

Early Slavs and modern Poland

No one should be surprised by the fact that in Poland, studies of the early Slavs have a long and lively tradition. The devotion to this field of research, shown by numerous historians, archaeologists and linguists, is quite understandable. The subject has been so attractive during the last 150 years that the development of various ideas and scholarly disputes has called for special studies and historical analyses. Of all the disciplines involved, it is archaeology that has focused the most attention on these discussions and contributed the longest list of publications.¹

The political and geopolitical circumstances in which these academic discussions of the early Slavs took place have always been acknowledged, but there has been no attempt so far to examine the issue within a broader perspective. This must be done in order to identify long-term trends or regularities. The analysis that I offer below unavoidably leads to the conclusion that studies of the origins of the Slavs in Poland have “always” been influenced by political realities, and the changing geopolitical situation of Poland has been reflected in contemporaneous discussions and prevailing interpretations. Therefore, it is not surprising that political influence can be identified even today, when actual discussion is accompanied by unexpectedly tense emotions.²

Even the very beginnings of institutionalized Slavic studies in the mid-nineteenth century turned the observer’s attention to the sphere of politics. The main reason for this was the specific historical situation of the division of Poland in the late eighteenth century into three parts occupied by Austria, Prussia and Russia. This made research into Polish history rather difficult, as the deeper integration of Polish lands into three kingdoms/empires was an obvious goal of the political centres located in Berlin, Vienna and Moscow. Both parties, i.e. Polish elites and imperial administrations, periodically sought ways to ease the growing tensions without allowing them to escalate into military conflicts, and it seemed that interest in the ancient pre-state past could well serve such an aim.

Intensification of studies of the Slavic past did not alarm even the Prussian administration, known for its strict strategy of so-called ‘Germanisation’. Thus in 1857 the Museum of Polish and Slavic Antiquities of the Grand Poznań Duchy was officially inaugurated in Poznań. Parallel developments in the territory annexed by Russia had a more complex background. There “the growing number of finds and the growth of interest in archaeology, as well as the fact that this interest...turned towards the ancient Slavic (and Lithuanian) past did not provoke much hesitation among the Russian authorities. It was just the opposite, because this trend met similar interest in Russian research.”³ Therefore, “the authorities did not object to interest in antiquities and especially to interest in Slavic studies”.⁴ The Austrian government accepted the academic status of archaeology presented in lectures on “the pagan Slavic remnants” by professor Jozef Lepkowski.⁵ He realized that archaeology represented “political value and it aims at the raising of the national soul”.⁶

¹ See the relevant chapters in Andrzej Abramowicz, *Historia archeologii polskiej – XIX i XX wiek* (Warszawa/Łódź 1991) and in Jacek Lech, *Between captivity and freedom: Polish archaeology in the 20th century* (*Archaeologia Polona* 35–36, Warszawa 1999) 25–222.

² I presented an analysis of the very recent discussion in Vienna in January 2003: Przemysław Urbańczyk, *Before the Poles: problems of ethnic identification in Polish archaeology*, in: *Archäologie der Identität. Methodenprobleme der Frühmittelalterforschung*, ed. Walter Pohl/Mathias Mehofer (*Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters*, Wien, im Druck).

³ Abramowicz, *Historia* 35.

⁴ Andrzej Wierzbicki, *Historiografia polska doby romantyzmu* (Wrocław 1999) 214.

⁵ Marek Gedl, *Kierunek archeologii Polski na Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim przed 1945 rokiem*, in: *Światowit* 32 (1971) 187–197.

⁶ Quotation after Abramowicz, *Historia* 42.

For Polish students of the past, concentration on the Slavs had an obvious political connotation because it strengthened the consciousness of national unity and sustained interest in their own past. In a country divided into three separate parts: “The interest in Slavdom, both in its ‘cultural’ (Slavophilia) and strictly political (Panslavic) aspects, surely was not indifferent to the process of shaping the Polish national consciousness Moving the accent from Polishness to Slavdom ... was an attempt to create an ideology that would ease the adaptation of Poles to changed political circumstances”.⁷

Such an attitude resulted in eager acceptance of various attempts to profit scientifically from the highly praised “patriotic” expectations. Good examples of the effects of this atmosphere may be found in all three annexed territories. In the Austrian territory, the four-faced stone idol found in the Zbrucz river in 1848 was immediately named “Swiatowit” and offered to the public as a unique presentation of an old Slavic deity. In the Russian territory, the alleged discovery of “Slavic runes” incised on the stones that popped up in Mikorzyn in 1855 was welcomed rather uncritically. In the Prussian territory, ruins discovered in 1856 on the Ostrow Lednicki island were quickly declared to be precious evidence of an ancient Slavic temple.

It was not only scholars who invested their energy into cultivating and supporting these emotions. Artists produced long series of pictures depicting imaginary ancient Slavic kings, heroes and deities. Writers came up with stories describing various aspects of the distant Slavic past. Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, a prominent figure of the time, wrote a novel called “Old Legend” that became extremely popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1860 he even published a “scholarly” book: “The arts of the Slavs, especially in pre-Christian Poland and Lithuania”. In this book he argued that “When considering arts a Slav stood on an equal level with neighbouring peoples, as is proved by excavations”.⁸

One must admit that there were also people who expressed their scepticism towards an uncritical glorification of the ancient Slavdom and who suggested caution with regard to the “national” interpretation of all finds.⁹ However, it was only positivism with its stress on cognitive objectivity and rigorous research methodology that managed to curb Slavophilia and to push it out of academic discussions. This resulted in the reinterpretation of some discoveries, including the above-mentioned “runic” stones from Mikorzyn, which were identified as primitive fakes, and the ruins at Ostrów Lednicki, which were instead connected to the activity of the early Christian monarchs.

Despite this positive tendency, there were still people responsive to the general public demand for the strengthening of national pride through the recollection of ancient times, which offered a relatively easy field for the formulation of ideology-driven declarations. This option was used to legitimize national emotions and complexes by transferring them into a possibly distant past. We find statements that are very direct in such intentions, for example that of Marian Sokolowski who wrote that “Their [i.e., Slavs’] pre-Christian culture [was] developed far ahead of Germanic [culture] but not much higher ... than Celtic [culture]”.¹⁰

We may easily criticize such an attitude, but should remind ourselves that it was in a sense provoked by the tendencies that were already then present in German historiography, whose eminent representatives (especially Leopold Ranke and Georg W. F. Hegel¹¹ but also Johann G. Herder¹²) “were of a very critical opinion not only concerning Poland, but also concerning Slavs in general”.¹³ At that time, however, the incorporating strategies of the three empires were already differentiated. Russia openly supported and Austria tolerated the pan-Slavic sentiments that were called upon to build a common Slavic political solidarity that referred to a shared cultural, religious and linguistic past. Such a political option was accepted by some Polish scholars who, like Stanisław Krzyżanowski, suggested closer cooperation: “first off all fellow Slavic tribes of a common family, common

⁷ Wierzbicki, *Historiografia* 146.

⁸ Józef I. Kraszewski, *Sztuka u Słowian, szczególnie w Polsce i Litwie przedchrześcijańskiej* (Wilno 1860) 9.

⁹ See discussion in Abramowicz, *Historia* 44f.

¹⁰ Marian Sokolowski, *Ruiny na Ostrowie jeziora Lednicy. Studium nad budownictwem w przedchrześcijańskich i pierwszych chrześcijańskich wiekach w Polsce* (Pamiętnik Akademii Umiejętności w Krakowie. Wydział Filologiczny i Historyczno-Filozoficzny 3, Kraków 1876) 172.

¹¹ E.g. his opinion that Slavs “have not yet themselves taken part in the chain of the transformations of human mind” published in 1837: Georg W.F. Hegel, *Wykłady z filozofii dziejów 2* (Warszawa 1958) 205–206.

¹² Karol Rosenbaum, *Osudy Herderovej kapitoly o Slovanoch v českom a slovenskom národnom obrození* (Slavia. Časopis pro slovanskou filologii 49, 1980) 48–56.

¹³ Gerard Labuda, *Słowianie w wizjach historiografii I. Kanta, J.G. Herdera i G.W.F. Hegla*, in: *Między wielką polityką a narodowym partykularyzmem*, ed. J. Kiwerska, B. Koszel (Poznań 2002) 53.

ancient past, common history and common monuments should join us".¹⁴ And this was not any political declaration but a programmatic speech of the president of the Domestic Archaeological Society, newly established in Lwów in Austrian Galicia.

Much more difficult was the situation of Polish "prehistorians" who lived under the Prussian administration where interpretations of archaeological finds were more and more politically loaded. Their nationalistic attitudes were more than visible in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As put by Gerard Labuda: "Hegel's and Ranke's negative opinions of the Slavs and attempts to remove them from the common past have strongly influenced the perception of their role in European history. Their concept of the great 'historic' and small 'non-historic' nations was eagerly adopted by the contemporary [i.e., nineteenth-century] politicians with the aim to justify the domination of the superpowers".¹⁵

Zygmunt Działowski, chairman of the then newly established department of history and archaeology of the Scientific Society in Toruń, justified the decision to initiate such an institution with the "conflict over the nationality of the first inhabitants of this land", and suggested "collecting proofs that would enable crushing any scientific resistance".¹⁶ Such an attitude may be explained by the controversy that erupted during the Eleventh Congress of the German Anthropological Society organized in Berlin in 1880. There German scholars shocked their Polish colleagues when they interpreted all exhibited finds thought by Polish archaeologists to be Slavic as Germanic or even German antiquities.¹⁷ Polish frustration is well-testified in the title of the post-congress report prepared by Władysław Jazdzewski: "Report from the dissertations of the Berlin archaeological congress referring to the question: Did the Slavs settle lands between the Elbe and Oder as late as the seventh century after Christ?"¹⁸ At first this controversy referred to the ethnic past of the Polabian area only, but soon sharp disagreements moved the attention of scholars to the Polish lands. These heated discussions on the ethnic interpretation of finds made some Polish historians uneasy, who surmised that "every archaeologist explains excavations as he likes: what is undoubtedly Germanic for a German, we interpret as Slavic".¹⁹

The disputes of the specialists burst into open conflict when Gustaf Kossinna published in 1902 his programmatic book "Die indogermanische Frage archäologisch beantwortet". In 1905, Erazm Majewski, editor of "Światowid," published in its sixth volume a summary of this book and his own highly critical commentary, "Kossina's hypothesis on the Germanic origin of the Indo-Europeans and the truth in science". However, his critique referred not so much to the ethnical question but, first of all, to the politically provocative thesis that the Germanic peoples were the *Urstock* of the Indo-Europeans.²⁰ Thus he claimed that this "dissertation, which at first glance may seem academic and purely archaeological, is in fact a poisonous fruit of monstrously overblown national chauvinism and serves as a propaganda tool".²¹

Contradictory opinions on the past achievements of the Slavs and Germanic peoples and attempts to prove the "seniority" of either of these ethnic groups became even more politicized after World War I. The publication by G. Kossinna in Gdańsk in 1919 of his book "Das Weichselland – ein uralter Heimatboden der Germanen" could be understood as political provocation towards the newly re-established Polish state. No wonder, therefore, that during the interwar period in Poland, proving the autochtonism of the Slavs between Oder and Vistula became an important part of the official ideology that questioned the historical justification of German expansionism, which itself had strong roots in German historiography of the nineteenth century.

¹⁴ Quoted after Abramowicz, *Historia* 69.

¹⁵ Labuda, *Słowianie* 58.

¹⁶ Barbara Osmólska-Piskorska, *Towarzystwo Naukowe w Toruniu. Powstanie i zarys dziejów – 1875–1948* (Zapiski Towarzystwa Naukowego w Toruniu 14, no. 1–4, Toruń 1948) 12.

¹⁷ Abramowicz, *Historia* 71.

¹⁸ See discussion reported in Krzysztof Kozłowski, *Czy Słowianie dopiero w VI wieku po Chrystusie zamieszkiwali kraje pomiędzy Elbą a Odrą. Sprawozdanie z Rozpraw Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk* (Przegląd Bibliograficzno-Archeologiczny 1, Poznań 1881) 344–351 and 383–390.

¹⁹ Aleksander Brückner [hidden under the nickname "Towarzysz broni"], *Metodyka badań starożytnych. Kilka aforyzmów ofiarowanych zjazdowi historyków polskich w Krakowie zamiast programu*, in: *Ateneum* 2 (1900) 391–400, at 398.

²⁰ Erazm Majewski, *Hipoteza Kossiny o germańskim pochodzeniu Indoeuropejczyków a prawda w nauce*, in: *Światowit* 6 (1905) 89.

²¹ Majewski, *Hipoteza Kossiny* 90.

The unquestionable leader of the research trend that aimed at proving the crucial importance of the Slavs in Europe's past was Józef Kostrzewski. Himself a student of G. Kossina and a follower of his research methods, Kostrzewski arrived at contrary conclusions when interpreting his archaeological finds and used them to oppose the Germanophilic concepts of his former mentor. With the aim of building a politically appealing counterbalance, he promoted the hypothesis that Slavonic roots of the great Lusatian culture dated to the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age.

Discussions between Polish and German prehistorians often "took an extreme form that by far exceeded the research sphere".²² Both parties used various media to promote their arguments. The public activity of J. Kostrzewski even provoked an official protest by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin, where Polish ambassador Józef Lipski was asked to explain the situation.²³

The deepening controversies which divided Polish and German prehistorians and tore apart the small research milieu in Poland, evidently worried some representatives of other sciences dealing with the past. In his "Wstęp do historii Słowian" [Introduction to the history of the Slavs] published in 1927, Jan Czekanowski reproached prehistorians that their stormy debate was undermining confidence in their scientific achievements.²⁴ More direct was Marcei Handelsman who wrote that "Prehistoric cultural systems are merged... in one evolutionary entity with historic systems for the sake of the presumption, which cannot be confirmed or corroborated by the sources, that we deal with one and the same ethnic material... e.g., Kossina's Germanism and Kostrzewski's Slavonism".²⁵ Despite these warnings, the controversy over the origins of the Slavs continued to attract the attention of many scholars, which was evident during the Second Congress of Polish Prehistorians in Kraków in 1935.²⁶

A "clinical" example of how the research on the early Slavs was politically manipulated was the propaganda campaign launched after the discovery of the famous Lusatian stronghold of Biskupin in 1933. Very well-preserved ruins of a carefully designed stronghold were used to prove the high cultural development of our predecessors. The already-present pre-Slavic interpretation of the Lusatian culture was intended to unveil the absurdity of the German propaganda that argued pre-Germanic roots of Central-Eastern Europe. Material "proof" of the three-thousand-year-long presence of Slavs on the Polish lowlands should have undermined the historic legitimization of the *Drang nach Osten*.

No wonder, then, that almost all the manpower of the Poznań archaeological milieu was directed to the excavations at Biskupin, supported by numerous donations. The political importance of the Biskupin discoveries is evidenced by the frequent visits made there by the highest-ranking notables in the country, e.g., President Ignacy Mościcki, Cardinal Sapieha and Marshall Edward Śmigły-Rydz. A propaganda campaign was launched, engaging journalists, writers and artists; special posters hung in public buildings including railway stations; the zeppelin "Pomorze" [Pomerania] made a special flight from Biskupin to the Baltic Sea spreading leaflets with relevant information.²⁷

This ideological challenge was taken very seriously by the German scholars, who took advantage of the occupation that followed the sudden attack of September 1939. The Gestapo immediately launched a search for Professor Kostrzewski who, despite the threat, survived the war by hiding under an alias. As early as 1940 Hauptsturmführer SS Professor Heinrich Schleif organized excavations in Biskupin that were supervised by Heinrich Himmler. However, results appeared so discouraging that all trenches were quickly filled in with sand, destroying the fragile wood remains.

Ironically, studies on the early Slavs continue to be politically attractive even when the geopolitical situation of Poland changed radically after World War II. On account of heated nationalistic emotions during the interwar period, such studies again found strong support in the new political power implanted by Stalin after the Yalta Treaty. Of course, communist authorities planned a different role for the studies that had been earlier used to strengthen nationalist sentiment. One of the new functions was supporting the old concept of "Pan-

²² Abramowicz, *Historia* 135.

²³ Józef Kostrzewski, *Pan baron denuncjuje...*, in: *Z otchłani wieków* 10 (1935) 64–66.

²⁴ Jan Czekanowski, *Wstęp do historii Słowian. Perspektywy antropologiczne, etnograficzne, prehistoryczne i językowe* (Lwów 1927) 222.

²⁵ Marcei Handelsman, *Hystorika* (Warszawa 1928) 69.

²⁶ Józef Kostrzewski, *II Zjazd Prehistoryków Polskich w Krakowie*, in: *Z otchłani wieków* 10 (1935) 53–56.

²⁷ Oral information by Wojciech Piotrowski.

Slavism”, invented in the nineteenth century. When the Soviet Union was attacked by the Nazis in 1941, Stalin soon established the Pan-Slavic Committee that functioned until 1948. Refreshing the old ideology, he aimed at legitimizing the ethno-political unity of Central-Eastern Europe, which itself soon became the main goal of Soviet geopolitical expansion. The Pan-Slavic and Neo-Slavic idea of the linguistic and cultural closeness of all Slavs seemed perfectly suited to legitimize imperial policy.

Therefore, Polish archaeologists, with their long experience of arguing for the ancient Slavism of the lands between the Baltic Sea and the mountain belt, were “natural” partners in the new geopolitical game, even if they were not fully conscious of the political expectations. The benevolence of the authorities enabled both the rapid institutional and personnel restoration of the research milieu, and provided the basis for an easy start for new research campaigns.

As early as August 1945 the first conference of Polish prehistorians decided to establish in Poznań the Institute for the study of Slavic Antiquities under the leadership of J. Kostrzewski, who subsequently published a series of books: “Prasłowiańszczyzna. Zarys dziejów i kultury Prasłowian” [Pre-Slavdom. An outline of the history and culture of the Pre-Slavs] (Poznań 1946); “Kultura prapolska” [The Pre-Polish culture] (Poznań 1947); and “Pradzieje Polski” [Prehistory of Poland] (Poznań 1948). In 1948 Konrad Jażdżewski published “Atlas do pradziejów Słowian” [Atlas for the prehistory of the Slavs] that was soon translated into English. Based on studies started in 1930, these works written during and after the war presented a uniform interpretation of the past, in which the Slavs had their roots in the Lusatian culture that took its full form during the Bronze Age.

This view was highly appreciated in the new political circumstances and helped the prominent scholars of the prewar period to re-establish their status even if they did not accept, but rather openly opposed, the new reality. Also those who wholeheartedly supported the geopolitical changes and followed the Marxist ideology found studies on the early Slavs to be very important. Thus, Włodzimierz Antoniewicz and Zofia Wartołowska included studying the origins of the Slavs in the list of four priorities when they wrote a programmatic paper sketching the future of Polish prehistory.²⁸

And, of course, further excavations in Biskupin became one of the corner stones in developing studies of the ancient past. The first campaign was organized there in 1946 under the leadership of J. Kostrzewski. In 1949 Zdzisław Rajewski, who was, just like before the war, the field leader of those excavations, was promoted to the position of the Director of the State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw. Until 1990 the Biskupin expedition was the flagship of this museum, which actively promoted the results of the excavations and made them well known in Europe.

These initial successes were soon faced with the counter action launched by radical Marxist scholars who strictly followed the lines of official policy and attacked representatives of the “reactionary ideology” who did not accept the officially promoted theory of the stadial development of languages invented by the Soviet scholar Nikolai Marr. The unpublished manuscript of a paper given by Zofia Podkowińska sometime in 1949 or 1950 presents harsh criticism of the “concept of Slavic ethnogenesis that is based on a false premise borrowed from Indo-European linguistics, which assumes the many-thousand-year-old survival of uniform peoples representing one anthropological type and one language”.²⁹ Podkowińska attacked “the racist and reactionary ethnological theory” propagated by K. Jażdżewski in his already mentioned “Atlas do pradziejów Słowian” and the Kossinian methodology promoted by J. Kostrzewski.³⁰

That campaign resulted in the removal of J. Kostrzewski from the chair of prehistory in Poznań in 1950.³¹ The dynamism of Slavic studies was suddenly halted due to political circumstances. Fortunately, Marr’s theory was condemned by Stalin in 1950 and nothing could prevent further development of the “Slavic archaeology”

²⁸ Włodzimierz Antoniewicz/Zofia Wartołowska, Planowanie prac badawczych w terenie w zakresie archeologii prehistorycznej i wczesnodziejowej w Polsce, in: *Światowit* 19 (1948) 323–370, at 330.

²⁹ Zofia Podkowińska, Uwagi o starych i nowych drogach archeologii przedhistorycznej [unpublished manuscript with hand written corrections of the author, to which Bogdan Balcer provided me access] (Warszawa 1949/50) 5.

³⁰ Podkowińska, Uwagi o starych 5f.

³¹ Józef Kostrzewski, *Z mego życia. Pamiętnik* (Wrocław/Warszawa/Kraków 1970) 266f.

that was not just supported but even imposed by political pressure. No wonder that the “fashion” of studying early Slavs also attracted prominent historians,³² anthropologists³³ and linguists.³⁴

For a decade, Slavic studies were “monopolized” by the Poznań milieu and all the abovelisted books were published there. The second wave of expansion came in an atmosphere of political relaxation that made new initiatives possible. In November 1956 a Department of Slavic Archaeology was established at Warsaw University. The chair was given to Witold Hensel, the initiator and editor of the journal “*Slavia Antiqua*” (published since 1948) and author of an important coursebook “*Historia kultury materialnej dawnej Słowiańszczyzny*” [History of the material culture of the ancient Slavdom] (Poznań 1951) that was later published as “*Słowiańszczyzna wczesnośredniowieczna. Zarys kultury materialnej*” [Early Medieval Slavdom. An outline of material culture] (Poznań 1952), and later reprinted three times in revised versions.

The new geopolitical situation allowed for the crossing of state borders and made Slavic studies an international issue. In March 1957 the First International Seminar of Slavic Archaeology was organized in Kraków. There, the old idea to prepare a “*Słownik starożytności słowiańskich*” [Vocabulary of Slavic Antiquities] that would cover the huge area between the Elbe in the west and the Volga in the east, the Baltic in the north and the Balkans in the south, was welcomed.³⁵ In 1960 “Slavic archaeology” was clearly accepted as a handy tool for the ideological reinforcement of the “alliance” of states subordinated to the Soviet Union. Therefore, this became an obligatory subject of research not only in the Slavic countries but also in East Germany, Hungary, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. This trend was institutionalized in 1965 when the International Union of Slavic Archaeology was established with many prominent scholars present in the executive body.

Not without reason, the First International Congress of Slavic Archaeology was held in Warsaw in 1965, and several hundred participants presented papers later published in seven volumes. The international context of Polish studies of early Slavdom was further expressed by specially commissioned books on: “*Słowiańszczyzna Wschodnia*” [Eastern Slavdom],³⁶ “*Słowiańszczyzna Zachodnia*” [Western Slavdom],³⁷ and “*Słowiańszczyzna Południowa*” [Southern Slavdom].³⁸ Polish scholars were also very active participants in International Congresses of Slavic Archaeology in Berlin (1970), Bratislava (1975), Sofia (1980) and Kiev (1985).³⁹

In this way the research trend that took shape in the atmosphere of nationalistic emotions accompanying the first re-establishment of the independent Polish state in 1918 proved its political usefulness in the strikingly different postwar circumstances of strongly promoted internationalism. No wonder that the vision of the autochtonism of the Slavs between the Oder and Vistula dominated academic and school education in Poland for more than four decades. It was commonly accepted and did not provoke substantial controversies among most archaeologists and historians.⁴⁰

There was, however, one exception to this general acceptance. In Kraków a small and not very active milieu of scholars survived who supported the alternative hypothesis that viewed Slavs as relative latecomers from the East. There Kazimierz Moszyński was still active and continuing studies that he had begun in the interwar period,⁴¹ frequently expressed his doubts as to the applicability of archaeological sources to ethnic questions.⁴² He consequently viewed Slavs as those who settled lands that had been previously inhabited by Germanic tribes.⁴³ The absence of Tadeusz Sulimirski, who did not return from England, and the lack of any other strong personality shifted Kraków to the margin of the great political discussions dominated by the competing milieux

³² E.g. Henryk Łowmiański, *Podstawy gospodarcze formowania się państw słowiańskich* (Poznań 1953); Kazimierz Tymieniecki, *Ziemia polska w starożytności. Ludy i kultury najdawniejsze* (Poznań 1951).

³³ E.g. Jan Czekanowski, *Wstęp do historii Słowian. Perspektywy antropologiczne, etnograficzne, prehistoryczne i językowe* [new edition] (Poznań 1957).

³⁴ E.g. Tadeusz Lehr-Splawiński, *O pochodzeniu i praojczyźnie Słowian* (Poznań 1946).

³⁵ The first volume was published in 1961 and the last (the eighth) in 1996. In the late 1990s German scholars initiated the preparation of the revised version, but only one CD was produced.

³⁶ Wojciech Szymański, *Słowiańszczyzna wschodnia* (Wrocław 1973).

³⁷ Lech Leciejewicz, *Słowiańszczyzna zachodnia* (Wrocław 1976).

³⁸ Zofia Kurnatowska, *Słowiańszczyzna południowa* (Wrocław 1977).

³⁹ After the geopolitical turmoil of the late 1980s, the last Congress was held in Novgorod in 1996.

⁴⁰ Aleksander Gieysztor, *Medieval Poland*, in: *History of Poland*, ed. Aleksander Gieysztor et al. (Warszawa 1979) 23–141, at 27.

⁴¹ Kazimierz Moszyński, *Badania nad pochodzeniem i pierwotną kulturą Słowian* (Część 1, Kraków 1925).

⁴² E.g. id., *O sposobach badania kultury materialnej Praslavian* (Wrocław 1962).

⁴³ E.g. id., *Pierwotny zasięg języka prasłowiańskiego* (Wrocław 1957).

of Poznań and Warsaw, allowing the survival in Kraków of an alternative vision of Slavic history. This “heresy” was tolerated by political authorities that shared the common opinion of Kraków as the most conservative town in Poland.

The situation changed when Kazimierz Godłowski, one of the most charismatic Polish archaeologists during the 1970s and 1980s, entered the stage. Educated in Kraków, he continued and further developed the concept of the allochtonism of the Slavs in Polish lands.⁴⁴ However, his lone striving for a different interpretation of archaeological finds did not provoke wider discussion.⁴⁵ There were some critical comments, but in general the domination of the stage by the neo-autochtonists was not substantially challenged.⁴⁶

The pendulum, however, could not remain for so long in one extreme position, and slowly Godłowski’s activity gained him young supporters who accepted his method of using written sources to ethnically interpret archaeological finds. Their studies concentrated on the Roman Age, while those dealing with the Early Middle Ages stood firm on the side of autochtonism. The tensions grew unavoidable, and they exploded into open conflict in the mid-1990s, reaching their climax in November 2001 at a conference in Kraków. I described this extremely heated debate in January 2003 at a conference in Vienna.⁴⁷

Trying to understand the overheated emotions of these discussions, I came to the conclusion that this recent conflict may also be explained in terms of geopolitical circumstances. Only ideological reasons help me understand the persistence and continuation of the orthodox concept of the total exchange of populations inhabiting Polish lands. Otherwise, common sense makes it hard to accept the existence of some historically unknown mechanism that made all Germanic agriculturalists depart from their homelands, which were then thoroughly settled by an entirely new mass of Slavic agriculturalists.

I suspect here an unexpressed fear on the part of Poles facing the unification strategy of the expanding European Union. There is a fear of losing their national identity, which consequently requires the protection and strengthening of this identity through a demonstration that “we” are of a pure blood and have our own glorious past that is not mixed with anyone else’s. I found confirmation of this suspicion in the book “Cień Światowida” [The shadow of the Svantevit] published in Lublin in 2002, which presented the strongest arguments of the allochtonists. The editor recalled in the introduction the tradition in his family of an “active and uncompromised defence of national identity” during World War II.⁴⁸

This may indicate the presence of a deep, unconscious need to retain the symbolic purity of the origins of “the” Poles, who emerged from the distant mythical cradle and took possession of Polish lands already emptied of any Germanic peoples. Such a myth could protect “Polish national identity” endangered by a European *Gleichschaltung*, which could then be opposed by recalling the very roots of our ethnicity.⁴⁹ In this way, politics once more influences the minds of scholars looking for the origins of the “royal Piast tribe”.⁵⁰ This is yet another example of geopolitical circumstances that cause fear and stimulate defensive attitudes, which are then reflected in interpretations of the ancient past.

Today very few scholars support the idea of looking for the roots of the Slavs as early as the Bronze Age.⁵¹ The debate between the autochtonists and allochtonists focuses on the concept of a “hiatus” (meaning depopu-

⁴⁴ E.g. Kazimierz Godłowski, Zagadnienie ciągłości kulturowej i kontynuacji osadniczej na ziemiach polskich w młodszym okresie przedrzymskim, okresie wpływów rzymskich i wędrówek ludów, in: *Archeologia Polski* 22 (1976) 378–401; id., Z badań nad zagadnieniem rozprzestrzeniania Słowian w V–VII w. n. e. (Kraków 1979); id., W sprawie lokalizacji siedzib Słowian przed ich wielką wędrówką w V–VII w. (odpowiedź prof. Konradowi Jazdzewskiemu), in: *Prace i Materiały Muzeum Archeologicznego i Etnograficznego w Łodzi. Seria Archeologiczna* 30 (1983) 349–372; id., *Ziemie polskie w okresie wędrówek ludów. Problem pierwotnych siedzib Słowian* (Barbaricum, Warszawa 1989) 12–63.

⁴⁵ However, see Marek Konopka’s report from the conference “The Slavs at the turn of the antiquity and early Middle Ages” organized in 1984, *Spór o Słowian. Materiały z sympozjum naukowego “Słowianie na przełomie starożytności i wczesnego średniowiecza”*, 29 marca 1984, ed. Marek Konopka (Warszawa 1986) 7–25.

⁴⁶ See discussion in Lech, *Between captivity and freedom* 104f.

⁴⁷ Urbańczyk, *Before the Poles*.

⁴⁸ Andrzej Kokowski, *Cień Światowita*, in: *Cień Światowita*, ed. Andrzej Kokowski (Lublin 2002) 8.

⁴⁹ See also Przemysław Urbańczyk, *Słowianie a sprawa polska*, in: *Dawne kultury w ideologiach XIX i XX wieku*, ed. Justyna Olko (Warszawa 2007) 34.

⁵⁰ This is the quotation from a patriotic song that was extremely popular before World War II.

⁵¹ E.g. Gerard Labuda, *Słowiańszczyzna starożytna i wczesnośredniowieczna* (Poznań 1998) 11–19.

lation) that supposedly separated the “Germanic” and “Slavic” periods sometime in the fifth to sixth centuries. This is not a new discussion and I would like to quote here Erazm Majewski’s opinion expressed exactly a hundred years ago. In questioning G. Kossinna’s tendency to separate allegedly numerous past migrations with periods of depopulation, he interpreted it as “a useful trick applied by Berlin ethnologists when they lack arguments”.⁵²

In my view, a compromise must be achieved by studying the processes of acculturation that took place under pressure from various (e.g., natural, economic, political, demographic) circumstances, including migrations.⁵³ Both fiercely opposed parties must find a common foundation and study various aspects of the changes that undoubtedly took place during the turbulent Migration Period.

⁵² Majewski, *Hipoteza Kossiny* 110, note 49.

⁵³ Przemysław Urbańczyk, *Władza i polityka we wczesnym średniowieczu* (Warszawa 2000) 136. This idea was first presented in 1998 at a conference in Vienna – see Przemysław Urbańczyk, *Foreign leaders in early Slavic societies*, in: *Herrschaft und Integration. Ethnische Identitäten und soziale Organisation im Frühmittelalter*, ed. Walter Pohl/Max Diesenberger (*Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 3, Wien 2002) 263f.