CHAPTER THREE

HOW DID THE SLAVS GET TO POLISH LANDS?

1. *Autochthonists*, *Allochthonists* and others: the long history of the debate on the origins of the Slavs

For Nestor, the Russian chronicler, the author of the Russian Primary Chronicle (*The Tale of Bygone Years*) written in the 12th century, it went without saying that after the collapse of the Tower of Babel, the Slavs were among the 72 peoples into which God divided mankind and they originated from Japheth’s tribe. They are said to have settled, after long wanderings, in the Danube region and then spread farther, adopting tribal names recorded in their written sources. The Slavs’ migrations were was seen in a different way by Jan Długosz, writing in the 15th century. He believed that they marched from the east to the west, namely from Babylon through the Caucasus Mountains and then to Europe. In this way he made a direct connection between the Slavs and the Sarmatians known to the classical authors.

Later on, as the knowledge on the topic increased, the possibility of the indigenous origin of the Slavs in Central Europe was discussed. The most eminent representative of this trend of thought was the Czech scholar, Lubor Niederle, who worked from the late 19th till the mid-20th century. In contrast to many of his predecessors he based his conclusions mainly on the achievements of archaeology. In the period between the two World Wars the advocates of the local origin of the Slavs (including the Polish prehistorians, Leon Kozłowski, Józef Kostrzewski and Konrad Jaźdżewski) tended to shift the first appearance of the Slavs to as early as the Bronze Age, linking their origins with the population of the Lusatian Culture.

The debate, which has been continued till today, involves the representatives of various sciences: history, ethnology, natural sciences,

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1 There is a wealth of literature on the debate about the Slavs’ origin. In compiling this part of the chapter use was made mainly of information from: Baran 1972; Barford 2001; Curta 2001; Godłowski 2000; Hensel 1984; Jaźdżewski 1970; Kostrzewski 1960; Leciejewicz 2000; Okulicz 1986; Parczewski 1988a, 1988b; ZOW 1985, were used; more suggested reading can be found in the Bibliography.
archaeology and linguistics. So far it has brought about a division into two camps fostering two main (but not the only) concepts of the origin of the Slavs, called in the Polish literature the ‘western’ (authochthonic) and ‘eastern’ (allochthonic) one.

According to the former, the cradle of the Slavs was located most often in the basins of the Vistula and Oder rivers, hence in the area of modern Poland. The other concept is that the homeland of the Slavs lay in the area of modern Ukraine and, partly, Belarus. There have been formulated some middle-of-the-road concepts which linked the origin of the Slavs with the areas between the Oder—Vistula—Dnepr as well as those locating the Slavs’ homeland in completely different regions.

A great deal of attention in the debates on the origins of the Slavs is devoted to the mysterious Venedi (or Veneti) people, which is mentioned repeatedly by the ancient writers (Tacitus, Ptolemy), and appeared also in the texts of the authors writing at the outset of the Early Middle Ages, especially Jordanes, who wrote the history of the germanic Goths in the middle of the 6th century. So far it has not been decided what was the origin of the Venedi mentioned in the first centuries of our era or even what lands these people occupied. According to some researchers they lived in the Polish lands and were the Slavs, whereas others believe that the Venedi had nothing to do with either of these two.

Witold Hensel\(^2\) assumed that the name ‘Venedi’ concerns two different peoples: originally it denoted a non-Slavic population but from the 6th century it was used for all the Slavs. At that time names for respective groups of the Slavs also came into use; it is possible that among them there existed some non-Slavic groups of the Venedi (Veneti). Additional arguments are apparently derived from the hydronyms, which, according to the Autochthonists, in the area between the Dnepr and the Oder have, (except for those of general Indo-European character), a uniform Slavic character. The emergence of the Slavic linguistic community from the original Indo-European one is believed to have taken place about the mid-2nd millennium B.C.\(^3\) It is also assumed that the Slavic culture formed simultaneously in many smaller centers. The advocates of the theory also stress the many similarities between the assemblages of the cultures of Late Antiquity (especially the Przeworsk culture) and the early Slavic one. As in many other cases the former were multi-ethnic

\(^2\) 1984.
\(^3\) Lehr-Sławiński 1946.