

## THE CELTS – THE GERMANS – THE SLAVS

### On the Topic of Ethnicity of Archaeological Sources of Protohistorical Tribes<sup>1</sup>

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The article deals with the capabilities of archaeology and its cooperative scientific disciplines in the study of expressions of protohistorical collective identities' ethnicity which are rather limited.

The Celts. Nowadays, we have considerable problems with ethnicity of a large group of tribes, the main bearers of the LaTène culture, although considerably numerous historical, linguistic, epigraphic, palaeographic, iconographic and other sources are also available here. Despite this fact, we know that the Celtic tribes were aware of their related identity. Historical linguistics – absolutely independently from archaeological testimonies – proved close relatedness of languages of ancient continental as well as medieval insular Celts. Although not all LaTène culture bearers were necessarily Celts, most of them were; at the same time, not all Celtic tribes maintained this culture after being included into the Antique world.

The Germans. We know that also tribes called Germanic were aware of their related identity. It is documented by the facts that they all spoke mutually understandable languages originating from Proto-German and shared very close mythology. Material culture of individual Germanic tribes is rather significant and, in many cases, typical of a tribe; however, in contact with the Roman Empire and the Huns, mainly their elites gave up their tribal and ethnic identity.

The tribes with stable and flexible organizational forms able to adopt progressive innovations succeeded in complex ethnogenetic processes. Besides the Franks, the Anglosaxons, Germans (Deutsche), Danes and Swedes were able to develop into independent medieval nations. The Goths, Vandals, Gepids, Suebi, Heruli and other Germanic tribes, however, did not manage to adapt to more developed environments and survive as original cultural-ethnic entities. They disintegrated and gave up to external military attacks when they became organizationally, militarily, economically and ideologically weakened in attempts to create their own 'states'.

The Slavs. A large group of tribes was called Sclavini, Anti, Veneti by antique authors of the 6<sup>th</sup> c. and documented under their own names – *Slovene*, *slovenski narod*, *slovensko plemja* since the 9<sup>th</sup> c., although they simultaneously used numerous tribal or regional names. Archaeologically, these oldest Slavs are represented by three related cultures – Prague, Penkovka and Koločin, which are interpreted as historically known Sclaveni, Antes and Veneti, from which individual branches of the Slavs developed.

The common Slavic linguistic and cultural identity gradually developed through tribal identities into identities of individual Slavic nations after extensive migrations mainly to the territories of Byzantium, former Roman provinces and their northern peripheries. As for this process among the western Slavs, the tribes which were able to found their own early 'states' – the Bohemian and Polish kingdoms – were first to achieve their own ethnic identity. Some of the tribes, like most of the north-western – Polabian and Pomeranian – tribes were assimilated by the East Frank Empire or later by the Kingdom of Germany and became extinct.

Keywords: protohistorical tribes, ethnicity, etatization, archaeology.

As far as studying of ethnogeneses of nations in general or identification of ethnic expressions of various collective identities (tribes, early states and empires) is concerned, the capabilities of archaeology were considered very limited in the past, since archaeology works with fragments of preserved material culture; non-material components of culture are usually totally absent. Undoubtedly, material culture is able to reflect ethnicity to some extent, however, its origin and changes are mostly associated with changes in economy, social and political sphere, or they can be interpreted as reactions to altered natural and living conditions. Even

those elements of material culture which can be basically the bearers of information on ethnicity can be – and often are – interpreted differently, e.g. as war spoils, goods for trade or exchange or a gift, or they suggest possible interactions and mutual contacts of various kinds between individual tribes, cultures, or changes in the economy and social sphere initiated by these interactions or imported ideas and technologies (Brather 2004; Müller 2009; Pohl 2010).

Despite the above mentioned and currently prevailing sceptical opinion on possible contribution of material culture to the study of ethnicity,

<sup>1</sup> The article is supported by grant project 2/0088/20 VEGA SAV Ethnic and Cultural Changes of Medieval Society (6<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries) in Archaeological Sources.



We know that Celtic tribes were aware of the related identity. It is documented by the fact that they all spoke mutually understandable dialects, resp. languages, following from the common protolanguage and shared identical or very similar mythology. Ancient Celtic literary monuments followed from it (Vlčková 2002).

The oldest documents of the Celtic language dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> c. are known from the territory of the Golasecca culture. Other larger concentrations of early inscriptions in some of the Celtic languages have been recorded at the Gallo-Hellenic territory near Marseille, with the Celtiberians from the Iberian Peninsula, in Dacia and Lesser Scythia, later on the British Isles and mainly younger inscriptions were found on lithic stelae and coins in various parts of the Celtic world including the territory of Slovakia (Maier 2015; Stifter 2008; 2019).

Historical linguistics proved close relation of prehistoric continental as well as medieval insular Celts' languages independently from archaeological testimonies by purely formal means. Thus, denying the above-mentioned people and languages the right to belong to the Celtic ones is nonsense.

Mutual relatedness of the Celts is clearly documented also by the fact that large territories settled by several Celtic tribes gradually included in the Roman Empire were given ethnic names – the large Roman province of Gallia, Galia Narbonensis, Galia Lugdunensis, Galia Transalpina or Cisalpina and – in Asia Minor – the 'state' of Galatians, Galatia (consisting of three tribes) and existing for approx. two and a half centuries (278 BC–24 AC).

As far as e.g. Galatia in Central Asia Minor is concerned, historical identity and ethnic tradition of the Galatian/Celtic tribes/nations were defined not only by the Galatians; they were attributed to them also by other ethnic groups and remained alive and stable after their autonomous political organization had terminated. In the territorial-organizational structure of Galatia, the tradition of three independent Galatian tribes of Trocmii, Tectosages and Tolistobogii was preserved and identity of the Galatians' ethnic-historical group survived in the Roman times as well. The Galatian aristocracy was integrated in the new political and social structures after Galatia had been included in the Roman Empire and became a representative of loyalty to Roman emperors, which was not difficult for them. Members of Galatian aristocratic families were even given Roman citizenship; however, despite their formal affiliation to the Roman Empire and Hellenistic world, they preserved

certain awareness and pride in relation to their Galatian origin. Nevertheless, it is interesting that the La Tène culture was not created in Asia Minor in association with the presence of Celtic tribes and a local branch of the culture with signs of any process was not formed either. Presence and activities of the Celtic tribes can be partly observed e.g. on finds of Middle La Tène brooches, bracelets and rings; other kinds of finds, e.g. coins, do not represent relics of the European La Tène material culture in the Hellenistic environment of Asia Minor. On the contrary, they are documents of advanced Hellenization of the Celts in Asia Minor (Strobel 2006, 90; Trefný 2007, 75–105).

Finally, the Galatians surrounded by much more numerous non-Celtic ethnic groups of Asia Minor and under pressure of the antique Roman civilization succumbed to assimilation. And that was the fate of most other tribes which – surrounded by much more numerous non-Celtic Roman, Hispanic or Asia Minor's ethnics – succumbed to assimilation under pressure from the antique Roman civilization and later Germanic tribes.

As far as the Celtic ethnicity is concerned, we can agree with prominent researchers in Celtic studies, such as P. Sims-Williams (1998; 2006; 2012) or A. Falileyev (2013; 2014), J. T. Koch, A. Minard or M. Raybould (Koch/Minard 2012; Raybould/Sims-Williams 2007), that occurrence of Celtic linguistic relics from the central Celtic territory as far as the peripheral areas is authoritative. Presence of the La Tène culture's relics is undoubtedly accumulated in the areas with relatively dense occurrence of Celtic names of people and places, which increases the cumulative value of evidence in favour of Celtic presence. However, we definitely cannot make similar conclusions in the opposite sense, on the basis of absence of such evidence. The correlation between the linguistic residues of a Celtic idiom and the physical imprint of its users (on the periphery of the Celtic world in particular) remains the subject of further studies. Use of the term of 'Celtic' in linguistic studies is exactly and clearly defined and it can probably be the same in archaeology, although these two definitions are not necessarily identical.

In combination with the above stated, importance of research of mitochondrial DNA, Y chromosome, studies of expansion of individual mutations of specific genes and molecular biological data of potential Celtic populations from La Tène cemeteries in sufficiently representative amount, with support of accompanying interdisciplinary researches of biochemistry, geochemistry and molecular medicine will rise on the expense of classical anthropological investigations of genetic populations.

## THE GERMANS

The populations which were given the name German did not use this name to call themselves and the Romans used it also only occasionally. It denoted several related groups with their own 'tribal' names which originally occupied the territories of southern Norway and Sweden, the Jutland Peninsula and north-western Germany. From there, they expanded further and in the centuries around the turn of eras, they lived in the large territory of so-called Magna Germania bounded by the Danube in the south, the Rhine in the west, the Vistula in the east and the North and Baltic seas in the north, including the southern part of the Scandinavian Peninsula. In that period, the Germanic tribes were divided into three large groups according to Tacitus – western, northern and eastern tribes (*Bierbrauer 1994; Heather 2002; Wolfram 2002* etc.).

We know that these tribes were aware of their common or related identity. This is documented by the facts that they all spoke mutually understandable dialects following from Proto-Germanic language and shared the same or very similar mythology from which the ancient Germanic literary monuments follow (*Vlčková 1999*).

Although culture of the Germanic tribes was very typical and sometimes with elements specific for individual tribes (e.g. some types of brooches or fittings, examples of several graves with typical Ostrogoths and Longobards fashion in Italy etc.). Germanic elites in particular adopted many artefacts (weapons, fashionable jewels and other luxurious goods, especially in Untersiebenbrunn horizon) from other environments, mainly Roman and Hunnic. Adoptions of powerful foreign collective identities was also common if it was beneficial for individuals, as documented by contemporary written sources.

Despite frequent migrations, changes in settlement, organization, language, religion (Pagan-Arian-Catholic) and material culture, all Germanic tribes were aware of their collective identities (certainly considerably metamorphic due to internal as well as external factors). The kingdoms of the Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Gepids, Vandals belonged to approx. twenty European late antique – early medieval 'states' with various levels of organization and length of existence. Only the empires of Visigoths, Langobards and Franks survived for more than two centuries. These barbaric kingdoms in the 4<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> c. preserved several elements originating in their tribal organization for a long time (*Bednaříková 2016; Collins 2004*). Only the Franks managed to build a permanent kingdom and state,

although they lost their Germanic language in the process. That language was substituted – thanks to the demographically strong Romanized foundations – for French, a Romance language.

Three early ethnics with stable but flexible organization adaptable to the environment, able to adopt progressive innovations and make these changes and adaptations trustworthy with support of traditions and rituals succeeded. Besides the Franks, the Anglo-Saxons, Germans (*Deutche*), Danes and Swedes achieved the same. Later, independent medieval and modern nations evolved from them. The Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Vandals, Gepids, Heruli and other Germans did not manage to effectively adopt and survive as cultural-ethnic entities in mainly civilizational, economically and organizationally more developed environments. In attempts to establish their own 'states', they became disintegrated organizationally, militarily, economically and ideologically weakened by internal conflicts and were defeated by external military attacks.

The late medieval nations and their cultural characteristics were final products of this complicated ethnogenetic process, moving, mixing, assimilation and sometimes also genocide of ethnics and, thus, they cannot be simply and directly identified with 'gens-ethnics' of the Antiquity and Early Middle Ages. Modern investigation comes to a conclusion that ethnicity of the early historic Germanic tribes and ethnicity in general cannot be characterized as a permanent quality obtained at birth in a certain linguistically, culturally and territorially related environment but as an 'ethnic practice' reproducing the bonds which keep the group in question together in the whole complex of areas (*Pohl 1991, 42*). The area of political acts and life strategies can be partly reconstructed from written historical sources. The cultural area, i.e. the rich variety of customs, traditions, fashion used to express ethnical identity, can be partly and under certain conditions traced by means of a combination of historical and archaeological research.

## THE SLAVS

As we know from domestic and foreign written medieval sources, the feeling of a certain unity between groups of Slavic nations, the feeling of their difference from the group of Mediterranean, Roman and Germanic nations existed long ago and was not limited only on the people who could read and write. This belonging was based on today easily understandable (and originally common) language, resp. there were only tiny differences



between individual Slavic languages in the course of the Middle Ages and, actually, until now. And although the projection of the 'Slavic idea' as understood in the 19<sup>th</sup> c. is an anachronism; it has been clearly documented that the concept of relatedness of Slavic regions was present as early as medieval written sources (Leśniwska 2012). If the Germanic tribes of the Great Migration Period were considered nationes – nations by their contemporaries and they were aware of their affiliation to their whole, there is no reason why we should not use this name for the historic Slavs and their main tribes or tribal groups. The origin and genesis of the cultural-ethnic identity of the Slavs remains a subject of discussion for a wide range of researchers – archaeologists, historians, linguists, historical demographers, anthropologists and recently also geneticists.

The large group of tribes was called Sclavini, Anti, Veneti by antique authors of the 6<sup>th</sup> c. and since the 9<sup>th</sup> c., they have been documented under their own names – Slovene, slovenski narod, slovensko plemja, although they simultaneously used a number of tribal or regional names. There were around 50 names in the 9<sup>th</sup> c. in the territory of the Western Slavs alone, as stated in the source known as the Bavarian Geographer (e.g. Obotrites, Veleti, Ukrani, Linonen, Havolans, Serbs, Silesians, Lusatians, Opolans, Czechs, Moravians, Vistulans etc.). Etymology of these tribal names has been subject of frequent linguistic and historical debates for more than a century. We have numerous data on the history of the Slavic tribes also from the 10<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> c., especially on the north-western (Polabian – Pomeranian) and east Slavic tribes (Nalepa 2003; Sedov 1982).

From several concepts of the Slavs' origin which have been created in the last few centuries, most European researchers consider the model of eastern (allochthonous) concept of the Slavs' origin and their further migrations to central, western, southern and eastern Europe most probable. According to this model, crystallization of the Slavs took place in the territory delimited approx. by the Upper Vistula and the Carpathians in the west and the middle Dneper stream in the east. The latest investigations increase the number of archaeological complexes including the oldest well datable Slavic components from the 5<sup>th</sup> c. sometimes together with elements of previous cultures, mainly the Kyiv and Chernyakhov cultures. Archaeologically, these oldest Slavs are represented by three related cultures – Prague, Penkovka and Kolochin, which are interpreted as the historically known Sclaveni, Antes and Veneti; after migrations, individual Slavic branches evolved from them (Kaczanowski/Parczewski 2005).

The above described concept is supported also by linguistic analyses of the oldest Slavic local names in the Greek, Latin, Baltic and Finnish language environment which prove that the beginnings of division of dialects, i.e. disintegration of the Pra-Slavic language, can be searched for between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> c., in the migration period of Germanic tribes from the north to the south. Then, first division of the Slavic tribes occurred and it continued in the migration periods in the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> c. (Rusek/Boryś 2004). According to the preserved written sources, the Slavs did not have great differences in their dialects in the time of their first contacts with the non-Slavic European nations (Stieber 1969–1973). The fact that the process of disintegration of the Pra-Slavic language into the main dialects was slow is documented by recent historical sources which mention only one Slavic language in the Early Middle Ages – *sclavina lingua, sclavorum lingua, slověnskij jazyk*. Adam of Bremen, a chronicler and geographer of the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> c., says that 'the inhabitants of Bohemia and Polans have identical clothes as well as language...' (Brémský 2009).

Thus, the latest linguistic research tends to agree with the opinion that genesis and crystallization of the Slavic language were such late phenomena – still uncompleted as late as the 6<sup>th</sup> c. – that it makes it irrelevant to search for an older localization of the primary homeland (Popowska-Taborska 1990).

The Slavic migrations from the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. to the territories of Byzantium, former Roman provinces and their northern peripheries are historically undisputable. Processes of fragmentation of the original tribes and their new formation in new territories by joining various tribal groups were diversiform. In the processes, remains of the original population in old Germanic territories must have participated as well as the Avar communities in the Middle and Lower Danube, Bulgarians and Romanised – originally partly Dacian, Thracian – populations of extinct Roman provinces. Only some of them can be traced by the linguistic research of toponyms and hydronyms and other remains of the old Slavic language fund – such as personal names, ethnic tribal names in individual regions or large settlement areas. The situation is complicated by the difficult Avar-Slavic as well as Bulgarian-Slavic relations in the 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> c., when acculturation, assimilation and adoption of ethnical or 'state' identity of victorious communities superior socially and in power took place.

In combination with the above stated, importance of correlation of mitochondrial DNA and Y chromosome of DNA (interpretation, explanation of controversial conclusions) will increase – on

the expense of classical anthropological research of genetic populations. The study of expansion of individual mutations of specific genes and molecular biological data of potential Slavic populations from the early medieval burial grounds in sufficiently representative numbers with support of accompanying interdisciplinary researches in biochemistry, geochemistry and molecular medicine are also important.

After the tribal communities in individual regions had been consolidated in vast territories of central-eastern Europe, the 'common' Slavic linguistic and cultural identity gradually started to develop through old and newly established tribal identities into identities of individual Slavic nations. As for the western Slavs, the tribes

which managed to create their own 'states' – the kingdoms of Bohemia and Poland – were the first to arrive to their own ethnic identity in this process. For south and eastern Slavs, this is true of the Bulgarian Empire and Kievan Rus. Others were created in the Middle Ages and the last ones completed the processes of their ethnogenesis and statehood and took their shapes as late as the previous century. Some of them, such as most north-western – Polabian and Pomeranian tribes, i.e. in the territories west of the Oder and Nisa rivers (the Serbs, Veleti-Lutici, Obotrites, Hevelli-Stodorane tribes, partly also Lusatians, etc.) on the other hand, were assimilated by the East Frank Empire or later by the Kingdom of Germany and became extinct.

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Manuscript accepted 12. 9. 2021

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