

BOOK REVIEWS

Dariusz Adamczyk, Norbert Kersken, (Eds.), *Fernhändler, Dynasten, Kleriker: Die piastische Herrschaft in kontinentalen Beziehungsgeflechten vom 10. bis zum frühen 13. Jahrhundert*, (*Deutsches Historisches Institut Warschau. Quellen und Studien*, Bd. 30), Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015. 293 p. ISBN 978-3447104210

This is a three-part volume about the main protagonists of change in the Polish lands in the tenth to early 13th centuries: entrepreneurial long-distance traders, power-greedy dynasts, and well-meaning churchmen. These codenames refer mainly, though not exclusively, to the economic, political and intellectual spheres of interaction that gave birth to Poland, and allowed it to become a recognisable member of Latin Christendom. In terms of geographical coverage, the general picture may also be subdivided into three zones: the outer circle reaching as far as Islamic lands rich in silver, spiritually active regions of post-Carolingian Frankish Europe and Poland's immediate neighbours right across the border, and the Piast powerhouse of Greater Poland itself. Hence *Beziehungsgeflechten*, an almost untranslatable word, to convey the unifying idea of the volume that the degree and quality of the involvement in transnational networks of every sort was a decisive factor for the Piasts to emerge from obscurity and stay afloat among other European dynasties. This idea in itself is hardly new. The formation of the Polish state has been explored from almost every possible point of view. All available literary sources have been discussed time and time again. True, there are still new sites to be discovered, and at least some old finds will be subject to reexamination, and that is why archaeologists look likely to be better placed to satisfy modern demand for scholarly originality and newness. By contrast, historians exposed to 'publish or perish' conditions have to write much, without bothering too much if they have something new to say in addition to what they have already said. So in terms of originality, this volume as a whole represents not so much a new and fresh start, as a collection of serious scholarly articles by recognised specialists. Most of them sum up the research done to date by the authors of this volume, most of whom belong to the middle and younger generation of Polish and German scholars. Their output brings together the current state of knowledge in a number of highly specialised fields.

In their introduction, Dariusz Adamczyk and Norbert Kersken, the editors of the volume, provide the *raison d'être* of their project. In my opinion, the most recent, comprehensive and relatively concise treatment of

the origins of the Polish state is to be found in the 2000 edition of 'Polish Territories in the Tenth Century and their Significance in Shaping a New Map of Europe'.¹ This was also a platform on which prominent Polish historians and archaeologists came together to share, discuss and publish the results of their decades-long research. Now we have a different set of scholars, made up again of historians and archaeologists. However, in contrast to their just mentioned predecessors, this team chose to concentrate their efforts on uncovering personal relations between, let us say, 'agents of change', and to assess their significance to society at large starting with the 'formative' tenth century to the 13th century. In this regard, it is an attempt to apply to Polish material the approaches and methods (not all!) that are so characteristic of German Medieval studies, clustered around what might be called the *Personenverbandsstaat* theory. By setting their volume within a broad historiographical context, Adamczyk and Kersken help first of all East-Central European scholars to find their Western counterparts, while all the rest of the volume may be viewed as an attempt to make Polish-related Medieval studies more readily available to German-speaking academia.

After the introduction by the editors, the volume starts with a numismatics section devoted to the import of Arabic dirhams into Polish lands. Christoph Kilger discloses the ways in which the transfer of silver could be carried out on the basis of a mutual understanding between Scandinavian and Arab merchants, in the absence of internationally recognised units of weights and measures. In order to get closer to the daily realities of the time, he takes recourse to ethnographic material from 20th-century Ethiopia (pp. 29–34). Marek Jankowiak's paper is devoted to the import of dirhams into Polish lands in the tenth century. He attempts to connect patterns of the distribution of datable hoards with actual changes on the ground, be it the demise of the Rus khaganate in the 870s (p. 49), or the short-lived appearance of slave hunters in Masovia in the second half of the tenth century (p. 50). The disappearance of dirhams from along the River Obra in the mid-tenth century is viewed as a result of the slave hunting activity undertaken on the part of the early Piasts, bent on consolidating and extending their power by bartering slaves for silver to be distributed among their followers (pp. 52–53). The article by Peter Ilisch is devoted to the somewhat later period, when Arab dirhams came to be superseded by German silver coins (*Kreuzdenare*) from about the 980s onwards (p. 64). According to Dariusz Adamczyk, the slave trade as a source of revenue became ever more unreliable from the late 11th century onwards (p. 69), and the Piast rulers were thus compelled to rely ever more on locally available non-human goods, such as furs, honey and wax. This move to make more profit from local resources was bound up with attempts to corner the silver

¹ *Ziemie polskie w X wieku i ich znaczenie w kształtowaniu się nowej mapy Europy*, pod. red. H. Samsonowicza (Kraków, 2000), p. 475.

distribution network by means of Piast-minted coins, which in their turn also had to be helpful in gaining more independence from silver imports, mainly from Saxony. The attempt was finally crowned with success in the early 12th century, when Polish coins became acceptable currency across the country (p. 76).

The dynastic section of the volume begins with Norbert Kersken's contribution, devoted to making sense of *all* marital relations concluded between the Piasts and the senior nobility of the German Reich from the tenth to the 13th century. It is a comprehensive overview of the topic, in which both Polish and German points of view are given equal attention. In Kersken's view, the highest rank should be ascribed to the 1086 marriage of Władysław Herman to Judith of Schwabia, the sister of the reigning German Emperor Heinrich IV (p. 83). Even though marriages between German margraves and Piast princesses were, one might say, the order of the day, no reigning German king had ever married a Polish princess, which is indicative of the standing of the Piast realm as compared to other noble families to which German royals were related (p. 103). As regards Piast marital relations with the ruling families of Bohemia (Joanna Sobiesiak), Hungary (Dániel Bagi) and Scandinavian countries (Jakub Morawiec), they were far less numerous than one might expect. The article by Dániel Bagi stands out in this respect. Conscious of the modern images of Polish-Hungarian *bona vicinitas*, he is wary of projecting them back on to the time of the Árpád dynasty. His article also shows that the extent of marital relations should not be taken as a yardstick *par excellence* to measure the extent of politico-cultural relations between neighbouring countries, an insight that is encountered in other articles too, without denying the fact that dynastic marriages did play a role. Extensive marital relations between the Piasts and the German noble families find a counterpart in Kievan Rus'. It is very likely that Dariusz Dąbrowski has no match in the field of Rurikid genealogical studies, as he feels quite at home with Polish and Russian sources (and Latin in general). He has calculated that in the time under consideration, we are dealing with some 20 Piast-Rurikid marriages, compared to some 170 Rurikid marriages as a whole. He has devoted special attention to four selected cases, and has come to the conclusion that even though marriages had pragmatic aims, they provided no guarantee for longstanding political alliances. They were so subsumed by political fluctuations that it is impossible, according to Dąbrowski, to find any underlying general mechanisms, and a scholar has no other choice but to investigate every case on an individual basis (p. 189).

The third 'clerical' part of the volume deals with intellectual culture writ large. The article by Anna Adamska is devoted to the issue of royal 'chancery' in the early Piast realm. Quotation marks are used to highlight the tendency in modern Medieval research to come to grips with unsettled practices in composing charters virtually all across Latin Europe in the High

Middle Ages. These new approaches have resulted in revealing that limits between 'official' and 'private' documents, between literacy and orality, were much more fluid than it had been assumed by bureaucratic-minded diplomatists in the 19th century (p. 198). So, the issue of the beginning of the royal chancery boils down to a discussion over when the informal group of highly educated Polish clerics at the side of a ruler became formalised (p. 216). The early stages of Polish annals are retraced in the article by Marzena Matla, who seems to support Tomasz Jasiński's thesis that the groundwork for Polish historical writing was provided by the 'Mainzer Annalen', which reached Poland through Bohemian mediation. Dariusz A. Sikorski takes a critical stance with regard to the received wisdom which leads us to believe that in Poland, churchmen in general, and bishops in particular, enjoyed exceptional prestige, power and authority from the earliest days after the country's conversion. Instead, he tries to see the 'real situation', by taking into consideration endowments, political power, the provenance of the clergy, and the more general process of the Christianisation of society. The article by Krzysztof Skwierczyński is devoted to the topic of Poland's intellectual contacts with foreign countries. In his opinion, the 'intellectual contacts' of the time must be understood in an 'extraordinarily wide' way (p. 279). In my opinion, that is one of the reasons why this article contains much interesting information, but no clear direction.

To sum up, this volume brings together research conducted by archaeologists and historians. It focuses on the Piast lands as seen from all cardinal directions. The strength of the volume is that you can readily gain access to what is actually discussed in distant but interconnected fields of scholarship.

Dariusz Baronas
Lithuanian Institute of History