

*P. M. Barford***SLAVS BEYOND JUSTINIAN'S FRONTIERS**

The problem of the so-called «ethnogenesis» of the Slavs is one which has long been subject to scholarly debate in central and eastern Europe. Over the past century, it may even be said to have become one of the dominant themes of the study of the past of this region. Even in recent years, much of the argument on this subject has however failed to develop from the text-driven culture historical positions reached several decades ago, often within some form of a nationalist agenda. A book published in 2001 offered a new approach to the problem of the emergence of a Slavic ethnicity in south central Europe between c. 500 and 700 AD. Its author was Florin Curta, a young American specialist in the Early Medieval period who was equally at home with the minutiae of the archaeological sources as well as the written material. In a novel way, Curta's book examined the issue from the perspective of current anthropological theory concerning the relationship between material culture and ethnicity and amalgamating the results of current archaeological and historical source criticism¹. The book is notable for the breadth of vision which allows a synthesis of the evidence from both sides of the Danubian limes to give a holistic view of the cultural and social processes taking place in that region, and showing the complexities inherent in such a frontier zone. The range of evidence utilised and the manner in which they are employed are impressive, and the author's arguments are persuasive².

While other writers have suggested that the relatively sudden appearance of the Slavs in the East Roman written sources of the early sixth century reflect the movement (migration) of groups of Slavs into the area of the Danubian Plain from an *Urheimat* elsewhere, Curta argues that the phenomenon in fact reflects the formation of a new barbarian ethnic identity in the shadow of the limes in response to Justinian's policies on the Danube frontier and in the Balkans. The changing

¹ *Curta F.* The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, c. 500–700. Cambridge; New York, 2001.

² The present discussion summarizes some of the current conclusions of a larger work in progress, no attempt has been made in the space allowed here to provide an exhaustive bibliography of all the topics touched upon, most of the works cited have extensive bibliographies citing earlier work.

political situation outside the northern limes and armed inroads inside the Empire in the first half of Justinian's reign led East Roman and Byzantine authors to create a name for this new grouping, and they began using names such as Sclavenes and Antes in order to make sense of the process of group identification that was taking place north of the Danube frontier. Curta thus shows Slavic ethnicity to be in some sense a Byzantine invention. The book takes as its starting point the time when East Roman writers begin to notice and name the Sclavenes and Antes, c. 500 AD. His discussion concludes with the earliest Slav settlement assemblages south of the Danubian frontier, which despite earlier dates claimed for them, should probably be assigned to the period after 700 AD.

The book's focus on the creation of a «Sclavonic» ethnicity area around the Danubian frontier region unfortunately prevents us from learning the author's views on the «making» of the Slavs (Slavic-speaking communities) further afield, in Poland and Bohemia for example. The problem here is that «the Slavs» is as much a linguistic concept as an ethnic or archaeological one, and linguistic and other types of evidence seem to show that Slavic languages were being spoken over a wide area of east-central Europe by the ninth century at the latest³. Curta gave this question some consideration in a later thought-producing text where he considers the role of the Slavic languages as a lingua franca and the contribution of the «nomad» peoples (in particular the role of the Avars)⁴. These provide a model to explain the spread of an early form of Slavic over a wider area, though the author himself admitted this still does not completely resolve all the issues raised by the linguistic and archaeological evidence.

Nevertheless, despite these problems, the novel and thorough approach of Curta's «Making of the Slavs» have a great deal to offer the scholar interested in many aspects of the history and historiography of Early Medieval eastern and southeastern Europe and the study of past ethnicities. One of the author's achievements is to break out of the circular and sometimes vicious academic arguments that have developed in central and Eastern Europe about these topics. These have their origin in part in the achievement of what may be seen as a stalemate in the linguistic research into the interpretation of the limited linguistic data⁵. Another source of conflict has been the continual use of the outdated culture historical model of archaeological (or rather artefactological) research which for some decades have substituted for academic discussion in much eastern European work on the topic⁶. Curta treats the spread and use of languages, the creation of an identity and socio-economic changes as processes occurring within societies, and this is one of very few attempts to examine the problem of the origin of the Slavs from the viewpoint of newer approaches in archaeology and historiography.

As a consequence of accepting the determinations of nineteenth century comparative linguists about the common origin of all today's Slavic languages in a single compact region as a proven fact (see below), the problem has long been seen in eastern European historiography as the search for an *Urheimat* from which the migration of the Slavs would have begun. Snippets of various types of information were used to identify the nuclear area where «Common Slavic» was spoken and thence transported by the movement of peoples. An extraordinary reliance was placed on the

³ Barford P. M. *The Early Slavs: Culture and Society in Early Medieval Eastern Europe*. London; New York, 2001.

⁴ Curta F. *The Slavic lingua franca (linguistic notes of an archaeologist turned historian) in East Central Europe* // *Europe du Centre-Est*, 2004. Vol. 31. Part 1. P. 125–148.

⁵ Popowska-Tuborska H. *Wczesne dzieje Słowian w świetle ich języka*. Wrocław, 1991.

⁶ E.g.: Cień Światowita: czyli pięć głosów w sprawie etnogenezy Słowian / Red. A. Kokowski. Lublin, 2002; *Archeologia o początkach Słowian: Materiały z konferencji, Kraków 19–21 listopada 2001* / Red. P. Kaczanowski, M. Parczewski. Kraków, 2005.

few words classical authors devoted to the region, overinterpreted and rendered almost scriptural reverence. Archaeologists strained to identify specific types of material culture which would seem to have been transported along with the migrating people. Linguists attempted to pit one theory of linguistic development against another in order to identify a region with the earliest river names, or find loan words which suggested movement from one area to another. All these efforts shared an underlying assumption that both cultural identity and language were specific to a fixed group of people and were carried as a cultural package only by their migration. It was rare however to find these assumptions being questioned in the discussion of the so-called Slavic «ethnogenesis». Each separate discipline competed to be the only one regarded as entitled to solve the issue, but this led to a fragmentation of approach.

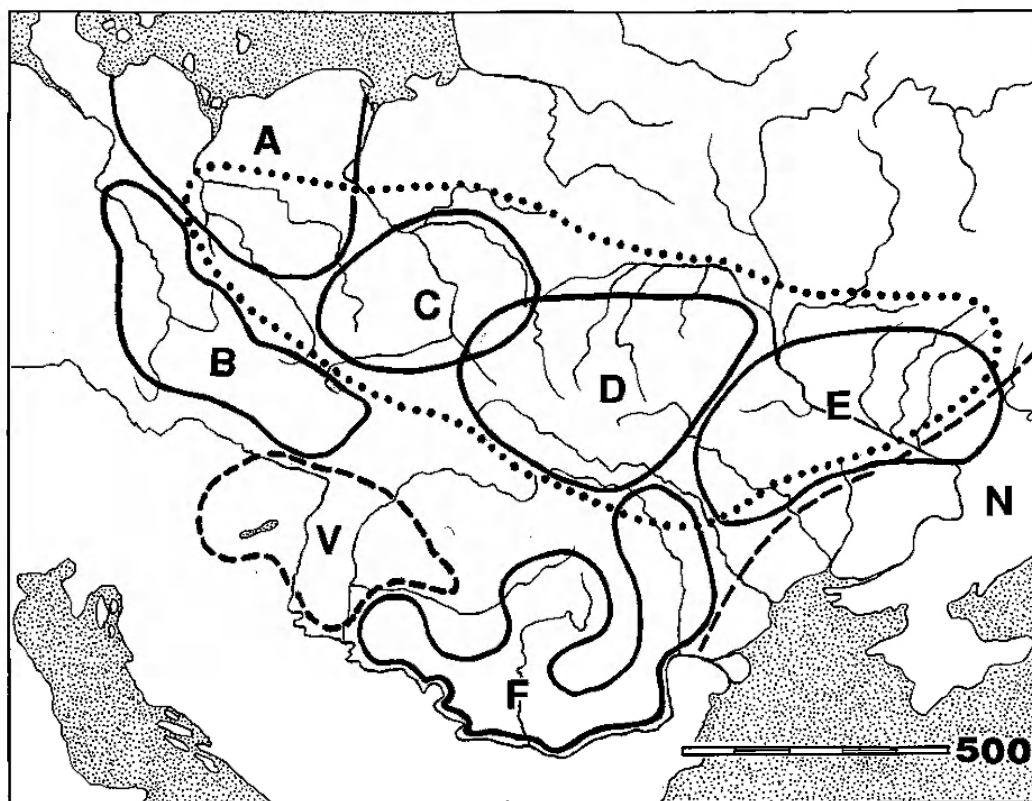
As Nichols reminds us «the question of language spreads is a sociolinguistic one by definition»⁷. Instead of a simplistic model of an ethnic movement from a specific localised area, a model of the spread of a language as a complex linguistic process linked to other social change such as the one Curta defines places the discussion on a new footing. A discussion of where the earliest forms of the Slavic languages were spoken is not restrained by the need to see the same area as the discrete *Urheimat* of the entire «Slavic people». Nevertheless the Slavic languages did not materialise from nowhere in the sixth century AD, they clearly have developed from earlier forms spoken somewhere, the result apparently of the differentiation and developments of prehistoric Indo-European forms.

Of the various attempts to identify the area in which there is surviving evidence for being the area in which the earliest forms of Slavic were spoken, those involving the hydronyms seem particularly interesting. Several linguists have analysed surviving river names of ancient origin in depth and come to a number of (sometimes mutually conflicting) conclusions. Nevertheless, despite differences of opinion, there is a diffuse zone (dotted line on Fig.) which contains the majority of the river names claimed as the most archaic⁸. This «Archaic Slavic Hydronymy Zone» stretches from the upper Severskij⁹ Doniets in the east to the middle Odra in the west and overlaps with the zone of Baltic and Iranian river names. Outside this area, current linguistic research claims there are no archaic Slavic hydronyms (it has been suggested by some scholars that there are Archaic Slavic hydronyms in Pannonia, but this has been shown by Udolf to not be the case⁹). It seems entirely reasonable to assume that this is in whole or part the region in which the earliest forms of the Slavic languages developed from other Indo-European forms, though we can only speculate when this might have been. Certainly it would be mistaken to attempt to associate the river names of Archaic Slavic type with any specific archaeological cultures. More importantly, neither can we assume that there was only one proto-Slavic language spoken across the area containing these names (still less that it would be possible to define any one part of it as an *Urheimat* from which all the Slavic nations have their origin). A large part of this zone (particularly at its western end) had been occupied from the second century BC by archaeological cultures of

⁷ Nichols J. The linguistic geography of the Slavic expansion // American contributions to the Eleventh International Congress of Slavists, Bratislava, August-September 1993, Literature, Linguistics, Poetics / Ed. by R. A. McGuire, A. Timberlake. Columbus, Ohio, 1993. P. 378.

⁸ Трубачев О. Н. Названия рек правобережной Украины. М., 1968; Udolf J. Studien zu Slawischen Gewässernamen und Gewässerbezeichnungen: Ein betrag zur Frage nach Urheimat der Slawen. Heidelberg, 1972; Babik Z. Najstarsza warstwa nazewnictwa na ziemiach polskich w granicach wczesnośredniowiecznej Słowiańszczyzny. Kraków, 2001; Popowska-Taborska H. Wczesne dzieje Słowian... S. 36–48 and refs.

⁹ Udolf J. Kamen die Slaven aus Pannonien? // Studia nad etnogenezą Słowian i kulturą Europy wczesnośredniowiecznej. Cz. I / Red. G. Labuda, S. Tabaczyński. Warszawa, 1987. S. 168–173 and refs.



Distribution of selected archaeological cultures in Eastern Europe (sixth and seventh centuries AD). The dotted line defines the zone containing the Archaic Slavic hydronyms: A — Sukow Culture, B — Prague Culture, C — Central Polish groups, D — Korchak Culture, E — Penkovka Culture, F — Slavs on Eastern and Southern flanks of the Carpathians and Danubian Plain, V — Early Avar polity, N — Other nomad groups.

«Germanic» aspect (also attested in some written sources), while the rest was affected by the establishment of the «Gothic hegemony» (early third century BC to the Hunnic invasion of the 360s).

Until some time before the mid sixth century, when they appear before the eyes of the East Romans on the Danubian plain, it would seem that Slavic speaking groups were separated from the Roman world by three to five hundred kilometres of steppe, forest steppe and mountains, parts of which at least were already populated by other groups much more familiar to the classical world. In such circumstances, not even the most optimistic national historian in a search for ancestors who were part of the world of Classical antiquity should feel justified in expecting classical writers to be able to impart much in the way of reliable information about such distant communities. However unpalatable that may be to national pride, it has to be admitted that the ancient ancestors of modern Slavic states were in fact simply invisible to the classical world.

At some stage, some Slavic speaking groups, probably together with other populations, moved south and southwest to the areas faced by Justinian's frontiers. There is no evidence from the region (under relatively close observation especially in the period of existence of the Roman

province of Dacia) that there had been any Slavic speaking communities in this area prior to that. What had precipitated this movement must remain unresolved. Perhaps some Slavic speaking groups moved south relatively unnoticed by the Romans under the hegemony of the Huns, for example during the events connected with the collapse of the pre-existing («Gothic») systems and the ascendancy and fall of the empire of Attila. The collapse and rise of political systems from the last decades of the fourth century may have led to significant changes in settlement pattern in the region along the eastern and southern flanks of the Carpathians, creating opportunities for new groups to move into the regions. This was after all the *Volkerwanderungszeit*. This is obviously a topic for further investigation, in particular of changes in settlement pattern.

Certainly by the first part of the reign of Justin I, Slav raiding parties were noticeable to the Romans along part of the Danubian frontier¹⁰. Even so, it should be noted that close reading of the surviving sources shows that the East Roman writers seem to have had a relatively foggy idea where the territory of the Sclaveni actually ended and had very little idea about the geographical and ethnic realities north of the Carpathians.

As a result of the consolidation of Slavic settlement down the east flanks of the Carpathians and along the Danubian Plain during the first part of Avar hegemony in the region (560s to the 620s), by the beginning of the seventh century Slavic communities had somehow become a significant if not necessarily dominant component of a triangular zone extending from the Tisza to the Danube estuary and Podolia in the north (Fig., area F).

To the north, in the eastern part of the zone in which Archaic Slavic hydronymy is present, the archaeologist discerns the development (by the mid sixth century, though some scholars suggest that the process may have begun as early as the late fifth century AD) of the Korchak and Penkovka cultures which few scholars doubt were the material correlates of Slavic speaking groups (Fig., D and E). The precise origin of these cultural entities still remains unclear. Archaeological study has attempted to trace the origins of the material culture of these groups by linking its constituent elements to those of pre-existing groups, mostly on the fringes of Wielbark expansion (for example the Kievan and Carpathian Kurhans Culture). It is however quite tempting to see the dominance and expansiveness of this post-Cherniakhovo material culture as the reflection of a the emergence and consolidation of a «communicative community»¹¹, and presumably (since following this there seems to be clear cultural continuity in the region with later groups who we know were Slavic speaking) one element of this was the use of a form or forms of a Slavic language. Whether or not this was wholly indigenous to the region and how it was affected by the processes represented by the appearance and demise of the archaeological Wielbark and Cherniakhovo cultures is difficult to say.

In adjacent areas of Barbaricum, there were other changes apparently caused by the weakening of influences emanating from the Roman empire. At the same time as Slavic-speaking communities were spreading southwards along the eastern flanks of the Carpathians, further to the north the western parts of the zone containing the Archaic Slavic hydronyms were deeply affected as the Germanic settlement structure collapsed¹². At some stage archaeological cultures very similar

¹⁰ Curta F. *The Making of the Slavs...* P. 74–119.

¹¹ Cf.: Zabrocki L. *Wspólnoty komunikatywne w genezie i rozwoju języka niemieckiego: 1. Prehistoria języka niemieckiego*. Wrocław, 1963.

¹² Goduowski K. *Ziemia polski w okresie wędrowek ludów // Barbaricum*. 1989. T. I. S. 12–63; Maczynska M. *Zanik kultury przeworskiej // Archeologia o początkach Suowian: Materiały z konferencji, Kraków 19–21 listopada 2001*. S. 157–163; Kaczanowski P. *Przemiany osadnicze na ziemiach polskich u schyłku starożytności // Ibid.* S. 215–227.

in aspect to the Korchak Culture start to appear in this region, first in southeastern Poland (the Mogila Group on the fringes of the Carpathians from the early sixth century).

Similar archaeological cultures then appear in the northwest part of the Carpathian basin, beyond the zone where the archaic Slavic hydronyms had been found. The date of the consolidation of Slavic settlement of Bohemia is still unclear, though communities in Moravia may have adopted Slavic culture patterns as early as by the middle or second half of the sixth century¹³. These processes led to the emergence of the Prague Culture by the second half of the sixth century¹⁴. It is still unclear to what extent the appearance of material culture assemblages of Slav type in the Prague culture area might represent the movement of Slavic speaking communities from the north (across the Carpathians probably through the Moravian Gate) or whether the adoption of these languages and material culture forms were developments among an autochthonous population. In the present state of knowledge, both mechanisms would raise more questions than they can answer, and this problem also still requires further investigation.

Eventually an archaeological culture of similar general character then appears on sites in the northwestern part of the zone containing the Archaic Slavic Hydronyms (the Sukow Culture: Fig. A). Recent work suggests this had not begun much earlier than the last decades of the seventh century¹⁵. The archaeological remains of this culture differ in several respects (principally in house type and burial rite) from those of the other Early Slavic culture groups of the period.

There is little direct evidence for the relationship between Slav communities and nomadic peoples on the Pontic steppe and Danubian Plain in the sixth century. There may have been Slavic-speaking groups among the warriors led by the Kutrigur Zabergan (558/9), but if there were, there is no mention of this in the sources. There is however rather more evidence of interactions between Slavic-speaking groups and Avars who first appeared on the Danubian plain in about 560¹⁶. The cultural group we label as «Avars» was probably a fluid polity¹⁷ which had grown out of the accretion of new elements to a successful and intrusive nomad horseman core group. The final phase of the formation of the Avars would have taken place on contact with the Roman limes and diplomacy on the Pontic steppes and Danubian plain. In the case of the latter area it may even have incorporated substantial numbers of Slav-speaking communities already settled in the area.

By the first decades of the seventh century we see Slavic raiders penetrating deep into the Balkans accompanied by their families (evidenced by near-contemporary written sources such as *Miracles of St Demetrius* Book II), this suggests that the Slavic communities over a wider area of

¹³ *Barford P. M.* The Early Slavs... P. 54.

¹⁴ *Curtis F.* The Prague type: A critical approach to pottery classification // *Archaeologia Bulgarica*. 2001. Vol. 5. Nr 1. P. 73–106; *Barford P. M.* The Early Slavs... P. 64. — See now: *Dulinič M.* Wczesnosłowiańskie obiekty archeologiczne na południu od Karpat, Sudetów i Rudaw datowane metodami bezwzględny // *Archeologia Polski*. 2007. T. I.II. S. 81–130. — The term «Prague Culture» is used here to refer to a specific cultural group with a relatively narrow geographical range south of the Carpathians and extending northwards only along the Elbe and for an as yet undetermined extent through the Moravian Gate. This is in contrast to many eastern European scholars who have come to use the term as a synonym for all «Early Slav» archaeological cultures (see for example papers in: *Archeologia o początkach Słowian: Materiały z konferencji*, Kraków 19–21 listopada 2001).

¹⁵ *Dulinič M.* Kształtowanie się Słowiańszczyzny Północno-Zachodniej: Studium archeologiczne. Warszawa, 2001. S. 27–34; *Brathler S.* The Archaeology of the Northwestern Slavs (seventh to ninth centuries) // *East Central Europe: L'Europe du Centre-Est*. 2004. Vol. 31. Part 1. P. 77–97.

¹⁶ *Pohl W.* Die Awaren. Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa 567–822 n. Chr. München, 1988.

¹⁷ *Geary P.* Ethnic identity as a situational construct in the Early Middle Ages // *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*. 1983. Bd 113. P. 15–26; *Pohl W.* Conceptions of ethnicity in Early Medieval studies // *Archaeologia* T. 29. Polona. 1991. P. 39–49. [Reprinted: *Pohl W.* Conceptions of ethnicity in Early Medieval studies // *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings* / Ed. by L. K. Little. B. H. Rosenwein. London, 1998. P. 13–24.]

the Carpathian Basin and along both sides of the lower Danube had presumably become consolidated enough to be the source of what must have been a Slavic-speaking population of some size. It has been suggested that one reason for this had been that at the height of Avar power in central Europe, in the last decades of the sixth and first decades of the seventh centuries, Slavic was a lingua franca used within part of the Avar polity¹⁸. In such a situation the ability to function within a certain linguistic community may well have affected the position of an individual in a group and their ability to achieve certain social goals. The conditions therefore exist for one language to gradually go out of use and be replaced by another. This is the elite dominance model of language spread. The same processes are operating today as indigenous languages die out in competition with others¹⁹. Instead of just examining the spread of dominant languages in such situations, we should also be considering the complex of linguistic processes more holistically, including the demise of competing communicative systems.

Slavic languages seem to have functioned in the same way among the Bulgar communities which established their hegemony south of the lower Danube from the 670s²⁰. Although the core elite of the Bulgars themselves were initially Turkic speaking, it would seem that there had been relatively large numbers of Slavic speaking individuals and groups that crossed the Danube as part of the group under the leadership of Asparukh. They were probably joined by others attracted to the increasing power and influence of this new power in the region. Within a few generations, the Bulgar elite had adopted Slavic nomenclature and when a literature emerges it is in a South Slavic language.

In both areas the material culture which is associated with these groups was a mixture of elements broadly similar to the material culture of the Korchak and Penkovka material, together with elements drawn from neighbouring groups and cultures. Involvement in an elite dominance system meant these people were not adverse to the material expressions of belonging to a particular social group, even if the prestige objects used were from totally alien cultures (such as Byzantine goods). In situations like this, the use of emblematic items to express social status may obscure actual ethnic origins of people represented by excavated remains in settlements or graves. Old disputes over whether graves in the northeastern parts of the Carpathian basin were of «Slavs» or «Avars» for example cease to have much meaning seen in such light.

In the areas to the north and east of the Carpathians and Sudeten (modern Poland and the eastern regions of Germany), the potential mechanisms involved in the creation of the initial Slavic cultures and the chronology of events are less clear. There have been two main schools of thought in the Polish archaeological community. The first (autochthonists) that the Slavs were always present in the area of modern Poland, indeed many were of the opinion that the area of modern Poland was the ancient *Urheimat* of the Slavs, while the other group (allochthonists) claims that the Slavs came to the region from the east, from Poland's former provinces in the east, now the Ukraine. Intense conflict has erupted between the holders of these two viewpoints in recent years²¹. The main bone of contention is the dating of the earliest cultural assemblages of Poland (the Central Polish groups — C on Fig.) which in all probability may be associated with Slavic speaking

¹⁸ Lunt H. G. On Common Slavic // Зборник Матице српске за филологију и лингвистику. Нови Сад, 1984–1985. Књ. XXVII–XXVIII. С. 421; explored further by: Curta F. The Slavic *lingua franca*... P. 125–148.

¹⁹ Dixon R. M. W. The Rise and Fall of Languages. Cambridge, 1998; Dalby A. Language in Danger. London, 2003.

²⁰ Angelov D. Die entstehung des Bulgarischen Volkes. Berlin, 1980; Shepard J. Slavs and Bulgars // New Cambridge Medieval History / Ed. by R. McKitterick. Cambridge, 1995. Vol. 2. P. 228–248.

²¹ Barford P. M. 1) The Early Slavs... P. 278–279; 2) Crisis in the Shadows: Recent Polish Polemic on the Origin of the Slavs // SA. 2003. T. XLIV. P. 121–155.

communities. One group of scholars perceives evidence that they appear as the direct effect of the collapse of the previous cultural order and occupation was continuous, the other denies this and places their first appearance in Poland a century later, and postulate the near total desertion of these lands in the interim (see below).

Over most of the area between the fifth and seventh centuries therefore, the archaeological evidence for the cultural changes suggests that they relate to the collapse of systems reflecting social relationships maintaining and maintained by hierarchical social organizations involving material culture with a strong emblematic element and the display of wealth. As in the case of the Korchak and Penkovka cultural zones, this became replaced with a material culture the archaeological reflection of which, by comparison with that of Germanic groups of the Migration Period, is noticeably spartan and simple. One interpretation of this apparent primitivism is that its users were impoverished and backward communities which had collectively somehow simply forgotten the technology and skills required to make better and a more varied assortment of goods. If this was the case, one wonders why there are so few instances in archaeological assemblages from this region of individual items of better quality not being utilised when available, a feature particularly visible in the case of the Central Polish groups. This somewhat puzzling circumstance suggests an alternative model may be equally viable, that the archaeologically unspectacular material culture of these societies may be the reflection of a deliberate rejection of the values of another social system (for example achieving social prestige through the display of symbols of wealth and social position), one which the new communities of this region no longer wished to associate themselves. In other words, this would be a deliberate expression through the use of symbols of a system of beliefs about the world rather than a symptom of economic and social backwardness.

This working hypothesis finds some support in the light of the fact that it is precisely across the middle of this region that at least three types of prestige goods are known to have been travelling. These are East Roman gold coins which are deposited in the Carpathian basin and on the Baltic coast (and entering the Baltic exchange systems) but not to any extent in the intervening area²². In the fifth and first decades of the sixth centuries these single finds and hoards are evidence that despite the collapse of wider systems, the internal socio-economic relations of some societies in quite distant areas of barbaricum were still under the influence of the Roman empire as in previous centuries. The feature which interests us here is that although this bullion was clearly travelling through the area north of the Carpathians, there is very little evidence that much of it was used or deposited there.

Travelling in the other direction, amber which originated on the Baltic coast is found in some quantities in contemporary Gepid graves, but again was apparently not being used to any extent by the people through whose territory it was travelling²³.

The distribution of a third type of object which has become known in the literature as *Slawische Bugelfibeln* is even more revealing. Curta has drawn attention to the similarities of the fibulae of the Danubian area and Carpathian basin and the so-called Olsztyn culture near the Baltic²⁴. He proposed that some items in both areas were actually coming from the same workshops. Again, we

²² See now: Ciolek R. Znależiska solidów na Pomorzu // *Wiadomości Numizmatyczne*. 2003. T. 47. Z. 2. S. 163–180.

²³ Curta F. The Amber trail in early medieval Eastern Europe // *Paradigms and Methods in Early Medieval Studies* / Ed. by E. Lifshitz and C. Chazelle. New York, 2007. P. 61–79.

²⁴ Curta F. 1) The Making of the Slavs... P. 247–275; 2) Female dress and «Slavic» bow fibulae in Greece // *Hesperia*. 2005. Vol. 74. P. 101–146; 3) *Slavic* bow fibulae? Werner's class I D revisited // *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*. 2006. Vol. 57. P. 486–535; 4) A contribution to the study of bow fibulae of Werner's class I G // *Arheologia Moldovei*. 2006. Vol. 29. P. 93–123.

find none of them being lost on settlement sites or buried in graves or hoards in the area which (presumably by down-the-line exchange) they travelled through. We are therefore faced with the paradoxical situation that the area may have been occupied by Slavs who were not in the slightest interested in wearing so-called «Slavic fibulae». This is not only a demonstration that the conventional name for this class of fibulae is a less than adequate one. More importantly, taken with the near absence of other types of ostentatious finds, it also suggests that any populations inhabiting the area at this time were simply not interested in the use of prestige goods of any kind, even the fibulae, a dress accessory most commonly in use for symbolic purposes by many other contemporary communities right across northern Europe²⁵.

Some scholars have suggested that the lack of clear and closely datable archaeological traces in the area of what is now Poland and the eastern parts of Germany (Polabia) is because the whole area was completely deserted, and that the Slavs only moved into from the east at a later date²⁶. The main evidence on which their views are based however is the absence of recognisably late forms of the metalwork which researchers into the Roman period in this part of Europe are accustomed to use to date their finds. Since those items were part of the symbolic status-display and emblematic systems of a specific culture order, their absence might only imply that the material culture has changed, not that the area was deserted²⁷. This is of course a circular argument.

There are several pieces of information which argue against desertion. There is an apparent survival of a number of apparent pre-Slavic hydronyms in parts of Poland²⁸ which, it is argued mean that their use cannot have been forgotten and re-invented, it therefore follows that they were continually orally transmitted from generation to generation of local inhabitants. While the survival of Archaic Slavic hydronymy in the area suggests not only that Slavic languages were spoken here when these rivers were named (perhaps in Antiquity), these languages in all probability continued to be used in at least parts of the area subsequently. More interesting data come from the palynological evidence which shows that while some areas did indeed experience a regrowth of forest and a decline in agriculture, this was by no means the case everywhere to the same extent²⁹, this evidence needs more careful collation and examination. There are now claims by several Polish archaeologists of many newly-discovered but as yet unpublished settlements, especially in recent large-scale excavations in advance of motorway construction which have a fifth and sixth century dating (including by dendrochronology).

In addition, the logistics of long-distance trade and exchange over relatively large tracts of uninhabited territory need to be considered. The archaeological evidence suggests that some prestige goods were moving with some frequency across more than 500 km. Some archaeologists are claiming this zone consisted almost wholly of totally uninhabited and densely reforested land. In such circumstances, such an expedition would need an enormous supply train and considerable

²⁵ Barford P. M. Identity and material Culture: Did the Early Slavs follow the rules or did they make up their own? // East Central Europe / L'Europe du Centre-Est. 2004. Vol. 31. Part 1. P. 99–123.

²⁶ Godłowski K. 1) Z badań nad zagadnieniem rozprzestrzenienia Słowian w V–VII w. n. e. Kraków, 1979; 2) Die Frage der Slawischen Einwanderung ins Ostliche Mitteleuropa // Zeitschrift für Ostforschung. 1979. Bd 28 (3). S. 416–447; 3) Ziemia polski w okresie wędrówek ludów. S. 12–63.

²⁷ An interesting parallel is post-Roman Britain where the archaeological evidence for the Dark Age British population is non-existent despite the fact that every other fact points to them being present. The only archaeological culture which is clearly visible to the archaeologist is that of the Anglo-Saxons.

²⁸ Manczak W. 1) Wieża Babel. Wrocław; Warszawa; Kraków, 1999. S. 128; 2) Zagadnienie praojczyzny Słowian w encyklopedii PWN // Archeologia Polski. 2000. T. XLV. S. 111; Babik Z. Najstarsza warstwa nazewnictwa...

²⁹ Tobolski K. Przemiany osadnicze na terenie Niziny Polskiej podczas okresu wędrówek ludów w świetle analizy palynologicznej // Archeologia o początkach Słowian. Materiały z konferencji, Kraków 19–21 listopada 2001. S. 281–292.

effort just to move limited quantities of commodities including some beads and brooches. It is difficult to accept that this is what was happening.

The largest zone to be occupied by Early Medieval Slavic speaking communities is that between the Pripiet and upper Volga, the area that later became the northern provinces of Kievan Rus. While some scholars have seen certain early archaeological cultures of this area as belonging to the Early Slavs, there is little to support this idea. While the evidence is still scant, it would seem that the movement of Slavs into most of the area was quite a late phenomenon, probably in the ninth century. There were other processes occurring in the northern forest zone at this time, including the creation of new exchange networks and power structures³⁰, and these may have created opportunities which Slavic-speaking elements utilised. Attention has been drawn to the evidence that among these elements were those who used a form of Slavic which was archaic when written in eleventh and twelfth century Novgorod birchbark documents³¹. While some (most notably V. V. Sedov) have seen this as evidence that the Slavs penetrated this area relatively early (sixth or seventh century AD), this relies on the model of the homogenous development of a single (Common) Slavic language in a specific *Urheimat* as proposed by nineteenth century philologists and comparative linguists. The evidence presented above tends to suggest however that there was no single compact area from which Slavs expanded in one great wave of migrations. Instead we see evidence suggesting a variety of processes happening in different places and at different times. Perhaps scholars should look again at the evidence for the linguists' *Urheimat* model.

The linguistic models in question have been ones of linear evolutionary development. These imply that there was one «Common Slavic» language spoken in a discrete area whence the Slav migrations had their origin³². Traditional comparative (diachronic) linguistics indicates that all three of the major divisions of the Slavic languages (East, West and South) and the languages within them would have had an origin in a common language. This is the logic behind the postulation of a Slavic migration from a restricted, densely populated and linguistically homogeneous *Urheimat*. It is only within such an area that maintaining such a linguistic unity would have been possible.

This model is a linguistic inference deriving from one possible model of the development of the Slavic languages. In turn, however, it raises many more problems than it resolves. Most prominent among them is how a Slavic-speaking population crammed into a small area could suddenly expand to populate a huge area of central and eastern Europe in the matter of a few generations. Most anthropologists would agree that this is simply demographically impossible³³. Furthermore all the evidence we have suggests that the populations of much of the area were egalitarian to an almost exaggerated degree³⁴, in which case there is little clear evidence to propose an elite dominance model for the initial linguistic spread in the sixth century. There is no obvious explanation of why the language of a small group of intruders should lead to the linguistic death of the languages with which it came into contact in adjacent areas. In addition, if an expanding «Common

³⁰ *Duczko W.* Viking Rus: Studies on the Presence of Scandinavians in Eastern Europe. Leiden; Boston, 2004 [Polish edition: *Duczko W.* Ruś Wikingów: Historia obecności Skandynawów we wczesnośredniowiecznej Europie. Warszawa, 2007].

³¹ *Curta F.* The Slavic *lingua franca*... P. 125–126. Footnote 4 with refs.

³² *Goląb Z.* The Origin of the Slavs: A linguist's view. Columbus, Ohio, 1992 [Polish translation: *Goląb Z.* O pochodzeniu Słowian w świetle faktów językowych. Kraków, 2004]; *Schenker A. M.* The Dawn of Slavic: An Introduction to Slavic Philology. Yale, 1996; *Mańczak W.* Wieża Babel; *Holzer G.* Proto-Slavic: Historical setting and linguistic reconstruction // East Central Europe / L'Europe du Centre-Est, 2004, Vol. 31, Part 1, P. 49–59.

³³ *Piontek J.* Zastosowanie modelu paleodemograficznego do rekonstrukcji historycznego procesu etnogenezy Słowian // Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis. Folia Archaeologica, 1992, T. 16, S. 285–299.

³⁴ *Barford P. M.* Identity and material Culture... P. 99–123.

Slavic» language were to find itself as a minority language in a society where the majority spoke a completely different one, we would expect there to have been rapid regional change occurring in «Common Slavic» as it was carried over ever more linguistically variant territory by a small and politically weak population. Instead, we find the linguists describing the opposite situation, the «Common Slavic» language is supposed to have maintained its purity against all the odds, and against the logic of what modern sociolinguistics tells us are the linguistic consequences of such situations. It was only when all the Slav «peoples» were in the area they were to occupy for subsequent centuries that traditional comparative linguistics would suggest the language began to increasingly differentiate.

There is little to suggest that the whole of the wide area which now contains the surviving Archaic Slavic hydronyms was this linguistically-postulated *Urheimat*. The size (c. 1500 x 450 km) of the area alone excludes it as being the area in which there had been a common language spoken which maintained coherence and stability for lengthy periods of time. In the fourth and fifth centuries AD the existing evidence (including those from written and linguistic sources) indicates that much of this area was dominated by groups whose languages were of different affinities (mostly however belonging to the Germanic groups of languages) which again would tend to have a spatially variable influence on the language of other groups living alongside them. By the sixth century, most of this area containing the Archaic Slavic hydronyms was thinly populated. These are all reasons why one would expect considerable linguistic variation and scope for change and differentiation of languages and dialects within this zone. Thus even if languages of Slavic type were spoken widely here by the sixth century and had been for some centuries, there is little chance that there would have been one homogeneous across the whole area. One would therefore have expected any subsequent expansion of the area covered by this language to reflect this variety. In other words, if this had been the case, there would have been no grounds leading linguists to propose that there had been a «Common Slavic» language. This raises questions to what degree the linear evolutionary models that led to the creation already in the nineteenth century of the notion of an *Urheimat* are the only possible interpretation of the linguistic evidence.

The first evidence of the form of the various languages that are used in diachronic linguistics comes from written texts in the vernacular. In many cases the more substantial of such texts are much later than the onset of literacy, and in the whole of this area, this only came with the creation of states. We know however that the inception of states in this region involved in many cases (such as Kievan Rus, Piast Poland) the amalgamation of diverse «tribal» societies each with their own culture, belief systems and, quite possibly, dialects or even languages. This raises the question of the degree to which the early medieval form of the written languages is the reflection of a literary and state language imposed on a much more diverse linguistic substrate in Moravia, Bohemia and Bulgaria, Kievan Rus and northern Russia. To what degree are those literary languages artificial constructs influenced by each other at the period of the creation of a state structure? It has been generally accepted that Cyril and Methodius from Thessalonika could communicate with the Moravians in the 860s to 880s because there was still a «Common Slavic» tongue in both regions. It may well be however that in part the language of literacy and liturgy they brought with them was less like the autochthonous version of Slavic than is generally assumed. This language of literacy probably affected Bohemia (which in turn was an influence on Poland). After the collapse of the Moravian mission it was carried to Bulgaria (880s), Serbia, and ultimately from there to Russia (980s). In all these cases the rise of literacy accompanied the creation of a state system which will have included an acceleration of linguistic processes including homogenization of the languages used to communicate with outlying regions. The imposition in the same regions of a new elite

often brought up in the dialect of the elite of the core of the state to replace the earlier «tribal» ones would have been an additional factor leading to language change by elite dominance. A hypothesis perhaps worth further exploration is to what degree such processes can explain the phenomena which led nineteenth century philologists to propose a hypothetical «Common Slavic» language in deep antiquity. It may well be that we have been led to apply a false linguistic model on the sixth and seventh centuries AD, by disregarding the fact that we might have been trying to examine it through the filter of another type of linguistic homogenisation taking place in the period of the ninth to eleventh centuries AD.

The simplistic equation of «the (Proto/Common) Slavic language» with «a Slavic people» common to most discussions of the so-called «Slavic ethnogenesis»³⁵ together with the rather anachronistic culture-historical (and text-driven) archaeology traditional in central and eastern Europe have together been the principal reasons why discussions on the origins of the Slavs appear to have reached a stalemate. Perhaps the questions need to be rephrased. As Nichols reminds us «the question of language spreads is a sociolinguistic one by definition»³⁶. Florin Curta's work raises a whole series of important issues about not only the relationship of material culture and identity, but also language and identity, all three seen as social processes. He also has exposed to scrutiny how modern ideological constructs affect the way scholars have interpreted the sources they work with. Linguistic processes are social processes inseparable from other social processes, some of which leave observable traces in the archaeological and historical record. Only by interpreting linguistic data in such terms does it seem that there might be a possibility of escaping from the circular arguments which has in recent decades bedevilled the study of the individual types of evidence (written, linguistic, archaeological) which have been used for following the process of the establishment of languages of the Slavic group over a large area of central and eastern Europe.

Резюме

В статье рассматриваются некоторые вопросы, поднятые в книге Флорина Курты *The Making of the Slavs*, в связи с проблемой распространения славянских языков в Центральной и Восточной Европе в раннее Средневековье. Вместо культурно-исторического и миграционистского объяснения культурной перемены используется подход, в котором изменение языка рассматривается как коррелят других процессов. Автор полагает, что данная проблема в первую очередь социолингвистическая, и в лингвистических исследованиях необходимо использовать в качестве отправной точки новые модели, приходящие на смену моделям чисто миграционистским.

Современная дискуссия о происхождении «славян» поднимает целый ряд важных вопросов об отношении не только материальной культуры и идентичности, но и языка и идентичности, рассматриваемых как социальные явления. Она придает большое значение тому, как современные идеологические конструкции воздействуют на интерпретацию источников. В данной статье рассматриваются некоторые важные для центрально-европейской историографии последствия модели, содержащейся в книге Ф. Курты, а также концепции, предлагавшиеся для объяснения данного феномена прежде.

³⁵ The term itself is a misnomer which judges the answers to questions which are never posed.

³⁶ Nichols J. *The linguistic geography...* P. 378.