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**'IN PAGO SILENSI, VOCABULO HOC A QUODAM MONTE...
SIBI INDITO.'**
**ON THE ROLE OF PAGAN CULT SITES IN THE TRIBAL POLITICAL SYSTEM OF
THE WESTERN SLAVS**

Thietmar of Merseburg's famous description of the war of 1017 contains a mention of the town of Niemcza. '*Posita est autem haec in pago Silensi, vocabulo hoc a quodam monte nimis excelso et grandi olim sibi indito; et hic ob qualitatem suam et quantitatem, cum execranda gentilitas ibi veneraretur, ab incolis omnibus nimis honorabatur*' (VII 59). This is the only surviving such explicit record of the cult of a mountain in the community of Western Slavs, or rather on rituals performed on the site. The fact that the description is written in the past tense does not leave any doubt that the scribe was not referring to practices that took place in his times but to customs from before the age of Christianisation, reaching back to as early as the 10th century ¹.

Thietmar's account introduces us to an extraordinarily interesting issue of interrelationships between the sacred and the profane within the Slavic tribal political structure. The name of the circle, in line with a frequent practice of the time, could have been actually derived from a hydronym, the name of the nearby river Ślęza, which joined the river Odra about 30 kilometres to the north. The fact that the Ślęza Mountain was the central element of the tribal structure is, nonetheless, beyond any doubt. Thietmar's account is all the more interesting that it refers to a religious system with archaic characteristics, much different from other similar types of cult also described in his chronicle, namely these of the tribes of Polabian Slavs.

Let us briefly recount the state of our knowledge on the subject of Ślęza in the light of archaeological data ². The mountain-top cult site seems to be of an ancient, prehistoric origin. It presents numerous traces of settlements from the closing period of the Bronze Age and the initial period of the Iron Age. Naturally, the very presence of these remains does not give us full certainty so as to function of the place. Even to the contrary: density of the settlement (fragments of Lusatian vessels constitute 66,5

¹ *Kronika Thietmara*, published and translated by M. Z. Jedlicki, Poznań 1953. This is how the publisher explains the meaning of the passage: 'this mountain was revered by all local inhabitants for the reason of its size and function, for it was the site where the damned pagan rites were performed' (p. 554). This suggests that the rituals were actually held in Thietmar's times. At the same time, the expression '*cum execranda gentilitas ibi veneraretur*' may be interpreted only as 'in the times when the damned paganism was worshipped there [that is in Silesia]'; this clearly shows that the scribe was referring to the past.

² See (also for further literature) an instructive review of discussions on this subject is presented by M. Młynarska-Kaletynowa, *Ślęza 2 (Słownik Starożytności Słowiańskich*, vol. 5, Wrocław 1975, pp. 564-566); for later literature see B. Gediga, *Śladami religii Prastłowian*, Wrocław 1976, p. 108 and following; H. Cehak-Hołubowiczowa, 'Dzieje Ślęzy na podstawie analizy ceramiki z wykopów na szczycie' (*Śladami dawnych wierzeń*, 2nd edition, Wrocław 1979, pp. 7-34, see it also for more information on the contents of the collection of excavated ceramics); see also T. Makiewicz, A. Prinke, 'Teoretyczne możliwości identyfikacji miejsc sakralnych' (*Przegląd Archeologiczny*, 28, 1982, p. 64 and following).



percent of the total amount of pottery excavated at the site) proves rather against the site being used for religious purposes. Far more modest are the remains of the settlements of the late La Tene and Roman period (only 1,3 percent of the findings) that were also found at the site and—what is especially significant in the context of Thietmar's account—come from the beginning of the Middle Ages (1,9 percent of the findings). Later—from the close of the 10th century to the mid-13th century—there have been discovered traces of growing human settlement (10,4 percent of the findings). What we also know is that in the first half of the 12th century, the mountain-top was most probably home to an abbey of Canons Regular and then to a fortified settlement.

What deserves much attention in the context of cult issues are the surviving stone walls surrounding the peak of the Ślęza Mountain and the neighbouring hills of Radunia and Wieżyca³. A view that these walls surrounded an area considered sacred seems rather convincing, however, the question of their origin is still debatable. Traces of human settlement discovered in Radunia were estimated to come from the early Iron Age, which is frequently used as an argument by scholars who try to justify the alleged ancient origins of the Ślęza stone fortifications. What also raises much debate is the origin of the surviving group of sculptures found on the hillsides of the Ślęza Mountain and its nearby area. What seems certain is that these sculptures were carved out of a local stone, gabbro, which means that they could not have been brought to the site from far away. We shall not engage here in a still on-going debate whether the fact of their creation as well as their form should be attributed to Thrace-Aegean influence on Lusatian culture or to a slightly later Celtic influences; as we know, Celtic settlement in the Ślęza Mountain area has been proven by archaeological evidence. Also disputable is the function and chronology of the marks of cross the sculptures are inscribed with. Over time, they were attributed a vast number of possible origins and functions: from prehistoric solar symbols to medieval border posts—especially widespread in West Slavic territories.

Unfortunately, accounts found in early medieval literary sources, except these by Thietmar, do not contain any other information on similar cult sites. In the Rip Mountain, presented by Kosmas of Prague in a tale of the forefather Czech's arrival to the Bohemian Basin, there were found no traces of pagan human settlement, and the rotunda of Saint Adalbert, situated on the top of the Rip Mountain was most probably erected in the mid-11th century⁴.

Later legends and folk customs give us clues on possible cult functions of the Bald Mountain (Łysa Góra) in the Świętokrzyskie Mountains. And these clues are to a large

³ See footnote no. 2; for a detailed description of the embankments and the group of sculptures see H. Cehak-Hołubowiczowa, 'Kamienne kręgi kultowe, na Raduni i Ślęży' (*Archeologia Polski*, 3, 1959, pp. 51–100); *Sztuka polska przedromańska i romańska do schyłku XIII wieku*, M. Walicki, ed., Warszawa 1972, p. 1, pp. 24 and following, part 2, pp. 762 and following for further literature. A view of the likely early Iron Age origin of the sculptures was shared, among others, by H. Cehak-Hołubowiczowa and B. Gediga, arguments supporting the view of its likely Celtic origin are most fully presented by Z. Woźniak, *Osadnictwo celtyckie w Polsce*, Wrocław 1970, pp. 65 and following.

⁴ *Cosmae Pragensis Chronica Boemorum*, B. Bretholz, ed., Berlin 1923, L. I, c. 2: See also R. Turek, *Cechy na usvite dejin*, Praha 1963, pp. 100 and following, for the Church of Saint Adalbert see A. Merhautova, *Rane stredoveka architektura v Cechach*, Praha 1971, pp. 306 and following; Kosmas, who described pagan customs of the Czech villagers, also wrote: '*ille montibus sive collibus litat*' (I 4).



extent confirmed by archaeological evidence ⁵. Namely, it has been discovered that the very peak of the Bald Mountain houses stone embankments similar to those found in the Ślęza Mountain, as well as a large amount of fragments of pottery dating to the 8th–10th century. What is more, similar structures were also discovered in a few other hillside locations: near Tumlin in the western part of the Świętokrzyskie Mountains, on the Dobrzeszów Mountain—further to the west—and near Przysucha—to the north. All these findings, according to archaeological research are dated to the same period as those from the Bald Mountain. The vastness of the territory enclosed by the embankments suggests that the sites were used as places of meetings of large numbers of people, perhaps tribal communities.

Other most likely places of former pagan cult include several hills in Pomerania, such as the Chełmska Mountain near Koszalin and the Rowokół Mountain by the lake Gardno; in the former location there have been discovered traces of human settlement dating to the 9th–10th century, in the latter one—outlines of embankments ⁶. For more information on all discovered

One may also name many examples from other regions, nevertheless, in most of the cases, their chronology is not verified.

Equally archaic characteristics were presented by some other cult sites, embodying the powers of nature. Thietmar writes of a sacred spring Głomacz situated by the river Elbe, which was said to foretell the local inhabitants of future events (peace, good harvest, war or famine): '*Et haec provincia ab Albi usque in Caminizi fluvium porrecta vocabulum ab eo trahit dirivatum*' (I 3) ⁷. Just like in the case of the Ślęza Mountain, the spring gave its name to the local Głomacz tribe, called by the Germans Dalemnice.

Other ancient cult sites included sacred groves. One of them named *Zutibur* (Sacred forest?), located in the vicinity of Merseburg was described by Thietmar as '*ab accolis ut Deum in omnibus honoratum et ab evo antiquo numquam violatum*' (VI 37); it was destroyed only in 1008 by a bishop who was Thietmar's predecessor ⁸. A more complete picture of the functioning of such sites was presented 150 years later by Helmold, who described a missionary action performed in 1156 near Stargard Wagryjski: '*veniremus in femus, quod unicum est in terra illa, tota enim in planiciem*

⁵ *Religia pogańska Słowian*, Kielce 1967; E. i J. Gąssowscy, *Łysa Góra we wczesnym średniowieczu*, Wrocław 1970; Makiewicz, Prinke, *op. cit.*, pp. 70 and following; cf. newer research of dr E. Gąssowska, whom I would like to thank for sharing useful information on the dating of findings.

⁶ Slavic cult places see A. Gieysztor, *Mitologia Słowian*, Warszawa 1982, pp. 176 and further; for the Chełmska Mountain see H. Janocha, 'Wyniki prac badawczych przeprowadzonych w latach 1961 i 1962 na Górze Chełmskiej (Krzyżance) koło Koszalina', II (*Materiały Zachodniopomorskie*, XX, 1974, pp. 130 and further). However, no traces of early medieval settlements have been found on the peak of the Rowokół Mountain (see F. Lachowicz, J. Olczak, K. Siuchniński, *Osadnictwo wczesnośredniowieczne na Pobrzeżu i Pojezierzu Wschodniopomorskim*, Poznań 1977, pp. 144 and following)—only a fortified settlement from 9th–10th century situated at its foot, *ibidem* pp. 141 and following. Similarly, there is no archaeological confirmation of the cult function of the famous Rock of the Dead (Skała Zmarłych) by the town of Königshain in Lusatia, since all the pottery excavated there dates to as late as the 11th–13th century, see *Corpus archaeologischer Quellen zur Frühgeschichte auf dem Gebiet der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (7. bis 12. Jahrhundert), published by J. Herrmann, P. Donat, Lfg. 4, Berlin 1985, pp. 171 and following.

⁷ It is currently called Altommatsch (Kr. Meissen); not verified archaeologically; home only to a number of burial mounds from 10th–11th century, see *Corpus archaeologischer Quellen...*, pp. 204 and following.

⁸ It was located in Scheitbar, Kr. Leipzig in the land of Chutice, cf. *Die Slawen in Deutschland. Ein Handbuch. Neubearbeitung*, J. Herrmann, ed., Berlin 1985, p. 310.



sternitur. Illic inter vetustissimas arbores vidimus sacras quercus, quae dicatae fuerant deo terrae illius Proven, quas ainbiebat atrium et sepes accuratior lignis constructa, continens duas portas. Preter penates enim et ydola, quibus singula oppida redundabant, locus ille sanctimonium fuit universae terrae, cui flarnen et feriaciones et sacrificiorum varii ritus deputati fuerant. Illic omni secunda feria populus terrae cum regulo et flamine convenire solebant propter iudicias. Ingressus atrii omnibus inhibitus nisi sacerdoti tandem et sacrificare volentibus, vel quos mortis urgebat periculum, his enim minime negabatur asilum. Tantam enim sacris suis Slavi exhibent reverentiam, ut ambitum fani nec in hostibus sanguine pollui sinant' (I 84) ⁹.

The source contains many valuable information on the issue of interrelation between the sacred and the profane in the public life of the Slavs. Despite fact that the account was produced relatively late in history, it is still reasonable to think that it presents the customs of remote past. The priest of Bosau punctuates the issue which draws most attention here, namely the fact that the sacred grove occupied a central location 'in terra illa'. The grove, most probably, extended beyond the area of the Stargard settlement to the entire territory of the Wagri tribe (for the scribe compares the deity named Prove with Siwa, the goddess of Polabians, and Radigast, the god of the land of the Obotrites). This supposition gains even more credibility when, taking into account the contents some of the chronicle manuscripts, we may identify Prove (in line with A. Gieysztor's view) as Prone, which is a slightly distorted version of the name of Perun, one of the principal gods of the ancient-Slavic pantheon ¹⁰. Also the cult of oak trees, much popular among the Indo-European peoples presented archaic characteristics. Let us remind here that '*quercus ingens et frondosa, et fons subter eam amenissimus*' (Herbord II 32) was worshipped some time earlier in Szczecin ¹¹.

Let us now shift our attention from the subject of potential cult sites discovered in the course of archaeological research to abundant comparative material from Polabian and Pomeranian lands on sacred space contained in buildings erected for religious purposes—temples. Most distinctive such buildings are the famous tribal pagan temples (*kąciny*), like Radgoszcz in the land of the Redar tribe and Arkona in the island of Rugia. These were not exceptional, for, as wrote Thietmar, '*quot regiones sunt in his partibus, tot templa habentur et simulacra demonum singula ab infidelibus coluntur*' (VI 25).

As we know, the discussion on the origins of religious complexes of this kind is still on-going, but the view, lately thoroughly substantiated by H. Łowmiański, that they were in fact modelled after those Christian ones, does not seem to be legitimate ¹². We are in possession of a great deal of archaeological material which proves the existence of temples already between 7th and 8th century (Feldberg), and between 9th and 10th

⁹ *Helmoldi presbyteri Bozoviensis Cronica Slavorum*, B. Schmeidler, ed., Hannover 1937. The holy grove might have been situated in the later location of Wienberg by Putlos, approximately 4 kilometres north-west to Stargard, cf. K. W. S t r u v e, *Die slawischen Burgen in Wagrien* (Offa 17/18, 1961, pp. 85 and following).

¹⁰ Gieysztor, *op. cit.*, pp. 50 and following.

¹¹ Herbord, *Dialog o życiu św. Ottona biskupa bamberskiego*, J. Wikarjak, K. Liman, eds., Warszawa 1974. The Indo-european character of the cult of trees, especially of oak trees, was earlier punctuated by J. G. Frazer, see *idem, Złota Gałąź*, Warszawa 1962, pp. 125 and following.

¹² H. Łowmiański, *Religia Słowian i jej upadek*, Warszawa 1979, pp. 166 and following (as a result of the rise of polytheism), pp. 228 and following; *idem, 'Zagadnienie politeizmu słowiańskiego' (Przegląd Historyczny, LXXV, 1934, pp. 655 and following)*.



century (Ralswiek, Wolin, Gross Raden) at the very latest and which is sufficient for us to qualify these temples as evidence of the evolution of the local customs. From a genetic perspective, they were perhaps, as claimed J. Herrmann, a product of ancient Celtic influence¹³. The topography of the pagan temple in Radgoszcz was to some extent similar to that of the Stargard grove, for it '*undique silva ab incolis intacta et venerabilis circumdat magna*', in the grove, on the other hand '*est nil nisi fanum de ligno artificiose compositum*' (Thietmar VI 23).

For the reason of complex political situation of the northern Polabian lands in the second half of the 10th century and in the 11th century, one naturally needs to be highly cautious when comparing the temple of Swaróżyc in Radgoszcz with the Ślęza Mountain cult site and other similar places. What is, however, characteristic is the etymological connection of the place's name with ethnonym, which was not much later used by Adam of Bremen to describe the deity¹⁴. Similar was the case with Arkon, but there is no onomastic evidence for this fact. Yet, historiographic sources unanimously highlight the temple's vital function as the centre of public life of the entire tribal community. Let us add that in the light of observations made in the course of archaeological research, the beginnings of this cult centre would probably date to the 9th–10th century¹⁵.

Slightly different position among the West Slavic cult sites was taken by these established near the first towns that were developing in the Baltic region. The oldest, dating to the 9th century, were discovered in Ralswiek and Wolin. Many such sites were introduced in connection with the process of Christianisation of Polabian and Pomeranian Slavs in the 12th century.¹⁶ The most ancient structure, like that of the Ślęza Mountain, was to some extent reflected in the Triglav cult site not far from Brandenburg, but what we know thanks to the excavation works is that it was probably established only after the Slavic Uprising of 983. Other temples were at that point already integral parts of early urban landscape, although they still occupied specially designated spots. Their religious function is not their only characteristics. Herbord's description of Szczecin presents this issue most fully: '*tres vero alie contine minus venerationis habebant, minusque ornatae fuerant. Sedilia tantum intus in circuitu exstructa erant et mense, quia ibi consiliabula et conyentus suos habere soliti erant; nam sive potare, sive ludere, sive seria sua tractare vellent, in easdem edes certis diebus conveniebant et horis*' (II 32).

Historiographic sources consistently highlight that cult sites consisted of the so-called profane and sacred zone where the seculars were forbidden to enter and where figures of deities along with other cult-related items, war banners and tribal valuables were kept. Their external parts gathered participants of religious ceremonies, and events involving making offerings, fortune-telling and feasts organized to celebrate

¹³ J. Herrmann, 'Zu den kultur geschichtlichen. Wurzeln und zur historischen Rolle nordwestslawischer Terhpel des fruhen Mittelalters' (*Slovenska archeologia*, XXVI, 1978, pp. 19 and following).

¹⁴ See (also for further literature) an instructive review of discussions on the subject is presented by J. Strzelczyk, *Radogoszcz 2 (Słownik starożytności słowiańskich)*, vol. 4, Wrocław 1970–1972, pp. 450–451); the issue of actual localisation of the cult site has not yet been solved.

¹⁵ See J. Herrmann, 'Arkona auf Rugen. Tempelburg und politisches Zentrum der Ranen vom 9.-12. Jh.' (*Zeitschrift für Archäologie*, 8, 1974, pp. 177–209).

¹⁶ See also T. Palm, *Wendische Kultstätten. Quellenkritische Untersuchungen zu den letzten Jahrhunderten slawischen Heidentums*, Lund 1937; W. Filipowiak, 'Der Gotzentempel von Wolin, Kult und Magie' (*Beiträge zur Ur- und Frühgeschichte*, vol. II, Berlin 1982, pp. 109–123); *Die Slawen in Deutschland...*, pp. 310 and following.



events important for the entire community. A vivid picture of harvest celebrations in Arkon was presented by Saxo Grammaticus¹⁷, who wrote that ceremonies were held outside the temple, in the area of the entire settlement embankment which divided the cliff-tip from the mainland. Archaeological findings supplemented this description by data on the season of the year the meetings took place and type of animal meat consumed on the occasion. Chronicler's information on practising human sacrifice were also confirmed.

Were the sacred sites also home to collective non-religious assemblies of entire tribal communities devoted to their public matters? There is no full certainty about that. Nevertheless, what supports this view is the crucial role of prophecy in making critical political decisions as well as latter mentions on the meetings of elders in the tribal temples. A somewhat important trace of this custom may be found in Adam of Bremen's account mentioning two missionaries who were murdered in Retra by decision of '*concillio paganorum ... diversis primo suppliciis examinati*' (III 20, schol.); we do not know, however, who exactly were the members of the *concilium*¹⁸. At the outset of the 12th century, communities of towns situated at the Odra river outlet held their assemblies not at the temples but at the markets.

Cult sites, as proves the account of Helmold on the Stargard woodland, were also places where courts were held. What is especially worth attention is the close cooperation between the Wagrian princes and priests, as well as the fact that individuals whose life was in peril were granted asylum in the area of the temple courtyard. The choice of the meeting point was most probably dependent upon the role of the pledge in the judicial process, which was viewed as an innately sacred factor¹⁹. Yet, the parish priest of Bosau added the following sentence to his description of the sacred woodland: '*iuraciones difficillime admittunt, nam et iurare apud Slavos quasi periurare est ob vindicem deorum iram*', but not much further he mentions that Slavs were banned from '*de cetero iurare in arboribus, fontibus et lapidibus*' (I 84). This message does not leave any doubt that the pledges were made in places that were considered sacred.

A strong influence of pagan priests on political actions of the coalition of the Veleti tribe at the close of the 10th and 11th century and the Rani tribe in the 12th century often resulted in scholars describing their systems of authority as theocratic ones²⁰. We should not forget, however, that Thietmar consistently referred to the guards of the temple in Radgoszcz as '*ministri*', and described them as '*ad haec curiose tuenda ... sunt specialiter ab indigenis constituti*' (VI 24). The priests controlled political affairs mainly through their prophecies and their power over the contents of tribal

¹⁷ *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, I, J. Olrik, H. Raeder, eds., Hauniae 1931, L. XIV, c. XXXIX, 4–6. Cf. also H. Berlekamp, 'Die Funde aus den Grabungen in Arkona auf Rugen in den Jahren 1969–1971' (*Zeitschrift für Archäologie*, 8, 1974, pp. 227 and following); H. H. Müller, 'Die Tierreste aus der slawischen Burganlage von Arkona auf der Insel Rügen' (*ibidem*, pp. 255 and following).

¹⁸ A. Bremensis *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, B. Schmeidler, ed., Hannover–Leipzig 1917; the term *concilium* suggests that the group was composed of rather few members.

¹⁹ Cf. V. Procházka, *Prisaha, ordal a svedectvi u polabsko-pobaltskych Slovanu* (Vznik a počatky Slovanu, II, 1958, pp. 169 and following); *idem*, *Snemovnictvi a soudnictvi polabsko-pobaltskych Slovanu*, *ibidem*, III, 1960, pp. 106 and following).

²⁰ Cf. on the role of priests W. Wachowski, *Słowiańszczyzna zachodnia*, 2nd edition, Poznań 1950, pp. 141 and following, 197 and following; V. Procházka 'Organizace kultu a kmenove zflžení polabsko-pobaltskych Slovanu' (Vznik a počatky Slovanu, II, 1958, pp. 145 and following); *Die Slawen in Deutschland...*, pp. 145 and following.



treasuries. In most cases, however, they rather collaborated with the ruling elite than took over its duties. In Rugia they actually owned a party of 300 horsemen, they also owned '*agros ac latifundia deorum*' (Saxo XIV 39:25), but as far as purely political actions were concerned, they were rather seldom involved. The tribal community was at the time represented by Duke (*rex*) Ciesław or his brother Jaromir. Also the priests of Szczecin, Wolin and Wołogoszcz did not act personally but through local people. Particularly, the relationship between the priests of Szczecin and the local merchants-noblemen was so close that both parties organized joint overseas expeditions. Let us also remind here that Helmold, when writing on the judicial activity, mentions the priest second after the Duke.

When examining the role of pagan cult sites in the public life of the Western Slavs it would be also worth to focus one's attention on the fact that they were often located next to the trading sites. The reason for this fact was most probably that the presence of temples, gathering large numbers of people, simply induced the development of business activity. This relation was certainly behind the attempts to encourage the folk to follow religious practices by setting the date of weekly markets to Sunday, which was not long later criticised by the Church.

It would seem that the case of Ślęza is a good example of such strategy²¹. In the 12th century at its foot there was situated a market whose estimated origins reached far back in history. However, the name of locality that was established there—Sobótka—was introduced only after Christianization. In addition, the spot was located as far as 4 kilometres away in a straight line from the cult circle at the Ślęza Mountain-top (less than 2 kilometres away from Wieżyca). Sobótka also presented characteristics that were often a prerequisite when establishing markets: it was situated in the borderland between rural and forested montane areas, which joined with woodland of the Sudetes Foothills.

Similar was the situation in the Świętokrzyskie Mountains, where the market in Słupia—if in fact existed—would be located 2–4 kilometres away from the Bald Mountain and its establishment would be rather strictly connected with the exploitation of local iron ores²². 15th-century sources mention a fair which took place at the mountain-top abbey and it was already K. Potkański, who pointed out the fact that these meetings, just like annual fairs held around a holiday of 'Zielone Świątki', were joined with pagan folk celebrations called *stado*²³. One could think that the exchange of goods took place next to the cult site during various holiday gatherings of the entire tribal community. There is no sufficient data, however, whether the spot was also home to often attended weekly fairs.

²¹ K. Maleczyński, *Najstarsze targi w Polsce i stosunek ich do miast przed kolonizacją na prawie niemieckim*, Lwów 1926, pp. 49 and following. The potential connection between the origins of the market and the pagan cult site was highlighted by K. Tymieniecki based on the town of Tarczek in the Świętokrzyskie Mountains (K. Tymieniecki, *Ze studiów nad dziejami osadnictwa i kultury w średniowiecznej Polsce. Początki Kielc w związku z pierwotnym osadnictwem Łysogór*, Kielce 1917); However, Tymieniecki highlighted also the issue of its location in the borderland between two economically different regions.

²² See Gąssowscy, *op. cit.*

²³ K. Potkański, *Pisma pośmiertne*, vol. II, Kraków 1924, pp. 3–42. The fact of exchanging goods on the occasion of holiday celebrations could be justified by the Church Slavonic term 'torzestvo'—'festive celebrations, triumph', see A. Bruckner, *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego*, 2nd edition, Warszawa 1970, p. 566. Cf. here also M. Młynarska-Kaletynowa, 'Targ na Zielone Świątki' (*Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, XI, 1967, pp. 25–32).



Similar was the case with the tribal cult sites located in the northern part of the Polabian land. More exact information on the loosening of ties between Radgoszcz and Hamburg were, most probably, obtained by Adam of Bremen from the merchants who visited those areas and the destruction of the temple in Arkona was witnessed by some kind of '*exteri questum in urbe petentes*' (Saxo XIV 39:33), who were regarded as merchants²⁴. Yet, these sources do not solve the issue of the exact location of the fair. Just like in the case of the Ślęza Mountain, the fair could have been situated at a certain distance from the sacred site. Recently, however, arguments have been put forward by J. Herrmann, which support his proposal to classify Arkona as a settlement, where trading, among other functions, was present already in the 9th–10th century²⁵. Besides focusing on certain archaeological indicators (findings such as scales and imported goods) Herman based his research also on Helmold's account relating to fees offered to the Arkona deity.

Is this evidence convincing enough? Let us first recount that the genesis of pagan temples (Wolin, Ralswiek) discovered together with market settlements from the 9th and 10th was, most probably, different than that of Arkona. They, just like the temples discovered later in other towns of the Baltic region served local early urban communities and were, most probably, modelled after the aforementioned ones. Local needs seemed to be also answered by open-space sacred sites located within permanent settlements (Feldberg, Gross Raden). From the very beginning of its existence, Arkona, located on a high cliff-tip cutting deep into the sea, was used, most probably, mostly for religious purposes. Let us recount here the excavated bone remains, which seem to prove the practices of ceremonial consumption that took place outside the city already between the 9th and 10th century. At that time markets were held at the nearby Ralswiek, whose location was characterized by better conditions for building harbour infrastructure and was less exposed to unexpected attacks. Between the 11th and 12th century, when each settlement located in the island could boast its own market providing service mainly for the locals, this function could be fulfilled by i.e. Putgarten (=Podgrodzie?), located almost 2 kilometres away or even Altenkirchen, where survives a 12th-century church²⁶.

Helmold's account does not, however, give any evidence that the market was located in Arkona. The chronicler states only that '*nec mercatoribus, qui forte ad illas sedes appulerint, potest ulla facultas vendendi vel emendi, nisi prius de mercibus suis deo ipsorum preciosa quaeque libaverint, et tunc demum mereimonia foro publicantur*' (I 6). Obtaining permission for putting goods on sale was dependent on making an offering for the deity, but this fact did not determine the function of the site where both practices were performed.

The aim of this article was to bring up the issue of the range of non-religious matters that were settled in the tribal cult sites of the Western Slavs. Scarcity of sources does not allow us to leave the area of supposition, and specific dynamics of historical

²⁴ L. Leciejewicz, *Miasta Słowian północnopołabskich*, Wrocław 1968, pp. 62 and following, 122 and following.

²⁵ J. Herrmann, *Hinterland, Handel und Handwerk derfrühen Seehandelsplätze im nordwestslawischen Siedlungsgebiet* (La formation et le développement des métiers au moyen âge (Ve–XIVe siècles), Budapest 1977, pp. 17 and following); *Die Slawen in Deutschland...*, p. 240.

²⁶ According to J. Herrmann the market could have been also located in Putgarten or in the seaside settlement of Vitt, see *Die Slawen in Deutschland...*, pp. 241 and following; O Altenkirchen Leciejewicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 137 and following.



development of the great 9th–11th-century period of breakthrough requires us to be very cautious in making generalizations. Supported by ethnological findings, we attempted to search the source material for information relating to the interrelation between the sphere of sacred and profane in the political structure of Western Slavic tribal communities.

It is beyond any doubt that the sacred sphere had a crucial impact on public life of the time. This was often manifested by the fact that the names of cult sites were identical with ethnonyms (Ślęza, Głomacz, Radgoszcz?). Cult sites were places where important community-wide political decisions regarding war and peace were made; prophecies determined the course of actions. Also courts were held at cult sites; this was determined by the sacred character of the tribal pledges. We are more sceptical regarding the findings on the structure of economic life of the time. In the light of our knowledge on the subject, expecting forms of economic activity other than accumulating goods that served the entire community in the tribal treasury and performing provisional exchange of goods on the occasion of religious celebrations, would be too far-fetched. Permanent markets were rather established at a distance from sacred sites. The situation only changed with the development of early urban communities. Nonetheless, even there, the temples were separated from the sites where the exchange of commodities took place. Markets served as places of public assemblies, proclamation of ducal orders and, later, also reading court sentences.

Translated by Katarzyna Hussar