

WHEN DID THE SLAVS ORIGINATE? THE CASE OF THE ANTES¹

Slavs are Slavonic-speakers; Slavonic-speakers are Slavs. The preponderance, nay, exclusivity of the linguistic element in the Slavs' self-perception, best expressed in the very name they gave to themselves,² means that searching for their ethnogenesis in practice boils down to trying to establish when and where Slavonic was first spoken.³ The aim of this paper is to show that Iordanes' report on

¹ The present study, my last text commented on by Professor Jerzy Kolendo, is a much expanded version of the paper I read at the Slavic Origin Workshop, organized by Ilya Yakubovich and Marek Jankowiak at Wolfson College, Oxford, on 10 December 2012. The paper was based on a communication I had written in the early nineties of the previous century for a conference on the Slavs' origins, which Professor Kolendo and Professor Kazimierz Godłowski were then preparing, a project cut short by Professor Godłowski's death. I would like to thank Robert Wiśniewski and Marek Jankowiak for comments which helped me give the text its final form, and Yevhen Synytsya, Aleksander Bursche and Kirill Myzgin for bibliographical references. Special thanks go to Mikhail Lyubitchev for making available to me his still unpublished doctoral dissertation. It goes without saying that responsibility for theses presented in the paper is mine alone. I also want to thank my colleagues Myzgin and Lyubitchev for drawing the maps, and Vadzim Biela-vec for indicating explored sites of Phase 0 of Prague culture.

² See below, pp. 234–235 and n. 38.

³ After the works of K. Godłowski (*The Chronology of the Late Roman and Early Migration Periods in Central Europe*, Kraków 1970, 'Bemerkungen über die Bedeutung der archäologischen Funde aus dem Karpatenbecken in Bezug auf die spätkaiserzeitliche Chronologie im nördlichen Mitteleuropa', in: *Actes du VIII^{ème} Congrès International des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protohistoriques*, Beograd 1973, vol. 3, 391–396, *Z badań nad zagadnieniem rozprzestrzeniania się Słowian w V–VIII w. n.e.* [*Studies on the expansion of the Slavs in the 5th–7th c.*], Kraków 1979), exploded the 'autochthonous' – from the Polish perspective – localization of the Slavs' *Urheimat* in the basins of the Vistula and the Oder, the only area where it can be looked for is the basin of the middle and upper Dnieper (see below, nn. 32, 33 and 34). Works which propose other solutions – J. Udolph, *Studien zu den slawischen Gewässernamen und Gewässerbezeichnungen. Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Urheimat der Slawen*, Heidelberg 1979, F. Curta, *The Making of the Slavs. History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region c. 500–700*, Cambridge 2001 – can only be rated as extravagances.

the Goths' dealings with the Antes (*Getica* 247), identified, both by Iordanes himself and many a present-day scholar, as Slavs, which is the mainstay of the theories on the Slavs' relative antiquity, refers to an Iranian-speaking tribe which alone or as a part of a larger Alan force destroyed the Gothic "empire" of Hermanaric.

Our dossier on the Antes/Antai/Anthi belongs to three chronological layers: the 1st century (Pomponius Mela 1.13; Plinius NH 6.35), the 4th (Iordanes *Getica* 247) and the 6th/7th (Iordanes *Getica* 34–35, 119, *Romana* 338; Procopius *Bell. Goth.* 1.27.2, 3.14.2, 7, 11, 21, 22, 29, 31, 22.2, 5, 40.5, 4.4.8, *Hist. Arc.* 11.11, 18.20, 23.6; Agathias 3.21.6, pseudo-Mauricius *Strategicon* 11.5, Menander Protector fr. 6 [p. 443 de Boor], Theophylaktus Simocattes 8.5.13). The earliest Antes were surely Iranian-speaking Sarmatians, witness their location north of the Caucasus;⁴ the latest surely spoke Slavonic, as shown, apart from other things, starting with Procopius' clear statement that the Antes et Sclavini speak the same language (*Bell. Goth.* 3.14.26), by the unmistakably Slavonic name of an Anta officer of the Roman army in Lazica in the years 554–555, spelt *Dabragezas* (Agathias 3.6.9, 7.2, 21.6). The 4th-century Antes from Iordanes' account could thus have been either still Iranian-speakers or already Slavonic-speakers. My argument will essentially consist in comparing Iordanes' account of the events on the Pontic steppe ca. AD 375, ie. immediately after the arrival of the Huns (*Getica* 126–130, 246–249), with that presented by Ammianus Marcellinus at the beginning of the last book of his *Res gestae* (31.3.1–3). Afterwards I shall examine in the light of this comparison Iordanes' complete dossier on the Slavs, factual or presumed, including their description in the initial, geographic part of the work (*Getica* 34–35, 119).

1. The fall of the "empire" of the Eastern Goths.

The fall of the "empire" created by the Greuthungi during the reign of Hermanaric is reported by Ammianus Marcellinus and Iordanes.

Amm. Marc. 31.3.1–3: (1) Igitur Huni pervasis Halanorum regionibus quos Greuthungis confines Tanaitas consuetudo nominavit, interfectisque multis et spoliatis, reliquos sibi concordandi fide pacta iunxerunt, eisque adhibitis confidentius Ermenrichi late patentes et uberes pagos repentino impetu perruperunt, bellicosissimi regis et per multa variaque fortiter facta vicinis nationibus formidati. (2) Qui vi subitae percellae percussus, quamvis manere fundatus et stabilis diu conatus est,

⁴ Pomponius Mela 1.13: *ac super Caspium sinum Comari, Massagetae, Cadusi, Hyrcani, Hiberi, super Amazonas et Hyperboreos Cimmerii, Cissi, Anthi* [the reading *Cissianti, Achaei* is impossible in the light of Plinius' version of the same list], *Georgili. Moschi*; Plinius NH 6.35: *Ultra eos iam plane Scythae, Cimmerii, Cissi, Anthi, Georgi et Amazonum gens, haec usque ad Caspium et Hyrcanium mare.*

impendentium tamen diritatem augente vulgatus fama, magnorum discriminum metum voluntaria morte sedavit. (3) Cuius post obitum, rex Vithimiris creatus restitit aliquantis per Halanis, Hunis aliis fretus, quos mercede sociaverat partibus suis. Verum post multas, quas pertulit clades, animam effudit in proelio, vi superatus armorum. Cuius parvi filii Viderichi nomine curam susceptam Alatheus tuebatur et Saphrax, duces exerciti et firmitate pectorum noti, qui cum tempore arto praeventi abiecissent fiduciam repugnandi, cautius discedentes, ad amnem Danastium pervenerunt, inter Histram et Borysthenem per camporum ampla spatia diffluentem.⁵

Iordanes, *Getica*: (126–127) [Hunni] Nam mox ingentem illam paludem transierunt, ilico Alpidzuros Alcildzuros Itimaros Tuncarsos et Boiscos, qui ripae istius Scythiae insedebant, quasi quaedam turbo gentium rapuerunt. Halanos quoque pugna sibi pares, sed humanitate, victu formaque dissimiles, frequenti certamine fatigantes, subiugaverunt. Nam et quos bello forsitan minime superabant, vultus sui terrore nimium pavorem ingerentes, terribilitate fugabant ... (129–130) Quod genus expeditissimum multarumque nationum grassatorem Getae ut viderunt, pavescunt, suoque cum rege deliberant qualiter tali se hoste subducant. Nam Hermanaricus rex Gothorum, licet, ut superius retulimus, multarum gentium extiterat triumphator, de Hunnorum tamen adventu dum cogitat, Rosomonorum gens infida, quae tunc inter alias illi famulatum exhibebat, tali eum nanciscitur occasione decipere. Dum enim quandam mulierem Sunilda nomine ex gente memorata pro mariti fraudulento discessu rex, furore commotus, equis ferocibus inligatam incitatis cursibus per diversa divelli praecipisset, fratres eius Sarus et Ammius, germanae obitum vindicantes, Hermanarici latus ferro petierunt; quo vulnere saucius aegram vitam corporis inbecillitate contraxit. (130) Quam adversam eius valitudinem captans Balamber rex Hunnorum in Ostrogotharum partem movit procinctum, a quorum societate iam Vesegothae quadam inter se contentione seiuncti habebantur. Inter haec Hermanaricus tam vulneris dolore quam etiam Hunnorum incursionibus non ferens, grandaevis et plenus dierum centesimo decimo anno vitae suae defunctus est. Cuius mortis occasio dedit Hunnis praevalere in Gothis illis, quos dixeramus orientali plaga

⁵ The Huns, then, having overrun the territories of those Alans who border on the Greuthungi, and to whom usage has given the name Tanaites, killed and plundered many of them and joined the survivors to themselves in a treaty of alliance; then in company with these they made the more boldly a sudden inroad into the extensive and rich districts of Hermanaric, a most warlike king, dreaded by the neighbouring nations because of his many and varied deeds of valour. He was dismayed at the violence of this sudden storm, and although for a long time he endeavoured to hold the ground and stay firm, nevertheless, since widely spread rumour exaggerated the horror of the impending evils, he put an end to his fear of these great perils by a voluntary death. After his demise Vithimiris was made king and resisted the Alans for a time, relying on other Huns whom he had paid to take his side; but after having sustained many defeats he was overcome by force of arms and died in battle. In the name of his small son Videric, the management of affairs was undertaken by Alatheus and Saphrax, generals known for their experience and unyielding courage; but compelled by the critical situation, they gave up all hope of resistance and cautiously retreated until they came to the river Dniester, which flows through the wide swathes of plain between the Danube and the Dnieper (text and translation by Rolfe [*Loeb Classical Library*] with modifications).

sedere et Ostrogothas nuncupari. (246) ... Quos constat morte Hermanarici regis sui decessione a Vesegothis divisos, Hunnorum subditos dicioni in eadem patria remorasse, Vinithario tamen Amalo principatus sui insignia retinente. (247) Qui avi Vultulfi virtutem imitatus, quamvis Hermanarici felicitate inferior, tamen aegre ferens Hunnorum imperio subiacere, paululum se subtrahens ab illis suamque dum nititur ostendere virtutem, in Antorum fines movit procinctum, eosque dum adgreditur prima congressione superatus, deinde fortiter egit regemque eorum Boz nomine cum filiis suis et lxx primatibus in exemplum terroris affixit, ut dediticiis metum cada-vera pendentium geminarent. (248) Sed dum tali libertate vix anni spatio imperasset, non est passus Balamber, rex Hunnorum, sed ascito ad se Gesimundo, Hunnimundi magni filio, qui iuramenti sui et fidei memor cum ampla parte Gothorum Hunnorum imperio subiacebat, renovatoque cum eo foedere super Vinitharium duxit exercitum; diuque certati primo et secundo certamine Vinitharius vincit. Nec valet aliquis commemorare, quantam stragem de Hunnorum Venetharius fecit exercitu. (249) Tertio vero proelio subreptionis auxilio, ad fluvium nomine Erac dum utrique ad se venissent, Balamber sagitta missa caput Venetharii saucians interemit neptemque eius Vadamercam sibi in coniugio copulans iam omnem in pace Gothorum populum subactum possedit, ita tamen, ut genti Gothorum semper unus proprius regulus, quamvis Hunnorum consilio, imperaret.⁶

⁶ Then, as soon as they crossed that great swamp [Maeotid Lake], they at once carried along like a whirlwind of nations the Alpidzuri, Alcildzuri, Itimari, Tuncarsi and Boisci, who lived on that border of Scythia. The Alans also, who were their equals in battle, but unlike them in culture, customs and appearance, they wore down by their incessant attacks and subdued. (127) For by the terror of their features they inspired great fear in those whom perhaps they did not really surpass in war.... (129) When the Goths saw this most warlike race, the ravagers of many nations, they took fright and took counsel with their king how they might escape from such an enemy. Now although Hermanaric, king of the Goths, was the conqueror of many tribes, as we have said above, yet while he was deliberating on this invasion of the Huns, the treacherous tribe of the Rosomoni, who at that time were among those who owed him their homage, took this chance to catch him unawares. For when the king had given orders that a certain woman of the tribe I have mentioned, Sunilda by name, should be bound to wild horses and torn apart by driving them at full speed in opposite directions (for he was roused to fury by her husband's treachery to him), her brothers Sarus and Ammius came to avenge their sister's death and plunged a sword into Hermanaric's side. Enfeebled by this blow, he dragged out a miserable existence in bodily weakness. (130) Balamber, king of the Huns, took advantage of his ill health to move an army into the country of the Ostrogoths, from whom the Visigoths had already separated because of some dispute. Meanwhile Hermanaric, unable to endure as much the pain of his wound as also the inroads of the Huns, died full of days at the great age of one hundred and ten years. His death gave the Huns the opportunity to prevail over those Goths who, as we have said, dwelt in the East and were called Ostrogoths. (246) ... It is an established fact that at the death of their king, Hermanaric, they were made a separate people by the departure of the Visigoths, and remained in their country subject to the power of the Huns; yet Vinitharius of the Amali retained the insignia of his rule. (247) He, being as brave as his grandfather Vultulfi, though less successful than Hermanaric, unwillingly endured subjection to the rule of the Huns; so little by little he disassociated from them and at the same time, striving to show his valour, he moved in arms against the country of the Antes. When he attacked them, he was beaten in the first encounter. Thereafter he pressed on vigorously and, as a terrible example,

Ammianus' account is almost that of an eye-witness, having been written some fifteen years after the events, or even earlier, if we accept Michael Kulikowski's well-argued hypothesis that Book 31 had originally been a separate work, written before the bulk of the *Res gestae*, soon after Theodosius' peace with the barbarians in 382.⁷ Be it fifteen or five years, the proximity to the events makes it obvious that what we have is the Roman version of the fall of the empire of the Greuthungi, based on reports of the Roman military intelligence. Iordanes wrote his *Getica* around 551, almost two centuries later, in his own words (§§ 1–3) as an extract of Cassiodorus' *De origine actibusque Getarum*, with addition of information from other Greek and Latin historians and his own research (*mea dictione*). His statement – a probable reworking of Rufinus' introduction to his translation of Origenes' commentary on the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans⁸ – is sometimes dismissed as a purely rhetorical device; yet Iordanes did include in his work references to authors other than Cassiodorus, who anyway could not be his source for the last decades covered by *Getica*. In fact, as we shall see below, differences between his and Ammianus' account clearly indicate that his version is essentially Gothic; it is impossible, and probably futile as well, to try to establish what he got from Cassiodorus (ie. from the court of Theoderic the Great) and what from the Goths who remained in the East.⁹

crucified their king, named Boz, together with his sons and seventy nobles, and left their bodies hanging there to double the fear of those who had surrendered. (248) When he had ruled with such liberty for barely a year, Balamber, king of the Huns, would no longer endure it, but sent for Gesimund, son of Hunimund the Great, who, mindful of his oath and fidelity, together with a large part of the Goths remained under the rule of the Huns. Balamber, having renewed his alliance with him, led his army against Vinitharius. They fought for a long time: Vinitharius prevailed in the first and in the second battle, nor can any say how great a slaughter he made of the army of the Huns. (249) But in the third battle, when they met each other at the river named Erac, Balamber killed Vinitharius by stealthily shooting an arrow and wounding him in the head. Then he took to himself in marriage Vadamerca, the granddaughter of Vinitharius, and from now on held in peace all the Gothic race as his subjects, but in such a way that one ruler of their own kin always ruled the Gothic people, though by the will of the Huns. (text by Mommsen, with some modifications by Giunta-Grillone, translation by Mierow, with modifications)

⁷ Michael Kulikowski, 'Coded Polemic in Ammianus Book 31 and the Date and Place of its Composition', *JRS* 102, 2012, 79–102.

⁸ Th. Mommsen in: *Iordanis Romana et Getica* (MGH. Auctores antiquissimi 5.1), Berlin 1882 (*ad locum*) 53–54.

⁹ The most recent survey of views on Iordanes' sources from a 'critical' (rather: hypercritical) position is A. Christensen, *Cassiodorus, Iordanes and the History of the Goths*, Copenhagen 2002. In his discussion, the author omits most works which present a different opinion on the role of the collective memory of the barbarian peoples, like e.g. O. Gschwantler, 'Ermanrich, sein Selbstmord und die Hamdirsage. Zur Darstellung von Ermanrichs Ende in *Getica* 24, 129f' in: H. Wolfram, F. Daim (eds.), *Die Völker an der mittleren und unteren Donau in fünften und sechsten Jahrhundert*, Wien 1980, 187–204.

The structure and some essential facts of the two accounts are very much the same. We thus have in both: (1) the coming of the Huns and their defeat of the Alans [Amm. 31.3.1, Iordanes *Getica* 126]; (2) Hermanaric's attempts at resistance and unmanly death [Amm. 31.3.2, Iordanes *Getica* 129–130]; and (3) the campaign of his more energetic successor, ending in defeat and the king's death [Amm. 31.3.3, Iordanes *Getica* 246–249]. The first difference we encounter concerns the death of Hermanaric. Both authors intimate that the old king's reaction to the Hunnic menace was unworthy of his previous record as warrior and empire-builder; but whereas Ammianus has him first try to resist the invaders but then commit suicide out of despair, in Iordanes' rather muddled report he dies being unable to withstand, first, pain from a wound (this wound would in the first place have made it impossible for the king to go forth against the Huns and so emboldened their ruler to attack his kingdom), and second – the Hunnic incursions. In the third stage the differences are more conspicuous: in Ammianus the name of Hermanaric's successor is Vithimir, and in Iordanes Vinithar/Venethar. In Ammianus the adversaries of Vithimir are the Alans, who after inflicting many defeats on the king eventually kill him in battle; in Iordanes the successor of Hermanaric first fights the Antes and after overcoming them faces the Hunnic king Balamber who, after two reverses, in the third encounter kills Vinithar and subjugates the Goths.

Such differences justify a closer look at the course of events in the Pontic steppe before and after the death of Hermanaric in the two accounts. Ammianus starts his with the description of the Huns (31.2.1–12), followed by that of the Alans, the latter decidedly flattering in itself and even more so in comparison with the repulsive image of the Huns (31.2.13–25). He turns to the narrative with the report of the conquest of the Alans by the Huns and of the latter's binding the former by an alliance, which emboldened them to attack Hermanaric's realm (31.3.1). As a result, from his account of the first stage of the war it is difficult to ascertain who precisely the Goths' adversaries were, the Huns or the Alans; but the second stage shows that those whom Vithimir – and so, clearly, Hermanaric as well – had to face were the Alans, the Huns being actually mentioned solely as mercenaries in the pay of the king of the Goths (31.3.3: *cuius post obitum rex Vinitharius creatus restitit aliquantisper Halanis Hunis aliis fretus, quos mercede sociaverat partibus suis, verum post multas quas pertulit clades, animam effudit in prelio, vis superatus armorum*).

Iordanes too, starts with the Hunnic conquest of the Alans whom he also presents in favourable light (§ 126); but his account of the fall of the Gothic "empire" is quite different. The first attack on the Goths is the work of the Hunnic king Balamber, encouraged by the news of Hermanaric's wound; and though we do not hear of any battles, the aged king's death makes it possible for the Huns to prevail over the Goths (§§ 129–130). The second bout starts with Hermanaric's successor,

Vinithar, attacking the Antes, first unsuccessfully, then winning a crushing victory (§ 247). This show of independence provokes Balamber to another invasion, in which he is supported by a large party of Goths who remained faithful to the alliance binding them to their conqueror. Vinithar, victorious in two bloody battles, dies in the third, slain by an arrow shot by Balamber himself, who crowns the subjugations of the Goths by marrying Vinithar's granddaughter Vadamerca (§§ 248–249).

As can be seen, the fundamental difference between the two accounts is that in Iordanes the Huns take place of Ammianus' Alans. Now, apart from the greater reliability of Ammianus in general and there being no reason why he, a Roman, should have tampered with reports on events occurring among the barbarians far from the frontiers of the Empire in particular, a mistake of identity on his part or a copyist's error is out of the question. First, the Romans knew the Alans very well, and never better than in the 4th century; second, in Ammianus' ethnographic excursus at the beginning of Book 31, which precedes the quoted passage, the Alans figure almost on a par with the Huns, which clearly indicates that he considered them a very important factor of what immediately follows: the Goths' flight towards the frontiers of the Empire, which starts the dramatic chain of events the description of which constitutes the bulk of the book. What is more, his version finds support in another very knowledgeable and practically contemporary source (written soon after 389), Ambrosius' *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam* 10.10: *Chunni in Alanos, Alani in Gothos, Gothi in Tayfalos et Sarmatas insurrexerunt*. The bishop of the imperial capital, with Imperium-wide contacts on the highest level, was surely abreast of the most important military and political events of his day: and he says that those who fell upon the Goths were the Alans. We can thus safely accept the literal meaning of Ammianus' account, namely that the overthrow of the empire of the Greuthungi was technically the work of the Eastern Alans.

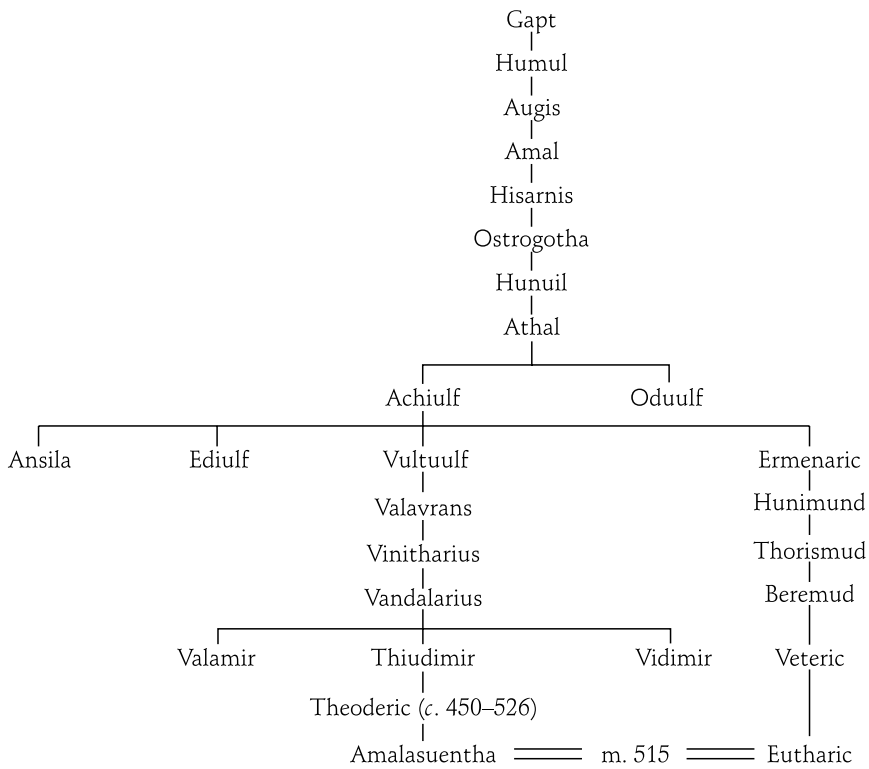
In modern scholarship the question of the relationship between the two accounts is debated mainly with reference to the identity of Hermanaric's successor. Different names are explained in two ways: the first, Vithimir was the name and Vinithar/Venethar, interpreted as "Venethi-slayer" or "Venethi-fighter", an epithet (quite improbable considering that their sons have different names as well, Videric and Vandalar); the second, Iordanes, or his source, simply inserted one of forefathers of Theoderic the Great into the line of kings of the Eastern Goths. Both solutions aim at reconciling Ammianus with Iordanes: in the first the problem is non-existent; in the second, the difference in names turns out to be a banal case of upstarts bettering their pedigree. However, the list of differences is longer and the one we are discussing – the identity of the enemy who defeated the Goths – at least as significant as their king's name. Hence the hypothesis of

Peter Heather that the two accounts report different events,¹⁰ more precisely, that Iordanes describes not the fall of the “empire” of Eastern Goths but an altogether different story, mistakenly placed in the Pontic steppe *ca.* 375 because of the infelicitous identification of Vinithar with Vithimir.

In Heather’s opinion, the account of Iordanes, or rather of his source Cassiodorus, is an outcome of two mistakes: collapsing two different historical personages, Vithimir and Vinithar, into one, and splitting one person, Theoderic’s uncle Valamir son of Vandalar, the first member of the Amal family known to have ruled at least a part of the Eastern Goths, into two, his fictitious alter ego being Balamber the Hun. The Valamir/Balamber confusion would have been started by Gothic informants of Cassiodorus when he was making up the genealogy of the Amals, which aimed at incorporating as many Gothic leaders of the past as possible. In Heather’s opinion, one of those leaders, Vinithar, interpolated as the father of Vandalar, was a contemporary of Valamir (Vandalar’s eldest son). In the power struggle among the Goths after the break-up of Attila’s empire Valamir killed Vinithar and married his granddaughter Vadamerca to assuage his followers. Since, however, in Theoderic’s dynastic propaganda there was no place for the Goths fighting among themselves and Vinithar had already been absorbed as the full Amal, the identity of his killer was hushed up. As a result, under Cassiodorus’ pen, Valamir, Theoderic’s uncle, the Gothic leader of Attila’s day, acquired a double: the killer of Vinithar, Theoderic’s alleged great-grandfather, with the name slightly distorted into Balamber (Heather tries to soften what would have been evidence of abysmal ignorance on Cassiodorus’ part with an assertion that already Senator’s informant was not aware that Valamir and Balamber had been one person). The other confusion would have been Cassiodorus’ own, due to his misreading of Ammianus. The perusal of that work in the first place would have prompted him to include Hermanaric, till then disregarded by Theoderic and his Gothic entourage,¹¹ among the Amals, and more precisely make him a direct ancestor of Eutharic, Theoderic’s son-in-law and father of his heir apparent Athalaric; it would also have persuaded Cassiodorus, misled by similarity of their names and of those of their adversaries (Alani and Antes), and the ultimate fate (death in battle), that Vithimir, in Ammianus the successor of Hermanaric, and Vinithar had been one person. The equation Vithimir = Vinithar would in turn have made him think that the latter’s killer had been a Hun. In this way Valamir, a Gothic *regulus*

¹⁰ P. Heather, ‘Cassiodorus and the Rise of the Amals: Genealogy and the Goths under Hun Domination’, *JRS* 79 (1989), 103–128, esp. 116–126.

¹¹ He is not mentioned among great Gothic kings of the past in Cassiodorus’ speech in the senate reported in *Variae* 11.1.19: *enituit enim Hamalus felicitate, Ostrogotha patientia, Athala mansuetudine, Vinitarius aequitate, Unimundus forma, Thorismuth castitate, Valamer fide, Theudimer pietate, sapientia, ut iam vidistis, inclitus pater.*



Rys. 1. Genealogy of the Amals according to Iordanes, *Getica* 79–81 (Heather, 'Cassiodorus and the Rise of the Amals', 104).

of *ca.* 450, became Balamber, the king of Huns of *ca.* 375. Of course, Cassiodorus, the author of the *Chronica*, would have been fully aware of the time-gap between the first Hunnic invasion and the heyday of Attila's empire; so he filled it with a forty-years long interregnum between Thorismund, in his account Hermanaric's grandson and Vinithar's second successor, and Valamir (§§ 250–251).

The obvious weak point in Heather's reconstruction is accusing a man of Cassiodorus' intellect and learning of committing three major blunders (failure to notice that Valamir was Vinithar's killer, identifying the latter with Vithimir, turning Vinithar's killer into a Hun) which at a closer look turn out to be not blunders but clumsy lies, inadequately covered up by a phoney interregnum. Equally unconvincing is his premiss that everything Cassiodorus could have known about Hermanaric and the coming of the Huns was what he had read in Ammianus, and its corollary: Hermanaric's conquests were entirely Cassiodorus' own creation, a blow-up of Ammianus' terse portrayal of the king: *bellicosissimi regis et per multa*

variaque fortiter facta vicinis nationibus formidati.¹² This premiss, which boils down to an assertion that by Cassiodorus' day Ammianus was the only factual source for both the Romans and the Goths about the dramatic events in the Pontic steppe in the last generation of the 4th century, which had such a devastating impact on the Empire and the *Barbaricum* alike, is fundamental, since only in this way can all the information transmitted in the account of those events in Iordanes be presented as products of confusion, propaganda and Roman or Christian literary *topoi*. However, even today, with our pitifully small evidence, we know of other historians whose works encompassed that period, like Eunapios in the East and Virius Nicomachus Flavianus in the West, not to mention those quoted by Iordanes: Priscus, who included in his work a historical and ethnographic excursus on the Huns (§ 123), and Ablabius, *descriptor Gothorum gentis egregius* (§ 28). As for Hermanaric's fame among the barbarians, the fact that Flavius Ardabur Aspar named after him the son from his Gothic wife shows that it was wide enough without Cassiodorus' help; or did Aspar also happen upon Ammianus' work and was similarly inspired?

One must admit, however, that if Heather is wrong in attributing the differences between the accounts of Ammianus and Iordanes to mistakes on the part of Cassiodorus, this does not invalidate what from the point of view of the present paper constitutes the essence of his argument, namely that information in Iordanes about Hermanaric's successor properly concerned a different person, and so a different set of events. The question can be posed thus: if we agree that different names imply different persons or, what amounts to the same, that one of the names – certainly that quoted by Iordanes – is erroneous, how much of that author's narrative concerning Hermanaric and his successor can be saved as referring to their activities?

With regard to the old king's death, Iordanes' wording does not entirely rule out suicide, the easiest way to die of despair or to end one's suffering: the stress he puts on the fact that, whatever the cause of his death, Hermanaric had lived to an extremely great age of no less than one hundred ten years (*Hermanaricus tam vulneris dolore quam etiam Hunnorum incursionibus non ferens grandevus et plenus dierum centesimo decimo anno vitae suae defunctus est*), might suggest that for all he knew the king in fact took, or was believed to have taken, his own life. Be that as it may, the main difference between the two accounts, the motif of the wound (inflicted by two brothers avenging their sister put to death at Hermanaric's order), is negligible and easily explicable as an effort by Iordanes or rather his source, unable to conceal the circumstances (and, possibly, manner) of Hermanaric's death, to soften this blow to the Goths' pride with a fanciful story.

¹² Heather, 'Cassiodorus and the Rise of the Amals', 116: «Ammianus provides the only historical information about the king, and all other details were fabricated by Cassiodorus».

A much more significant difference appears immediately afterwards. In Ammianus the war goes on till the final defeat of Vithimir, when the Goths give up all hope of resistance and withdraw towards the Dniester. In Iordanes, after Hermanaric's death, his successor Vinithar ostensibly acknowledges the Huns' supremacy. This feint gives him some freedom of manoeuvre (which he exploits to attack the Antes), cut short after barely one year by Balamber's invasion in which on the Hunnic side fights a large Gothic contingent led by Gesimund, in Iordanes' genealogy the son of Hunimund and the grandson of Hermanaric; after Vinithar's death Hunimund becomes the ruler of the Goths under the Hunnic sovereignty. The first surrender of the Goths, incompatible with Ammianus' account, is explainable by its consequence: the split within the Gothic elite, which makes it possible to introduce Hunimund – with his son Thorismund surely one of the most famous leaders of the Eastern Goths (see above, n. 11), and the great-grandfather of Eutharic – as a member of the Amal family, and explain how his line, and not the descendants of Vinithar, became the first rulers of the Eastern Goths under the Hunnic domination, with the bonus of a hint that it was that split which made possible Balamber's victory.

Next comes the identity of Iordanes' conqueror of the Goths. In itself, the main argument hitherto advanced to reject his historicity, Ammianus' words: *aguntur autem [Huni] nulla severitate regali sed tumultuario primatum ductu contenti perrumpunt quicquid inciderit* (31.2.7),¹³ is weak. In the seventies of the 4th century the Huns may not yet have had kings of Attila's stature, but some *primas* had to lead them on a campaign,¹⁴ and it would be a very small exaggeration, if any, on our sources' part to call him *rex*. Much greater difficulty is that, as we have seen above, Ammianus, corroborated by Ambrosius, makes known that the real conquerors of the Eastern Goths were the Alans, not the Huns. Does it mean that Balamber was an Alan? This ethnicity would go much better with his marrying Vadamerca. The Alans and the Goths having been neighbours for a century and a half, mixed marriages between their elites must have been quite common; but a Hunnic king marrying a granddaughter of the king of an enemy his people first encountered a year before makes little sense. The key question is, however, whether we can separate Balamber from his victim Vinithar. If we can, the foregoing hypothesis – Balamber was the Alan conqueror of the Eastern Goths – is quite acceptable; if we can't, ie. if he appeared in Iordanes' account as the killer of Vinithar, then, like the latter, he must disappear from the story of the fall of Hermanaric's "empire". In absence of other data, the matter must be left open.

¹³ Heather, 'Cassiodorus and the Rise of the Amals', 121.

¹⁴ O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1973, 12–13.

Iordanes' most significant departure from what we find in Ammianus, his claim that the Goths were defeated by the Huns, is surely another means of embellishing his people's image. One can easily imagine later generations of the Ostrogoths substituting in their group memory the Alans, fellow-subjects of the Huns, with their common masters and undisputed rulers of the *Barbaricum* as those who – at a great cost for themselves and aided by 'their' Goths – broke the heroic (at last!) resistance of their ancestors.¹⁵ More difficult to explain is another feature of Iordanes' account of the deeds of Hermanaric's successor: his attempt to resist the Huns consists in attacking not them, as one might expect, but a different enemy, the Antes. The simplest way to account for this notice has been to connect it with Ammianus' mention of the Alans as the Goths' adversaries on the assumption that – in spite of considerable differences regarding the part the two peoples play in their respective accounts – both authors are referring to the same events. The basis of this opinion is the aforementioned fact that, whereas in the 6th century the Antes certainly spoke Slavonic, 1st century writers mention a people of that name living north of the Caucasus, in the zone then inhabited by the Sarmatians (see above, p. 212);¹⁶ the Antes mentioned by Iordanes as victims of Vinithar's aggression would simply have not been slavified yet.¹⁷ Needless to say, this stance which, as in the case of the identity of Hermanaric's successor, tries to reconcile the two accounts, is rejected by Heather. In his opinion Iordanes' mention of the Antes, whom Heather treats *sic et simpliciter* as Slavs,¹⁸ is just another proof that he and Ammianus are telling disparate stories. A different argument against identifying the two peoples has been put forward by Florin Curta who interprets Iordanes' mention of the Antes as one of that author's "modernizing narrative strategies": in this particular instance, he would have replaced Ammianus' Alans, suppos-

¹⁵ It is worth noting that later Roman historians of a somewhat lesser stature than Ammianus also make the Huns the conquerors of the Goths, starting with Orosius (7.33.10: *gens Hunnorum ... exarsit in Gothos*) whom Iordanes quotes *verbatim* (§ 121: *...ut refert Orosius, Hunnorum gens omni ferocitate atrociter exarsit in Gothos*).

¹⁶ In M. Shchukin, M. Kazanski, O. Sharov, *Des Goths aux Huns: Le Nord de la Mer Noire au Bas-Empire et à l'époque des Grandes Migrations*, BAR International Series 1535, Oxford 2006, 128, we read with regard to Vinithar's war with the Antes: «Ces Antes sont parfois considérés, sans moindre preuve, comme des Alains (...), bien que Iordanes souligne leur appartenance slave»; see also 152–153: «les Antes ont été proclamés, en dépit de tout bon sens, peuple iranien, ou, tout de moins, gouverné par une élite alano-sarmate». No wonder that the authors are unable to find "a scrap of evidence" for the Iranian affiliation of the Antes, since in their discussion of the literary sources one does not find the passages cited in n. 4. As for their quoting Iordanes as an authority on the ethnic connections of the 4th-century Antes', see below, p. 228.

¹⁷ See e.g. H. Wolfram, *Die Goten. Von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts. Entwurf einer historischen Ethnographie*⁵, München 2009, 254.

¹⁸ Heather, 'Cassiodorus and the Rise of the Amals', 117.

edly no longer recognizable to his mid-6th century audience, with the by his day all too familiar Antes.¹⁹

Curta's view is not convincing. The alleged modernizing narrative strategies did not prevent Iordanes from presenting a flattering picture of the Alans facing the Huns (§§ 126–127) and later on from mentioning them regularly in his narrative (twenty-one times in all), including the famous descriptions of the battles in the Catalaunian Plains (§§ 197–212, esp. 205) and at Nedao (§ 261). The Antes are mentioned barely thrice: in two glosses in passages dealing with the Venethi, where the author says that today, ie. in his day, the latter are known as Sclaveni and Antes (§§ 34–35, 119, see below, pp. 226–227), and once in our passage, in his account of the events of the 4th century (§ 247). As can easily be seen, no modernizing narrative strategy here. We can thus safely conclude that Iordanes mentioned the Antes because they had been in the story. The question is in which: the one of the demise of Hermanaric's empire or the *res gestae* of Vinithar?

This brings us back to Heather's argument. His dating of Vinithar (*floruit* ca. 455) eliminates the Antes from his saga. The first mention of that tribe in historical narrative, barring our passage, is an event of the reign of Iustinus (518–527), which excludes them from peoples moving westward before or together with the Huns, otherwise we would find them in the sources for the 5th century. Evidently they must have stayed all that time near the Pontic forest-steppe zone east of the Dnieper, which by the middle of the 5th century the Goths had long since left. If, however, we reject the infelicitous identification of Balmaber with Valamir, nothing precludes Vinithar being Valamir's grandfather, as in the "official" genealogy of the Amals; and this would push his death back to the beginning of the 5th century. Could the Eastern Goths have fought the Antes at that time? Although Iordanes nowhere explains when they moved from Scythia to Central Europe, written sources indicate the period between 375 (the westward flight of Vithimir's infant son Videric and his entourage) and the turn of the 4th century. The fate of Gainas and the invasion of Radagais on the one hand and, on the other, notices in *Getica* about wars which Hunimund and his son Thorismund waged against the Suebi and the Gepids suggest that the bulk of the Eastern Goths either anticipated or participated in the migration of the Huns and peoples under their sway ca. 400 towards the Carpathian Basin and the Lower Danube, which started the second, decisive wave of the *Völkerwanderung*. Of course, many Goths surely remained on the Dnieper to the last, i.e. to the disappearance of the Chernyakhov culture, of which they were one of two major components, at the end of the first quarter of

¹⁹ F. Curta, 'Hiding behind a piece of tapestry: Iordanes and the Slavic Venethi', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 47 (1999), 321–340 (330–332), abridged in *Id.*, *Making of the Slavs*, 38–43 (42–43).

the 5th century;²⁰ assuming that Vinithar was their leader, this would give him an extra decade or two to fight the Antes. We would thus have the ancestor of the historical Amals, who in the early 5th century ruled the easternmost group of the Goths;²¹ hundred years later, when the Ostrogothic tradition was being invented at the court of his great-grandson Theoderic the Great, he was made Hermanaric's successor and his war with the Antes – apparently the one achievement he could boast of – was included in the story of the fall of the empire of the Greuthungi.

This reconstruction presents a number of disputable points. Since Iordanes places the fight with the Antes during the war that destroyed the empire of the Greuthungi, just after Hermanaric's death, we should start by leaving it there to see whether it fits the evidence; putting it in a different moment requires a demonstration why this version should be rejected. Now, the Goths surely had the best opportunity to fight the Antes when they were still the masters of the forest-steppe on both sides of the Dnieper, i.e. in the time of Hermanaric and his successor. The main argument against Iordanes' version – the general incompatibility between his account and the one we find in Ammianus, epitomized in Heather's catchy statement: «Jordanes can be made to agree with Ammianus only by rejecting all of his information»²² – is not strong. Apart from the different names of Hermanaric's successor, the main events – the king's unmanly death and the ultimate defeat of the Goths – are the same in both accounts, no doubt as hard historical data that could not be tampered with (though Iordanes' source made a try at it with the story of Hermanaric's wound). The identity of their conquerors proved more malleable, with the Huns, under whose dominion the Goths eventually fell anyway, supplanting the Alans. The point is, however, that in Iordanes the Huns

²⁰ The end of the Chernyakhov culture in the forest-steppe zone at the end of the first quarter of the 5th century was first dated to the period considerably later than the coming of the Huns ca. 375 by M.B. Shchukin (М. В. Щукин, 'Некоторые проблемы хронологии Черняховской культуры и истории ранних славян', in: *Rapports du IIIème Congrès International d'Archéologie slave*, Bratislava 1980, vol. 2, 399–411). See now I.O. Gavritukhin in: И.О. Гавритухин, А.М. Обломский (edd.), *Восточная Европа в середине I тысячелетия н.э.*, Москва 2007, 9–24, and М.В. Любичев, *Культурная история днепро-донецкой лесостепи I-V вв. н.э.*, Киев 2013 (National University of Kiev Ph.D. diss.), *passim*, esp. 43–52, 68–89, 229–274, 319–355. M. Kazanski ('Radagaïs et la fin de la civilisation de Černjahov' in: V. Ivanišević, M. Kazanski [eds.], *The Pontic-Danubian Realm in the Period of the Great Migration*, Paris–Beograd, 2012, 381–403) argues that the migration of Radagaïs led to the irreversible depopulation of the territory of the Chernyakhov culture, which he puts therefore slightly earlier than the authors quoted above, ca. 400–410.

²¹ An attempt to recreate a trans-Dnieper 'kingdom of Vinithar' of the end of the 4th century on the basis of literary sources (in my opinion, a bit uncritically read) and archaeological material in M. Kazanski, 'Le royaume de Vinitharius: le récit de Jordanès et les données archéologiques' in: W. Pohl, H. Reimitz (eds.), *Strategies of Distinction. The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800*, Leiden–Boston–Köln 1998, 222–240.

²² Heather, 'Cassiodorus and the Rise of the Amals', 118.

are not the only adversaries of the Goths and since those other adversaries could well be ethnic Alans, their identification with at least a part of the people who in Ammianus broke the empire of the Goths and drove their ruling elite from their homeland is surely the most economical. The important part of the Alans in those events is also suggested, as in Ammianus' account, by Iordanes' stressing that they were as formidable warriors as the Huns, but at the same time true nomad gentlemen in appearance and way of life (*pugna sibi pares, sed humanitate, victu formaque dissimiles ... quos bello forsitan minime superabant*).

Another argument for identifying Iordanes' Antes with Ammianus' Alans is a singular feature of the part they play in his account. Whereas in Ammianus the Goths under Hermanaric's successor are repeatedly beaten, Iordanes makes them fight five battles of which only the first and the last are defeats, one at the hands of the Antes and the other in the final encounter with the Huns. The first defeat, briefly mentioned (*prima congressione superatus*), is promptly and gruesomely avenged (*deinde fortiter egit regemque eorum Boz nomine cum filiis suis et lxx primatibus in exemplum terroris adfixit, ut dediticiis metum cadavera pendentium geminarent*); in the fight against the Huns Vinithar wins two great victories (*primo et secundo certamine Vinitharius vincit. Nec valet aliquis commemorare, quantam stragem de Hunnorum Venetharius fecit exercitu*); Balamber prevails in the third battle only by stealthily slaying his heroic opponent (*tertio vero proelio, subreptionis auxilio, ad fluvium nomine Era, dum utrique ad se venissent, Balamber sagitta missa caput Venetharii saucians interemit*).

The campaign against the Huns is a banal case of the last stage of history turning into myth: the Huns having replaced the Alans as the Goths' conquerors, it became possible to create an utterly fanciful narrative with only one restraint – the war is ultimately won by the enemy. More telling is the campaign against the Antes. Iordanes did not belong to the school of story-tellers who enhance martial exploits of their race by stressing the prowess of their adversaries: Vinithar's two defeats are the first battles lost by the Goths in the whole *Getica*,²³ followed only by Belisarius' victories over Vitiges, which conclude his history (§§ 312–313). In other words, he acknowledges only those defeats of his people that it was impossible to conceal because of their results – the long servitude under the Hunnic yoke and the destruction of Theoderic's kingdom – and the first battle with the Antes. Now, why should the author who does not utter a word about the Goths'

²³ In § 101 we read that during the reign of Decius (249–251) the Gothic king Cniva besieged Novae, but was repulsed by the future emperor Trebonianus Gallus (*Novas conscendit. Unde a Gallo duce remotus*): hardly a defeat in battle, especially as followed by a crushing victory over the emperor himself, a prelude to (more precisely: a doublet of) the slaughter at Abrittus (§§ 102–103).

disasters at the hands of Gallienus or Constantine note a quickly avenged defeat by an insignificant enemy that the Antes would be on the hypothesis that they belong to Vinithar's tale? The best explanation of the appearance of this battle in Iordanes' account is that defeats inflicted by the Antes were a central element of the tradition of the fall of Hermanaric's empire. With the insertion of the Huns into the narrative they could be defeated, as they duly are, but the memory of their victories must have been so strong that the Goths vanquish them only in the second battle; in the first they are worsted.

It follows that the Antes of Iordanes are the Alans of Ammianus, or at least a substantial part of them. As to the question of why then Ammianus mentions the Alans and not the Antes, the answer is that, with his macroscopic, Roman perspective he only saw the great people of the Alans, not their particular tribes (see 31.3.17: *Halani, quorum gentes varias nunc recensere non refert*). In fact, the only subdivision of the Alans he mentions are the Tanaites, a Greek geographical appellation, not an Iranian tribal name, most appropriate in a geographical excursus considering that the river from which this appellation was derived in the ancients' opinion constituted the border between Europe and Asia. The Goths, once the rulers of the Pontic steppe, had a sharper vision and specified the name of the tribe they had fought.

2. The Venethi, the Antes and Iordanes' 'Slavonic dossier'.

There remains the main argument against identifying the Antes as (the major part of[?]) the Alans who according to Ammianus broke the "empire" of Hermanaric: the fact that in the other two passages which mention their name Iordanes reckons them among the Venethi, i.e., to use the modern, rather misleading term, proto-Slavs.

Iordanes, *Getica* 34–35, 119: (34) *Introrsus illis Dacia est, ad coronae speciem arduis Alpibus emunita, iuxta quorum sinistrum latus, qui in aquilone vergit, ab ortu Vis-tulae fluminis per immensa spatia Venethorum natio populosa consedit, quorum nomina licet nunc per varias familias et loca mutantur, principaliter tamen Sclaveni et Antes nominantur.* (35) *Sclaveni a civitate Novietunense et laco qui appellatur Mursiano, usque ad Danastrum et in boream Viscla tenus commorantur: hi paludes silvasque pro civitatibus habent. Antes vero, qui sunt eorum fortissimi, qua Ponticum mare curvatur, a Danastro extenduntur usque ad Danaprum, quae flumina multis mansionibus ab invicem absunt. ...* (119) *Post Herulorum cede item Hermanaricus in Venethos arma commovit, qui, quamvis armis despecti, sed numerositate pollentes, primum resistere conabantur. Sed nihil valet multitudo inbellium, praesertim ubi et Deus permittit et multitudo armata advenerit. Nam hi, ut in initio expositionis vel catalogo gentium dicere coepimus, ab una stirpe exorti, tria nunc nomina ediderunt,*

id est Venethi, Antes, Sclaveni; qui quamvis nunc, ita facientibus peccatis nostris, ubique daeseviunt, tamen tunc omnes Hermanarici imperiis servierunt.²⁴

Before examining these passages it is worthwhile to recall two basic points, non-controversial and often made in the past.²⁵ First, Iordanes' 'Slavonic' dossier has two chronological levels. This is particularly clear in § 119, where the Venethi, once, i.e. in the 4th century, victims of Hermanaric's aggression, are now (*nunc*), i.e. in the author's time, known under three names: Venethi, Antes and Sclaveni. In a geographical excursus that is §§ 34–35 the situation is ideally static, witness the exclusive use of the present tense; but the earlier chronological level shows through in the crucial phrase: *quorum nomina licet nunc per varias familias et loca mutantur, principaliter tamen Sclaveni et Antes nominantur*: today (*nunc*) they are principally called Antes and Sclaveni, which relegates the name of Venethi to the past. The second point concerns the apparent contradiction between §§ 34–35, where the only contemporary subdivisions of the Venethi are Sclaveni and Antes, and § 119, where the old ethnonym is mentioned alongside the new ones, which would signify that the descendants of the old Venethi are now divided into three groups: Antes, Sclaveni and Venethi. In reality what we are facing is not contradiction but Iordanes' careless, imprecise language: in § 119 he explicitly refers to §§ 34–35 (*ut in initio expositionis vel catalogo gentium dicere coepimus*) where, as we have just seen, the Venethi are no more, only the Sclaveni and the Antes. The author surely means that today there are two brethren people of Sclaveni and Antes who in the past had a common name of Venethi, clearly not used anymore, not only because, when it comes to specifying their borders, Iordanes speaks only of these two peoples, but also because his contemporaries, and he himself in the *Romana*, mention only the Antes and the Sclaveni, never the Venethi.

²⁴ (34) Within these [rivers] lies Dacia, encircled by the lofty Alps as by a crown. Near their left slope, which inclines toward the north, and beginning at the source of the Vistula, the populous race of the Venethi dwell, occupying a great expanse of land. Although their names are now changing according to various clans and places, yet they are chiefly called Sclaveni and Antes. (35) The abode of the Sclaveni extends from the city of Noviodunum and the lake called Murisianus to the Dniester, and northward as far as the Vistula. They have swamps and forests for their cities. The Antes, who are the bravest of the peoples dwelling in the curve of the sea of Pontus, spread from the Dniester to the Dnieper, rivers that are many days' journey apart. ... (119) After the slaughter of the Heruli, Hermanaric also took arms against the Venethi, who, though despicable as soldiers but strong in numbers, at first tried to resist him. But a multitude of unwarlike is of no avail, particularly when God permits and an armed multitude arrives. These people, as we started to say at the beginning of our account or catalogue of nations, though off-shoots from one stock, have now three names, that is, Venethi, Antes and Sclaveni. Though they now rage far and wide in punishment for our sins, yet at that time they were all obedient to Hermanaric's commands. (text by Mommsen with some modifications by Giunta-Grillone, translation by Mierow, with modifications)

²⁵ See e.g. J. Kolendo, 'I Veneti dell'Europa centrale e orientale. Sedi e realtà etnica', *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze Lettere ed Arti. Classe di scienze morali lettere ed arti* 143 (1984–85) 415–435.

A real contradiction is elsewhere. If, according to Iordanes, in Hermanaric's day the only ethnonym of the ancestors of Sclaveni and Antes was Venethi, this name should be borne by the enemies the Goths fought just one year after the old king's death. We are told, however, that they fought the Antes; and this means that those Antes were not Venethi. In fact, in § 247 there is not a single word about the former being a subdivision or a different name of the latter. Clearly, the source from which Iordanes took the information about the war with the Antes knew nothing about their kinship with the Venethi. If therefore in Iordanes' account the 4th-century Goths fought both the Venethi and the Antes, the only way of escaping the conclusion that these Antes were an Alan tribe (Ockham's razor precludes their belonging to a still different ethnic group) is to remove the Venethi from the 4th century as an anachronistic projection of the days recorded by Tacitus (see the next paragraph), in other words to negate the historicity of Hermanaric's war with the Venethi.

Controversies about Iordanes' account of Hermanaric's conquests are as old as the modern historiography, but his war with the Venethi was long left alone save for occasional remarks accentuating similarities with Tacitus' description of that people in *Germania* 46.²⁶ Recently, however, its historicity has been rejected by Curta, in whose opinion Iordanes inserted the Venethi in the account of Hermanaric's wars simply because of their prominent position in his description of nations inhabiting Scythia, itself based on some work similar to Claudius Ptolemaeus' *Geographica* and certainly on Tacitus' *Germania: immensa spatia* they occupied on the "mental map of earlier accounts" could not be left unfilled, i.e. untouched by Hermanaric's lust of conquest.²⁷ The proof of the Tacitean origin of the reference to the Venethi in Iordanes' account of the king's exploits is the mention of another victim of his, the Aesti, «for, like him [Tacitus], Iordanes constantly associates Venethi with Aestii».²⁸

I do not quite grasp Curta's reasoning: why should the mention of the Aesti alongside the Venethi indicate that the latter's subjugation by Hermanaric was imagined out of Tacitus' work? First and foremost, it is not at all certain that Iordanes read Tacitus whom he mentions only once (§ 13) in his description of

²⁶ These controversies mainly concern identification of the *arctoi gentes* subjugated by Hermanaric in § 116 (see below, p. 229). In the exhaustive, though slightly superficial presentation of the subject from the late 18th century onwards by Christensen, *Cassiodorus, Iordanes and the History of the Goths*, 158–193 (Chapter Six: "The Gothic Kingdom of Ermanaric"), the conquest of the Venethi is mentioned in two sketchy sentences at the beginning and the end of the chapter (pp. 159, 193) – precisely because earlier historians had nothing to discuss about it.

²⁷ Curta, 'Iordanes and the Slavic Venethi', 328–332.

²⁸ Curta, 'Iordanes and the Slavic Venethi', n. 56; see *ibid.* n. 74: «again, the Tacitean association between Venethi and Aesti betrays Iordanes' sources».

Britain (§§ 10–15), an off-topic display of pseudo-erudition, in which he managed to quote, apart from Tacitus, the names of Livius, Strabo and Cassius Dio (or Dio Chrysostomos). It is a fact that Iordanes alone among our sources follows Tacitus in calling the eastern neighbours of the Central European Germans Venethi, and the amber-pickers at the mouth of the Vistula Aesti (named *Venedi* in Plinius and Οὐένεδαι in Claudius Ptolemaeus [*Geographica* 3.5.9]). However, in the *Tabula Peutingeriana* we find *Venadi Sarmatae* beside *Venedi*, and the Aesti were addressed under this appellation (*Hesti*) in Cassiodorus' letter written in the name of Theoderic the Great (*Variae* 5.2.2.), which shows that Tacitus' use of the two ethnonyms was not just his own idiosyncrasy copied by Iordanes. Be that as it may, Curta's argument is pointless since, first, Tacitus does not "associate Venethi with Aesti", quite the opposite; second, the Venethi do not fill all the unattributed "mental map of earlier accounts". The Venethi and the Aesti are in fact mentioned in *Germania* close to each other, in successive chapters of our editions (45 and 46), but their descriptions belong to different parts of the work. The Aesti are dealt with, together with twenty-two other *nationes*, in the long *descriptio Suebiae* whose beginning and conclusion are loudly proclaimed by the first phrases of, respectively, *Germania* 38 (*nunc de Suebis dicendum est*) and 46 (*hic Suebiae finis*).²⁹ The Venethi, together with the Peucini-Bastarnae and the Fenni, are the last group of nations described in the work (*Germania* 46), living between *Germania* proper and *Sarmatia* (*Peucinatorum Venethorumque et Fennorum nationes Germanis an Sarmatis ascribam dubito*). Had Iordanes been following Tacitus the way envisaged by Curta, we should expect him to include the Peucini and the Fenni among Hermanaric's victims. The fact that he does not and that, while knowing both these peoples, he places them in different areas than Tacitus – the Peucini live on an island in the Danube delta (§ 91) and the Fenni (spelt *Finni*) in Scandinavia (§ 22) – shows his independence from the older historian, whether he read him or not.

Above all, I fail to see what's wrong with Iordanes' account of the subjugation of the Venethi. In his narrative the peoples conquered by Hermanaric fall into two categories. The first is a dry list of *arctoi gentes* (§ 116), none of which can be identified with certainty³⁰ and which to Iordanes were plainly just odd-sounding names; the second are three well-known peoples whose conquest is described narratively: the Heruli (§117–118), the Venethi (§ 119) and the Aesti (§120). The

²⁹ On the structure of Tacitus' work in general and the *descriptio Suebiae* in particular, see J. Kolendo in: P. Cornelius Tacitus, *Germania* (translated into Polish by T. Pióciennik, introduction and commentary by J. Kolendo), Poznań 2008, *passim*, esp. 35–44, 145–197 (in Polish), *Id.*, 'The Embassy of Masyos, King of Semnones, and the Description of Suebia in Tacitus' *Germania*', *Palamedes* 3 (2008) 167–188.

³⁰ Christensen, *Cassiodorus, Iordanes and the History of the Goths*, 166–192.

passage on the Aesti is very brief, as it contains barely their location on the Baltic's shore and the fact of their subjugation (*Aestorum quoque similiter nationem, qui longissimam ripam Oceani Germanici insidet, idem ipse prudentia ac virtute subegit*); those on the Heruli and the Venethi are quite detailed and include a short characteristic of each people and, in the case of the Heruli, the position of their land (the dwellings of the Venethi are specified indirectly by a reference to their description in the *expositio gentium* at the work's beginning [§§ 34–35]). Now, whereas the subjugation of the Aesti is clearly suspect for geographical reasons (it seems that they figure in the narrative mainly to substantiate the somewhat excessive contention that Hermanaric *omnibus Scythiae et Germaniae nationibus ac si propriis laribus* [mss.: *labores*] *imperavit* [§ 120]),³¹ there is nothing that deserves suspicion in the conquest of the Heruli and the Venethi, in Iordanes' geography close neighbours of the Goths' 'third dwelling-place' (*mansio tertia*) above the Black Sea (§ 38): the Heruli to the south-east by the Maeotid Lake, the Venethi to the north-west and north. It is a fact that, in the latter's case, what he describes are really quite accurate limits of the territory of the Prague and Pen'kivka cultures of the first half of the 6th century (and rightly so: he is describing the lands of Sclaveni and Antes of his day, see above, pp. 226–227, and below, pp. 231–234),³² the southern part of which two hundred years before was occupied by the Goths

³¹ Mommsen's correction *laribus*, rejected by Giunta and Grillone, is clearly the only acceptable one. With it the text makes perfect sense: Hermanaric "ruled all the nations of Scythia and Germania as his own household"; with *labores* it makes no sense whatsoever.

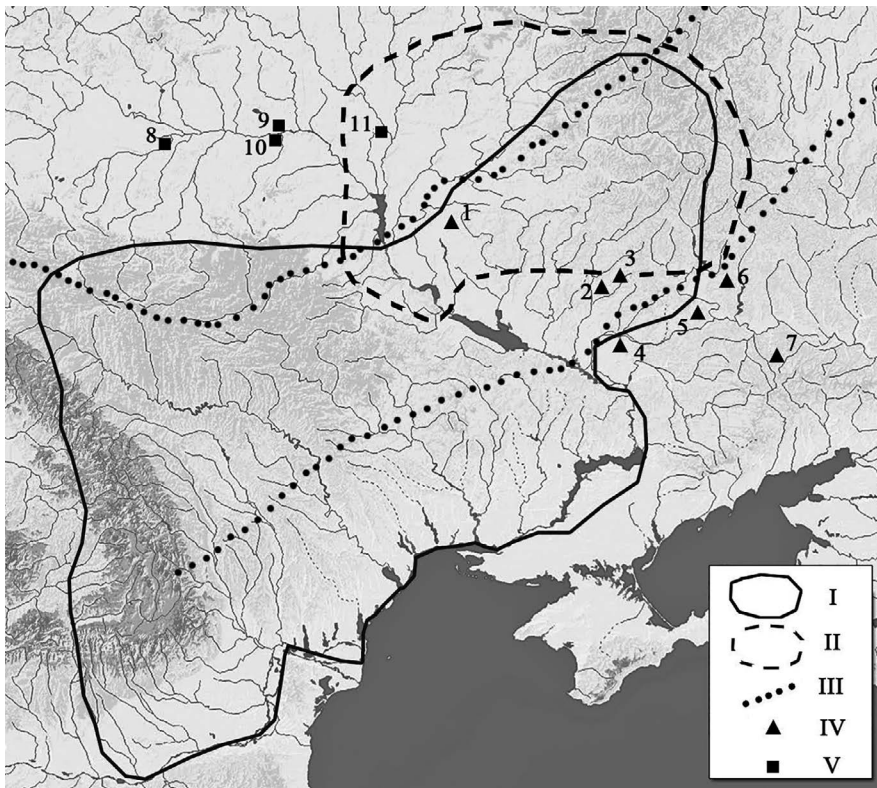
³² It is worth noticing in this context that the northern limit of the Scalveni: *in boream Visclatenus commorantur*, which has recently been interpreted as implying a glaring error on Iordanes' part, the mistaken west-east direction of the river being due to a confusion caused by the author's poorly matching two maps which would have been his only source for this particular question (Curta, 'Jordanes and the Slavic Venethi', 332–335, *Id.*, *Making of the Slavs*, 42–43), fits like a glove the extent of the Prague culture in Poland at that time: in fact, throughout the 6th century this culture kept to the right bank of the upper course of the Vistula (M. Parczewski, *Najstarsza faza kultury wczesnosłowiańskiej w Polsce*, Kraków 1988, *Id.*, *Początki kultury wczesnosłowiańskiej w Polsce. Krytyka i datowanie źródeł archeologicznych*, Wrocław 1988) which, as a glance at the map shows, actually flows from west to east. What is more, today the exactness of Iordanes' specification of their borders appears even greater than twenty-five years ago. Results, still unpublished, of the archaeological survey of Lesser Poland, an offshoot of the program of constructing motorways in the south of the country, reveal that until the beginning of the 7th century dense settlement ended on the San (personal communication from Michał Parczewski) which river, from the map of Claudius Ptolemaeus onwards, was considered in Antiquity as one of the two sources of the Vistula (B. Biliński, 'Le vie d'ambra, la Vistola e le carte geografiche di Tolomeo', *Archaeologia Polona* 7, 1964, 135–150 [139–141]). In other words, *ortus Vistulae fluminis* here, at the source of the San, did constitute the exact northern limit of the land of the Sclaveni. Iordanes must have got this datum not from incorrect use of maps, but – like other similar, topographically very correct descriptions of the locations of other peoples in the geographical excursus in §§ 33–37 – from a very well-informed contemporary source, probably a native or at least someone thoroughly familiar with the Slavs of the day.

themselves; but in the northern part there dwelt in that period the descendants of Tacitus' Venethi (the post-Zarubintsy populations of southern Belarus and northern Ukraine), the carriers of the Kiev culture³³ and of another, lately referred to as phase 0 of the Prague culture.³⁴ In other words, it suffices to assume that the appellation *Venethi* (whether the name they gave to themselves or, more probably, by which they were known to their neighbours, see below, pp. 231–233) survived from the 1st century to the 4th (as the people of the region surely did, as shown by the archeological evidence) and Iordanes' account becomes ethnically and geographically unassailable. As for its historicity, as far as I know no one questions Hermanaric's conquest of the Heruli; what reason then for disputing his subjugation of the Venethi: just because their name also figures in Tacitus' *Germania*? All other things apart, in order to reach the *arctoi gentes* he had first to subdue his immediate neighbours to the north.

If the foregoing argument is correct, among the neighbours of the mid-4th century Eastern Goths there were two distinct peoples, the Venethi to the north and the Antes, an Alan tribe of the Tanaites group, to the south-east/east. Two hundred years later the old dwellings of the Goths were occupied by the Sclaveni and the Antes, in spite of different names sharing the same customs and the same Slavonic language. The obvious way to account for the transition from the mid-4th to the mid-6th century situation is to assume that the Sclaveni were the descendants of the Venethi and that the Antes had in the meantime adopted their language and way of life. This scenario, however, entails several points to be clarified, starting with the question of whether Iordanes was right in his assertion that the Venethi of yore were the ancestors of the Slavs, and if he was, how he arrived at it. Now, the consistency with which later-epoch inland Germans applied the name of Wenden to their Slavonic, i.e. eastern neighbours, first seen

³³ On the culture of Kiev and its relation to the later cultures of the region, see А.М. Обломский, *Днепровское лесостепное Левобережье в позднеримское и гуннское время (середина III – первая половина V в.)*, Москва 2002, Р.В. Терпиловский, *Славяне Поднепровья в первой половине I тысячелетия н.э.*, Lublin 2004, А.М. Обломский (ed.), *Памятники киевской культуры в лесостепной зоне России (III–начло V в. н.э.)*, Москва 2007. A sceptical view in М.Б. Шуклин, *Реплика по поводу 'киевской культуры'*, in: Д.А. Мачинский (ed.) *Европейская Сарматия*, Санкт-Петербург 2011, 239–244.

³⁴ This culture, first recognized at Ostrov in southern Belarus, ca. 25 km south of Pinsk, where a settlement of the first half of the 5th century of the Prague type was found, with pottery combining Kiev and early Prague traits (А.А. Егорейченко, 'Поселение у д. Остров Пинского р-на Брестской области' in: *Archaeoslavica* 1 [1991], 61–71), has since been identified in several places in the southern Belarus, north-western Ukraine and (probably) eastern Poland; see И.О. Гавригухин, 'Понятие пражской культуры' in: *Сложение русской государственности в контексте раннесредневековой истории Старого Света*, Санкт-Петербург 2009, 7–25. With these finds the archaeological "white spot" in the northern Volhyn – Polesie region, the only possible cradle of the Prague culture, is fast disappearing.



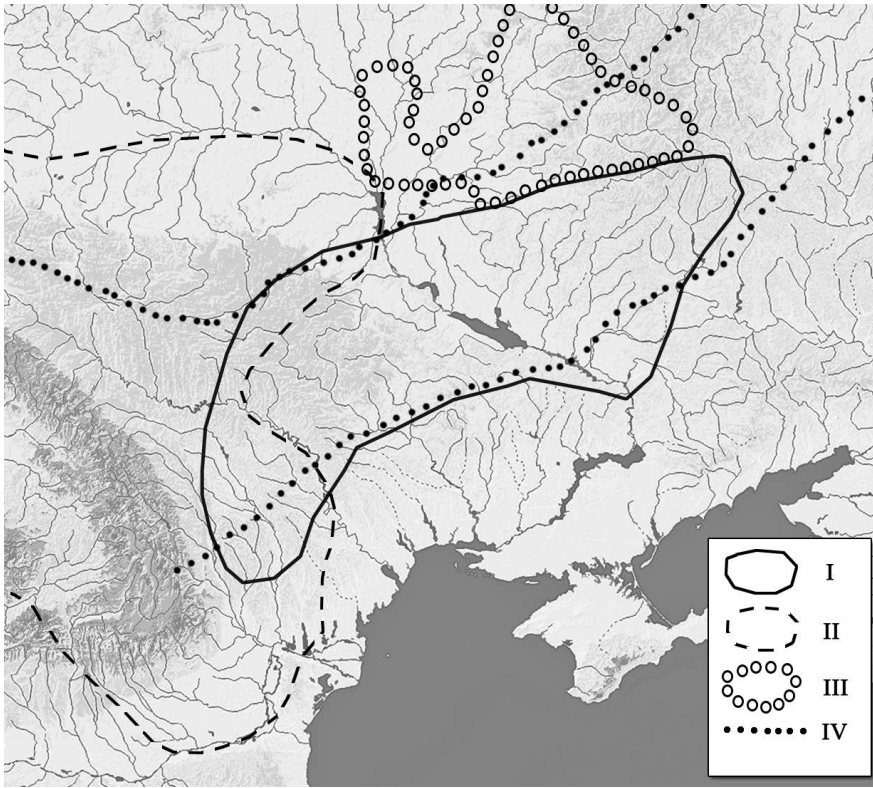
Rys. 2. Pontic steppe before the coming of the Huns.

I – Chernyakhov culture; II – Kiev culture; III – north and south limits of the steppe-forest zone; IV – sites of the Kantemirovka type (1 – Irzhevo, 2 – Storozhevoe, 3 – Kantemirovka, 4 – Dmukhaylovka, 5 – Mechebelovo, 6 – Vorontsovka, 7 – Mospinskaya); V – sites of phase 0 of the Prague culture (8 – Ostrov, 9 – Petrikov, 10 – Sniadin, 11 – Mokhov).

already in Fredegar who surely never read Iordanes,³⁵ suggests that it was well-rooted in the ancient Germanic, and so also Gothic, tradition. And in fact, we have just seen that in the Early Roman period its two variants were applied to peoples who were the Germans' eastern neighbours as well, *Venedi*/Οὐένεδαι to the Aesti, and Venethi to the carriers of the post-Zarubintsy horizon (probably to be identified with Στάουανοι in Claudius Ptolemaeus, *Geographica* 3.5.9).³⁶ Clearly, Venethi/Venedi was the name by which ancient Germans referred to their eastern

³⁵ As shown most clearly by the 'mythe d'origine' of the *Vendi*, the story of the rebellion of the Avars' sons by Slavonic women against their fathers, in Fredegar, 4.48 (p. 39).

³⁶ H. Łowmiański, *Początki Polski. Z dziejów Słowian w I tysiącleciu n.e.*, Warszawa 1963, 1, 175–180, see also Kolendo, 'I Veneti dell'Europa centrale e orientale', 431.



Rys. 3. Early Slavs.

I – Pen'kivka culture; II – Prague culture; III – Kolochin culture; IV – north and south limits of the steppe-forest zone

neighbours in general and to their subdivisions in particular, just as they referred to their civilized southern neighbours, be they Celts or Romans, by derivatives of Volcae (Welsch). Now, the only possible Venethi of the 4th century (the victims of Hermanaric in *Getica* 119), the carriers of the Kiev and Prague phase 0 cultures, were in fact direct ancestors of the bearers of all the three archaeological cultures that can safely be identified as early Slavonic: the former of those of Kolochin and Pen'kivka and the latter of Prague. In other words, Iordanes was right, whether because he had good informants or because he made an intelligent, though not very exacting guess.

The second point concerns the reason(s) of the dichotomy of Sclaveni and Antes, carefully distinguished by the 6th and early 7th century East Roman authors. On the face of it, archaeology concurs with them, having revealed in

the 6th-century forest-steppe zone two material cultures, Korchak/Prague and Pen'kivka, structurally very similar, equally poor and primitive, yet distinctive and, though akin, of different immediate origin. Of course, material differences on the basis of which today we identify the carriers of the former with the Sclaveni and of the latter with the Antes (or at least with a substantial part of them) – essentially elements of Chernyakhov ancestry in the Pen'kivka culture – would have been meaningless to Procopius and Iordanes who, however, emphasized that they not only had the same language and way of life, but also descended from a single stock, Σπόροι in Procopius (*Bell. Goth.* 3.14.29) and Venethi in Iordanes. The only possible basis on which they were able to make this distinction was that the two peoples actually called themselves, and so differentiated from one another, by names rendered by the contemporary Roman writers as *Sclaveni* and *Antes*. The former, meaningful exclusively in Slavonic, a language unattested before the 6th century, made great career, becoming the autonym of all the Slavonic-speakers and the appellation of a number of their subdivisions (always peripheral, i.e. given by their non-Slavonic neighbours). The latter, most probably an old Sarmatian tribal name, disappeared two or three generations after being first recorded: from the second decade of the 7th century onwards Byzantine authors mention only Greek variants of *Sclaveni*, clearly also with reference to the descendants of those whom their predecessors called *Antes*. The mechanisms of their adoption must therefore have been entirely different.

Antes was surely a polito-ethnonym: the peculiarities of the 6th-century people of that name make sense if we assume that a group of Alans conquered or in some other way imposed direct rule on a substantial Slavonic-speaking population in the midst of which they quickly lost their Iranian language and the nomad way of life, while retaining their tribal name, and so their tribal self-consciousness as well, and passing them to their subjects. We have seen that the place and time of this process could for historical reasons be only the Pontic forest-steppe belt in the 5th century. Indeed, ca. 450 the Pen'kivka culture with its elements of Chernyakhov origin appeared in the southern part of that zone east of the Dnieper (previously occupied by the Chernyakhov culture), from which it quickly spread south-west, by the early 6th century reaching in that direction the limits of the dwellings of the Antes specified by Iordanes. Another archaeological witness of the formation of the late, Slavonic-speaking Antes is possibly the appearance slightly earlier (first half of the 5th century) and in the southernmost part of the same zone, of Sarmatian elite burials of the Kantemirovka type.³⁷ The political

³⁷ These finds are conveniently described in M. Kazanski, A. Mastykova, 'Les Alains sur le Dniepr à l'époque des Grandes Migrations: le témoignage de Marcien et les données archéologiques' in: J. Bouzek, H. Friesinger, K. Pieta, B. Komoróczy (eds.) *Gentes, Reges und Rom. Auseinandersetzung – Anerkennung – Anpassung. Festschrift für Jaroslav Tejral zum 65. Geburtstag*, Brno 2000, 209–219.

character of the Anta identity would have helped them to acquire the reputation of the bravest of “Venethi” (*Getica* 35: *Antes vero, qui sunt eorum fortissimi*) but in the long run must have contributed to their disappearance: the Avars, set about dominating all the Southern Slavs, could not tolerate among them a people with a historically and politically defined self-consciousness. The last information concerning the Antes, by then Roman allies, is an attack launched against them by the Avars in 602 (Theophyl. Sim. 8.5.13); during the next decade, with the collapse of the Danubian frontier and thus of the Imperial protection, the Anta elite, bearers of the aforementioned self-consciousness, must have been wiped out, letting the rest of their people dissolve in the pan-Slavonic sea.

The original of *Sclaveni*, **Slověne* – I repeat: meaningful exclusively in Slavonic and so obviously an autonym – indicates some fundamental change in that people’s perception of themselves, of essentially linguistic character: we are those who speak, who understand each other, as opposed to **Němci*, the mute.³⁸ As such, it has the appearance of being ideally as old as the language itself. The question is: how old? We have seen that Iordanes was right about the Sclaveni’s (and Antes’ too, to an extent) descent from the Venethi. This, however, does not necessarily make the latter Slavonic-speakers; it is worth noticing that Iordanes also implies that in his day the name of Sclaveni – and so, one might add, their language as well – was brand-new, which goes well with the total lack of references to the Slavs in our earlier sources.

I do not want to say that the 4th-century ancestors of the Sclaveni (and of the Antes of non-Iranian origin), whatever their name, could not speak Slavonic; I only think that the burden of the proof lies with those who affirm that they did – and such a proof is not forthcoming in the historical, ie. written, sources. That, in turn, if correct, means that, without direct historical evidence and with archaeological material unable to tell us whether the language spoken by the makers of Kiev pots was Slavonic or not (that the makers of Prague and Pen’kivka pots spoke Slavonic being, on the contrary, so obvious as to require no demonstration),³⁹ our

³⁸ As is well-known, many a scholar reject the only sensible etymology of **Slověne* from *slovo*, ‘word’ (see e.g. G. Schramm, ‘Antes, Sclabeni, Sclavi. Frühe Sammelbezeichnungen für slawische Stämme und ihr geschichtlicher Hintergrund’, *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Osteuropas* n.f. 43 [1995], 161–200), just as some reject the etymology of the complementary **Němci* from *němъ*, ‘mumbling’, ‘mute’, but this seems to me a symptom of the *warum einfach, wenn es auch kompliziert geht* syndrome. See the judicious presentation of the question in H. Popowska-Taborska, *Wczesne dzieje Słowian w świetle ich języka* (*Early History of the Slavs in the Light of Their Language*), Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 1991, *passim*, esp. 58–60.

³⁹ The main problem with the vision, shared by many East European archaeologists, of the Slavs’ ethnogenesis reaching back at least to the beginning of our era, with the sequence of archaeological cultures: Zarubintsy – post-Zarubintsy – Kiev – Kolochin/Pen’kivka/Prague, as the material expression of the consecutive stages by which “proto-Slavs” evolved into Slavs *tout*

basis for investigating the origins of the Slavs and their speech – ie. trying to pinpoint the time and area when Slavonic was first spoken – is the study of the language. Did Old Slavonic originate as a vernacular whose verb system had gone wild, or as a *lingua franca*? Is it possible to devise a time clock recording times of phonetic changes common to all the Slavonic languages? Was Old Slavonic an offshoot of Baltic with loans from Iranian and Germanic, or a mixture of the three? Only if the philologists arrive at binding answers to these and similar questions, will archaeologists and historians be able to specify archaeological cultures and, perhaps, ethnic names recorded by ancient authors, which may be linked with the Slavs' ethnogenesis.

Adam Ziółkowski

a.ziolkowski@uw.edu.pl

Institute of History
University of Warsaw
Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28
00-927 Warsaw, Poland

court, is that, looked at closely, the said sequence turns out to be a simplification of a complicated process which was taking place in the area of the middle Dnieper and its confluences in the 1st–5th century. What we see there are archaeological mini-complexes appearing and collapsing after a couple of generations, reappearing in different, sometimes quite distant places, influencing one another, and at the same time absorbing, in varying mode and degree but constantly, influences from the great cultural complexes of the steppe (the Sarmatians) and Central Europe (the La Tène-permeated Germans). In the 3rd century these two complexes gave birth to the Chernyakhov culture whose area encompassed a good part of the territory of the said sequence of cultures and whose importance in the birth of at least one component of the earliest surely Slavonic cultural complex, the Pen'kivka culture, is obvious. It is only logical to assume that the linguistic situation in the region was as dynamic and multidirectional.