

Slavic Raid on Konungahella

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The article explores the naval raid of the Slavic forces on the coastal Norwegian port settlement of Konungahella in the mid 1130s. The paper analyses the raid in the context of regional politics and from the perspective of Baltic Slavs. It also encompasses the wider political context of contemporary imperial and Polish politics. It addresses the issue of the timing of the raid, participation of other than Pomeranian Slavs, and the reasons why it took place. It focuses on the reasons behind the raid which are surrounded by controversy and various interpretations. The paper postulates an alternative explanation to the politically motivated explanations previously accepted.

One of the least known and researched historical events in Scandinavian mediaeval history appears to be the Slavic ride and plunder of the important Norwegian port and settlement of Kungahälla-Konungahella¹, that took place around 1135/1136. Before we analyse the reasons, causes and implication of this raid, we will concentrate on some background issues including a short description of the expedition and assault on Konungahella.

Sources

Regretfully our knowledge about this event comes solely from a single historical source, that being *Saga of Magnus the Blind and of Harald Gille* by Snorri Sturluson. He was an Icelander who was born in 1179 and died in 1249. The *Saga of Magnus the Blind and of Harald Gille* is part of a larger work known as *Heimskringla* – a saga or history of the kings of Norway. It was written sometime between 1220 and 1230 in Iceland. Snorri, besides his literary and historical works was also heavily involved in the politics of Iceland and Norway since the turn of the thirteenth century. On at least two occasions he spent a long time in Norway at the royal court and in upper class circles. Moreover, according to English scholar Eric Christiansen, Snorri's foster-father Jón Loptsson lived in Konungahella at the time of the Slavic raid we are

¹ Konungahella is the name of the settlement usually used in English language literature, and this spelling is to be used in this work. It is called Konghelle in Norwegian, Kungahälla in modern Swedish, and another known spelling is: Konunghalla.

concerned with, as well as a number of other people who Snorri appears to have known.² It is very likely, if not certain, that they provided the chronicler with eyewitness accounts. Taking all this into consideration, and despite the usual mediaeval exaggerations, biases, and God-given omens in his accounts, his works should be regarded as a relatively reliable historical source.

Location and importance

Konungahella under the name of Cuneghella appears in the writings of English chronicler of Norman background, Orderic (Ordericus) Vitalis (who lived circa 1075–1142). He wrote contemporary chronicles of eleventh- and twelfth-century Normandy and Anglo-Norman England. Orderic named Konungahella as one of the six most important Norwegian *civitates*, or coastal port-towns, of this period in the following order: *Berga* (Bergen), *Cuneghella* (Konungahella), *Copenga* (identified as Trondheim), *Burgus* (identified as Sarpsborg), *Alsa* (a medieval settlement within modern Oslo) and *Turesburga* (Tønsberg) (Ordericus Vitalis, X.6 (pp. 214–215, n2)). As the list is not alphabetical and does not follow geographical directions it clearly shows the importance of Konungahella at this period. Snorri's other accounts indicate that around 1064 it was already a port of some significance (Snorri, *Saga of Harald Hardrade*, ch. 74). It is also known that the Norwegian king Sigurd I (1103–1130) gave Konungahella an important status upon his return from his Crusade to the "Holy Land":

... and King Sigurd came eastward, where he remained all winter, and was long in Konungahella, which town he greatly enlarged and improved. He built there a great castle of turf and stone, dug a great ditch around it, and built a church and several houses within the castle. (Snorri, *Saga of Sigurd*, ch. 24)

However, as Swedish scholar Lars Hermanson has pointed out, archaeological evidence shows that Konungahella was not as important a commercial or trading centre as described by Snorri. So, its importance must have been more symbolic and ideological as it was a royal Norwegian residence, and a local church possessed a widely venerated relic assumed to be a splinter from the holy Cross. At the same time a legacy of crusader king Sigurd I could contribute to the prestige of the settlement (Hermanson 2009). It was located inland with access through two branches of the Göta River on either side of an island called Hisingen. It laid around 2.5 kilometres west from the modern town of Kungälv, in Västra Götaland County, north of Göteborg, in modern Sweden. After its destruction, the settlement was relocated to a site slightly to the west

² Christiansen, in Saxo 1984: 712–713 n8; and Snorri, *Saga of Magnus the Blind*, ch. 9.

of the original site. Snorri Sturluson, writing nearly a century later, said that Konungahella has never completely recovered. (Snorri, *Saga of Magnus the Blind*, ch. 11; Pieradzka 1953: 64–65). However, this does not appear to be the case. Konungahella was mentioned on a number of occasions by other sources and Snorri himself, creating the impression that, despite its gruesome fate, it remained an important centre. For example, during the reign of Canute I of Sweden (c. 1173–1195) there was a royal mint at the town (Christiansen, in Saxo 1987: 733 n79). It remained an important strategic stronghold in the second half of the twelfth century (Snorri, *Magnus Erlingson's saga*, chs. 15, 19; *Saga of Hakon Herdebreid*, chs. 1–2, 12–14). A slow decline of Konungahella only took place towards the end of the Middle Ages.

Dating

There are two dates placing the raid in a timeframe, the year 1135 or 1136. It is most often accepted that the raid took place in August 1135, and this is based on the notion from Snorri who stated that it occurred during the fifth year after the death of Norwegian king Sigurd I Magnusson, also known as Sigurd the Crusader (Snorri, *Saga of Magnus the Blind*, ch. 9), who died on the 26th of March 1130. However, among some others, the Polish historian Edmund Kosiarz dated the event to 1136 (Kosiarz 1978: 39), though in his work he did not explain how he came up with this date. To understand the timetable of the events leading to the raid on Konungahella we have to look more closely into the broader regional political context. After the death of Danish and Obodrite duke/king Canute Lavard, Denmark went into an internal succession conflict. It is beyond the scope of this article to go into the well known details of that civil war. Briefly however, the internal conflict practically ended after Eric II Emune defeated king Niels, his son Magnus Nielson (the Strong) and his half-brother Harald Kesja at the Battle of Fotevik (in Scania) on the 4th of July 1134, where Magnus was killed (*Chronicon Roskildense*, ch. XV). Soon after, Niels was assassinated in Schleswig and this was followed by the killing of Harald Kesja and his eight sons (*Chronicon Roskildense*, chs. XVI–XVII). Consequently, Eric II became the sole Danish king. A year later, in 1135, he paid homage to the Emperor Lothar III (Turasiewicz 2004: 219), thus bringing him international recognition and legitimizing his claim to the throne of Denmark. According to Saxo Grammaticus, at that time the Slavs, most likely the Ranove of Rügen Island (their political entity to be referred to in the text as the Rugian Principality), ravaged the Danish coast and islands. It must have been a real concern for Eric II, as the chronicler indicated it was an excuse for not intervening in the succession conflict in Norway on behalf of the then exiled Harald IV

Gille. The latter took refuge in Denmark after being defeated on 9th August 1134 by Magnus IV Blind at the battle of Färlev (Saxo, XIV.1 (p. 352), cf. pp. 712–713 n8). Taking into consideration that Färlev is located about 70–75 kilometres north of Konungahella it is extremely unlikely that the Slavs would plan a large naval and coastal operation in an area where two major armies were active. Therefore, we may definitely exclude the year 1134 as the date of the raid.

Also, we need to look into events in Norway which at that time was also entangled in a civil war of succession. The conflict culminated on the 7th of January 1135 when Norwegian king Magnus IV the Blind (ruled 1130–1135, 1137–1139) was captured in Bergen and mutilated on the orders of Harald IV Gille (ruled 1130–1136) (Snorri, *Saga of Magnus the Blind*, chs. 6–8). Harald IV Gille himself was assassinated on the 14th of December 1136, on the orders of yet another pretender to the throne, Sigurd Magnuson Slembe (ruled 1136–1139) (Snorri, *Saga of Magnus the Blind*, ch. 17). Snorri's account places the raid on Konungahella in the chapters just after the capture and mutilation of Magnus IV (Snorri, *Saga of Magnus the Blind*, chs. 8–9), while the following chapters narrate the events that took place before the assassination of Harald IV Gille (Snorri, *Saga of Magnus the Blind*, chs. 12–18. The volume of the narrative and number of events that took place in this part of Snorri's work strongly suggest that they could not have all occurred after the fall of Magnus IV and before early August of 1135. It is worth noting that during this period Harald IV Gille briefly campaigned twice on the Danish islands of Hvedn and Hlesey (Snorri, *Saga of Magnus the Blind*, ch. 12). This strongly suggests that the events in Snorri's Chapters 12 to 18 happened after the raid on Konungahella. Moreover, as already mentioned, and according to English scholar Eric Christiansen, Snorri's foster-father Jón Loptson lived in Konungahella at the time of the Slavic raid (Christiansen, in Saxo 1984: 712–713 n8; Snorri, *Saga of Magnus the Blind*, ch. 9), and might have provided the chronicler with an eyewitness account. So, with no positive indication in any sources for the year 1136, Snorri's account, as well as cumulative circumstantial evidence, safely places the raid on Konungahella as occurring on the 10th of August 1135.

The raid

The raid, according to Snorri, took place on Saint Laurentius (Laurence) on the 10th of August, and as we now know in 1135. The chronicler says that the Slavic expedition comprised 550 ships, with each taking on board 44 armed men and 2 horses (Snorri, *Saga of Magnus the Blind*, ch. 10). It would give us 24,200 warriors and 1100 horses which is of course a gross exaggeration. We cannot come up with an exact number of

ships, but most likely a very large expedition might have included between 50 and 70 vessels of various sizes, and the number of raiders might have been between 1,000 and 1,500. We will look into ships and boats of the Baltic Slavs in a bit more detail later.

The raiding party was led by the Pomeranian duke Ratibor I (born c. 1124 – d. before 1156)³ and beside the Pomeranians, some other Baltic Slavs also took part. By mediaeval standards, it must have been a well organised and large expedition, especially considering that it was conducted at quite a remote location. This Slavic fleet had to sail from Pomerania or perhaps from Rügen Island for about 300 nautical miles. It is hard to say how long the voyage took, but it was most likely somewhere between 4 and 5 days. The first leg was definitely the longest, from their point of departure to somewhere in Scania, and then alongside the coast, north toward Konungahella. They must have snuck past Sjælland (Zealand) island, most likely overnight, through the eastern strait between Copenhagen and Lund (modern Sweden) (Kosiarz 1978: 39). In the usual fashion of the times they pillaged the Scanian coast for food and other supplies. According to Snorri, prior to the attack, both king Eric II Emune and Archbishop Asser of Lund warned the inhabitants of Konungahella of Slavic incursions, almost certainly alongside the Scanian coast (Snorri, *Saga of Magnus the Blind*, ch. 10). Konungahella itself was assaulted through the two branches of the Göta river. The ships under chieftains Donimir and Uniebor approached the town from the eastern branch of the river and landed nearby. The main force under Ratibor I sailed toward the port through the western branch, while the riders rode on the land. They attacked the harbour from the land and ships and seized, pillaged and burned nine merchant vessels. The rest of the invaders then disembarked, pillaging and burning the settlement. The residents of Konungahella took refuge in the main stronghold which was besieged by the Slavs. According to Snorri, Ratibor offered the inhabitants free passage but the defenders refused to surrender. Soon after around 200 Norwegian men came as reinforcements from the nearby settlement of Skurbagar but they were defeated by the Slavs. Finally, after a number of assaults the stronghold capitulated (Snorri, *Saga of Magnus the Blind*, ch. 10). Snorri did not specify how long the siege took place but a safe guess would be that the stronghold capitulated on the 12th of August, on the third day after the initial attack. This could be concluded from the fact that all the events that took place as described in Snorri's narrative, would simply not fit into one or two days. Also it is worth noting that according to the source, Ratibor I thrice offered safe passage to the Konungahella defenders (Snorri, *Saga of Mag-*

³ Rettibur in Snorri. A corrupted form of Slavic name Ratibor, Racibor. Two part name comprising roots raci-, "war, combat, to fight" and bor- "fight, battle". Meaning: "one that fought in many battles".

nus the Blind, chs. 9–10). The Slavs apparently did not keep their promise of a safe passage, plundered and burnt the stronghold, slaughtered old and young who were unfit for labour, and took a large number of inhabitants of Konungahella into captivity. They were all taken into slavery back in the Slavic lands, with the exception of local parish priest Andreas and four clerics who were allowed to go free. Apparently some more prominent captives were later ransomed (Snorri, *Saga of Magnus the Blind*, ch. 11). This release of the priest could be explained by the fact that Ratibor I was a Christian, at least nominally, and he must have shown some respect to the Church and its people.

Ships and boats

It is beyond the scope of this article to go into detail about the vessels used by the Slavs during this raid. Nonetheless, this subject has to be briefly addressed. The Slavs settled the Baltic coast in the course of the sixth and seventh centuries. Slavic settlements become visible in the archaeological record from the middle of the 6th century, primarily by the appearance of cremation burials and characteristic pottery. They increased in number and size thereafter. In the course of the sixth and seventh centuries the entire region was settled by the Slavs, while the remnants of the Germanic population were slavified (Godłowski 1981: 49–50; Miś 1997: 114). Ships and boats for fishing and commerce were made locally in most Slavic Baltic settlements and were clearly modelled and built on Scandinavian examples.⁴ This is demonstrated by the fact, that when the Slavic fleet approached Konungahella some locals mistook it for being Eric II's ships coming to the port (Snorri, *Saga of Magnus the Blind*, ch. 10). It comes as no surprise as the Slavs who settled the southern Baltic coast originally came from the area north of the Carpathian Mountains, which is now Western and Central Ukraine, and possibly south-eastern Poland. They were farmers who emerged as a distinct linguistic and cultural group far away from the sea. When they settled in the Baltic coastal region and adjoining islands, they quickly learned maritime skills from their Scandinavian neighbours, and adapted to the coastal and insular environment (Łowmiański 1967: 98–101, 104, 221). A number of Slavic vessels from this period were excavated. For example, at Kamień Pomorski in Pomerania from the eighth to ninth centuries, Szczecin (Ger. Stettin) from the ninth century, Ralswiek of Rügen Island from the ninth to eleventh centuries or Gdańsk (Ger. Danzig) from tenth to twelfth centuries. Generally speaking Slavic ships were between 7–18 metres long, 2 to 5 metres wide, and 1.5 metres height,

⁴ Boats and ships modelled on Scandinavian: Dvornik 1959: 297; and for Scandinavian ships description, see: Graham-Campbell 1980: 46.

and resembled Scandinavian *snekkja* (snekke). They were built usually from oak timber. They had about 20 rowers and a mast to sail in favourable conditions. On average they could carry about 20-40 people. Alternatively they could transport up to 10 tons of cargo (Wędzki 2008: 316–318; Chrzanowski 2007: 76–78; Wójcicki 1989: 15; Collins 2013: 99). This is of course a very broad generalisation and some ships were larger and some smaller. As mentioned earlier, in this particular case some Slavic ships were as large as Scandinavian vessels that could carry up to 44 men and 2 horses. Of course Ratibor I's fleet must have been a collection of odd boats and ships and only a small number of them must have been that large.

The involvement of other Slavs

The Slavic forces which raided and sacked Konungahella comprised a relatively large number of ships and people. This clearly indicates that the attacking force must have included not only the Pomeranians but also others. Unfortunately, Snorri did not specify who these others were, but it is unlikely that they were recruited for the expedition randomly. Snorri has written that the raid was led by Ratibor I of Pomerania, his sister's son Danimysł⁵ and Uniebor,⁶ “a chief who ruled over many people” (Snorri, *Saga of Magnus the Blind*, ch. 10). It is worth noting that the speech delivered by Uniebor during the campaign indicates that he was an important person on a par with the expedition leader Ratibor I (Snorri, *Saga of Magnus the Blind*, ch. 10). Although the content of Uniebor's speech is most likely an invention of Snorri, the very fact he was mentioned by name is a clear indication that he was not a simple freelance warlord or pirate. Instead, he must have been a leader or ruler of a large Baltic Slavic political entity. In the twelfth century, beside the Pomeranians under Ratibor I, we have two candidates for being involved in the raid. We can consider either the Obodrites, who lived in modern Mecklenburg, or the Ranove of Rügen Island. Taking into consideration political realities among the Baltic Slavs of that period, only they could provide a large number of ships and warriors for the expedition.

We can exclude the Obodrites as after the assassination of their ruler, Danish prince Kanut Lavard, in 1131 (Helmold, I.49–50), the unity of the Obodrites' state was not maintained. The Western part of the Obodrite lands of the Wagrians and Polabians

⁵ Dunimiz in Snorri. It seems to be a corruption of a Slavic name. Not certainly but most likely – Danimysł or Dunimysł. Also a two part name comprising Slavic roots dan-, dani- “to give, giving” and mysl- from myśl “to think, thought”. Meaning – “one that gives advice, an idea”.

⁶ Unibur in Snorri. A Slavic name Uniebor or Unibor. Again a two part name comprising roots unie-, uni- “better” and bor- “fight, battle”.

came under the authority of Pribislav of Lübeck, of the Nakonid dynasty. At the same time the Eastern part fell – Obodrite proper, Varnove, as well as lesser tribes – under the control of an Obodrite magnate, Niklot. Therefore, the Obodrites as such were weakened and it appears that Niklot was reluctant to get involved in any major operation against his neighbours. Polish historian Adam Turasiewicz speculated that some Obodrites might have taken part in the raid, however if this was even the case, they would have been a few warlords acting independently (Helmold, I,52; Turasiewicz 2004: 217–220), and had no significant impact on the outcome of the expedition. Besides, it is worth to note that neither Pribislav nor Niklot were mentioned by Snorri on this occasion.

This leaves us with the Ranove of Rügen Island as the only candidates to be participants in the raid. To make this claim credible we need to look more closely into Pomeranian and Ranove affairs and their mutual relationship. It is known that a sister of Ciesław I (Tetzlav) and Jaromir I (Jaromar) of Rügen married the Pomeranian duke Warcisław I (Vartislaw), a brother of Ratibor I.⁷ The marriage probably took place before 1124, prior to the subjugation of Pomerania by Bolesław III the Wry-Mouth of Poland.⁸ This dynastic link between Pomerania and the Rugian Principality is supported by a charter issued in 1218 by Pomeranian duke Bogusław II, a son of Bogusław I, just after the death of Jaromir I of Rügen. He referred to a deceased Ranove duke as “*cognatus noster*” – our relative – when he claimed rights to lands at Eldena previously given to the Cistercian monks, as being his on the basis of “*iure hereditario*” – inheritance rights (Christiansen in Saxo 1984: 909–117). At the same time a daughter of Warcisław I was apparently married to an unnamed member of the ruling family of the Ranove of Rügen (Rymar 2005: 109–121). As we know, medieval marriages were to a large extent a political act performed to reinforce or create alliances. It therefore appears that, at the time of the raid on Konungahella, some form of political alliance must have existed between the Ranove and the Pomeranians. Also, such an alliance would be a logical arrangement for both principalities. In the early twelfth century the Ranove were in practically constant, ongoing conflict with the Danes (Saxo, XIII and XV). At the same time Pomerania was under strong political and military pressure from Poland and subsequently had to submit to Bolesław III. However, it seems that Pomeranian dependency was most likely limited to a declaration of vassalage and payment of a tribute, and a largely nominal acceptance of Christianity (Herbord, II,5). Additionally, the Ranove and Pomeranians must have been aware of the Em-

⁷Saxo, XVI. 4 (pp. 608–609). Saxo referred to Jaromir as *avunculus* – “uncle” of Bogusław I (Boguslav) of Pomerania, son of Warcisław I.

⁸On Warcisław I, see Leciejewicz 1990: 396.

pire's advances into the region especially since 1128 when the German Emperor Lothar III appointed a Dane, Canute Lavard, an Earl of Schleswig, as an Obodrite ruler (Helmold I.49–50). Moreover, there is no doubt that both the Pomeranians and Ranove were aware of Polish interests and expansionist plans for the region. The Polish ambitions were manifested by the marriage of Bolesław III's daughter Richeza to Magnus the Strong (Nielsson), a rival for the Danish throne in the ongoing succession conflict. This marriage took place around 1129.⁹ It appears to be obvious that such a dynastic liaison must have been aimed at making Denmark and Poland allies, and for coordinating both kingdoms' expansion into the Rugian Principality as well as strengthening the Polish hold on Pomerania. It is worth noting that on at least one occasion Magnus the Strong's forces assisted Bolesław III in his campaign against the rebellious Vartislav I of Pomerania (Saxo, Book XIII.5). This alliance was however short lived. Magnus the Strong was killed in the battle of Fotevik in 1134, and Richeza was sent back home (Saxo, Book XIII.12; cf. Christiansen in Saxo 1984: 303–304 n39). Consequently, when a triumphant Eric II gained Emperor Lothar III's backing, he simply did not need Polish support. Being squeezed between the German Empire, the Danes and the Poles meant that nothing however changed for the Rugian Principality and the Duchy of Pomerania. They could still expect aggression from three sides. Therefore, they would be natural allies, and an alliance between them is very plausible, if not certain. In turn, this additionally supports the notion of participation of the Ranove in the expedition. So, all the above, as well as the recognition of Uniebor as a person of political and military high standing leave no doubt that he must have been a contemporary ruler of the Ranove, or at least an important member of their ruling family. Hence, concluding this section, we can assume, that the raiding party that sacked Konungahella comprised of the Pomeranians led by duke Ratibor I, and it also included a large contingent of the Ranove under the command of Uniebor of Rügen.

Reasons for the raid

The most surprising fact about the whole event was that Ratibor I's raiders sailed as far north, about 300 nautical miles, to attack a remote Norwegian settlement, albeit an important one. It is clear that such a large raid was not a simple matter. To undertake such a logistically difficult enterprise there must have been some good reasons for organising this expedition. Unfortunately, our sole account about the raid, that is Snorri, does not provide us with any information or clues as to why this expedition took place.

⁹ Richeza or Ryksa. Her Slavic name Sventoslava, wife of Magnus the Strong: Saxo, XIII.5; Christiansen, in Saxo 1984, p. 292 n5; Jasiński 1992: 211–214; and Kosiarz 1978: 38.

For these reasons a number of historians have attempted to explain the raid on Konungahella in a broader political context and to link it to Imperial (German), Danish and Polish interests and policies in Central Europe of the first half of the twelfth century.

In Polish historiography, especially older works, there is a notion that the raid was instigated by Polish ruler Bolesław III the Wrymouth. Attempts have been made at explaining it in the broader context of regional politics, and linking it to the Merseburg Convention held there on 15th of August 1135. Bolesław III was summoned there by Emperor Lothar III. The main issue at Merseburg was to resolve the ongoing conflict between Bolesław III of Poland, Sobieslav I of Bohemia and Bela the Blind of Hungary, where the Emperor acted as an arbiter (Wyrozumski 1984: 103–104). As the subject of the Merseburg meeting is beyond the scope of this work we will not discuss the conflict involving the three abovementioned kingdoms. It has been postulated, among others by Polish historian Lech Fabiańczyk, that Bolesław III encouraged Ratiбор I of Pomerania to undertake an attack on Konungahella. This was supposed to harm Danish interests there. Also, Fabiańczyk claimed that by doing so Bolesław III aimed to demonstrate his power and influence in the South-Eastern Baltic basin and to strengthen his bargaining position with the Emperor (Fabiańczyk 2001: 69–70).

However, this explanation does not appear to be very convincing. First of all, the Merseburg Convention took place on 15th of August 1135, while the raid on Konungahella happened on the 10th and most likely the stronghold was taken on the 12th of August. It is very unlikely that news about it would reach the Emperor in such a short time. Secondly, although Danish politics were mingled with Norwegian affairs, the devastation of Konungahella would be of no great consequence for Eric II. Thirdly, homage from Pomerania and Rugian Principality was recorded by Otto of Freising, a contemporary chronicler. The account also mentioned payment being made to Lothar III from these territories due for the previous 12 years.¹⁰ This issue requires some further explanation. Sometime around 1121/1122, Vartislav I of Pomerania was subdued by the Polish duke Bolesław III after a series of defeats, and the duchy of Pomerania became a Polish fief.¹¹ At that time the Rugian Principality

¹⁰ Otto Friesingensis, *Chronicon*, Book VII, Year 1135 (p. 336). “Polanorum ducem cum multis muneribus obvium habuit. Quem tamen non ante dignatus est suo conspectui presentari, quam tributum XII annorum, hoc est D [500] libras ad singulos annos persolveret et de Pomeranis et Rugis hominum sibi faceret subiectionemque perpetuam sacramento firmaret”.

¹¹ Cumulative narrative in the sources points to year 1121/1122; Herbord, II.5; Ebbo, III.4; *Rocznik Świętokrzyski dawny*, Year 1122 (p. 774). As for tithe, see: Herbord, II.30. “Tota terra Pomeranorum duci Poloniae, quicumque sit ille, 300 tantum argenti marcas publici ponderis annis singulis persolvat. Si bellum ingruerit ei, hoc modo eum iuvabunt: Novem patres familias decimum in expeditionem armis et impensis habunde procurabunt”.

included not only Rügen Island but adjoining territories of the mainland. It incorporated Stralsund and Barth as well as Tribsee districts (Christiansen in Saxo 1984: 782 n240; 824 n428). Probably not long after subduing Pomerania, Bolesław III conducted an expedition against the Ranove sometime around 1123/1124. The evidence here is circumstantial but the Ranove, at least formally, might have paid some ransom or submitted to the Polish duke.¹² Although by 1135, Pomerania was formally a Polish vassal the position of Bolesław III in the region was rather weak. As for the Rugian Principality, it appears that Bolesław III did not exercise any power over them whatsoever and in reality the Rugian Principality was fully independent. In terms of the Merseburg Convention we have two prime sources: *Annalista Saxo* (Year 1135 (pp. 769–770)) and *Annales Magdeburgenses* (Year 1135 (p. 185)). Neither provides detailed information on its outcome, and the Magdeburg Annals are based on the *Annalista Saxo* for entries between 1125 and 1139 (Werthschulte 2013). It is worth noting that at Merseburg during a ceremonial procession Bolesław III carried a sword walking in front of Lothar III (*Annalista Saxo*, Year 1135 (p. 769)). This clearly indicates that he submitted to and declared himself a vassal of the Emperor. Hence, it is most likely that by making homage from the Rugian Principality, the Polish duke relinquished his doubtful and nominal claims to it. As for Pomerania, he paid due tribute, something possibly agreed upon with Emperor Lothar III prior to the Imperial campaign in the region against the Obodrites and the Veletian Slavs, and the Polish wars on Pomerania. The agreement must have taken place most likely sometime around 1121/1122 (*Annalista Saxo*, Year 1121 (p. 756)). Consequently this homage could be seen as Bolesław III's assurance to the Emperor that he will not interfere with future imperial plans to subjugate the Ranove. As for Pomerania it remained a Polish fief with Imperial consensus. It has to be acknowledged that politically resolving the conflict with Bohemia and Hungary and gaining the support and friendship of the Emperor was the most important matter for the Polish duke. Additionally, it is widely accepted that at Merseburg Bolesław III lobbied for recognition of the independence of the Polish archbishopric of Gniezno. In fact it was granted in the Papal Bull *Ex commisso nobis a Deo* of 1136.¹³ Therefore, taking into consideration all the above, it would be pointless, if not contrary to Bolesław III's interests to instigate the Pomeranians and Ranove to attack a remote Norwegian settlement. Besides, as the outcome

¹²Wyrozumski 1984: 102; Kosiarz 1978: 38; Otto of Friesland's account in note 50 supports the claim. Bolesław III's overseas expedition: "Bolezlavus tercius mare transivit et castra obtinuit", *Rocznik krakowski*, Year 1123 (p. 832). This account may refer to Rügen Island but may as well to a Pomeranian Usedom/Uznam Island.

¹³*Ex commisso nobis a Deo*, in *Bulla gnieźnieńska z 7 lipca 1136 roku*; and Wyrozumski 1984: 103.

of the Merseburg Convention shows, the Polish duke was loosing his influence in Pomerania and on the southern Baltic shores. Moreover, Ratibor I's dependency and allegiance to Polish duke Bolesław III are not as certain as it is sometime postulated.¹⁴ It appears that although his duchy remained a fief of Poland, he tried to loosen his dependency and might have acted independently. Ratibor's wife Pribislava,¹⁵ as her name indicates, was of a Slavic background but there is no evidence to identify her as a daughter or niece of Bolesław III of Poland. It is worth noting, that it has been argued that she was a daughter of Rurikid prince Yaroslav of Volynia and Turov (died c. 1123). Older literature even speculates that she was an Obodrite related to Nakonid dynasty (Rymar 2005: 107–109; and Wójcicki 1989: 35). So, in light of this cumulative evidence we can discard the notion that Bolesław III of Poland was in anyway instrumental in the raid on Konungahella.

With Polish involvement in the raid excluded we are practically left with one explanation: That it was an independent Pomeranian initiative and execution. It appears that the Ranove were asked to participate and so they vigorously did. The Scandinavian seafarers, mainly from Denmark and modern Sweden, were frequently engaged on pillage raids as much as they were involved in maritime commerce in the Baltic basin. These pillage raids were often undertaken in the South on Slavic inhabited areas. At the same time the Norwegians predominately operated on the North Sea and on the Atlantic (England, Ireland, France, Iceland or on the Northern Danish shores). As far as we know there was an isolated Norwegian-Slavic sea encounter reported by Snorri, but it took place sometime in the middle of the tenth century. King Håkon the Good on his way to Zeeland encountered and defeated 11 Slavic ships in the Sund (Øresund). Snorri says that the Norwegian king commanded only 2 ships (Snorri, *Hakon the Good's Saga*, ch. 7). So, it is most likely that they were Slavic merchant ships rather than warships. Besides this, there is no evidence whatsoever of any Norwegian incursions on the southern Baltic coast inhabited by the Slavic people, at the time we are concerned with. Hence, we can also exclude that it was any sort of retribution or revenge expedition.

Henceforth, we are left with the most plausible explanation that the main reason for the expedition was primarily to get as much booty as possible by plunder. Then, the reasoning of the Slavs for undertaking this expedition can be easily reconstructed. It has to be remembered that numerous Baltic Slav warriors took part in many Scan-

¹⁴ It has been postulated by prof. Lars Hermanson that Ratibor acted in some conjunction with Bolesław III of Poland: Hermanson 2009.

¹⁵ Konrad Bishop of Pomerania confirmed the possessions of Kloster Grove, including donations by "dominus Ratiborus cum...consorte sua Pribizlaua...successores eius Bogozlauus et Cazimerus", by charter dated 1168.

dinavian wars in the Middle Ages, either as adventurers or mercenaries, or both. Moreover, dynastic marriages between the Western Slavs and Scandinavians were not rare,¹⁶ and on some islands such as Lolland and Falster there lived a Slavic and mixed population. This is confirmed by topomastic evidence and the Slavonic names of a number of local landlords.¹⁷ So, the Baltic Slavs were fully aware of the nature of Scandinavian politics and the current situation there during the lull in the Norwegian civil war (Snorri, *Saga of Magnus the Blind*, chs. 12, 17). It has to be admitted that Konungahella might not have been a trading centre of a great importance but a raid would still bring a valuable booty in the form of luxurious items such as jewellery and other valuable artefacts. Also, important captured people would provide a hefty return when ransomed. Therefore, the Slavs must have counted on the element of surprise, hoping to catch Konungahella off guard. They never before went as far as Konungahella and the Norwegians would not expect an attack by such remote people. It is also very likely that the timing of the raid correlated with the Merseburg Convention where Bolesław III of Poland submitted to emperor Lothar III and made homage from both Pomerania and the Rugian principality. Ratibor I of Pomerania and Ranove's leadership were very likely aware of what will happen at Merseburg. Therefore, this was a final opportunity to go plunder and get some riches, before the Empire and the Danes resume their expansion into the region assured of no interference from the Kingdom of Poland. In fact exactly this happened a year later, when Eric II of Denmark attacked and defeated the Ranove on Rügen Island (See Appendix 1). As we could see, the raid was a massive operation, but beside a booty and numerous people being taken captive, any significant political goals can hardly be seen. At best we can assume that, both Ratibor I and Uniebor, by acquiring booty from Konungahella would enrich their coffers, which in turn could be used for defensive measures in face of the inevitable Danish and Imperial encroachment. So, it must have been an opportunistic, albeit well planned expedition, to get a rich booty and slaves, some of whom could be ransomed later.

Concluding, in the light of all presented evidence it can be said that the raid on Konungahella on the 10th of August 1135 had mainly material goals and was an opportunistic deed at the time of internal turmoil in Norway. In terms of long-term politics it was a rather inconsequential episode.

¹⁶ To cite a few examples: Adam of Bremen, II.39 (37) (cf. p. 81n); Helmold, I.24–25, 48; Christiansen, in Saxo 1984: 784.

¹⁷ Łowmiański 1967: 221.; and on Gnumerus of Falster: Saxo, XIV.22; and Christiansen, in Saxo 1984: 781–782 n239; and *Knytlunga saga*, ch. 119; and on Thord Dobicsun Christiansen, in Saxo 1984: 767 n178.

APPENDIX

ERIC'S RAID ON ARKONA ON RÜGEN ISLAND

There were claims that the Danish raid on Rügen Island that took place around the time of the sacking of Konungahella, was a retaliation on the Ranove by Eric II of Denmark for their participation in the destruction of this Norwegian settlement (Saxo, XIV.1; Christiansen, in Saxo 1984.: 712–713 n8). However, this claim does not have any merit.

Eric II attacked Arkona (main pagan religious centre of the god Sventovit's cult and a well fortified stronghold) on Rügen Island, defeated the Ranove and forced them to negotiate a truce. As a part of the agreement they might have promised to accept Christianity. However, the Slavs did not keep their promises and continued to practice their own religion after the Danes left. This Danish expedition was described in detail by Saxo Grammaticus. The chronicler placed the expedition just after Eric II refrained from giving full support to Harald IV Gille in his conflict with Magnus IV the Blind (Saxo, XIV.1 (pp. 351–352)). It definitely must have occurred after the battle of Färlev in August 1134 (Saxo, XIV.1 (p.352); Christiansen, in Saxo 1984: 712–713 n8). While Snorri does not mention the invasion of Rügen Island, according to *Knytlunga Saga* Eric II's attack took place a year after Harald Kesja was killed, and Harald's death has been dated to 1135 (*Knytlunga saga*, ch. 101). Also, taking into consideration that a major expedition required long preparation and both Scandinavian and Slavic raids in the Baltic basin usually took place in summertime, Eric II simply would not have had enough time to launch the expedition in 1135. Therefore, the evidence strongly suggests that this conflict with the Ranove happened in 1136. By that time Eric II was formally an Imperial vassal. The 1136 date perfectly fits the notions that Eric II capitalised on political agreements (Polish homage from Rügen Island) made at Merseburg in August 1135 between the Emperor Lothar III and Polish duke Boleslaw III.

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