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Slavery, Religion and the Prus¹

In recent years there have been notable advances of research into the Viking age slave trade along the Baltic littoral.² There have been two main lines of inquiry: firstly, the trade itself, its markets and supply lines and in particular, its relationship to the truly vast hoards of silver dirhams from Central Asia found in Scandinavia and modern Poland, Belarus, Russia and Ukraine.³ Secondly, attention has centred on the trade's influence on the political development of the region, notably the process of state formation by the Czechs, Poles and Rus. There has been rather less about what influence, if any, the Christian religion had on the trade, partly because both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches seem to have regarded slave taking and trading as a fact of life. Yet by the twelfth century there was legislation and the development of some limitations on the practice. The contribution to the trade of the *Prusi*, Old Prussians or Prus allows us a case study of two aspects of the trade. What was the contribution of the south-east Baltic to the trade and how significant was it that the Prus remained pagan when most of their neighbours were Christians?

Their persistent adherence to pagan beliefs is one reason why we know relatively little about the Prus: we lack the great founding narratives provided by chroniclers such as Gallus Anonymus for Poland, Cosmas of Prague for Bohemia (Czechia) or the author of *Povest'*

¹ My thanks to Mitko Panov for organising the conference in the difficult circumstances of the 2020 pandemic and also to my fellow panelists, Christian Raffensperger and Alex Feldman and also Jonathan Shepard and Christian Zschieschang for their suggestions and help.

² See D. Adamczyk, *Srebro i Władza* (Warsaw: PWN, 2018); P. Frankopan, *The Silk Roads: a new History of the World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 117-35; J. Gruszczynski, M. Jankowiak and J. Shepard (eds.), *Viking-Age Trade: silver, slaves and Gotland* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020); M. Hardt, 'The Importance of the Slave Trade for the Slavic Princes of the early and high Middle Ages' in *Acquérir, prélever, contrôler: Les ressources en compétition (400-1100)* ed. V. Loré et al (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 81-93; M. Jankowiak, 'Dirhams for slaves: investigating the Slavic slave trade in the tenth century'. Paper given at All Souls, Oxford, 27-2-2012; M. McCormick, *Origins of the European economy* (Cambridge: University Press, 2001), 237-61; B. Raffield, 'The slave markets of the Viking world: comparative perspectives on an 'invisible archaeology'', *Slavery & Abolition*, 40:4 (2019), 682-705. See also, A. P. Roach, 'The People Trafficking Princes: Slaves, Silver and State Formation in Poland', *Slavonica*, 25:2, (2020), 132-156.

³ Notably through Oxford University's 'Dirhams for Slaves' project financed by the UK AHRC.

Vremennyykh Let or Tale of Bygone Years Russian Primary Chronicle (Russia/Ukraine).

However, the presence of Christian missionaries in their territory and the Prus' inclination to martyr them led to descriptions of them in hagiographies and mentions as distant political actors by chroniclers of the region such as Gallus Anonymus or Thietmar of Merseburg. The limitations of the written sources and growing interest in Europe's pagan culture has stimulated archaeological interest and there has been intensive research in the area usually assigned to the Prus in the coastal region between the Vistula and Niemen/Nemunas/Memel rivers. The highlight of this has been the discovery and partial excavation of the great early medieval trading settlement of Truso.

One late writer who was interested in both the Prus and slaves was the Polish renaissance chronicler, Jan Długosz, Longinus (1415-80). Based in Kraków for much of his life, he was a diplomatic envoy for Casimir IV (r. 1447-92) to the Teutonic Knights and so knew the area.⁴ He was also a devotee of Saint Wojciech or Adalbert (c.956-97) to whom one of Kraków's oldest churches was dedicated and where the saint had supposedly preached on his way from Prague to the Polish court at Gniezno, where he planned his ill-fated attempt to convert the Prus to Christianity. Slavery runs like a thread through Długosz's account of Adalbert's life and encounter with the Prus. One reason Adalbert abandoned his bishopric of Prague was because its inhabitants 'sold boys and girls to the Jews'. On his return to Prague in 993 he redeemed some more who had been sold to the Jews and gave them their freedom. He was also appalled by the polygamy of Prague's citizens, citing it as one reason why he found episcopal life there intolerable.⁵ Polygamy was a blurring of the lines both between paganism

⁴ J. Wyrozumski, 'Medieval historiography' in *Polish Cultural and Scientific Heritage*, ed. E. Szczepanik (London: Polish Society of Arts and Sciences Abroad, 2003), 237-8.

⁵ Ioannis Dlugossii, *Annales seu Cronicae incliti regni Poloniae*, ed. I. Dąbrowski, (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1964), 210: Długosz, Jan, *Annals*, trans. M. Michael (Chichester: IMP, 1997), 5, 8.

and Christianity, and between marriage and slave concubines. It occurs again when the chronicler describes Adalbert's mission to the Prus:

The Prussians bought their wives and compelled them to work at servile tasks. They burnt the bodies of the dead together with their horses, arms, clothing and other things dear to their hearts... Prussians could have an unlimited number of wives, just as many as each could afford to buy; consequently they did not respect them, but forced them to fulfil the duties of servants and slaves.⁶

Długosz wrote centuries later and had his own agendas, not least the denigration of Poland's neighbours, but he drew from a variety of earlier sources, some of which are no longer known to us and he is acute in some of his observations such as the similarity of the Prussian and Lithuanian languages. He offers a compelling picture of the Prus with the clear implication that they were used to trading in people and there are good reasons to think that even if he erred in some of his dates, the broad picture he drew was correct. One telling detail as an example is that Długosz reported that the sale of Adalbert's body to Poland's ruler was conducted in silver which, from both archaeological evidence and modern research on the Baltic economy was the most likely means of exchange.⁷ The anonymous twelfth century French monk, Gallus Anonymus, the first chronicler of the Polish kingdom is closer to the events, but reports the transaction in gold which is unlikely as the archaeological scarcity of gold from this period suggests very rare use of it in trade.

Early medieval sources are relatively generous in evidence of the economic life of the Prus.

The first account we have of them link them with trade: the late ninth century voyage of Wulfstan, an Old English account of the Baltic inserted into a translation of Orosius'

Historiae, features the port of Truso, near modern day Elbląg, on the shores of Lake Drużno,

⁶ Ioannis Dlugossii, *Annales* vol. 1, 216 (997), (my translation, but see Michael,9). Cf. Henry of Livonia, *Chronicle*, ed. and trans. J. Brundage, 2nd edn. (New York: Columbia University Press), XXX (1), 238. The pagan Oeselians violate female prisoners. 'taking them as wives, each taking two or three or more', selling others.

⁷ J. Kershaw, 'Gold as a Means of Exchange in Scandinavian England (c.AD 850–1050)' in *Silver, Butter, Cloth*, ed. J. Kershaw et al (Oxford: University Press, 2019), 228-9.

now identified with the archaeological site of Janów Pomorski. Wulfstan informs his audience us that there is much honey and fishing in *Estland*, as he calls the surrounding region, and he makes clear that this was a severely stratified society when he refers to the king and powerful men drinking fermented mare's milk and that the poor and the slaves (*peowan*) drink mead.⁸

Wulfstan says little about Truso itself which had developed as an outlet to the Baltic via the convoluted mouth of the Vistula. From the archaeological evidence of objects found it would appear to have been founded by Scandinavians, predominantly Danes, in the late eighth century. Its importance is registered by the fact that by the time Wulfstan wrote, it was his destination.⁹ Truso and the surrounding area also took part in the extraordinary accumulation around the Baltic Sea of silver dirhams, drawn from Asia, especially from the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad. This has intrigued scholars wondering what it was that these areas had to sell to draw in bullion in such vast amounts.¹⁰ Furs were a high value item of limited weight which the region certainly traded in, but the correlation between fur production and dirham hoards is poor.¹¹ While there is evidence that furs had reached Baghdad by the early ninth century and in the succeeding decades became a lucrative trade for Rus merchants, they constituted a staple trade which continued throughout the middle ages and cannot account for the dramatic fluctuations in eastern silver.¹² The same can be said of amber which was both

⁸ Janet Bately, 'Wulfstan's Voyage and his description of *Estland*: the text and the language of the text' in A. Englert and A. Trakadas, *Wulfstan's Voyage* (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2009), 15-16.

⁹ Marek F. Jagodziński, 'The settlement of Truso' in Englert and Trakadas, *Wulfstan's Voyage*, 187.

¹⁰ M. Jankowiak, 'Dirham flows into northern and eastern Europe and the rhythms of the slave trade with the Islamic world', and D. Adamczyk, 'Trading networks, war lords and hoarders: Islamic coin flows into Poland in the Viking Age,' both in Gruszczynski et al, *Viking-Age Trade*, 113 and 133-5 respectively.

¹¹ J. Howard-Johnson, 'The fur trade in the early middle ages' in Gruszczynski et al., *Viking-Age Trade*, 64-7 and J. Martin, *Treasure of the Land of Darkness: the fur trade and its significance for medieval Russia*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1986).

¹² Ibn Khurradādhbih and Abū Hāmid al-Andalusī al-Gharnātī in *Ibn Fadlan and the land of Darkness*, ed. P. Lunde and C. Stone (London: Penguin, 2012), 112 and 75 respectively take us from the ninth to the twelfth century.

light and beautiful and had reached Baghdad by around 850.¹³ A closer correlation can be found with the trade in slaves which had been pioneered by Viking Rus merchants and it is its contribution to this which most probably brought prosperity to Truso.¹⁴ From the early ninth century blonde, blue-eyed slaves such as Slavs or Balts, both male and female had become fashionable, firstly in the Abbasid caliphate capital of Baghdad and later in the new Samanid power centre of Bukhara in modern Uzbekistan. These slaves were sometimes used as domestic servants and fighters, but the trade was primarily oriented around sex.¹⁵

They [the Rus] arrive, moor their boats by the Itil (Volga) and build large, wooden houses on its banks. [. . .] They are accompanied by beautiful female slaves for trade with the merchants. They have intercourse with their female slaves in full view of their companions.¹⁶

Ibn Fadlan was writing in the early tenth century to shock his audience and he still does, but his testimony captures a fascination with the barbarians and the women they traded in.

That fascination lasted even though Truso's pattern of trade underwent a change in the latter half of the ninth century. There have been no dirhams found in the town dated later than 850 and evidence that those that had been imported in the eighth and early ninth century carried on being used in the region as late as the twelfth.¹⁷ By the time of Wulfstan's voyage, Truso was apparently no longer using silver in its trading. Much has been written about this which

¹³ McCormick, *Origins of the European economy*, 610.

¹⁴ Jankowiak, 'Dirham flows', 106, 112, Adamczyk, 'Political Economy', 276; D. Baronas and S.C. Rowell, *Conversion of Lithuania* (Vilnius: Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, 2015), 29-30.

¹⁵ Ibn Rusta, 'On the Rūs', in Lunde and Stone, *Ibn Fadlan*, 126; A. P. Roach and A. Marshall, 'The dynamics of the drugs trade: a model for the medieval trade in slaves?' in Gruszczynski et al., *Viking-Age Trade*, 79.

¹⁶ Ibn Fadlan, 'Mission to the Volga' in *Two Arabic Travel Books*, ed. and trans. J. E. Montgomery and T. Mackintosh-Smith, (New York: University Press, 2014), 243.

¹⁷ M. Bogucki, 'Coin finds in the Viking-age emporium at Janów Pomorski (*Truso*) and the 'Prussian phenomenon'', in *Money circulation in antiquity, the Middle Ages and Modern Times: international symposium of the 50th anniversary of 'Wiadomości Numizmatyczne'*, ed. S. Suchodolski and M. Bogucki (Warsaw-Cracow: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology Polish Academy of Science, 2007), 97-8.

has become known as the “Prussian phenomenon”, the essence of which is that to Prussian linguistic and religious exceptionalism one can add an economic dimension too. Furs, amber, glass beads salt, and even weights have all been suggested as possible alternative means of exchange based on finds in the area and such a wealth of material evidence suggests that trade still continued at Truso, albeit in a changed form¹⁸

While the problem of the Prussian phenomenon cannot be solved here, there are one or two observations which can be made. To begin with, a distinction can be drawn between trade in symbolic currency and trade in goods of intrinsic value, but used as money, such as amber. Prussia was not unique in not having silver finds in the late ninth and tenth century; further south, Prague and the surrounding area was in a similar position, despite it being a famous market for slaves, particularly supplying southern markets such as Andalusia and north Africa. The tenth century Jewish traveller, Ibn Ya’qub described a system of payments there through cloth kerchiefs with little intrinsic value. Such a system relies on trust and an ultimate enforcing authority: Jankowiak has suggested that the ruler completely controlled the market in Prague and the nobility brought in most of the goods, so both trust and authority were present.¹⁹ The other famous example of a symbolic currency is the later account of Abū Hāmid al-Andalusī al-Gharnātī and the intrinsically worthless old squirrel skins in twelfth century Kyiv. They are validated by ‘a piece of black lead, sealed with a die stamp bearing the image of the king.’ Whether buying or selling the skins had to be accepted.²⁰ It is more difficult to see any similar arrangement being replicated in Truso and the surrounding

¹⁸ Bogucki, ‘Coin finds’, *Money circulation in antiquity*, 100-05; I. Jansson, ‘Gotland viewed from the Swedish mainland’, in Gruszczynski *et al*, *Viking Age Trade*, 332.

¹⁹ Jankowiak, ‘Two systems of trade’, 141-2.

²⁰ Abū Hāmid al-Andalusī, in Lunde and Stone, *Ibn Fadlan*, 75-6. See also D. Malarczyk, “‘...A seal with an image of the king’ – Abū Hāmid al-Gharnātī’s report on the use of black lead in eastern Europe’ in *The Sphinx of Slavic sigillography – small lead seals of “Drohiczyn type” from Czermno in their East European context Sfinks słowiańskiej sfragistyki – plomby „typu drohiczyńskiego” z Czermna na wschodnioeuropejskim tle porównawczym*, ed. M. Wołoszyn and A. Musin (Kraków: 2019), 105.

area. As Wulfstan says: ‘Estland is very large and there is very many a town (burh), and in each town there is a king (cyningc)...there is very much (or great) conflict between them.’²¹

The analysis of political fragmentation and a lack of unity is echoed more politely, but persistently by later writers. Adam of Bremen (*fl.* 1050-1081/85) wrote that the Prus ‘will not endure a master among them.’²² In the 960s Ibn Ya’qub commented:

They are known for their bravery. If an army comes to them, one does not wait for his companion to join him but comes out and fights without addressing anybody until he dies.

Significantly, the next sentence is about how they are raided.²³

Skre’s distinction between slave-takers and slave-traders may also be important. Early Truso had a seasonal existence as a trading centre in the late eighth to early ninth century, with the presence of eastern dirhams, both there and elsewhere in the region.²⁴ This fits the pattern of slave-takers; settled or semi-settled Scandinavians on the Baltic coast selling slaves captured or bought from local Slav and Balt communities, on to long distance traders, perhaps based in Gotland and pumping silver into the local economy.²⁵ Later on, though trading continued, high end wealth tended to go elsewhere. It has been suggested that the initial silver influx may well have exacerbated tensions between local Prus leaders or simply swamped demand. High quality Frankish swords have been found in the area and these may have replaced the silver as payment.²⁶

²¹ Bately, ‘Wulfstan’s Voyage’ in *Wulfstan’s Voyage*, 16.

²² Adam Bremensis, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae Pontificum*, ed. B. Schmeidler, (Hanover, 1917) bk.4, xviii (18), 246; Adam of Bremen, *History of the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen* trans. by F. J. Tschan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 199.

²³ Ibn Ya’qub, ‘Account of the Slavs’, tr. D. Mishin, ‘Ibrahim ibn-Ya’qub at-Turtushi’s account of the Slavs from the middle of the tenth century’, *Annual of Medieval Studies at the CEU 1994–1995*, 188.

²⁴ Jagodziński, ‘Settlement of Truso’ in Englert and Trakadas, *Wulfstan’s Voyage*, 187.

²⁵ Dagfinn Skre, ‘Some reflections on Gotland: slavery, slave-traders and slave-takers’, in Gruszczynski et al, *Viking Age Trade*, 443-4.

²⁶ Adamczyk, ‘Trading networks, warlords and hoarders’, 136; ‘Political economy’, 269 and 275-6, 277-8 and *Srebro I Władza*, 90-98.

Ibn Ya'qub's closing remark about raiding made in his discussion of the surrounding peoples while at the Prague slave market may be the most helpful explanation: namely that 'the Rus' attack the Prus, 'coming on ships from the West.'²⁷ From Ibn Ya'qub's perspective 'Rus' was a term which could be applied to all Scandinavian types from Norway to Kyiv, but their western origin indicates that the Prus were victims of Swedish or Danish Viking raids.²⁸ Of the two, Wulfstan's evidence of a Danish presence all along the Baltic coast to the west makes them the more likely, but genetic evidence of southern Baltic peoples in Sweden and Gotland suggests that Swedish raiders were also possible.²⁹

All parties in Truso's early development were pagan, yet there was growing Christian interest in the region and the next extensive account we have of the Prus is at the end of the tenth century from the various contemporary retellings of Adalbert's martyrdom. The hagiographer, John Canaparius, from Adalbert's monastery in Rome was the author of the first *Vita Prior* and wrote around 999. He described the Prus as a people 'whose god is the stomach and avarice joined with death' which implies a certain degree of acquisitiveness combined with recklessness.³⁰ However, the saint, a bishop of Prague who turned missionary may have seen them as victims. In his time in office (983-9, 993-5), Prague was still the major slave market described by ibn Ya'qub and Adalbert was concerned enough, according to his other biographer, Bruno of Querfurt (974-1009), author of the *Vita Altera*, to put aside

²⁷ Ibn Ya'qub, 'Account of the Slavs', tr. D. Mishin, 188.

²⁸ S. Franklin and J. Shepard, *Emergence of Rus* (Harlow: Longman, 1996), 28-9.

²⁹ Margaryan, Lawson, Willerslev et al., 'Population genomics of the Viking world', 393.

³⁰ John Canaparius, *Passio Sancti Adalberti martiris Christi/ Vita Prior* in *Vitae Sanctorum aetatis conversionis Europae centralis (saec. X-XI)/ Saints of the Christianization Age of Central Europe (tenth-eleventh centuries)*, ed. G. Klaniczay (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013), 168-9.

a proportion of his episcopal revenue for the redemption of captives and their restoration.³¹ It may well be that it was in the markets that he first came across the Prus and it influenced his decision to convert them, as opposed to the other candidates for his mission, the Slavic Liutizi.³²

The mission of Adalbert and his two companions also reveals signs of the slave trade. The mission was concentrated along the coastal lands and was a fairly unmitigated disaster.

According to Bruno of Querfurt, Adalbert preached in a market place and met with a hostile response, including the charge that the missionaries caused the crops to fail. The crowd looked for a scapegoat:

But they threatened death to the man who having been placed at the entrance to the kingdom, despatched the good guests to that place: foaming with anger, they promised to burn his house, divide up his property, to sell his wife and children.³³

It is not clear from Bruno's version who is being referred to, but, shortly having crossed into Prus territory, Canaparius has the lord of the area invite Adalbert and his companions to his residence, curious to discover who they were and why they had come and he may in fact be the target of the crowd's anger.³⁴ Equally, the mechanics of servitude are ready to hand. A little later the missionaries are confronted by a group of horsemen who dismount and put them in chains.³⁵ Adalbert's mission probably took place in and around Truso, his martyrdom has been placed in the village of Pachoły, some 30km inland to the south, but it shows what

³¹ Bruno of Querfurt, *Vita Altera/secunda*, 599. See Klaniczay, *Vitae sanctorum*, 379-85 for terminology of different texts about Adalbert and also I. Wood, *The Missionary Life: saints and the evangelisation of Europe, 400-1050* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 207-25.

³² Canaparius, *Passio S. Adalberti/ Vita Prior*, 168-9.

³³ Bruno of Querfurt, *Vita Altera/secunda*, 608. 'Illi vero, qui in ingressu regni positus bonos hospites eo loci dimisit, mortem minantur; domum incendere, divisus rebus uxores et filios vendere, spumante ira pollicentur.'

³⁴ Canaparius, *Passio S. Adalberti/ Vita Prior*, 170-3.

³⁵ Canaparius, *Passio S. Adalberti/ Vita Prior*, 176-7. Bruno of Querfurt, *Vita Altera/secunda*, 610.

one might expect: he visits three settlements reasonably close together and finds the Prus curious, fearful, superstitious, violent, but also connected to commercial life.³⁶

Truso was already in decline and before the most well known assessment of the Prus was written by Adam of Bremen, it seems to have disappeared completely. The Prus maintained a trading presence: writing in the 1070s, Adam reported them at Birka on the island of Björkö just west of modern Stockholm along with Danes, northmen, Slavs and “other Scythian people”.³⁷ Adam’s information was out of date, Birka had already lost much of its importance and he might be referring back to the time of Unni, the missionary bishop who died in 936.³⁸ However, in his geographical section he refers to the Prus as

a most humane people, who go out to help those who are in peril at sea or who are attacked by pirates. Gold and silver they hold in very slight esteem. They have an abundance of strange furs, the odour of which has inoculated our world with the deadly poison of pride. But these furs they regard, indeed as dung, to our shame, I believe, for right or wrong we hanker after a martenskin robe as much as for supreme happiness...Living, moreover, in inaccessible swamps, they will not endure a master among them.³⁹

In essence, Adam is repeating Wulfstan’s analysis; this is a land rich in resources, but divided politically. Even the seeming contrast between Adam’s analysis of the Prus’ lack of materialism and Canaparius’s attribution to them of avarice is less than it first appears. For one thing Adam used the same trope when describing the Swedes:

For they regard as nothing every means of vainglory; that is gold, silver, stately chargers, beaver and marten pelts, which make us lose our minds admiring them.⁴⁰

But he is more explicit in their case about why he mentions this, because he goes on to talk about converting them to Christianity. In writing the *Gesta* of the archbishops of Hamburg-

³⁶ Klaniczay, *Vitae Sanctorum*, 180 n.2.

³⁷ Adam Bremensis, *Gesta*, Bk 1 lx (62), 58. Adam of Bremen, *History*, 52,

³⁸ N. Blomkvist, S. Brink and T. Lindkvist, ‘The Kingdom of Sweden’ in *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy*, ed. N. Berend (Cambridge: University Press, 2007), 182.

³⁹ Adam Bremensis, *Gesta*, Bk 4, xviii (18), 245. Adam of Bremen, *History*, 199.

⁴⁰ Adam Bremensis, *Gesta*, Bk 4, xxi (21), 251. Adam of Bremen, *History*, 202-03.

Bremen Adam was keen to renew the archdiocese's role of mission he felt had been neglected or usurped, so he framed his description of the surrounding peoples with their suitability for conversion.⁴¹ For the Prus this was to portray them as humane and slightly unworldly as regards clothing, even if their enthusiasm for meat and intoxicating drinks, not to mention their closely guarded pagan sites, might have suggested otherwise.⁴²

Adam combined an assessment of the likelihood of conversion with some hard economic information. The centre of Prus activity had shifted considerably further east to Samland, the modern day Kaliningrad peninsular which Adam described as an island. From his earlier references to activity at Birka, the Prus seem to have been seafarers involved in the business of trading furs, with the possible implication that they did not obtain the full value for their produce, exchanging them for *faldones*, coarse pile woven woollen cloaks produced in Scandinavia with the qualities of drying quickly and staying warm while wet.⁴³ Just as with Wulfstan's emphasis on mead instead of beer, there is the implication that Latin writers thought that the Prus were too content to live off their abundance of natural resources rather than turn to the hard graft of crop cultivation or weaving, and this impression is reinforced when Adam discusses their habit of eating their draft animals and drinking their fermented blood and milk to inebriation. In addition, their concern with pirates off their coast shows that they were being raided by sea.⁴⁴

While the influx of dirhams and the markets of the Samanid empire had died out in the 980s, there was still evidence of a slave trade in eleventh century Europe. In England William of

⁴¹ F.J. Tschan, Introduction to Adam of Bremen, *History*, xiv-xv.

⁴² Adam Bremensis, *Gesta*, Bk 4, xviii (18), 245. Adam of Bremen, *History*, 199.

⁴³ Nille Glæsel, Nille Viking website, <https://nilleviking.no/experimental-archaeology/pile-weaving/> (accessed 17 Dec. 2020).

⁴⁴ Adam Bremensis, *Gesta*, Bk 4, xviii (18), 245. Adam of Bremen, *History*, 199.

Malmesbury described the lines of young men and women roped together at Bristol in the lifetime of Wulfstan of Worcester (c.1008-95), probably bound for the market in Dublin.⁴⁵ The market in Prague was also thriving. In recounting the emperor Henry IV's campaign in Swabia in 1077 Bernold of St. Blasien reported that his Bohemian supporters 'preyed on people more willingly than on cattle' with the usual aims of satisfying their lusts and making a profit, although Bernold added the novel feature that captives would be bought for food by the dog headed *cinocephali*.⁴⁶ There was however growing unease at the enslavement of fellow Christians: in England the Laws of William the Conqueror (r. 1066-87) forbade the sale of anyone outside the country, though these laws may in fact date from the early twelfth century.⁴⁷ In 1124 Vladislav I of Bohemia (r. 1109-17, 1120-5) arrested a leading Jewish merchant, redeemed all the Christian slaves in the hands of Jewish merchants and banned Christians from serving them in future, to the delight of the chronicler, Cosmas of Prague.⁴⁸ Around the same time the famous bronze doors of Gniezno cathedral show Adalbert as bishop of Prague, petitioning its duke of for the release of slaves manacled by two Jewish merchants.⁴⁹ The first cautious steps to limiting the slave trade by the Church as a whole

⁴⁵ William of Malmesbury, *Saints' Lives: Lives of SS. Wulfstan, Dunstan, Patrick, Benignus and Indract*, ed. M. Winterbottom and R. M. Thomson (Oxford: University Press, 2002), 100-03. J. Fontaine, *Slave Trading in the British Isles and the Czech Lands, 7th-11th Centuries*, Ph.D thesis, King's College, London, 2017, 157-60.

⁴⁶ Bernold of St. Blasien, *Chronicle in Eleventh Century Germany*, ed. I.S. Robinson (Manchester: University Press), 260. Gillingham reminds us that 'people' is a better translation than 'men' for *homines*, J. Gillingham, 'Women children and the Profits of War' in *Gender and Historiography. Studies in the earlier middle ages in honour of Pauline Stafford*, ed. J.L.Nelson et al. (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2012), 73 n.62.

⁴⁷ 'Ego prohibeo, ut nullus uendat hominem extra patriam super plenam forisfacturam meam.' F. Lieberman, *Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, (3 vols., Cambridge: University Press, 1903-16), vol.1, 488. My thanks to Dr. Janel Fontaine for this reference.

⁴⁸ Quod autem dux gratia Dei instinctus christiana mancipia ab omnibus Iudeis redemit et, ut nullus ultra christianus seruiret eis, interdixit, 'Amen, amen', inquam. Cosmas, *Chronica Boemorum*, bk 3, ch.57, 232. Cosmas, *Chronicle*, 245.

⁴⁹ M. M. Postan, 'Economic Relations between eastern and western Europe', in *Eastern and Western Europe in the middle ages*, ed. G. Barraclough (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970), 126.

came eleven years later at the Council of Pisa when the sale of free Christians was forbidden on pain of excommunication.⁵⁰

Such moves did not offer Christians complete protection from enslavement and sale by their co-religionists, but it did make stubbornly pagan peoples a more attractive target. The Polish ruler, Bolesław III 'Krzywousty' or 'Wrymouth'(r. 1102-38) launched two major attacks on the Prus according to the first chronicler of Poland, Gallus Anonymus. He says very little about the first in 1107 or 1108, apart from that Bolesław returned with much plunder and many captives. However, he offers background material that functions as a justification. He described the Prus as descendants of the Saxons who fled by sea from Charlemagne when he conquered and converted the area. Thus Gallus was able to mobilise the historical reputation of the Saxons as brutal and persistent pagans to demean the Prus as not just unenlightened, but obstinate; 'they still persist without king and without law', as he put it. He also made reference to their defences of lakes and marshes which were better than cities or castles.⁵¹

In terms of enslavement, Gallus is more explicit about Krzywousty's later campaign in the winter of 1110-11. This seems to have been more systematic in that in entering Prussia in winter, when marshes and lakes were frozen, Krzywousty was able to turn former obstacles into bridges. Campaigning throughout this 'barbarous nation' Krzywousty collected plunder and captured men, women, boys, girls, slaves and maidservants. The implication here is that the Prus themselves still had slaves.

⁵⁰ R. Somerville, 'The Council of Pisa, 1135: A Re-Examination of the Evidence for the Canons', *Speculum*, 45:1 (1970), 108.

⁵¹ Gallus Anonymus, *Gesta*, 194.

It is uncertain what Krzywousty did with his captives. He might perhaps have resettled them. The Russian Primary Chronicle entry for 1031 has an example of Rus princes raiding Piast territory and taking the population to be colonists in new settlements further east.⁵² It is worth noting however, that Krzywousty had just emerged from a draining conflict with the German king Henry V (r.1099-1125) and his Czech neighbours and that these gains could still be monetised. Children, young men, and especially young women could still be sold. There were markets to the south which still had international connections with Venice and the markets of the Middle East.⁵³ Not only was there Prague, but around 1150 Abū Hāmid al-Andalusī bought a slave girl in Hungary and remarked on the very reasonable prices which could be obtained for slaves of both sexes ‘during the raiding season’.⁵⁴

Such mass abductions are conspicuously absent from the account of thirteenth century chronicler Vincent Kadłubek (c.1150-1223) and the emphasis is much more placed on conversion. He described the failed attempt of Bolesław IV Kędzierzawy (‘the Curly’) (r.1146-73) to impose Christianity after a campaign in 1147 which resulted in an annual tribute to Kędzierzawy, but mass apostasy among the Prus. While the tribute could be understood as a tax in money or produce, Kadłubek implies that people had to be handed over when he ended his critical account of Kędzierzawy’s neglect of the backsliding with the question,

but I ask, will the person who did not dread to break the faith of salvation, the covenant of the saving faith, with what devotion will he preserve the pact of compelled servitude?⁵⁵

⁵² *Russian Primary Chronicle*, : *Laurentian Text*, trans and ed. S. H. Cross and O. P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (Cambridge MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1953), 136.

⁵³ Postan, ‘Economic relations’, 126-7.

⁵⁴ Abū Hāmid al-Andalusī in Lunde and Stone, *Ibn Fadlan*, 80-1.

⁵⁵ Vincent Kadłubek, *Magistri Vincentii Chronica Polonorum*, ed. E. Mühle (Darmstadt: WBG, 2014), 292 and see Darius von Güttner-Sporzyński, ‘Constructing memory: holy war in the Chronicle of the Poles by Bishop Vincentius of Cracow’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 40:3, (2014), 284-5.

Predictably, the Prus resume their raids like wolves and their vicious bestial nature is also a feature of Kadłubek's account of Kazimierz II's (r.1177-94) campaign against them in 1192, in which the chronicler may have participated, though by now the vocabulary is even more focused on conversion and carries heavy crusading overtones.⁵⁶

It is probably a change in rhetoric rather than any change on the ground. Further north where the attempts of Bishop Albert of Riga (1165-1229) to "convert" the pagans of Livonia to Christianity were being recorded by Henry of Livonia, there were sixty-seven major slave raids, twenty-five of which were conducted by pagans and forty-two by Christian forces.⁵⁷ Markets were still in operation along the Baltic coast and the Kurs, south of Riga are recorded as being customers for slaves, although Henry only records it because in this case the merchandise was Christians brought from Sweden by Estonian raiders.⁵⁸ Traffic around Prussia and Masovia was on a smaller scale, more an inconvenience than a threat to the local ruler Conrad of Masovia, but a sharp increase in raids in the mid 1220s caused him to invite a military religious order, the Teutonic Knights to put a stop to Prussian incursions while he dealt with more important internal political concerns.⁵⁹

Here we encounter something unfamiliar: the Prus as slave takers. Given the importance of raiding to the region's economy there is little doubt that the Prus must have been participants in the trade in slaves and they had access to the Baltic and also the Vistula river, so routes south and east. Nevertheless, the lack of references suggests they did not operate on the same scale as their Slavic or Scandinavian neighbours. The trade took its place in the complicated

⁵⁶ Kadłubek, *Chronica*, 360-2. Güttner-Sporzyński, 'Constructing memory', 289-90.

⁵⁷ D. Wyatt, 'Tracking slaves and slavery in the early middle ages: reading between the lines' in Gruszczynski et al., *Viking-Age Trade*, 26.

⁵⁸ Gillingham, 'Women, children and the profits of war', 64.

⁵⁹ N. Davies, *God's Playground: vol.1 The Origins to 1795*, (Oxford: University Press, 1981), 88

network of amicable relations and violent confrontation which characterised the area. There is a glimpse of this in the short text of the Miracles of Saint Adalbert the Martyr which purportedly dates from shortly after the saint's death, but was more probably composed in the twelfth or thirteenth century.⁶⁰ One of the miracles concerns a Prussian noble from Pomerania who came to Samland (eastern Prussia) to do business. He hears from locals that someone whose language they did not understand, has been killed and goes to investigate. He finds Adalbert's decapitated head which asks him to take it to Gniezno in Poland in exchange for great wealth for him and his descendants. The merchant agrees, but on the journey west, as they pass near his home he is overcome with the wish to visit his children and his two wives. Placing the head in a hollow oak tree he departs, but on returning he cannot find it. It had been discovered by a relative who gains all the benefits of completing the mission. It paints a picture of regular travel along the coast and inland. Another story features the saint's brother, Gaudentius who converts another Prussian who spoke Polish. These descriptions of permeable contact are still obviously recognisable for a later audience; so the first Prussian's two wives and therefore possible links with the trade in slaves pass without comment.⁶¹

The more lasting impact of the trade on the region was depopulation. The most common role for the Prus in this trade was as merchandise and constant raiding and abduction of people had economic consequences. This brings us back to Długosz, who as we recall, knew the area. He describes no towns to speak of; settlements in deserted places surrounded by forests, pools and swamps.⁶² Urban, the modern historian of the Teutonic Knights speculates that one reason why the knights could expand initially was the depopulation of the Culm region on the east bank of the Vistula by previous Polish raids.⁶³ Literary evidence is however, unreliable

⁶⁰ Wyrozumski, 'Medieval historiography', 234.

⁶¹ *Miracula Sancti Adalberti martiris* in *MGH Scriptorum*, vol. 4, ed. G. H. Pertz, (Hanover, 1841), 613, 614.

⁶² Długossii, *Annales*, 215-6.

⁶³ W. Urban, *The Teutonic Knights* (London: Greenhill, 2003), 52.

as both the Polish state and especially the Teutonic Knights, sought to erase the ambiguities of the border society which had previously existed.⁶⁴ Yet archaeological evidence of early settlement in Prussia shows a variety of ethnicities, a country with Baltic, Slav and Scandinavian villages and strongholds.⁶⁵ Wulfstan's 'many kings and burhs' suggests that settlements may well have been quite dense. Adalbert visited three separate settlements with short journeys between them. As time went on it seems to have become less dense: Gallus Anonymus's account of Bolesław vainly looking for battle or places to besiege, implies a lack of population centres. There are parallels with the tribes who surrounded the Piast strongholds of Gniezno and Poznan. Repeatedly raided, their populations abducted and their strongholds burnt in the mid tenth century, the dense population along the river Obra had disappeared by around 100⁶⁶ Place name evidence suggests a similar process was going on south-east of Prussia in the contested area between the Piasts and the Kyivan princes, with promising economic development being stymied by continued raiding and abduction of the population.⁶⁷

In conclusion, the answers to my two questions are visible in outline: the pagan Prus were enthusiastic traders and raiders more or less throughout the period. They undoubtedly participated in the slave trade and it, along with furs and amber, at first brought wealth and connections as it did for the Piasts, the Kyivan Rus and other peoples in the Baltic region. However, as time went on they became marginalised from the main trade and quite often populations were abducted by land or sea. The Prus suffered from their lack of political

⁶⁴ P. Milliman, *The Slippery Memory of Men' : The Place of Pomerania in the Medieval Kingdom of Poland*, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 62.

⁶⁵ Jagodziński, 'Settlement of Truso', 192.

⁶⁶ Jankowiak, 'Dirhams for slaves', 10-12.

⁶⁷ C. Zschieschang, 'Osadnictwo wokół Trepczy, Czermna i Gródka we wczesnym średniowieczu okiem językoznawcy. Uwagi metodyczne in analiza przestrzenna' in *From Cherven towns to Curzon Line*, ed. M. Wołoszyn (Kraków: U Źródeł Europy Środkowowschodniej, 2017), 205-06.

organisation, which in turn may have been a result of the difficult marshy terrain as much as human factors. Historians have long speculated as to the stimulating effect of the enormous amounts of silver imported into Europe from the east in the ninth and tenth century. The experience of the Prus suggests it heightened inequalities and exposed the weaknesses of political organisations as much as it offered opportunities and encouraged the creation of centralised governments.

At first religion played little part in attitudes to the acquisition and trading of slaves; it was simply a fact of life, though it is striking that during Adalbert's mission Christianity is not seen as a route to prosperity, quite the contrary. By the twelfth century the issue had become more complicated: on the one hand the involvement of the Roman Church had introduced a dimension of faith into enslavement and slave ownership, but on the other there seems no discernible incentive for the Prus to have converted and the conventional narrative of a sullen and resentful Christianisation largely achieved by the relentless force of the Teutonic Knights seems mainly correct.

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the role of the pagan Prus in the medieval Baltic slave trade. The region initially shared in the influx of eastern silver through the Scandinavian port of Truso, but the use of silver in trade seems to have discontinued after 850, the so-called 'Prussian phenomenon'. Accounts of the brief mission of Saint Adalbert in 997 show evidence that the Prus participated in the trade, but other evidence from Ibn Ya'qub and Adam of Bremen show that the Prus were being raided by sea while Polish chroniclers such as Gallus Anonymus and Vincent Kadłubek also show evidence of raids and abductions by land. The latter using the rhetoric of the Crusades. The Roman Church grew gradually more concerned with the slave trade, shifting from Adalbert's dislike of Christians being owned and sold by Jews to twelfth century questioning of Christians being traded at all. This may have resulted in the Prus being more targeted as an obstinately pagan people. While the central medieval text *Miracula Sancti Adalberti* shows an integrated world of Christian and pagan along the Baltic coast, later evidence from Jan Długosz and parallels with areas further inland show that raiding and the trade in slaves may well have led to long term depopulation and economic underdevelopment.

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