond, 1997)

- Terrain fragmentation

Terrain fragmentation are the obstacles to travel and communication in the area, including chasm, rivers, and mountains. This can influence how well the people can unify into a political unit. (Diamond, 1997)

- Isolation

Isolation is how far away the people are from other societies. An isolated society will be isolated from new ideas and new technologies. The Morior lived in a small area and were isolated from the rest of the world. Their small area forced them to have a small democratic society at the same time being isolated prevented them from developing new ideas. (Diamond, 1997)

In summary, the less obstacles between people the more unified they will be. The better geographical variables are for agriculture, the more the single population grows. The more the population grows the denser the population. The denser the population the more farmers who can devote themselves to growing food. The more farmers there are the more this will create a food surplus. The more food surplus the more nonfood growing members of society, like craftsmen, and soldiers and political leaders can exist. The more nonfood producers in a society the more elaborate and complex the political organization and technology will be (62). The better the geographical variables are for agriculture and unification the more elaborate and complex the society. (Diamond, 1997)

## 2.2 Applied methodology

We will use Jared Diamond's methodology of comparing a single unified people who were divided and then changed by different geographies. Then we will

compare the different societies and see how the geography changed them. Instead of using the Polynesian society we will use the Slavs, who were once unified into a single culture and then migrated away into different geographies creating the distinctions of west, east and south Slavs. By comparing and contrasting the societies of the west, east and south Slavs we can see how their local geography impacted and changed their societies.

However not all Jared Diamond's geographical variables are applicable to the Slavic people. The Geology of the island is not applicable because in my research the geology did not vary much among the Slavic tribes.

Here is the new list of geographical variables applied to Slavic tribes:

- Climate
- Resources
- Area
- Terrain fragmentation
- Isolation

The first section will detail the Slavic culture and lifestyle before they migrated. Then each of the following sections will look at each of the west, east and south Slavs, examining their geography of their new homelands, then their history and changes in their culture and society. At the end of each section we will examine how the geography changed their culture and influenced their history.

### 3 The Slavs before the Migration

#### 3.1 The Slavic homeland

Before we begin with the West, South and East Slavic section, first we need to understand who the Slavs were and what their original culture looked like.

The exact homeland of the Slavs is largely unknown; however, the Slavs did live united between the Baltic Sea and Carpathian Mountains in the Polish territories. According to Ancient History Encyclopedia Proto-Slavic people were in an area that stretched roughly from western Poland to the Dnieper River in Belarus. (ancient.eu, 2018)

Frank Kmietowicz argues in his book *“Ancient Slavs”* that the Slavs lived in isolation in the area enclosed between the Baltic Sea to the north, the Carpathian Mountains to the south, the Odra River to the west and the river Pripet to the east. He concludes that the exact location is a mystery, but he says it is somewhere in the area of central Poland and the *“muddy region of the river Pripet basin.”* (Kmietowicz, 1976)

He continues to say that the Slavs lived there mostly isolated for 2000 years united by geography, language and a common uniform culture. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

Mr. Paul M Bradford in his book *“The Early Slavs: culture and society in early medieval eastern Europe”* also argues that the Slavs existed and developed in isolation. *“We have seen that the linguistic evidence strongly suggests that the Slav languages and a Slav identity formed in a restricted area from where they seem to have spread over wide areas of Europe.”* (Bradford, 2001)

Bradford says that the Slavs lived in isolation but leaves the location of the cradle land a mystery putting forth only possible theories including the upper and middle Dnieper region in Belarus, the Bohemian basin, the area of modern day Poland. (Bradford, 2001)

The exact location isn't important to the topic of this thesis. The geography of the original cradleland isn't crucial. What is crucial is where the East, West and

South Slavs migrated to and where they settled. What is important is that prior to their migration they formed a single people group and a common culture.



Picture 1: Slav's homeland (themaparchive.com)

## 3.2 The Slavic culture and society

There are two methods of examining the early life of the Slavs, first is archaeology and the second is through linguistics.

Kmietowicz explains that when the proto Slavs met the Venti. The Venti were a mysterious people who lived in the Slavic homeland before the Slavs. The two groups merged into one people, the Slavs where they developed one uniform culture called the Lusatian. It lasted from the 1300 BC to the 3rd century B.C.. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

How do we know that the Lusatian culture, found in the areas between the Elbe, Oder, Vistula, and the Bug Rivers, was in fact a product of early Slavs? The truth is, we don't know who created the Lusatian culture, but the author Francis Dvorník makes the case that the Lusatian culture is in fact of Slavic origin because we know the Slavs moved from their original homeland territory and there is *"...a vacuum in the lands where the Lusatian culture flourished. On several grounds it would seem reasonable to fill this vacuum with the Slavs. Such a hypothesis would render more understandable the rapid expansion of the Slavs in historical times."* (Dvorník, 1959) Kmietowicz seemingly agrees with this. crediting Joseph Kostrzewski for creating the theory. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

But regardless, if the Slavs did not create the Lusatian Culture, then the culture that came after it, was undoubtedly Slavic. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

### 3.2.1 Lusatian Culture

If Lusatian culture was in fact created by the Slavs it is important to look at it in order to understand how their society started and developed.

The Lusatian culture was unique for its cremation, Mr. Kmietowicz explains, that the normal person was burned, and the ashes were placed into a hole while the chief or a highly respected person was placed in a special grave with ornaments. (Kmietowicz, 1976)



They were highly skilled in ceramics and adornments. Flint was used and mined locally. Copper was exported and then iron was used after 700 B.C.. Iron was mined from the local Holy Cross Mountain. They used tools such as sickles, needles, swords, and adornments. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

As the population grew new **farming** techniques were developed. The Slavs would burn down a forested area and use the ash to fertilize the soil (fire farming). They were also some of the first people to use animals for agriculture, using cattle to pull a plough. They grew emmer, bread, wheat, peas, and beans and lentils. They ate wild plums and apples. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

Many aspects of early life can be also deduced by looking at the remnants of their **villages and strongholds**. There have been 200 fortified towns discovered in the Lusatian area. Biskupin discovered in Biskupin Poland was one of the most preserved, being discovered underwater. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

The town had 13 longhouses. All the houses were equal in size with streets separating the houses with a town square near the gate. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

The reasons for building such a well-guarded town are a mystery. Either they were built to protect themselves from Slavic tribal wars or some other invading forces.

Villages were built in a circle or straight along a river. Circular villages had to be built in places where there was more danger. This round village was called the "okolnica". There was only one gate and it was closed at night. These villages are seen as a precursor to the Biskupin model. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

The other model of a village consisted of a long street next to a river. This was called the "ulicowka" and often these villages would connect to more villages, with a communal cornfield between them called a "pola". A collection of these villages separated by a pola was called an "opole".

Based on the archeology its possible to deduce some aspects about the Slavic society. We know the Slavic people lived in communal societies not ruled by any sort of prince. Every family had equal rights. This is based on archaeological

evidence found in the ancient city of Biskupin where all the family huts were of the same size, but as the farming techniques changed so did the society. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

The fire farming technique was perfected by women who designed the hoes and plows to rouse the soil. Men on the other hand were stronger and instead worked on cattle raising. When it was discovered that animals could help rouse the soil instead of the women the society changed, and women were no longer treated as equals. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

Women shared in the decisions because they shared in the work but once animals were used to plow women no longer had any say in meetings and making decisions. And as farming became more efficient it took less people to work the farm and so farming became more independent and more family oriented than community focused. Families began to live separately from the communities. Families also worked differently, and some were more skilled than others leading to a difference in social standing and wealth. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

As techniques in mining developed specialized craftsmen appeared, such as miners and blacksmiths who then in turn created weapons for another new specialized class: warriors. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

Originally Slavic people lived in communes but as farming and mining techniques developed smaller units of people could live independently of each other and specialized classes created further distinctions in societies.

The Lusatian culture would eventually end. Francis Dvorník in his book, *"The Slavs their early history and civilization"* claims the Lusatian culture ended in 500 B.C., destroyed by an invasion of the Scythians. He proves this by claiming that by many of the destroyed Lusatian strongholds there are Scythian tombs. A new culture, unquestionably Slavic arose from the Lusatian ashes called Vendian. (Dvorník, 1959)

Mr. Kmietowicz claims that the Lusatian culture came to an end much sooner than 500B.C. He claims it ended in the 3rd century B.C, not by invasion but

by “new factors and influences”. The new cultures that emerge are a product of Gothic influence. (Kmietowicz, 1976)



Picture 3: Lusatian grave (Novák, 2016)



Picture 2: Lusatian ceramics (Leite, 2016)

### 3.2.2 The new cultures after the Lusatian culture came to an end

In the west Slavic areas there arose new cultures called Oksywian and the Przeworski culture, while in the more eastern part of the Slavic territories they developed the Zarubiniecian (from second century B.C. to the second century A.D.) and then Czerniakhovian culture (from the second century A.D. to the fifth century A.D.).

How were these new cultures different? Within **the Oksywian** culture (located near Oksywie near Gdansk, by the Black Sea) they started burying the dead instead of burning them, and they buried them with endowed adornments and special weapons or razors and knives. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

**The Przeworski** culture, located near southern Poland near the city of Przeworsk, likewise had extremely decorated cemeteries. People were no longer burned after death, but instead were buried with prized possessions. However, some people were buried with nothing at all, suggesting a change in the society of the Slavs. There were now societal differences. Houses were huts, low into the

ground and hunting only played a minor role. This culture ended at the first half of the 5th century A.D.. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

The Slavs near the upper and middle Dnieper and southern Pripet and Desna, created the **Zarubiniecian culture** being inspired by the Przeworski culture. Farming and cattle were important as well, but hunting played a bigger role. Ceramics were basic and lacking decoration. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

The Zarubiniecian culture inspired those living in the farther east to create the **Czernaikoivan culture**, located by modern day Kiev, which lasted from the 2nd to the 5th century.

These four cultures came to end as well around the 5th century ad, ending because the Slavs started to move and migrate. Despite having slight differences these cultures were very similar. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

What was the **Slavic life** like after the Lusatian culture? Bradford once again gives a very detailed account of the Slavic homelife and society in the later periods before the Slavic culture split apart.

By looking at the skeletal remains of these people, we can observe many new things about the life they led, for one they had good teeth and good nutrition. (Bradford, 2001)

A family was the basic unit of society, more than one family created a clan. Most men were monogamous except for the elite (419, Bradford). As we have seen before the Slavic society in its early form was more egalitarian but has farming changed so did class distinction.

**Society** was patriarchal but at home the woman had “considerable authority”. The family homestead consisted of different buildings made of wood, each building had a different use and with a main building having a stone, or clay oven and they often lived next to rivers or lakes. The settlements were never repaired but abandoned and then replaced in a different location. If the population grew too big people branched off and built a different settlement farther away.

These homesteads were never meant to be permanent. A collection of these family settlements was considered a clan. (Bradford, 2001)

Settlements were still in straight lines along the rivers as described above. These one road villages are called “opole” in Poland and in south Slavic areas as “zupa”. (Bradford, 2001)

**Strongholds** were often pretty common as well and were constructed with the help of more than one clan. These places were not used for permanent settlement but only in cases of danger or as regional meeting places. These strongholds were more common in the west and east Slavic territory and almost not at all in the south Slavic territory. (Bradford, 2001)

We will discuss that more later once we begin explaining how the Slavs developed differently.

Their **diet** included onions, peas, broad bean, lentils, cucumber, parsnip, parsley, walnut, peach, plum, cherries, apple, pear, hops, millet, rye, barley and beer. Cattle was the most consumed meat followed by pigs, they also had chickens. Cattle was used for food, dairy and farming. (Bradford, 2001)

Despite having different cultures, for the most part early Slavic cultures were fairly uniform. It was only after they migrated and settled down that differences begin to develop. Bradford explains,

*“We have seen that, for most of the period we have been considering, Slav culture was relatively consistent over wide areas. The ninth and early tenth centuries saw the splitting of the previously relatively culturally uniform area inhabited by Slavs into a series of more discrete zones. The most are the developing differences between the three main blocks, the south, West and East Slavs.”* (Bradford, 2001)

Before we move on and examine the differences that developed once the Slavs migrated we can flesh out more details of the Slavic culture and society by looking at their common language.

### 3.3 Linguistics

Linguistics also plays a role in understanding the original Slavic way of life. Mr. Kmietowicz writes,

*“When some Slavic nations parted between the 5th and 7th centuries the communication among them was poor and broke off completely when the Hungarians and Bavarians cut off the western Slavs from the southern Slavs in the Balkan. However, in their languages remain about 1700 common words unchanged or slightly changed in sound, form and meaning. It points out that this vocabulary constitutes their cultural heritage from when they lived together.”* (Kmietowicz, 1976)

Linguistics is the science of language and by looking at what words all Slavic languages have in common we can paint a picture of a shared culture and society.

All Slavs have the words rye, wheat, barley, oats, millet, flax, hemp and corn, and also for rake, shovel, flail axe, hammer, plow, hoe, harrow, scythe, sickle, and fork. Obviously, they were an agricultural society. They also had common words for milk, cheese, butter, cream. They used the metals lead, silver, gold, copper, and iron. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

They have names for all fish and were able to build bridges, dams, ferry boats, and dugout canoes. This also proves that they lived along rivers and lakes. They had words for servant, peasant, neighbor, guard, landlord, landlady, plowman, shepherd, war leader, deputy and judge, further establishing the distinctions that were growing in their society. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

They were a religious people, having words gods, paradise, hell, devil and miracle. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

They knew about war knowing the words for arrow, bow, mace, spear, quarrel, battle, war, pillage, slavery, freedom and army. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

### 3.4 Conclusion

This was the culture and society of the ancient Slavs before they migrated and formed different societies. Kmietowicz concludes that *“...when the ancient Slavs*

*parted, they were culturally developed enough to compete with the nations of ancient Rome and Greece.” (Kmietowicz, 1976)*

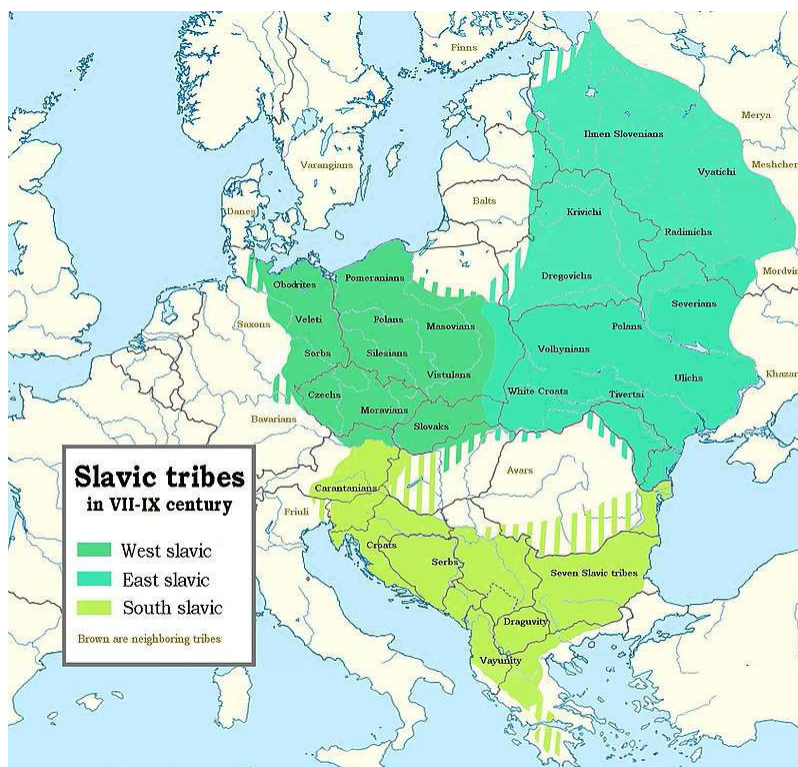
They created their own society in isolation from the other major societies for a millennium. (Kmietowicz, 1976) Bradford likewise says, “*we have seen that the linguistic evidence strongly suggests that the Slavic languages and a Slav identity formed in a restricted area from where they seem to have spread over wide areas of Europe.*” (Bradford, 2001)

The Slavs were a pagan agricultural society. They had no centralized government but were organized by tribes and clans. It appears that they were at least moderately democratic, but as the society began to splinter, elites and specialized workers began to appear. They lived in villages along rivers and streams and in times of distress ran to forts and shelters. They seemed to at least be partially nomadic because when a settlement fell into ruin the Slavs would leave and create a settlement elsewhere. They were skilled farmers, but their ornaments and metal workings were very basic and not very elaborate.

Now that we know what the Slavic society looked like before they migrated we can examine, using Jared Diamond's methodology how the west, east and south Slavic societies changed once they migrated and adapted to their new geographies.

## 4 Slavic Migration

For fifteen centuries or even longer ancient Slavs lived together in geographic isolation. Despite Celtic and German penetrations, they clung to their cradlelands. No attempt was made to abandon territories between the Baltic sea and Carpathian Mountains, and the rivers Odra and Bug. (Kmietowicz, 1976)



Picture 4: Slavic migration (*i.pinimg.com*)

This changed around the 5th century AD. Even before the great migration, the Slavs had been moving east due to an increase in population (Dvorník, 1959) and then according to Kmietowicz, the east and west Slavs became divided when the Celts cut the Polish territories in two, creating the East Slavs and the West Slavs. Then the east Slavs were further divided when the Goths invaded (Kmietowicz, 1976). Kmietowicz cites linguistic evidence to illustrate that the Slavs were divided into 3 groups while still in the Polish territories (Kmietowicz, 1976). Over time the Slavs migrated, either for a better life or for adventure, or for a safer



area. Even after the great migration Slavs still had very much in common; it was only about the ninth century AD that the Slavs began to develop into different cultures and societies. Bradford explains,

*“We have seen that for most of the period we have been considering, Slav culture was relatively consistent over wide areas. The ninth and early tenth centuries saw the splitting of the previously relatively culturally uniform area inhabited by Slavs into a series of more discrete ones. The most obvious ones are the developing differences between the three main blocks, the south, West, and East Slavs.”*  
(Bradford, 2001)

Kmietowicz likewise agrees that the Slavs, were once unified broke then apart, but argues that it happened in the 5th and 7th centuries when the Hungarians and Bavarians cut off the Western Slavs from the South Slavs in the Balkans. (Kmietowicz, 1976)

## 5 Slavic societies after they migrated

Regardless of who is right, or how the Slavs split, the important thing is that they did and that after they migrated they developed into different societies. The differences that grew between the Slavs after they migrated are the differences we will examine. How did the geography of their new homes change them into a different culture?

### 5.1 The East Slavs

The east Slavs came to inhabit the areas of modern day Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. The Slavs had been moving east before 500 B.C. (Dvorník, 1959).

Either the Slavs moved east due to an increase in population (Dvorník, 1959), or they were attacked by the Goths forcing them to seek a safer environment (Kmietowicz, 1976).

Paul Robert Magocsi author of the book *"A History of Ukraine: the land and its People"* explains that the Slavs, like other peoples at the time, were drawn to Ukraine because of its natural wealth and the possibility to trade with the Greeks, who had been there at least since 700 B.C.. (Magocsi, 2010)

By the middle of the first millennium B.C. the Slavs had begun to move slowly in various directions from their original homeland. This gradual process of outward migration was to last a millennium. It was especially pronounced toward the south, into the middle Dniester and South Buh valley of southwestern Ukraine. The Slavs and, for that matter, other peoples were drawn to Ukraine because of its natural wealth and the possibility for trade with the Greek and later Roman cities along the coasts of the black sea and sea of Azov. (Magocsi, 2010)

### 5.1.1 Geography

- Climate

Magocsi describes the climate of Ukraine where the Slavs migrated as “moderate” with “adequate rainfall”. It is colder than the average temperatures in central Europe, being between 6 and 9 Celsius. It is much more similar to Canada than western Europe. However, this does not stop it being “*one of the most fertile regions in the world*” as Paul Magocsi writes. (Magocsi, 2010)

- Resources

Bradford says that based on evidence in old Slavic sites in Ukraine and Russia we know that they farmed millet and other things. They also fished and hunted. (Bradford, 2001)

- Area

The line between the East and West Slavs is typically drawn between Poland and the Former Soviet Union (Bradford, 2001). Paul Magocsi writes that Ukraine, as a state is 232,200 square miles or 603,700 square kilometers, but the size of the Ukrainian ethnolinguistic area, (that is the area defined by the people who speak the same language) is 288,800 square miles, or 750,800 square kilometers. That is roughly the size of Germany, Austria, and Italy combined. (Magocsi, 2010)

The Kievan Rus, a federation of the east Slavs, stretched from the Baltic sea in the north to the black sea in the south, the headwaters of the Vistula to the west and the Taman Peninsula in the east this was around 133000 Km<sup>2</sup>. (izbornyk.org.ua)

- Terrain fragmentation

Paul Magocsi describes the country as very flat. “*It seldom rises more than 1600 feet above sea level.*” (Magocsi, 2010) and “*It consists of vast plains and plateaus*” (Magocsi, 2010). The whole country is very open, lacking any real natural border. However, there are many rivers that allow convenient north and south travel. The main rivers are Dnieper, Southern Buh, and Dnieper and all of these lead to the Black Sea. It also has access to two seas, the Baltic and the Black. (Magocsi, 2010)

- Isolation

Without any natural borders and with access to two seas, this area was anything but isolated.

### 5.1.2 History and migration

When the Slavs moved east they came into contact with a people called the Scythians were living in the area of southern Russia. After 200 B.C. a new group called the Sarmatians appeared and defeated the Scythians and formed a new empire over the southern Ukraine territory. The Slavs moving east came under the influence of the Sarmatians, both politically and culturally. However, the Goths as well started moving - following the Dnieper towards the Black Sea. By the 300 AD, the Goths established an empire consisting of all southern Russia and the Slavs were again under the political and the cultural influence of the Goths. (Dvorník, 1959)

In 370 A.D. the Huns fleeing from Avars settled in southern Russia and destroyed the Gothic empire. Then following this, two other Asian nomadic people invaded, the Bulgars and the Khazars. The Bulgars had control over the region but when the Avars appeared they migrated towards the Roman Empire. Then the Khazars in the second half of the 7th century appeared. Following this, the Scandinavians appeared on the Baltic shore. Between 856 and 860 the Norsemen reached Kiev and defeated the Khazars. The Slavs welcomed the new Norse overlords. (Dvorník, 1959)

Then in about 864 the Eastern Slavs accepted Christianity at least until 882, when they were attacked again by Russian prince Oleg, who at this time was pagan. Oleg then unified the whole area defeating the Khazars and befriending Byzantium in 911. Over time, even after Oleg's death the relationship between Russia and Byzantium grew, and Oleg's wife, Helga, now the leader made Christianity the state religion. (Dvorník, 1959)

However, the Scandinavians "Boyars" did not like nor trust Byzantium's religion. Helga's son, Svjatoslav, became the first Norse ruler and he did not like

this religion. He expanded his empire fighting the Khazar empire, bringing the last eastern Slavic tribe under his rule. Then in 965 he continued expanding, defeating the Volga Bulgars and brought his empire to the Volga and the Caspian Sea. He had plans to go as far as Bulgaria, but he was defeated by Byzantium and killed on his way home. (Dvorník, 1959)

His son, Vladimir (980-1015), consolidated his empire by uniting it with a city in Russia called Novgorod, and bringing back some rebellious tribes to his rule. He then embraced Byzantine Christianity.

Bradford says by the eleventh century the Kievan Rus was 990000 sq. km. (Bradford, 2001)



Picture 5: Kievan Rus (timetoast.com)

### 5.1.3 Culture

The change in culture had begun around the 9th century when Igor the old ruled (912-945) he consolidated the state and with his rule, and with the Scandinavian influences inhumation burials became popular, many of them with rich chamber burials. Sometimes they were even buried with their weapons. This often was used to express social status. This new tradition shows a change in the society. (Bradford, 2001)

For the most part, the Slavic culture remained unchanged. Houses stayed the same through all the various cultures in the east. They had sunken floor huts, corner ovens and homemade pottery made with a potter's wheel (Bradford, 2001)

What did change was the amount of wooden hill structures. The East Slavs had developed many of them, Kmietowicz even comments, "*the east Slavs had so many strongholds that they Varangians called their territories "gardarike" – "the land of strongholds"*" (Kmietowicz, 1976) Dvorník gives an excellent explanation,

*"The centers for these various Slavic tribes were hill forts known as Horodyska or Horody. At first, there were no more than stockades encircled by moats and ramparts where the surrounding agricultural population came for protection in times of danger. Eventually the horody became towns where artisans produced wares and merchants conducted trade."* (Dvorník, 1959)

He further explains that by the ninth century there were 400 of these strongholds in the Kiev area, 350 in Volhynia, and 250 in Podolia and 100 in Galicia. However, Kiev was the most important. (Dvorník, 1959)

They started out as places to run for safety but then they changed into towns, and then they became key in the administration of the state. Bradford explains that Igor would send trusted men in these strongholds across the country. These men would then control and administer the villages around the settlement for the ruler collecting taxes etc. this was called the pogosty and it was first implemented by Igor the wise. (Dvorník, 1959)

Often the goods were stored in strongholds towns and kept over the winter- in the spring the goods were sent in boats to Kiev (Dvorník, 1959). Islamic gold was found in these settlements, especially in eastern Ukraine. (Bradford, 2001)

What can we understand from this change in culture? The Slavs who migrated east built wooden structures - like all Slavs do, in order to protect them from invaders and they were invaded quite often.

Dvorník explains, Successive waves of invaders had followed one another across the steppes of southern Russia-Scythians, Sarmatians, Goths, Huns, Turkic Bulgars, Avars and Khazars. Each of these invasions left its mark on the lands over which it rolled, a mark which cannot be ignored by the Slavic tribes which had made it clear from the beginning of their penetration eastwards that they intended to stay there for good. (Dvorník, 1959)

These structures eventually became cities. They became towns where artisans and merchants conducted trade (Magocsi, 2010). Then they became centers for administrative control.

The constant attacks grouped people together and helped change the form of government from tribal organization to cities. As cities gained in wealth and trade more people were drawn to these areas.

*“The main reason for this difference was economic - the flourishing trade that went on between the North and the east. This circumstance enhanced the importance of cities in the national life and helped to replace the old tribal organization by a regional grouping of the population around cities as centers of administration.”* (Dvorník, 1959)

Bradford also explains,

*“In southern (inner) Russia the rise of stronghold towns as the tribal political and administrative centers was a result of the consolidation of settlement, and the development of production and exchange: they developed in the centers of densely settled areas. These sites seem to have developed around administrative centers in the middle of settlement concentrations. ... these stronghold-towns emerged as local*

*centers of political and military power or as regional administrative centers.”*  
(Bradford, 2001)

#### 5.1.4 Conclusions

What part of East Slavic geography allowed it to succeed and create such a vast empire? As we have concluded in the Jared Diamond section, the better the agriculture of a society the more complex the society. This is apparent in the East Slavic territories, as Magocsi describes it as one of the most fertile places on earth. This society was able to organize into an empire 990000 sq. Km large.

Another interesting feature that led to the empire's success was the country's lack of borders, Mr. Bradford explains that,

*“The archaeological evidence suggests that the tribe or tribes in this area had achieved some form of wealth and perhaps organization by the end of the ninth century, presumably involving some means of generating wealth and prestige by controlling some form of long distance exchange through their territory.”* (Bradford, 2001)

It would appear that the lack of natural borders and access to the Black Sea allowed the inhabitants to interact with the rest of the world. This allowed them to trade and prosper and increase their wealth.

On the other hand, Paul Robert Magocsi author of *“A History of Ukraine”*, says it best,

*“Ukraine’s lack any real natural boundaries, even the Carpathian Mountains, which in any case cover a very small area of Ukraine, contain several passes through which communication has been maintained. Lacking any natural geographic barriers, Ukraine has historically been open to all peoples, friendly or unfriendly, who might wish to come there.”* (Magocsi, 2010)

The open borders gave them wealth, but also opened them up to invaders. The constant threat of invaders in turn - led to the creation of forts, and these forts would become cities, (or as archaeologists call them, “emprias” (Bradford, 2001) and these cities would eventually become centers for administrative control.



We can conclude that the open borders of the east Slavic territory allowed them to organize more efficiently, to gain wealth and allowed them to exchange ideas - as evidence by their relationships with Christianity and a change in the burials. The fertile environment allowed for a rich agriculture which allowed them to grow in numbers giving them nonfood growing members of society, such as tax collectors used by Igor and soldiers that were used by Svjatoslav when he tried to expand his empire to Bulgaria. There were also merchants and artisans as evidenced by archaeological discoveries found in the stronghold cities.

## 5.2 West Slavs

The west Slavs live in the countries of Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia. But for the sake of convenience let's focus on the Slavs who migrated into the Czech Republic.

There are archaeological finds that date the Slavs in Bohemia as early as the 5th century. But more Slavs entered at the end of the fifth century and early sixth century from the region of Upper Oder and the Vistula. (Dvorník, 1959)

The Slavs entered the country at the time the Germanic tribes the Marcomanni and the Quadi were leaving, giving them the land of Bohemia. Of course, other Slavs kept pushing and some ended up in Slovakia and eventually Hungary, but more on that later. (Dvorník, 1959)

### 5.2.1 Geography

- Climate

The Czech Climate is temperate - with mild to hot summers and cloudy - humid winters. (myczechrepublic.com, 2018)

Jaroslav Pánek and Oldřich Tůma authors of "*A history of the Czech lands*" writes that when the Slavs migrated into the Czech lands it was exceptionally warm and humid. (Pánek, et al., 2009)

- Resources

The Czech land was mostly broadleaf forest with primeval forests around the mountains. Along with hunting and gathering wild fruits the Czechs could grow wheat, rye. They raised primarily pigs which could graze unattended in the wild oak forests. (Pánek, et al., 2009) There are also mines for silver, gold and copper.

- Area

The Czech Republic's size has changed over the years. Bohemia has natural borders which makes it easier to measure. Today it is 52,065 Km. Today Moravia is 22,349 sq. Km. However, the Great Moravia was much bigger, and its exact size is still debated today. In all the current territory of the Czech Republic is a small 78,866 sq. km. (Pánek, et al., 2009)

- Terrain Fragmentation

Historically the Czech land has been divided into two regions, Bohemia and Moravia. Bohemia takes up the western side and is very well defined by its natural borders, of mountains to the north, southwest and the west. (Bradford, 2001) There is a less obvious border separating Bohemia and Moravia.

The land of the Czech is flat, with a total of 22 rivers that flow away from the Czech lands, either to the North Sea or the Black Sea. Bohemia is mostly plains and hills and Moravia is also very hilly. (Pánek, et al., 2009)

- Isolation

The country is in fact landlocked. It also has a mountain range that acts as a border - which used to be covered by primeval forests. (Pánek, et al., 2009)

## 5.2.2 History

The land was large, and the people were few. They were able to grow wheat and rye easily, without much work or labor. Most of the cattle did not make the trip but they had many pigs which they could let roam wild in the oak forests unattended. They lived in half buried sod cabins with an oven in the corner. Other than houses there were no other buildings in a village. The decisions of the village were decided by diet of equal men. (Pánek, et al., 2009)

During the 6th and 7th centuries, Slavs fighters allied with the Avars moved into Bohemia and Moravia. They intermixed with the old Slavs already there and some Germans and formed the Czechs. (Pánek, et al., 2009)

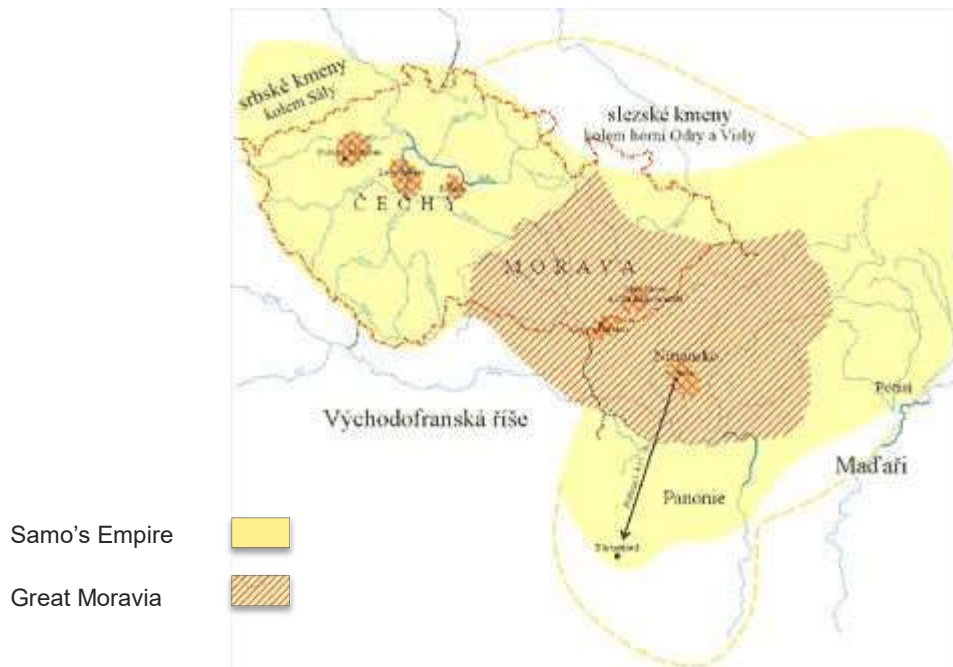
The Czechs soon wanted independence from the Avars. A Frankish merchant named Samo rose up and united the various tribes living in Bohemia and Moravia. Together they fought and gained independence. The confederation ended when Samo died in 658/659 and the tribes went back to their independent ways. (59) The Franks led by Charlemagne finished the fight and defeated the Avars in the years 791 to 805. (Pánek, et al., 2009)

This greatly helped the Slavic princes in the area of Moravia - the ones who lived on the Moravian River - in Mikulica, Uherske Hradiste and Olomouc. They invaded the Avars and took people, livestock and valuables - giving them the resources they needed to form a state. Mojmir I took control of the Moravian Slavic tribes *"breaking the power of the of tribal institutions"* as Tůma describes it. (66)

In 806, during their second battle the Franks invaded the Czech lands, subduing both the Bohemians and Moravians. (Pánek, et al., 2009)

However, Charlemagne's empire suffered internal struggles and the territory of Bohemia and Moravia fell to Louis the German. Fearful of an attack the Bohemians sought to convert to Christianity. Louis the German attacked Moravia and the Bohemians retaliated. (Pánek, et al., 2009) From this time onward, the Bohemians rebelled against the empire and rejected Christianity.

The new leader of Moravia, Rostislav was having good relations with Louis the German, but he was declined ecclesiastical help from the pope (67). So, he requested some priests from the current Pope in Byzantium. He was sent two brothers, Constantine and Methodius. They created a Slavic alphabet and a Slavic Bible. (Dvorník, 1959)



Picture 6: Somo's Empire and Great Moravia (mindomo.com)

*“The Byzantine missionaries were warmly welcome in Moravia and were easily able to out maneuver the Franks whose missionary methods the Slavs had grown to fear and hate.”* (Dvorník, 1959)

Then, Rastislav, the leader of Moravia, was betrayed by his nephew Svatopluk who betrayed him to the Franks. However, Svatopluk was also imprisoned in 870. The Moravians then rose up and Louis the German freed Svatopluk who then with his Moravian brothers fought against Louis the German pushing them back. (Pánek, et al., 2009)

But knowing it was only temporary Svatopluk made peace with Louis the German in 874. Svatopluk took advantage of this situation to grow his empire,

invading and forcing other Slavic tribes to convert to Christianity. By the year 880, he had acquired a great empire. He placed Premysl Borivoj, a Bohemian prince as his second in command and in charge of the Bohemian princes. (Pánek, et al., 2009) Before this the Bohemians were democratic. (Pánek, et al., 2009) controlled by "*strong but independent tribes.*" (Bradford, 2001)

Svatopluk died in 894 and his son Mojmir II took charge. In 906 the Moravian empire was destroyed by invading Magyars; the invaders withdrew to Slovakia, but the Moravian was utterly destroyed - even the ethnicity of the Moravians were destroyed. (Pánek, et al., 2009)

The Moravian Empire though not really impacting the history of the Czech lands, did change the foundation of the tribal society. For the first time Moravians lost their freedom and there was restriction of property rights and the tribal diet lost some of its decision-making power, but this relieved them of having to make difficult choices. In turn the princes did meet together with the ruler to discuss matters of the state shared in the administration. This well-organized administrative system helped create and equip a professional army. (Pánek, et al., 2009)

The Moravian empire changed Bohemia as well. In the beginning of the 9th century there were numerous and independent tribes located in the Bohemian basin. By the end of the ninth century these tribes were under the leadership of the Premyslid dynasty. (Bradford, 2001)

After the Moravian empire fell, the Bohemians joined with the Franks while the Great Moravian second in command, Premyslids still acted as the head of the Bohemian princes. Spytihnev, acting as the head of Bohemian princes-built castles using them as centers of state. However, the princes acknowledged his rule but still acted independently. (Pánek, et al., 2009)

Wenceslas would eventually be the heir to this position, but he did submit under the rule of King Henry in 929 (Pánek, et al., 2009).

Wenceslas was killed by his brother, Boleslav I in 935. He then destroyed all the other principalities creating a large unified state. He created a peace tax and was able to create his own money. He increased the army and moved a trade road from the Danube to Prague. He then invaded Moravia and increased his empire to Czech border with Kiev Russia. Fighting with Henry's, son Otto I finally submitted to him in 950. (Pánek, et al., 2009)

But after this the empire lost the territory of Silesia and then Boleslav II died in the year 999. Then the empire shrank in size, power and significance. However, in the year 1040 Bretislav who through lost battles and failed deals, lost land in the Czech lands he was able to “. Consolidate the Czech state very effectively within its borders, and these later would change only to a small extent in the following centuries.” (Pánek, et al., 2009)

Bohemia and Moravia would continue to unify and break apart again and again until the 13th century - when once again the Premyslid unified the country. (Bradford, 2001)

### 5.2.3 Culture

Bradford explains that in the ninth and tenth centuries there is an increase in the number of strongholds along a major river route, that connected northern and southern Europe through the Moravian gate. In these areas there is a new “metalwork” emerging with obvious Avar, and Carolingian influences. (Bradford, 2001)

As the Moravian empire grew in the 870s and 890s these areas became “urban centers” and with the influence of Christianity stone churches were constructed with inhumation cemeteries. The material culture is more advanced with more well-made pottery, more iron, more silver jewelry, etc.

Dvorník agrees, explaining that Christian and Byzantium influences found their way into crafts during the 8th and 9th centuries. This is seen in the bracelets, rings, golden earrings, buttons, necklaces and silver crosses and silver doves, which

Dvorník claims came from Byzantium. Moravia has become international and influenced by its neighbors. (Dvorník, 1959)

Bohemia early in the 9th century likewise was on an international trade route - with large tribal strongholds. In these strongholds there are “craft activities” (Bradford, 2001) Then in the second half of the ninth century these tribes began to unify under the Premyslid dynasty.

Bradford explains that the Premyslid Dynasty was able to unify the tribes not only because the Premyslid dynasty had the patronage of Svatopluk but because they were the strongest tribe located in the fertile farmlands on the confluence of Moldau, Elbe, Ohre, Berounka and Sazava rivers. (Bradford, 2001)

By looking at the culture we can conclude that Bohemia was less advanced than Moravia and while Moravia was able to unify into a great empire Bohemia was led by tribal princes. Even after Premyslid took over the other Bohemian tribes, Bradford says this, “*the Primacy of the Premyslid was acknowledged by the other Bohemian chiefs, but outside the relatively compact Premyslid realms other areas of Bohemia were still pagan and had a less well organized socio-political system*” (Bradford, 2001)

The changes in material culture are also products of the geography. Moravia with its open borders had more opportunities to learn from its neighbors while Bohemia with its natural borders had less opportunities.

#### 5.2.4 Conclusions

The climate and the resources of the Czech lands were strong and adequate enough for them to form craftsmen and metalworkers. However, the geography of the region, isolation and terrain fragmentation did influence Moravia and Bohemia’s abilities to organize politically, giving Moravia a stronger ability to organize than Bohemia. While the Moravians were able to unify and form a great empire, the Bohemians were democratically and independently governed by tribe leaders - the unification of the tribes of Bohemia were only possible because of the leadership of Moravia and the Premyslid dynasty. Bradford explains that the

success of the Premyslid dynasty was due to its fertile farmlands and its location on a well-traveled trade route. (Bradford, 2001)

The Premyslids were able by conquest to extend their rule over the territories of neighboring weaker tribes. The core of Premyslid territory was a zone of fertile farmlands about 60 km in diameter in the confluence of the Moldau, Elbe, Ohre, Berounka and Sazava rivers: from this center was to begin the territorial expansion leading to the formation of the Czech state under this dynasty. The central position of this territory at a major crossroads of trans-European trade routes and the productivity of the land were important factors in their increasing power. (Bradford, 2001)

Why was Moravia able to unify faster than Bohemia? This might be caused by Bohemia's smaller area and well-defined borders and in this way the Bohemians resemble the Morior on the isolated Chatham islands. The Bohemian tribes like the Morior were democratic as Tůma explains,

*"For many years now, the lands of the colonies had not been commonage: individual families owned them freeing and privately. This ownership and freedom was protected by the tribe which had been established not through some organic growth, but through the political decision of all free men, owners of the village."* (Pánek, et al., 2009)

And like the Morior the Bohemians lived in an isolated and small area (an area well defined by natural borders isolated them from all directions except in the direction of Moravia, forcing them to live to get along and not kill each other.

As Jared Diamond explains,

*"With no other accessible islands to colonize, the Morior had to remain in the Chathams, and to learn how to get along with each other. They did so by renouncing war, and they reduced potential conflicts from overpopulation by castrating some male infants. The result was a small unwarlike population with simple technology and weapons and without strong leadership or organization. "* (Diamond, 1997)



The isolation of Bohemia becomes more apparent when we see the differences in the craft work. Moravia has crafts from more places, showing a more international trade than Bohemia.

We can see that Moravia on the other hand had the special geographical qualities to unify. It was near the Moravian gate, which allowed it to benefit from the Avar defeat by Charlemagne, giving some tribes more resources than the others and to become stronger, allowing it to unify the others. Their political unification allowed them to create an “*independent ecclesiastical institution*”. (Pánek, et al., 2009) This in turn allowed for more cultural advancement.

However, the isolation granted the Bohemians from their mountains did protect them from the Magyar invasions the same invasion that utterly destroyed the Moravians. (Bradford, 2001)

The isolation of the Bohemians prevented them from unifying but saved them from invaders, while the close proximity to the outside world allowed the Moravians to gain strength at the expense of others and to develop culturally but brought upon their destruction just as quickly. A flame that burns brighter will burn out quicker than a dim flame.

As Tůma explains, quoting Frantisek Palacky, these borders will continue to exist, isolating Bohemia from the rest of the world and its history,

*“Nature itself, having completed and formed Bohemia as a particular unit, thus predetermined the main character of Czech history... distance from the sea, lack of great navigable lakes and rivers in the land, and that very wreath of border mountains which obstructs commerce and connection with the rest of Europe: these factors isolated Bohemia, and this lack of natural routes into the country was only compensated when artificial ones were carved out later.”* (Pánek, et al., 2009)

### 5.3 South Slavs

The South Slavs are the Slavs that migrated and settled in the modern-day countries of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia. This area has been historically named the Balkans.

There is linguistic evidence that places the Slavs in the Balkans by at least by the 2nd and 3rd century (Dvorník, 1959) Also the Roman writer Ammianus Marcellinus writes that in 334 A.D. the Sarmatian Iazyges, who were living in Hungary at the time, were defeated by their subjects, the Vendei. There are other account verifying the Slavs in this location before the fifth century. (Dvorník, 1959)

However, in the fifth and sixth century the Germans fled allowing the Slavs freedom to travel south and settle into the areas of Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia and Hungary. (Dvorník, 1959)

### 5.3.1 Geography

To explain the geography of the region a book called "*The Early Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from The Sixth to The Late Twelfth Century*", written by John A. Fine, will be used.

- Climate

The northern and central areas of the Balkans have a central European climate, meaning cold winters and warm summers with good rainfall. The southern areas have a climate that is characterized as "Mediterranean." They have hot, dry summers and mild rainy winters. (Fine, 1983)

- Resources

Fine describes this area as "underdeveloped." They exported pastoral products like cheese, and forest products, like wood, wax and honey.

The southern coastal warmer area can grow olive trees, citrus fruits and grapes. Thought not stated by Fine, it is safe to assume that these areas had access to fish and marine life. (Fine, 1983)

The northern area has "*sufficient rainfall for regular agriculture and the production of cereals*". Due to the similar climate to the Czech Climate we can assume that the resources of the northern Balkans resemble that of Bohemia and Moravia. (Fine, 1983)

- Area

The area is 257,400 square miles or 666,700 sq. Km. (Fine, 1983)

- Terrain fragmentation

The Balkans are extremely mountainous. Historically the mountains in the Dinaric formed a border between Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Montenegro, blocking Slavic tribes from Italian culture. Another mountain range called the Pindus divides the eastern and western parts of Greece. There are several mountains in the Peloponnesus and the Balkan mountain range go from east and west separating Bulagar from Thrace. The other mountain ranges run north and south, leaving an unprotected opening in the north of the Balkans. (Fine, 1983)

The Balkans are south of the Danube, Save, and Drava. (sciencedirect.com, 2018) Most of the rivers in the Balkans are not navigable except for the Danube, Sava, and the lower Neretva. There were some important roads that tended to follow the rivers, for example a road following the Neretva river. (Fine, 1983)

In addition to mountains, and rivers the terrain is further fragmented by *“plentiful thick forests. These forests historically provided refuge for criminals and highwaymen.”* (Fine, 1983)

There are a couple of mainland roads through the Balkans that went from south from the Danube. The other road went from modern day Albania to Constantible.

Despite these roads, the terrain is very fragmented. The rivers were often used as borders and the mountains, except for the Balkan range, were not very traversable isolating some areas of the Balkans from the other. (Fine, 1983)

### 5.3.2 Isolation

The Balkans are located on a peninsula surrounded by the Adriatic Sea to the west, the Mediterranean Sea and the Marma Sea to the south, and the Black Sea to the east. The sea and the rivers were some of the only access points to the outside world. There were some villages along the Neretva river that *“even to the present day many villages here have no land connections with the outside world and carry on all communication with it by boat.”* (Fine, 1983)

The Danube likewise was considered a border between civilization and barbarism, while at the same time was important for transporting goods.

As was previously stated, there were two important roads. One started in central Europe across the Danube, then it follows south along the Morava River to a city called Nis, where it split into an east road and a south road. The East road went to Constantinople, while the south road went to Athens. This road was both a trade route and an invasion route. This route was used by the Slavs when they invaded. The second major road started at the port of Durazzo in modern day Albania and went on to Constantinople. (Fine, 1983)

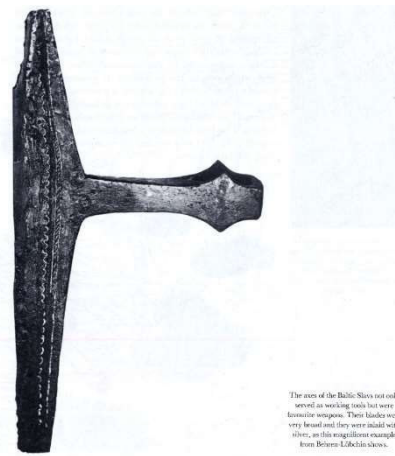
Some areas were not accessible by land but areas next to the trade routes and the sea were not so isolated. Mr. Fine explains that,

*“For territories near water, communications by the sea were more important than by land. It was by sea that foreign products reached the Balkan ports. ...In keeping with this, most of the largest Balkan cities in the middle ages were seaports.”*

(Fine, 1983)



Picture 7: A Ships of the Baltic Slavs, a wreck found at Ralswiek (Váňa)



Picture 8: The axes of the Baltic Slavs (Váňa)

The axes of the Baltic Slavs not only served as working tools but were likewise weapons. Their heads were very broad and they were inlaid with silver, as this magnificent example from Ralswiek-Libichin shows.

### 5.3.3 History and Migration

During the 5th and 6th century these eastbound Slavs came into their first contact with the East Roman Empire on the lower end of the Danube. They created settlements in modern day Wallachia, then they crossed the Danube in 517 and continued their expansion raiding Macedonia, Thessaly, Epirus and Illyricum. By 536 they had reached the shores of the Adriatic and the Dalmatian city of Salona. A Slavic tribe called the Antes eventually joined the ranks of the Byzantines. (Dvorník, 1959)

Then in the middle of the 6th century the Avars, defeated by the Turks in their home in Asia, traveled west. The Slavs in the areas of Wallachia and Illyricum were subjected by the rule of the Avars. The Antes rose up but were defeated but for the most part the southern Slavs accepted the rule of the Avars they adapted their dress and military tactics and joined in battles against the Byzantine Empire. There is one important difference between the Avar and the Slav battle strategy: the Avars were raiders while the Slavs would create settlements after defeating their opponents. (Dvorník, 1959)

The Slavs and the Avars continued, and by 578 they had invaded the Peloponnese and in 581 the Slavs had settlements in Greece. Finally, Emperor Maurice defeated the Avars and the Slavs and made peace, however in the years 592,600 and 602 the Slavs continued their expansion into the areas of Istria and Venetia, and Tagliamento in Italy. By the 7th century they had occupied the whole of Dalmatia. They also have invaded the Roman provinces of Moesia, Dacia, Dardania and Macedonia. (Dvorník, 1959)

The Slavs had migrated and settled from the whole territory from the Alps, to the Adriatic, to the Dobrudja on the Black Sea. At the end of the 6th century A.D. the Slavs and the Byzantine empire joined forces against the Avars. After defeating them the emperor gave them the lands that would eventually become Yugoslavia. (Dvorník, 1959)

Bulgars fleeing Khazars fled to modern day Bulgaria in 679 A.D. where they were welcomed by the Slavic tribes. The two joined forces. The Slavs had a bigger population while the Bulgars offered the political organization. This was the start of a Balkan empire. (Dvorník, 1959)

The two empires continued to fight until 775 when Byzantine Emperor Constantine V died leaving the Bulgarian empire alone. Bulgaria was able to hold onto this land and the leader of the Bulgarian Empire, the Bulgarian Khagans Krum made the throne hereditary and instituted legislation. (Dvorník, 1959)

When the Franks defeated the Avars, the Bulgars having already invaded Thrace and Macedonia, invaded a large part of Hungary. (Dvorník, 1959)

Mr. Bradford says that this was the first independent state in the Balkan Peninsula. (Bradford, 2001)

Charlemagne, the Emperor of the Franks after defeating the Avars in 796, took control of the Slavs in the area between the Danube and the Sava rivers, at this time these Slavs were already organized and ruled by a prince named Vojnomir, but they quickly submitted before the Franks. The Franks would eventually rule Slavs in Noricum in modern Carinthia and Styria in the Alps. They would also receive the Croatian region of Dalmatia and Istria. (Dvorník, 1959)

However, the Slavs in 816 revolted against the Franks, but the revolts were stopped. By the middle of the ninth century, the Balkans had 3 powers the Franks, Bulgaria, and Byzantium, all having different Slavic tribes under their command, wanting control over the other powers. (Dvorník, 1959)

The power of the east Franks declined by the end of the ninth century. Duke of the Dalmatian Croats, Tomislav (910-928) brought the Pannonian and Dalmatian Croats together. He assumed the title King of the Croats in 925. Later the Byzantine emperor Romanus gave him all the towns and islands of Dalmatia. Peter Kresimir IV (1058-1073) extended his territory to Narenta. (Dvorník, 1959)

There was another attempt to unify the Balkan Slavs under the Bulgarian rule of Samuel. His goals didn't come true because in 1014 Byzantine empire

defeated the Bulgars and Bulgaria would not emerge as an independent country until the 12th century. (Dvorník, 1959)

The southern Slavs never did unify into a single empire, rather they were divided and used by the other powers in the area.

#### 5.3.4 Culture

When Byzantine first saw Slavs, they described them as “wild” and “free.” they were not ruled by any one man, but rather lived democratically. Since they did not have any centralized governance tribes would often feud and fight each other. They were farmers who were on the move quite often. They did not keep slaves and lived near swamps and rivers. (Fine, 1983)

Benedictine Herold in his book “*The life of St. Otto of Bamberg*”, written in 1160 gives us another small glimpse into the Slavic life in the Pomerania. In the description he claims that everyone had their own house, which was clean and comfortable. Herbs were placed on the floor in order to sweeten the air. The table was always full of food and drink. The Slavs were also incredibly hospitable. (Herold in Bradford, 2001)

The Slavs reached the south of Greece in the 6th and 7th centuries. However, their settlements are hard to find. In the northern areas of the Balkans there are settlements dated to the late 7th and 8th centuries. (Bradford, 2001)

In the 7th centuries in this same area it seems that the Slavs stopped migrating and repaired the buildings instead of moving on. (Bradford, 2001)

The south Slav tribes were organized into something called a zupa, the basic form of territorial organization. In the 6th century the population around these zupas would increase. (Bradford, 2001)

In the 9th century the Slavic settlements in the south Slavic territories lost their traditional shape. They were open, unenclosed, rural settlements. Mr. Bradford explains,

*“Here the Slav settlement structure is based on unenclosed rural settlements and sparse occupation of walled towns and forts of Graeco-Roman origin. The Slavs in*

*this area seem to have been partially absorbed into preexisting social and agricultural systems and perhaps to some extent had not been able to (or felt no need to) express their communal affinity in this way as much as in the Slav colonization of the northern forest zones. They instead adopted the social models of the Romanized population they lived alongside.”* (Bradford, 2001)

Strongholds as well in the southern Slavs territories were not built. Small Slavic forts were built in Bulgaria, but these were “*modelled more on Byzantine patterns.*” (Bradford, 2001)

This is one trend of Slavic culture in the Balkans, that they would slowly disappear. The Bulgar invasion of 679 AD would help further erase the Slavic culture.

Bradford claims that when the Bulgars ruled over the Slavs, the Slavs retained their culture, their ethnic identity, language, and tribal leaders. However, the Slavs were resettled by Khan Omurtag (814 - 831) Many of the cultural patterns of the Bulgars became influenced by the Byzantine empire and the Slavs. Eventually by the 8th 9th century, the Slav tongue became the national language. (Bradford, 93) However after the resettlement the Slavs’ tribal boundaries broke down, creating a new ethnic identity. The Bulgarians overshadowed the Slavs, creating a new culture of Byzantine and Bulgur influence. (Bradford, 2001)

In Bulgaria the art and political organization did not have any Slavic influence. Though the Slavs outnumbered the Bulgars, the Bulgars were “*superior to their Slavic subjects not only in the military but also in the cultural sphere.*” (Bradford, 2001)

The buildings likewise, first were more Persian than Byzantine, but over time the two influences morphed, leaving out the Slavs entirely. (Bradford, 2001)

This happened politically as well. The Bulgars dominated the political organization, leaving no Slavic element of the political organization. Then by the second half of the 8th century, the chief of state called the khan, was called “by the



grace of god.” The ruler also wore purple shoes and robes mimicking the rulers of the Byzantine emperors. (Dvorník, 1959)

*“All this shows that the primitive Bulgars possessed a certain degree of civilization, a face which may have helped them in subduing the Slavic population.”* (Dvorník, 1959)

The Slavic elements in the Bulgarian empire disappeared. Bradford writes, *“The Byzantine influences on the organization and material culture of the Bulgar state became very clear in the 9th and 10th centuries.”* (Bradford, 2001)

Croatia was a different story. During the 9th and 10th century there are obvious signs of a Christian cultural influence, such as churches all over Dalmatian Croatia and Pannonian Croatia. Jewelry has also been found in old Croatian cemeteries. There is also local jewelry that native goldsmiths would develop later. (Dvorník, 1959)

Bradford and Dvorník both claim that Croatia was more influenced by the west than the east. When Tomislav became the ruler of Croatia he owed his allegiance to the Roman church and the churches used the Latin alphabet instead of the local one (Bradford, 2001), (Dvorník, 1959).

Dvorník claims that this is due to the proximity the Croats had to the Latin cities on the coast. In fact, he says that they developed bishops and other religious foundations faster than in Bohemia and Poland. Though influenced by the Roman church, the government was obviously influenced by Slavic foundations. They had a duke, who would later be a king. He did not have absolute rule. He had a diet of councilmen and he was expected to call a national assembly. Cities also had city councils, the presidents of which were elected by the people. The Duke had “Zupani” who would administer the different realms in Croatia. There was no court nobility. (Dvorník, 1959)

In Croatia, the Slavs seem to be more or less self-governed and the government is more or less based on tribal organization. The buildings and jewelry show a more Christian influence than a Slavic one.

The Slavic culture would continue to exist but in pockets. Some parts of the Slavic culture existed in Dalmatia. Mr. Fine explains that the Slavs in the city tried to save their culture, which is why in the 15th century Dubrovnik made laws decreeing Italian to be the official language in order to break down the Slavic culture. (Fine, 1983)

Slavs in a town called Nis were able to protect some of their identity. Nis was Byzantine in structure but in the countryside the Slavs were able to hold onto some of their culture. Many cultural influences made it into the towns and the surrounding hinterlands but the Slavs living in the hinterlands “... did not allow themselves to be Latinized” (Fine, 1983)

### 5.3.5 Conclusions

How did the geography of the Balkan areas influence the Slavic migrants? In the 6th century, as was already stated, the population of the Slavs increased, and they lived in dense communities.

The denser the population the more complex the society. There were plenty of nonfood producing specialists in the society, which led to the creation of churches, governments officials, blacksmiths, and soldiers. The climate was good for agriculture which in turn created a strong organized society.

The area of the Balkans is 666700 sq. Km. This is slightly bigger than Ukraine. It was a large enough area for the people to grow, and like the Maori to grow different societies to compete with each other, as is seen with the three large powers of the Franks, Bulgars and Byzantines, each living and competing in the same area.

The area of the Balkans is quite large, but also very fragmented. There are several mountain ranges and unnavigable rivers. These created natural borders between states in the area, for example, the east-west Balkan mountain range “*formed the border between the Bulgarian state and the Byzantine Empire*” (Fine, 1983)

The rivers acted as borders as well. The river Drina was a border to Bosnia and Serbia. The Danube was also historically seen as the border between barbarism and civilization. The Dinaric mountain range as well isolated the countries Bosnia, Herzegovina and Montenegro forming a border against the Italian culture of the coast. (Fine, 1983)

Travel by sea and water was easier than traveling by land. In the case of Croatia, it was easier to travel across the Adriatic Sea to Italy. We see more Italian western Roman influences in Croatia than Byzantine despite Byzantine being closer. (Fine, 1983)

When the Slavs invaded the ports were able to guard against them behind their walls and were able to receive everything they needed through the sea. There are also of pockets of Slavic culture in the hinterlands, while the cities remain culturally connected to either the Byzantine, or Roman Catholic, as was already explained in the example of Nis and Dalmatia. (Fine, 1983)

The terrain was so fragmented that it was easier to travel by sea than by land. The fragmented society is the reason why the Slavs were not able to unify. Mr. Fine explains:

*“The mountains, by isolating people and encouraging localism, have hindered the development of states. They contributed to the fact that the South Slavs never created a single united nation state in the Balkans, and they impeded the unification of individual peoples.”* (Fine, 1983)

As Jared Diamond explained the terrain fragmentation prevents people from unifying into a single political unit. This is true with the South Slavs not being unified caused them to lose their Slavic identity to be replaced by whatever dominant culture was in the area, be it the Bulgarian, Byzantine or Italian. (Diamond, 1997)

To conclude the geography of the Balkans hindered the culture and political formation of the Slavs. The terrain of the Balkans separated the Slavs from each

other easing their culture significance while at the same time giving them access to other domineering cultures. The geography was fragmented but not isolating.

## 6 The geographical influences on Slavic societies

Let's examine how the geography affected the Slavs after they migrated. We will use Jared Diamond's geographical variables and examine how each variable changed the Slavs society.

### 6.1 Area

The size of the area impacted the structure of their societal organization. In the Slavic homeland they lived in semi nomadic independent tribal societies. No one tribe ruled over another. Important decisions were reached democratically. As the Slavs migrated away this power structure changed.

How does the size of the area impact the societal organization? The bigger the area the more competitors and the more likely that one people group can overpower the others. The smaller the area, the less competitors and the less likely that one group of people will overpower the others leaving the inhabits at a political standstill.

This was the case with the Jared Diamond's Morior who lived in the Chatham islands an area too small for one tribe to overpower the others, forcing them to resolve all conflicts peacefully. (Diamond, 1997)

#### 6.1.1 East Slavs

At its height the Kievan state was 990,000 sq. Km an area quite large, large enough to support both any invading force and the Slavs, first it was the Sarmatians, then the Scythians, then the Goths, then the Huns, then the Bulgars and the Khazars and finally the Scandians who created the Kiev empire. (Magocsi, 2010)

The area was so too large to defend, allowing others to invade and take power. There were no external forces to prevent them from invading and creating an empire ruled by elites.

### 6.1.2 West Slavs

The same thing happened in Moravia, where after the defeat of the Avars by the Franks. With the Avars defeated the Moravians were free to increase the area of their empire and overtake the Bohemians and several others creating the Moravian empire.

The same forces were against the Bohemians, whose area was kept small by the mountains and the forests on the border of their territory. They retained the tribal organization that they had in the Slavic homeland because no one tribe could get enough force and space to overpower the others, at least not until the Moravians used the Premyslid tribe to break down the tribal organization.

### 6.1.3 South Slavs

The Balkan peninsula was 470,000 sq. Km, large enough in fact to support three large powers fighting for control, the Franks, Bulgaria and Byzantium. On a much smaller scale there was Croatia. (Fine, 1983)

Croatia was in a similar situation to Bohemia. They were governed by a Duke, but his rule was not absolute and would call a diet when he wanted to make a ruling. Presidents of cities were also democratically elected. The kingdom of Croatia was by the 11th century 110,000 sq. Km. (Fine, 1983)

The empire of Bulgaria would become one of the biggest empires. In 830, it was 593,000 Km sq. and it would grow to 487,000 sq. Km (Atlas of Europe in the Middle Ages", Ostrovski, Rome, 1998, page 64) Bulgaria of course would never become democratic, it was ruled by a king.

## 6.2 Terrain fragmentation

Extreme terrain fragmentation can separate a people, or it can unify those of different cultures. Terrain fragmentation creates the boundaries of a society and a people, unifying those on the same side and separating those on opposite sides.

### 6.2.1 East Slavs

As previously stated the East Slav territory was extremely flat, consisting of vast plains and plateaus. As a response there were no boundaries to Slavic unification. The culture was uniform throughout the territory depending on the ruler at the time and with the use of the rivers it was easy for the empire to administer over a wide area.

### 6.2.2 West Slavs

Other than the mountains on the border the area of modern day Czech Republic was mostly flat. Did it help unify the people? Yes and no. If the Czechs were forced to unify by external force they did, but the area was too small for one tribe to overpower the others. There was the case of Samo, who did unify the Bohemia in order to fight off the Avars, but this unification was short lived. There was no external force keeping it together.

The culture was uniform except for the differences between Moravia and Bohemia. After the defeat of the Avars Moravia had a bigger space to unify allowing it to embrace a state religion. This changed its culture from pagan to Christian. It also had the strength to overpower Bohemia as there is no geographical boundary between the two.

### 6.2.3 South Slavs

The terrain of the Balkans is very fragmented. This prevented the southern Slavs from unifying and it divided their culture. Rather than unifying the Slavs were split and controlled by whatever dominant culture invaded them.

## 6.3 Isolation

Isolation's effect on a society is very similar to terrain fragmentation. However, it doesn't unify a people rather it further divides them. The Morior were isolated on the Chatham islands. This prevented them accessing new ideas, new technologies and new cultures. If the area is too small for them to unify they will live in a forced peaceful coexistence further giving them no reason to develop better and stronger fighting technology.

### 6.3.1 East Slavs

The east Slavs were not isolated. They lived with open borders and they had access to the Black Sea. This opened up their society to innovative technologies and new markets allowing them to grow rich and access to new cultures such as eastern Orthodoxy.

The constant threat of attack also helped them develop cities, as they were constantly attacked they sought protection in their Slavic strongholds which over time became permanent settlements and then wealthy cities. These cities existed independently of whatever empire was ruling at the time.

In conclusion the open borders of the East Slavic land changed the semi nomadic, tribal pagan society of the Slavs into a centralized, wealthy Christian empire.

### 6.3.2 West Slavs

The Slavs of the modern day Czech Republic were split between the Bohemians and the Moravians. The Bohemians were isolated by mountains and forests and the Moravians were less isolated as they had no clear borders. This had a strong effect on their societies.

The Bohemians, much like Jared Diamond's Morior, were isolated from the rest of the world. This protected them from invasions, like the Mygar invasion but

also prevented them from developing as complex a culture as the Moravians because they were not exposed to new ideas.

The Moravians on the other hand were not isolated and had several invasions and different rulers at different times. This did help them create an empire after their borders were opened up following the defeat of the Avars exposing them to new ideas as their culture became more advanced than that of the Bohemians.

The isolation of the Bohemians kept their Slavic nature intact. In the outskirts of their land they were still pagan and weren't as politically organized as the Moravians.

### 6.3.3 South Slavs

The Slavs of the Balkans were not isolated, as the Bohemian's society remained Slavic due to its isolation, the Bulgarian Slavic culture was mostly destroyed because of its open borders. The Bulgars invaded the Slavic tribes in modern day Bulgaria. Over time the culture and the society became predominantly Bulgarian and Byzantine. The Slavs were no longer pagan and no longer organized by tribes.

The Croatian Slavs on the other hand still held onto some of their Slavic identity. They were self-governed and retained their democratic tribal organization but culturally they were more alike to the Italians to the west as they converted to western Christianity.

## 6.4 Climate and Resources

The climate and the resources of an area contribute to the people's ability to grow food. It contributed to the success of the Maori and to the hindrance to the Morori. The warmer climate of northern New Zealand helped the Maori to grow more food and to increase the population density. It then helped create a food surplus which allowed non-food-producing specialists to develop in the society,



such as soldiers, craftsmen and political leaders. Thus, the more food surplus the more complex the society.

Farming across the Slavic world has been constant though the West, East and South Slavs. Each Slavic society had developed complex farming techniques which enabled them to develop food surplus. Mr. Bradford explains,

*“The farming of the Slavs, even allowing for some regional differences, seem in general to follow much the same pattern over most of the area which they settled and may be discussed here as a whole. In many areas there seems to have been development of farming techniques in the period between the initial expansion and the tenth century, and we see a gradual improvement in (and new types of) agricultural tools. To some extent the improvement of crop yields which these changes brought allowed the accumulation of surplus, which is one of the preconditions of the rise of more complex social organizations.”* (Bradford, 2001)

Farming techniques unlike the other geographic variables have been constant throughout the Slavic world. It did not change in the territories of the west, east or south Slavs. All the Slavs had the means to create a complex society.

However, the Slavs may not have changed but the climate was different in all the West, South, East territories. The west Slavs in the Czech lands lived in a central European climate. The south Slavs lived in a Mediterranean climate and the east Slavs lived in northern Europe which had a climate more alike to Canada than to the rest of Europe. All of these Climate zones were well suited for agriculture and it appears that no Slavic people were hindered by a lack of food surplus.

## 7 Conclusion

What effect does geography have on a society? In the case of the Slavs it changed them pagan to Christian. It changed the Moravians and Eastern Slavs from a tribal society to an empire. In the case of Bohemia, it can preserve a culture or in the case of the Bulgarian Slavs it can destroy a culture. Geography is a stronger unifying force than culture or language as was the case with the Bulgarian Slavs. It can unite a nation with its enemies and divide it from its friends. It can isolate a nation from the world, as in Bohemia or it can make it the center of the world as the case with the East Slavs. Geography can make a democracy or an empire. It can give a people the strength to overtake their enemies as was the case with the Moravians or it can make them weak. The better question might be what aspect of society does Geography not have control over?

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