

## Abstract

Agriculture makes its first appearance in human history about 12 000 - 5 000 years ago. Around that time, people took to a sedentary way of life so they could primarily till the land and grow the grains which they had come to know in their wild varieties. This new way of life gradually changed the social and cultural order. A return to primeval living was not impossible, though.

Before the Slavs arrived on the territory of what is today Moravia and Bohemia, various Indo-European tribes had already pursued agriculture in our part of the world, chief among them the Celts and the Germans. The Slavs, which came from the eastern part of Europe, probably in the second half of the 6th century, built upon the farming of these erstwhile peoples. After the rise and fall of proto-states, for which evidence has survived only in the case of Great Moravia, an early Bohemian state took hold. In the local culture, grain played an indispensable role. Farming was the main livelihood of the entire populace. Crops of choice at the time were millet, einkorn, and emmer wheat, which gradually gave way to common wheat and barley. The land was tilled with wooden hoes which merely cut furrows in the soil. The grain, which was harvested using sickles, was stored in pits in the ground. To improve digestibility of the grain for humans, it was milled to flour. This purpose was initially served by rotating hand mills, and as of the 12th century by large mills powered by water wheels. The grain-based diet was overall very simple. Only noblemen and the sovereign could afford to eat food, e.g. meat dishes, that was superior to bread and gruel. Prior to the inception of the Czech state and during its early years, grain-related pagan symbolism hold sway in this part of the world. For more than two centuries, Christian priests strived to eradicate this symbolism, though grain has its own prominent place in Christian imagery as well.

The arrival of monastic orders in the Bohemian lands had a beneficial impact on the further development of farming. The advancing agricultural colonization of this part of the world improved the economic situation of the principalities. During the period from the 10th – 12th century, Bohemia became known as the granary of Western Europe. However, the majority of the population lived in constant fear of hunger. The cultivation of common wheat, barley, and millet was supplemented with rye and buckwheat. The crooked plow came into use for plowing. The diet of commoners did not change all that much. Bread was the staple of villagefolk. On special occasions, e.g. pies would be baked. Soup, and of course gruels, were also a mainstay of period cooking.

The period between the 13th and the 15th century was rather tumultuous, and brought a number of political subversions and changes within the system of sovereign rule. Cities were built at an unprecedented scale, which began to compete with nobility and peasantfolk and created massive pressure towards increased grain output. Ploughs replaced the crooked hoe as the main instrument for working the soil. This was an agricultural revolution, magnified by the introduction of the three-field crop rotation. The cultivation of rye supplanted that of common wheat, which had previously been planted primarily for those who could not afford more valuable grains. The first cook book appears. The 13th century may be called a century of famines – famines which also ravaged during the Hussite Wars and religious conflicts up until the end of the Jagellon dynasty. The baker's trade blossomed primarily in cities, as people in villages gave preference to their domestic products. Finally, Christian culture offers a not insignificant amount of grain-related symbolism.

**Key words:**

grain, culture, symbolism, nutrition, Bohemian lands