“Tribal” societies and the rise of early medieval trade: 
archaeological evidence from Polish territories 
(eighth-tenth centuries)

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Introduction

The decline of antiquity in Central Europe in the fifth century is characterised by a breakdown not only of political, but also economic and socio-cultural structures. In many territories a time of economic stagnation, attested by archaeological data can be observed. At the beginning of the early medieval period (sixth-seventh centuries) several depopulated areas were successively settled by Slavs. But this was not a singular or uniform process. At the same time both in Scandinavia and on the south coast of the Baltic there was a continuously developing economy without the slump occurring in the rest of continental Europe. Notably in Scandinavia, contrary to the situation in Central Europe, after changes brought about by the migration of some ethnic groups to the south from the seventh century onwards one can observe a stabilised cultural pattern based on warfare. At the same time, an enormous progress in shipbuilding made it possible to undertake long-distance expeditions. As a consequence, Scandinavians obtained economical impulses from different regions of Europe.

Before the tenth century, the contacts between the Baltic zone and Central Europe were maintained by means of overland and river transport. Since ancient times, the continental rivers in particular had served as a suitable transportation net, assuring connections to the Baltic areas. This net probably was one of the important factors for the location of the earliest Polish town centres, which arose at the junction of such roads. In the Polish Lowlands such natural routes, as well as the overland routes running alongside these rivers were decisive for the development of local pre-state tribal communities.¹ Overland routes did not become more important until the rise of the Polish State in the late tenth century with new ones being established, many of them cut through forests.

¹ When I write “tribal” I mean it in a sense more similar to the “ethnic group” definition found in recent anthropological studies rather than to the classic definition of “tribe” (cf. Jones 1997; Jenkins 1997).
The effects of early trade and exchange on settlement patterns were different in the regions of the Baltic coast and in Southern Poland. Between these two flourishing regions characterised by intensive exchange relations, there existed the intermediate zone of Great Poland. Its gradually growing prosperity, finally leading to the establishment of the tenth-century Polish State, was due to the earlier economic advancement of the regions in the north and south.

The southern coast of the Baltic Sea: the long durée of economic prosperity

Since the beginning of the early medieval period the regions along the coast of the Baltic Sea differed significantly from the continental and southern ones. First of all, in the territories of Pomeranian the economic decline of the fifth century was not as marked. In difference to other Polish regions settled by Slavs, the Pomeranian regions produced only typical Slavic pottery (of the so-called Sukow-Dziedzice type), but not a single archaeological piece of evidence for the sunken huts held to be of typical Slavic building-type. There is also no evidence for Slavic funeral rites, as known from regions further south. Moreover, some archaeological findings of pre-Slavic character can be attested here continuously until the end of the sixth or even of the early seventh century. It is still an open question if the first Slavs were assimilated by the local communities of the post-Roman period, and if so, how? It has also to be asked, why the Scandinavians, already present in the neighbouring territories of the Polabians (Mecklenburg,
Western Pomerania) as well as in the western territories of the Baltic at the southern coast of the Baltic Sea since the seventh century, did not show any early interest in the Pomeranian region. It was only in Pomerania’s late eighth century when its first trading ports, comparable with those earlier ones of the Peene River or of Rugen Island came into being.\(^2\) At the same time, trading routes of regional as well as of supra-regional importance were activated throughout the vast Polish territories. The decisive impulse for their development was the rise of the Baltic trading zone. Thus, the former regional trading routes became an important element of trans-European trading (Fig. 1). This trading network brought together the maritime character of the Scandinavian economy and the agrarian type of Slavic economy.\(^3\)

For many years the role of Scandinavians in creating early Slavonic political structures has been under discussion. Opinions differ quite significantly and reach from a total negation of any Scandinavian presence to ascribing to the newcomers a crucial role in the political and economic development of local communities. Actually, a variety of

\(^2\) Cf. Dulinicz 1999.

\(^3\) Leciejewicz 1979, 179-180; Łosiński 1997, 74.
reciprocal relations may have existed. Firstly, I would like to emphasise piracy both of Scandinavians and Slavs, whose aim was to gain slaves from the territories south of the Baltic coasts, salt from Kolobrzeg, amber and corn. The archaeological finds confirm that the pirates offered luxury products to the local people. Besides jewellery, many pieces of whetstones made from Norwegian soapstone, high-quality Scandinavian iron products and many other imports have been found.4 Starting from the late eighth century, the southern coast of the Baltic Sea not only sees the presence of Scandinavian imports, but also of Scandinavian settlers (warriors, traders) and representatives of Scandinavian elites living among the Slavs.5 Thus, a broad economic zone composed of Scandinavians, Balts, Finns, Frisians and Slavs developed around the Baltic Sea. The early trading ports situated around the Baltic Sea played a crucial role in this development, which finally also reached Pomerania.

Pomerania: archaeological evidence of early urbanisation

In contrast to other regions of the Polish territory, there are several sites in Pomerania considered by archaeologists as evidence for early urbanisation. They cluster in two regions: the first one in the west includes Szczecin, Wolin and Kolobrzeg, while the eastern cluster is composed of Gdansk and Puck. Moreover, before the tenth century, Truso situated in the territory of the Prussians played a special role (Fig. 2).

The most important among the above-mentioned settlements was Wolin (Fig. 3). Its development began about 50 years after that of similar places known from neighbouring Polabia. According to the archaeological data, there is no uniform pattern of house building in the Wolin area. Besides buildings of the post-construction type – characteristic of Saxon and Scandinavian building traditions – there are many other kinds typical of the Slavonic milieu.6 It is commonly agreed on that most of the archaeological finds including the silver hoards from this central site and from its vicinity show direct relations with the Danish milieu.7 Nevertheless, it is questionable to define this centre as being of purely Scandinavian origin, particularly when considering that it’s ascent was based upon an earlier local Slavic settlement development. Moreover, no ethnical or cultural differentiation of the living quarters has been attested. For these reasons, the assumption of a cohabitation of representatives of different ethnic groups in Wolin, including Scandinavians seems to be much more probable.8 The same can be supposed of the earliest history of Kamień situated next to Wolin, which took over the prerogatives

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4 Cf. Łosiński 1997.
5 See Chudziak 2003, 125.
8 Cf. Żak 1963/1967, 43.
of Wolin during the eleventh-twelfth century and rose to become both a centre for the West-Pomeranian principedom and a bishop’s seat. Szczecin’s development was also based upon older local Slavic settlement traditions. It was an important strategic point, playing a crucial role in the politics of the first Polish rulers, especially as a starting point for their expansion to the Polabians.

In the archaeological settlement complex of Świelubie at the Parsęta River, situated 100 km east of Wolin burial mounds with many grave gifts comparable to those well-known examples from Swedish Birka have been discovered. According to W. Duczko, a detailed study of their features would show that certain ethnic groups which lived here were settlers from the Swedish Mälaren Lake-region. Perhaps an attractive argument in favour of a settlement here were the salt resources in Kolobrzeg – the subject of intensive trade. But until now, it is not possible to decide where the people buried at Świelubie lived. Perhaps it was in the nearby Bardy stronghold, as W. Łosiński argues, which according to the archaeological data was linked to the local Slavonic communities, or perhaps at another, as yet unidentified settlement centre that was in their hands.

The above-mentioned settlements played only a temporary role in the history of early trade because they finally disappeared in the late ninth or early tenth centuries. In the case of Świelubie, the successor of this settlement centre seemingly was the nearby Kolobrzeg, whose origins go back to the ninth century. A dislocation of the functions of the older centre to the newer one has to be assumed, which would be an interesting example for regional settlement history. At the same time, or at least in the early tenth century, Kolobrzeg shows the traits of an early urban centre.

Fig. 3. Reconstruction of the harbour area in early medieval Wolin (ca. 900)

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10 Cf. Leciejewicz 2000, 139.
13 Łosiński 2000, 19.
14 Ibid., 19.
If we try to summarise our remarks now, it seems necessary to emphasise the well-defined regularity of the settlement pattern. In case of the western ports of trade such as Wolin, the direct connections with the Danish milieu are evident; while in the case of settlements situated at the Parsęta River interactions with Sweden are much more convincing. Beside the sites discussed above, there are some others that need to be mentioned: the ship burial from Chełmska Mound (near Koszalin) and the many silver hoards from this area.\footnote{Cf. Duczko 2000, 33 with references.}

The archaeological data from the eastern part of Pomerania show a pattern similar to the sites located in the central part of the Baltic coast. Special attention has been paid to the burials from Ciepłe near Gniew. Before the Second World War, some very rich burials were explored, including that of a warrior with a sword and equestrian equipment, together with weights.\footnote{Cf. Żak 1957; Kara 1998, 509.} There are different interpretations concerning the significance of this grave. Some scholars stress the mercantile aspect of these finds, while others emphasise the existence of representatives of Scandinavian elites – royal warriors, who maintained a very high social status in the local Slavic milieu.\footnote{Cf. Chudziak 2003.} According to W. Duczko\footnote{Duczko 2000, 35.} they most likely had connections with the Danish milieu on the British Islands.

Apart from Ciepłe, other archaeological sites located around the Bay of Gdańsk are very poorly investigated. Only a few authors have mentioned archaeological finds of probable Scandinavian origins.\footnote{Cf. Żak 1963/1967.} But detailed data, as well as the character of the contacts, their intensity and importance remain beyond archaeological analysis. An exception is Truso situated in Prussian territory.

Truso: port of trade in Prussian territory

In the year 890, the Anglo-Saxon traveller Wulfstan sailed from Hedeby in Denmark to Truso in Prussia. Although his written account contains a lot of information on the location of the site, until the 1980s all efforts to identify its position were unsuccessful. In 1982 in a small place called Janów Pomorski (near Elblag), the remains of a large trading settlement were found.\footnote{Cf. Jagodziński; Kasprzycka 1991.} For the next decades up until the present this site has been the subject of archaeological scrutiny. Today we know that the early medieval port of trade was situated on the river Dzierzgoń. The whole area is known as a zone of intensive commercial contacts between Balts, Slavs and Scandinavians since the
beginning of the early Middle Ages. There is considerable archaeological evidence that this area was settled by Scandinavians in the ninth century. A theory confirmed by the medieval cemetery identified some years ago in Elbląg.

The site at Janów Pomorski (Truso) covers approximately 15 ha. The long-house shape of the buildings and their spatial arrangement resembles the pattern known from the Danish trading port of Haithabu.\(^{21}\) Besides long houses there are many structures attesting the harbour and areas where boats were repaired and maintained. As a result of the archaeological investigations, the remains of nine such boats have been identified.

There is much archaeological evidence from Truso confirming early trade and craftsmanship. This concerns activities relating to amber, antlers and animal bone, glass, iron and silver. Hundreds of coins from the site and many elements of scales and weights uncovered inside buildings provide evidence about the importance of early trade in the everyday life of Truso’s inhabitants. Special attention has been paid to the coin finds from Truso. Most of them are Arabic dirhams dating from the 730s/770s to 821/822. Other coins are linked to Hedeby (Fig. 4) and one comes from the British Islands – an Æthelwulf denar of 845-848. It is still an enigma why there are so many coins dating from before the middle of the ninth century, but no younger ones. Such a chronology seems contradictory to the dating of many other finds, including jewellery and pottery. Some authors believe that some oriental coins from the eighth and ninth centuries were still in circulation during the tenth century.\(^{22}\) Until now, there is no clear picture of the factors responsible for such a situation, these problems therefore will remain under investigation.

The pattern of spatial organisation identified in Truso was very common over a wide area around the Baltic Sea between the eighth- twelfth centuries. According to the archaeological data, the site dates from the early ninth to the middle of the eleventh centuries and its origins point to Danish settlers.

\(^{21}\) Jagodziński 2000.
\(^{22}\) Cf. Bartczak/Jagodziński/Suchodolski 2004, 44.
An early monetary zone?

The example of Truso, but also that of some of the other trading ports in Pomerania mentioned above, attests that monetary long distance trade developed earlier in the northern part of the Polish territory than in its other regions.\(^{23}\) During the tribal period (eighth to early tenth centuries) Arab dirhams were predominant. We know of 26,000 such finds from the whole Polish territory.\(^{24}\) Such a strong supply of Arab silver continued until the late tenth century, but ceased in the early eleventh century.\(^{25}\) Contemporaneous to the decline of Arab silver since the late tenth century Byzantine milaresions appear in the Baltic Sea area. In terms of numbers unearthed, Poland with its 138 items takes the third place after the Swedish islands and Estonia. Since the late tenth century, denars from the German Empire start spreading over the Polish territories south of the Baltic Sea coast, becoming predominant during this time. With 84,000 such items from medieval hoards having been found, Poland takes second place after Sweden all countries situated around the Baltic Sea. There are also some coins of Carolingian origin, but they are relatively rare.\(^{26}\)

The causes for the shift from a predominant use of eastern silver (the Arab dirham) to Western Europe’s silver currency in the area around the Baltic remains an unexplained

\(^{23}\) Cf. Łosiński 1996.
\(^{24}\) Suchodolski 2001.
\(^{25}\) Ibid.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., 90.
question. Some symptoms of a beginning monetary crisis appear in the middle of the tenth century. Nonetheless, opinions about the reasons responsible for such a situation differ. According to S. Suchodolski the Baltic trade of the tenth century became unprofitable for Arab merchants, because the goods imported until then – e.g. furs, slaves – might have turned out to be too expensive in a new political and economic situation. Probably there was less silver, what might have caused a considerable augmentation of its value. We must consider the long distances between the Near East and the Baltic Sea area. In this situation, merchants from the West, encouraged by the Vikings, particularly the Varangian movement, intercepted the prerogatives of eastern traders. As a result, the Baltic countries were bound closer to the Western European economy.

Great Poland: the long dawn of medieval trade and exchange

While the earliest ports of trade in western Pomerania show many features of an advanced monetary market economy, it is difficult to detect similar evidence in the central localities of the early Piast state of Poland. On the other hand, a significant concentration of silver hoards can be attested here for the tenth century (Fig. 5). Different factors are responsible for such a situation. Firstly – the oldest centres came into being almost 100 years later than the coastal trading ports. Secondly – even from the late tenth until the mid-eleventh century, when the most of them were already in function, it is hard to define them as early urban centres, first of all they were the central seats of the new ruling dynasty. Hence their urbanisation was a long process, starting, as some scholars believe, in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. Maybe for such a reason one of the main goals of the Piast rulers was to capture the older trade ports situated on the Baltic coast and to build new ones competition. This can be illustrated by the example of Gdansk and Truso in the eastern part of the Baltic coast area.

An open question is to which extend the Arab dirham was considered to be a monetary unit or whether it primarily was a particularly attractive metal good, indicating the high status of its owners. The answer is most likely that across the vast Scandinavian-Balto-Slavic territories there was no uniform monetary system. In the principal ports of trade the monetary function of coins had probably been recognized, while on the periphery with its barter economy, non-metallic types of money were predominant. According to W. Łośniński, the existence of a monetised economy seems likely only in territories connected with long-distance trade – such as the areas around the Baltic Sea.

28 Suchodolski 2001, 94-95.
31 Łośniński 1996, 172-175.
As for the economy of Great Poland – linked to the traditional economy of the Piast rulers, defined by a system of levy and highly specialized services – such a monetary function would have seemingly been useless, particularly at an earlier date.

Some scholars emphasise the immediate dependence between the principal routes (on rivers or overland) and the location of the first central sites of the Piast state. Gniezno, the first Polish capital, arose at the junction of several water routes including the River Warta, leading to other sites of importance for the Piast dynasty. The Warta River offered further suitable interregional connections within Polish territory. Moreover, it is possible to define this river as part of the principal route for the long-distance trade between the Baltic and the Black Sea. Maybe the necessity to keep this route under control was the reason for the location of Poznań – the second principal centre of the early Polish state. Its position facilitates a connection with the economically strong

Fig. 6. Early medieval Silesian iron bowls (from different sites); used as a non-monetary means of payment
Baltic zone and the vast territories in the basin of the Vistula and Oder rivers. Due to the fact that in Poznań these routes intersected with those running towards Western Europe, the newly built centre was capable of fulfilling a political as well as many economic functions. Finally, Poznań became the counterpart of Gniezno.

Trading routes through Mazovia and along the river Bug

On the eastern side of Great Poland, the vast expanse of the Mazovian region was crossed by the old Vistula-Bug river route – another important element of the long-distance transit way connecting the Baltic and Black Sea zones. Located alongside this route are three important strongholds: one in Brest, one in Mielnik and one in Drohiczyn (cf. Fig. 2). Each of them played an important role in the history of the Polish-Rus’ borderlands and stimulated a network of early medieval settlements. Along this route three important silver hoards containing Arabic coins of ninth-tenth century origin have been found. The amount of such finds near Drohiczyn shows that already before the eleventh century – when this centre came into being – an important intersection of trading routes was located in this area. It is not impossible that another route was located near Drohiczyn – stretching from Lublin (in Little Poland) to the Sambian territories. A similar presumption concerns Brest situated at the outlet of the Muchawiec to the river Bug, where local routes intersected with the long-distance ones. That is why Brest – like Drohiczyn – profited economically from its geographical position between the North-Slavic territories and the East.

The Bug river transit route promoted the development of settlements not only in Eastern Mazovia, but also in eastern Little Poland, particularly around the large centres dating from tribal times situated in Lublin and Chelm. Long-distance trade could reasonably be expected as the explanation for the massive finds of coins there. Maybe, as W. Łosiński believes, this trading route was activated around 880 – thus initiating a direct trading connection reaching from Kiev and along the Bug and Vistula rivers towards the Baltic Sea zone.

32 Kurnatowska/Kurnatowski 2001, 97.
33 Cf. Kurnatowska 2002a, 100.
34 Dunin-Wąsowicz 1981.
36 Tyszkiewicz 1974, 121-122.
38 Łosiński 1993, 27.
Fig. 7. Axe-shaped iron hryvna from Krakow, (13, Kanonicza Street): the biggest hoard (treasury) in Europe from the ninth century: above – stratigraphy of finds; below – the last layer of hryvna with pieces organised in clusters.
Trans-European and regional routes: early trade in Southern Poland

Contrary to the regions discussed above, the political situation of Little Poland before the mid-tenth century was very complex. For some years there have been two different concepts concerning the position of Silesia and Little Poland on the geopolitical map of Central Europe. There are opinions stressing the direct relations to Great Moravia and the political dependencies of both regions on the Moravian principality, while others negate such a possibility. Looking at this problem through the perspective of archaeological finds, the hypothesis stressing the close relation of Silesia to the state of Great Moravian seems very convincing.39 Here, the numerous finds of so-called axe-shaped hryvna, very common not only in the territories of Moravia and Slovakia, but also in Little Poland should be pointed out (Fig. 6). The oldest medieval coin hoards, dated in Southern Poland to the ninth century, are unknown from Great Poland, the oldest monetary hoards dating from the period of 930-990.40 Another peculiarity distinguishing the southern territories from others are the relatively abundant finds associated with nomadic peoples (e.g. Magyars, Khazars, Avars), while in other regions further to the north, such finds are absent.41

Cracow, situated on the trans-European route leading from Prague and Regensburg towards Kiev and Byzantium played a special role in the development of early trade. Around Cracow the soil is suitable for agriculture (loess), also there exists an abundance of natural salt resources – the exploitation of which already beginning in Wieliczka in the early Neolithic. Moreover, there are rich reserves of raw materials for the production of iron, lead and silver located near Olkusz.42 Since the Middle Ages this area also provided abundant amounts of good quality stone for monumental buildings. All these factors favoured the division of labour inside the local societies mentioned in the written sources as Vistulans thereby stimulating early trade.43 Cracow, like the centres situated on the Baltic coast, is among the few towns in the whole Polish territory, which grew continuously since the ninth century.44 In Cracow there exist the unique monumental barrows of Krakus and Wanda – recalling a similar idea common to both the Kievan Rus’ (Cernyhov, Gnezdovo) and Scandinavia (Gammle Uppsala, Jelling). Their presence points to the beginnings of the local pre-state dynasty of the ninth century.45 In the life of St. Methodius there is an episode mentioning an unknown “prince” who, according to the chronicler was “powerful” and, being pagan, was a threat to the

39 Wachowski 1997, 44-60.
43 Cf. Labuda 1988, 125-151.
44 See Radwański 1975.
Christians living in Great Moravia. Many scholars believe that this episode relates to the pre-state organisation of the *Vistulans*, including their central site at Cracow.⁴⁶

From the Cracow area there are many archaeological finds demonstrating direct contacts with the Great Moravian area, moreover, even with the milieus of the Avars and Magyars. The ninth-century development of local trade and exchange is attested by findings of dirhams and of non-coin money, such as silver scrap and, above all, the hoard of axe-shaped *hryvna* (4212 pieces, weight ca 4000 kg), found at Kanonicza Street 13 (below Wawel Hill), dating to the beginning of the same century.⁴⁷ Their arrangement in clusters from a few to dozens of items could indicate, as some scholars believe that they were delivered to the local treasuries as a regular tribute or donation.⁴⁸ If so, this discovery (Fig. 7), the largest and best studied in Europe is the archaeological evidence of the first treasury system on Polish territory dependent on local political power. All

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⁴⁷ Zaitz 1981.
⁴⁸ Radwański 2000, 548.
of these observations, including the famous hoard from Zawada Lanckorońska (Fig. 8) make it possible to define the special role of Cracow for the early trade and exchange in this part of Europe.\textsuperscript{49}

In Southern Poland there is one more region which played a particular role in the area of early trade and exchange before the tenth century – the Przemyśl area. All of the main routes of local, as well as of regional and supra-regional importance passed through the Przemyśl Gate, connecting the zone around the Baltic with the Black Sea. The importance of this area goes back to the La Tène age – demonstrated by many settlements and numerous finds (including coins) from Celtic and Roman periods, known from Przemyśl itself and its surrounding areas.

At the beginning of the early Middle Ages one can observe the continuity of long-distance exchange confirmed by finds of coins – beginning with the times of Justinian the Great, and above all a hoard of dirhams (ca. 700 coins) from the ninth-tenth centuries.\textsuperscript{50} Some other finds – such as a Byzantine gem and a concentration of strongholds dated to the ninth-tenth centuries – demonstrate the specific role of Przemyśl in the time before the Polish state came into being (Fig. 9). An important factor for its prosperity were the local salt resources in the neighbourhood of the town, which remained under control of this centre. All of this formed a solid background for the formation process of the political organisation of the Lendzane – mentioned in the ninth century by written sources.\textsuperscript{51} A monumental barrow at Przemyśl – linked with the legendary founder of the town – is redolent of similar monuments known from Cracow.

The special importance of the Przemyśl Gate is confirmed by the only cemetery on Polish soil of Magyar warriors from the ninth/tenth-mid tenth centuries. Apart from male skeletons there are also some of females and children and besides human burials

\textsuperscript{50} Kunysz 1981, 66.
\textsuperscript{51} Labuda 1988, 201-211.
also horses were interred. For several years the question has been discussed why a small community of Hungarians settled in this place, with many opinions to explain this interesting phenomenon. Some authors believe that the Magyars were protecting the Przemyśl Gate against Petchenegs, while others emphasise their role in keeping the important trading routes under control and perhaps also the local ethnic groups called Lendzane.52

Final remarks

The system of trade and exchange on Polish territory continued to be stable until the mid-tenth century, i.e. until the definitive formation of the Polish state. It is interesting to follow what happened with it in the time, when, after 966, the Piast ruling dynasty rose to power. The 960s were a period of the formation process and territorial consolidation of the *Genzdum civitas* (the first denomination of Poland known from the written sources of the tenth century). For the 970s, archaeology has produced evidence concerning the eastern borderland in Little Poland and the eastern part of Pomerania (Fig. 10). During

52 Koperski 2003, 373.
this decade, the principal urban centres of the Polish, e.g. Sandomierz, Lublin, Przemyśl (Little Poland) and Gdańsk (on the eastern Baltic Coast) were rebuilt or newly built by the new rulers. As a consequence, the Piast’s expansion embraced the whole route along the Vistula-Bug River and the Przemyśl Gate.

At the beginning of the eleventh century, Boleslaw the Brave built a new palatium and a royal chapel in Przemyśl, near the frontier with the Kiev Rus’. Such a policy might have enabled him to keep the most important trading and exchange areas from the north to the southeast under control. At the same time, Gdańsk was founded (or rebuilt) by the Piast rulers, acting as a new trading centre of international significance on the Baltic Coast and possibly having served to eliminate the neighbouring ‘Danish’ Truso; its definite end came in the middle of the eleventh century.

For the next decade there is much archaeological data and many written sources relating to Piast military activities in Western Pomerania and Silesia. According to the dendrochronological data, the mid 980s were a time of the rise of the principal urban centres in the western part of Poland. Some of them were captured and rebuilt by Piast rulers, first of all the prospering ports of trade like Kołobrzeg, Wolin or Szczecin, with others like Wrocław and Opole in Silesia, coming into being. The far-reaching political activities over enormous territories and the large investment in urban development attest an impressive military and also economic potential of the new ruling dynasty. Before the end of the 980s this dynasty finally incorporated Mazovia into the Polish state, though in the policy of the Piasts the province was to play the role of a territory of secondary importance. The last object of the Piast strategy was Cracow, which they took from Czech hands. Contrary to the situation in eastern Little Poland, this operation, probably carried out around 989, was relatively peaceful; there is no archaeological evidence of any catastrophes affecting the older strongholds in the surrounding areas. Moreover, the older centres (including Cracow) were still in function after their seizing by the Piasts. Possibly some or even all of them were economically very prosperous, thus also providing revenue to the new rulers.

Already before the end of the tenth century a new economic system had been introduced across the whole Polish territory. All of the historical regions had been divided into provinces and managed by the prince’s officials with the title of comes. As a consequence, regional and interregional exchange declined and a system of centralised economy, based on highly specialised production practiced in so-called service-villages, forged a new pattern of trade and exchange. Only some centres in Western Pomerania – such as the older ports of trade incorporated into the Polish state – tried to defend their economic, political and ideological independence until the middle of the twelfth century. But in the new politically organised and Christianised Europe, such attempts were inevitably doomed to fail.

54 Cf. idem 2002.
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