
(doi: [10.1080/13617427.2020.1841389](https://doi.org/10.1080/13617427.2020.1841389))

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Deposited on: 28 October 2020
The people trafficking princes: slaves, silver and state formation in Poland

Abstract
The Piast princes were traders in slaves which was the foundation of their power. Conversion to Christianity was part of a wider project at stabilisation which can be compared to Coase's "firm", whereby previously 'ad hoc' market arrangements between agents are formalised in return for regular remuneration. This proved timely as the establishment of the Piast state coincided with a decline of the trade with the east, but enabled the Piasts to take a larger share of what commerce remained. Despite their best efforts, in the 1030s the Piasts succumbed to internal pressures and powerful neighbours. Nevertheless, the structures they created provided the basis for the kingdom of Poland.

There has been growing academic interest in the slave trade as an economic driver in early medieval Central Europe. This article takes the example of the early Piasts in what we now call Poland, to illustrate how such a trade might have worked and the colossal wealth it generated. It will advance the study of the slave trade in early medieval central Europe through detailing it as the defining economic activity and modelling it, demonstrating how state formation became not so much a by-product of, as much as the solution to the insecurities of a society erected on the machinery of slave trading. Finally, its legacy will be considered in that although the trade was a brutal business and the state founded by Mieszko and Boleslaw Chroby all but ceased to exist in the mid eleventh century, the skills required in the slave trade of moving people about, accessing markets and forming international connections were a superb training for the early rulers of the region.

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1 This paper was given to the Medieval Research Seminar, University of Glasgow in February 2019 and a shortened version to a roundtable on ‘Eastern Europeans as Migrants and Refugees’ organised by Katarzyna Nowak and the Polish Studies Group at the 2019 BASEES conference. I am grateful to Stuart Airlie, Callum Brown, Simon Dixon and Jonathan Shepard for reading earlier drafts and to Paul Ormerod for discussion of the economic aspects. Special thanks to Jonathan Shepard for involving me in the Dirhams for Slaves project, see below n.17.

2 Urbanczyk, Zanim Polska zostala Polska, and see interview in Wirtualna Polska: also Fontaine, "Slave Trading"; Bogucki, ‘Intercultural relations’ and also Hardt, 'The Importance of the Slave trade'.
The difficulty of tracing the early history of this region is partly due to written sources being few and far between. Of the writers from within the region, only Thietmar of Merseburg from the early eleventh century offers an account which might be described as contemporary. It is not unreasonable to wonder whether academic consideration of slave trading in the region has been exaggerated as contemporary Western writers mention it very little. Thietmar treats it obliquely, as a rather distasteful fact of life. The first chronicler writing in Poland in the early twelfth century, the Gallus Anonymus, who seems to have been quite close to the court, says almost nothing about it in relation to the Piast state’s heroic founders more than a century before. His near contemporary in Bohemia, Cosmas of Prague takes the same line until after the campaign of 1031 when Oldřich I (1012-33) and his army were condemned at the papal curia and he cannot avoid it. Vincent Kadlubek, writing in the thirteenth century is similarly reticent about the trade, although not about servile status. It is only with the enormous and very late chronicle by Jan Długosz (Longinus) in the mid-fifteenth century that a more distanced view of the past allows several mentions, although almost five centuries removal from his subject raises other difficulties about his reliability.

By contrast, accounts from outside the Christian community are closer to the time and stress the importance of trading slaves; Successive writers such as Ibn Fadlan (c. 922) and his near contemporary Ibn Rusta describe Slavs being bought and sold at markets in Central Asia. Archaeological sources confirm a commercial link between Vikings, Slavs and the east with hoards of Samanid dirhams and imitations of them being found in modern Scandinavia, modern Poland, Belarus, Russia, Ukraine and especially the Baltic trading centre of Gotland.3 The account which ties together slaves, trade and state formation and is therefore crucial to any analysis of the early economic and political development of central Europe is that of Ibn

Ya’qub, a Jewish traveller who wrote an account of the market at Prague and the Slavic nations, especially the leader of the wealthiest of the four mentioned, King “Mashaqqah” of the north who is generally identified with duke Mieszko I of Poland (962/3-992).4

1. Mieszko’s wealth and the slave trade

The scale of Mieszko’s wealth is quite remarkable and Ibn Ya’qub, who was probably a merchant himself, was appreciative.5 According to him, Mieszko had three thousand warriors wearing coats of mail, and supplied with clothes, horses and ‘everything they need’: the ruler’s largesse extended to their families, with maintenance paid to the children of warriors, both boys and girls, and capped with a dowry on their marriage. Moreover, Mieszko (in common with other Slavic leaders) had some impressive trappings, travelling in a large van which rose on four wheels within which was a primitive, yet reportedly effective, suspension system covered in gold brocade ‘so that...[he] did not shake when the van shakes’.6 Medieval estimates of number are notoriously unreliable as absolutes, but Ibn Ya’qub was a shrewd judge of size and scale.7 A comparison can be drawn with Anglo-Saxon England, generally accepted to be the richest kingdom in northern Europe. Cnut (1016-35) had a force running into the thousands, consisting of housecarls and naval lithsmen which he directly supported through the heregeld, a burdensome tax according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Once he had become secure on the throne, Cnut himself reduced the number of his naval followers from 40 to 16 ships and the force was eventually abolished by Edward the Confessor in 1051.8 A nearer contemporary of Mieszko was King Eadred (946-55) who on his death, left a

7 E.g. seeing the mighty monastery of Fulda as ‘a town’, Airlie, ‘Palace Complex’, 262.
recently drawn up will. Along with the normal distribution of land to relatives and supporters, he bequeathed two gold crosses and two gold-hilted swords to “the place where he wishes his body to rest” along with 400 pounds. Ninety pounds went to favoured royal nunnerys, but a further 1600 pounds was to be distributed among his people, so that they may redeem themselves from famine or a “heathen army”. Finally, sufficient gold was to be taken to mint 2000 mancuses (around 250 pounds in weight) to be distributed among the ten bishoprics under his control. Eadred was counting on a large amount of cash and bullion to be available, which he was entitled to do because of England’s effective tax system based partly on trade, but mainly on hidage of land.

In comparison the sources of Mieszko’s wealth are less easily discernible and the links between him and his followers are quite personal given his commitment not only to them, but also their families. As Richard Abels has observed, to separate followers from mercenaries is a false dichotomy; to follow a leader resources are required. It is clear that we are dealing with someone who had authority in the sense that Mieszko both had resources and the ability to collect, distribute and exercise control over them. Ibn Ya’qub makes reference to taxes collected: ‘those are the salary of his men in every month, and each of them has a certain amount of them to get.’ Ibn Ya’qub adds the phrase ‘in market weights’ which could be equated with trade weights based on hack silver or, with a slight amendment, translated as ‘in coin of good metal.’ Unlike Anglo-Saxon England’s hidages these do not seem connected to landholding. Archaeological attention has been drawn to the truly vast hoards of silver buried in the regions around the Baltic coast and Piast strongholds, consisting mainly of

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Samanid dirhams issued in Transoxiana with imitation dirhams (about 10%) mostly dating from the tenth century issued by the Volga Bulgars. With over one thousand hoards known, there may have been a million coins found, but nothing like a complete database exists.\textsuperscript{12} It is therefore tempting to speculate that the same source provided the “salaries” for Mieszko’s followers.

Part of the value of Ibn-Ya'qub’s account is that he also gives a broad account of the region’s economy. According to him, “Mashaqqa’s” realm abounded in food, meat, honey and fish. In terms of exchange value, meat and fish, preserved by salting or drying, though suited for short or medium distance trade, was unlikely to generate wealth on this scale. Honey, a by-product of wax production, which was also commonly traded from the Slav lands, was worth longer distance transport by the barrel. It was valuable enough to be taxed by the wagonload alongside wine in Louis the Pious’ confirmatory charter for the fair of Sant-Denis in 814.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore it could have been a sizable source of income, but it was also a staple of subsistence farming all over Europe and seems more likely to have been a profitable sideline for producers.

Ibrahim Ibn-Ya'qub also provided information about trade in the area to the south in his description of Prague which he visited once or possibly twice between 962 and 965. He states that in “F.ragah” “slaves, tin, and various kinds of furs are exported from there.”\textsuperscript{14} These are all higher value goods. There was a limited amount of tin in the area although it usually emerged in association with other metals, so this may well be quite small-scale river panning. Nevertheless, demand for its role in producing bronze and pewter made it worth

\textsuperscript{12} Jankowiak, ‘Dirhams for slaves’, 3: Gruszczynski, \textit{Viking Silver}, 1 puts it around half Jankowiak’s figure.
\textsuperscript{13} McCormick, \textit{Origins of the European Economy}, 651.
\textsuperscript{14} Mishin, ‘Ibrahim ibn - Ya'qub’ suggests “flour” \textit{daqiq} or “slaves” \textit{raqiq}, 186 n.16.
transporting long distances.\textsuperscript{15} The serious contender to slaves in terms of value is the trade in furs, for which there was a considerable demand in the Islamic world both in the markets of Muslim Spain as well as the east.\textsuperscript{16} The problem here is that furs were a staple export of Slavic countries and while they were a considerable source of exchange, nowhere else do they give rise to the sort of exceptional wealth to which Mieszko seems to have had access.

By far the most likely source of Mieszko’s wealth was the trade in slaves which has received increased scholarly attention since 2000.\textsuperscript{17} It was the same rising tide which had floated Přemyslid power in Prague in the first decades of the century, but it was almost at its zenith.\textsuperscript{18} Crucial to this commerce were the Rus, memorably described by the Arab writer Ibn Fadlan in 922 on his visit to the city of Bulghar on the Volga. He quoted their pagan prayer;

Lord I have come from a distant land with such and such a number of slaves and such and such a number of sable pelts… I want you to bless me with a rich merchant with many dinars and dirhams who will buy from me whatever I wish and not haggle over any price I set.\textsuperscript{19}

A trader’s worth and perhaps trustworthiness was easily established by reference to his womenfolk:

Every woman wears a small box made of iron, silver, brass or gold, depending on her husband’s financial worth and social standing… The women wear neck rings of gold and silver. When a man has amassed ten thousand dirhams, he has a neck ring made for his wife. When he has amassed twenty thousand dirhams he has two neck rings made. For every subsequent ten thousand, he gives a neck ring to his wife. This means a woman can wear many neck rings.

\textsuperscript{15} McCormick, \textit{Origins of the European Economy}, 701, 702.
\textsuperscript{17} McCormick, \textit{Origins of the European Economy}, 733-59: Frankopan, \textit{The Silk Roads}, 117-28. See also AHRC funded \textit{Dirhams for Slaves} project.
\textsuperscript{18} Fontaine, “Slave trading”, 167.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibn Fadlan, \textit{Mission to the Volga}, 243-5.
It is a fair assumption that these Rus are Vikings, “tall as palm trees, fair and reddish”, using Frankish swords.\textsuperscript{20} Exactly where the slaves came from is made clear by Ibn Rusta:

The Rus raid the Saqāliba, sailing in their ships until they come upon them. They take them captive and sell them in Khazarān and Bulkār.\textsuperscript{21}

The Saqāliba are, of course Slavs and the places mentioned are Bulgar on the Volga and the Khazar capital of Itil near the Caspian Sea. Both of the Arabic writers from the first quarter of the tenth century are describing a relatively new configuration of an established trade. Whereas slaves and furs had been traded for eastern silver since the early ninth century, the enterprise had been magnified with the emergence of the Samanid kingdom based in Bukhara in modern day Uzbekhistan, towards the end of that century which boosted demand at the Bulgar and Khazar markets to the west and provided the Samanid \textit{dirhams} to be found in so many hoards in northern Europe. As both writers make clear, the market was volatile and the competition fierce.

Yet as we have seen, the place where the trade impacted most in terms of population movement and influx of silver is where there are fewest written sources. In the circumstances, it would sensible to align what evidence we do have with social science models taken from similar trades in different circumstances. One such is the modern drug trade. While a superficial reading of it may conclude that a comparison is invalid since the modern drugs trade is technically illegal throughout most of the world whereas there was nothing forbidden about the medieval trade in slaves, further thought reveals the many similarities: the huge profit margins from the point of origin to the market, the infrastructural challenges of taking commodities long distances and preserving their value. Above all there are the difficulties of conducting business in an absence of law. The transport of heroin from Afghanistan to the

\textsuperscript{20} Ibn Fadlan, \textit{Mission to the Volga}, 241.
\textsuperscript{21} Lunde and Stone, \textit{Ibn Fadlān}, 126.
West is only achieved by harvest and shipment through countries where there is little
government, so-called “failed states” or where local officials are either unconcerned or
compromised by corruption. In such an environment contracts are often unenforceable except
through violence and trust is at a premium.\textsuperscript{22}

Similar characteristics can be observed in accounts of medieval slave trading. According to
Ibn Rusta, traders were so fearful of their rivals that they did not relieve themselves except
with armed companions. Disputes were referred to their ruler, but if his decision was not
accepted then the matter was settled by single combat.\textsuperscript{23} Especially in the early days of the
trade before regular transactions could establish reputations, it must have been difficult to
ascertain characteristics such as reliability and creditworthiness. There are hints in the Arab
accounts: the ostentatious display of wealth through the wearing of neck rings by his
womenfolk, wealth from past transactions vested in the vulnerable, could be seen as a
indicator of reliability in the future. By contrast, there is also ethnic solidarity, despite their
mutual mistrust, if they [the Rus] are attacked, ‘they form a single fist against the enemy,
until they overcome them.’\textsuperscript{24} In the drugs trade too, the ostentatious display of ‘bling’ and
links through family and community groups have an economic role to accompany their social
one.\textsuperscript{25}

For the medieval slave trade, there was a gradual evolution. Whereas at first, Norsemen may
have been willing to obtain the slaves through pillage and then try and transport them across
the Continent to the main slave markets in Prague, Constantinople or even Baghdad to collect
all the profit themselves, by the time the Arabic writers above describe the trade, it had

\textsuperscript{22} Roach and Marshall, ‘Dynamics of the drugs trade’, 77-8, 85-6.
\textsuperscript{23} Lunde and Stone (eds.), Ibn Fadlän, 127.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} For the production side see Kopp, Political Economy of Illegal Drugs. For retail see Venkatesh and Levitt,
“Are we a family or a business?”
evolved and was lucrative enough to be conducted on the more practical model of middle men operating in the regions they knew best and selling on. The markets at Bulgār on the Volga and Itil on the Caspian Sea had emerged as medium-haul destinations for Baghdad and Samarkand and there was a vertical integration of patronage and a concentration of the means of intimidation and violence.26 Adamczyk has termed the supply side of the business “a hierarchical tributary-predatory Rus’ network-system.”27 In the Russian Primary Chronicle, after Olga of the Rus’ final ruthless attack on the Derevlians in 946, she killed some captives and gave others to her followers as slaves.28 Assuming that in this comprehensive victory, the number of slaves was more than the victors could have used themselves, then her soldiers would have monetised their gains by selling captives on. The terms of the subsequent tribute she exacted, followed by her programme of establishing trading posts suggest that these are all part of the same strategy. Prices for slaves were substantial, so that even quite modest figures such as mercenaries serving with John Tzimiskes’ (969-76) Byzantine army campaigning against the Rus in Bulgaria were taking captives to sell on as slaves. The emperor tried to tax the practice, although whether it was to discourage the practice or obtain a share for the imperial treasury is unclear.29

Further west, what is striking from an archaeological point of view is the disappearance of populations which had occupied the region around the river Obra, the region to the west of the Piast heartland centred on Gniezno and Poznań. The decline in population density in this area, particularly in contrast to the Piast lands themselves was noticed some time ago, but when it is placed in context with the lack of silver hoards in the region dated after the 940s

28 Russian Primary Chronicle, 81.
and hillforts dated dendrochronologically from the mid tenth century with signs of violent destruction, the probable fate of the population becomes obvious.\(^{30}\) Consistent with the idea that the Piasts began by conquering and selling their neighbours into slavery is the fact that within the area of Piast power there are some huge hoards: notable is one known from the village of Dzierznica, east of Poznań, close to the river Warta, known as Dzierznica II dating from 982/3 and including at least 18,200 fragmented dirhams for a weight of 15 kg of silver.\(^{31}\) Moreover, there is a clear link with trade in other hoards with items such as balances and Scandinavian jewellery being found.\(^{32}\)

Mieszko’s early role was probably quite similar to that of Olga and later, her son, Svyatoslav; leading military expeditions, collecting booty, enforcing tributes and selling on people and other goods to more distant markets.\(^ {33}\) The trade in modern drugs and medieval slaves combine enormous wealth with insecurity. The medieval archaeological evidence of depopulation and the early mythical history of the Piasts’ rise to power recorded by Gallus Anonymus hint at an instability that rivals and competitors could easily exploit. In comparison with his Anglo-Saxon contemporaries Mieszko had far less landed wealth or governmental machinery and if he was dependant on this combination of booty, taxes or tributes and trade on his own account, then in a trade so ruthlessly dynamic it would be easy to be edged out. Then the impressive wealth gathering and redistribution described by Ibn-Yaq’ub would collapse and his followers desert or defect. Worse still the traders and their communities could easily become the traded. Like any dealer in a high risk business, to survive and thrive, Mieszko had to maximise profits. Moreover, if he and his family were to


\(^{31}\) Adamczyk, *Srebro i Władza*, 343.

\(^{32}\) Adamczyk, ‘Political Economy’, 280. Others include Poznań, c. 961/976; Zalesie, c. 976; Kąpiel, c. 985.

\(^ {33}\) Russian Primary Chronicle, 86 for Svyatoslav’s summary of Rus fur, wax, honey and slaves being transported along the Danube, presumably *en route* to Constantinople.
have a future less dependant on Mieszko’s youth and strength, they also, if it is not stretching
the analogy, had to “launder” themselves and their wealth, setting themselves apart from
interlopers and upstart competitors. This should not be taken as a blackening of the early
Piasts; they were statesmen because they invented something which lasted beyond its
immediate context and in doing so displayed a remarkable understanding of the political and
economic realities of their time.

2. Economics: modelling Mieszko’s state and the role of bishops
There is early evidence of Mieszko attempting both profit maximisation and elevation of
status in the chronicle of Widukind of Corvey, the earliest reference to him besides that of
Ibn-Ya’qub. He seems to have been unsuccessfully attempting vertical integration of trade
and concentration of violence recorded as two defeats at the hands of Wichmann, the
renegade member of the house of Billung some time in the early or mid 960s.34 Wichmann
ended his life in 967 fighting against Mieszko for the “Vuloini” or “Wuloini”, generally taken
as the inhabitants of the port of Wolin, north of modern Szczeczin.35 Wolin was a thriving
emporium, “the greatest of all the cities in Europe” if Adam of Bremen’s remarkable claim,
writing about a century later, is to be believed. Mieszko and his followers may have fallen
out with its formidable entrepreneurs, either looking for new outlets for sales, or possibly
trying to impose taxes to keep his enormous household. Significantly, Adam twice mentions
that Greeks live and trade there and this may give a clue as to Mieszko’s commercial logic.36
Access to the coast and the trade along the Baltic would have been helpful and besides
contact with Greek merchants would have also possibly set up links with the market at
Constantinople. There is also evidence of the other strand of Mieszko’s policy, as Widukind

34 Widukindus, Rerum gestarum Saxonicarum, III, cap.66, 141: Bachrach, 140.
35 Widukindus Rerum gestarum Saxonicarum, III, cap. 69, 144-5.
made clear, because by the time of the second encounter Mieszko’s circumstances had changed; he had received two squadrons of cavalry from his father-in-law, the duke of Bohemia, for now he was a Christian.  

Much has been written about Mieszko’s conversion through his marriage to Dąbrawa, the daughter of Boleslav I of Bohemia in 965 and his own baptism the following year. The arrival of Dąbrawa with her great retinue of Christian followers, both secular and ecclesiastic may have brought about a culture change at Mieszko’s court. Before, it had had more than an echo of Ibn Fadlan’s slave trader as Mieszko varied nightly seven ‘mistress-whores’ (pelicum scortis) as Vincent Kadłubek, acidly termed them, whom Mieszko called wives. If Długosz is to be believed, women were still used as human balance sheets at Mieszko’s court. He ordered the nation’s ‘most eminent matrons and maidens, in all their finery, wearing their gold, silver and other ornaments’ to greet his Christian Bohemian bride. It sets up a context for the evidence of Thietmar of Merseburg, writing around 1015, who in recounting what was already a trope about the fidelity of Slavic women, said that in heathen Poland ‘every woman followed her husband on to the funeral pyre, after first being decapitated’, recalling the famous Ibn Fadlan account of the Rus funeral, where the female slave is put to death and burnt with her master.

Yet any changes introduced may have been acceptable to Mieszko because he knew that his new in-laws had walked this way themselves. The Přemyslids had converted to Christianity in the ninth century, had afterwards built a castle at a ford on the Vltava river which became

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37 Widukindus, *Rerum gestarum Saxonicarum*, III, cap. 69, 144.
the site of the major market in the region described by Ibn-Ya’qub, over which they
presided. Other political advantages of conversion are also well known to historians. His
son, Bolesław, born to Dąbrawa in late 966 or 967 would be a Christian heir for Mieszko. As
recounted above, Mieszko gained a valuable if short-lived military alliance with Bohemia and
besides could be considered as one of the fraternity of Christian leaders to help forge
diplomatic ties. Moreover, Mieszko gained something which his Přemyslid neighbours did
not have, a bishop. Attention has been drawn to the open ended geographical nature of the
emperor Otto I’s recent foundation of the archbishopric of Magdeburg presumed to expand
eastwards along with Ottonian influence. Mieszko’s conversion, association with Bohemia,
and his bishopric, possibly directly under papal patronage, put a stop to this.

There may also have been commercial advantages to the alliance. As we have seen, according
to Ibn-Ya’qub, Prague had a thriving market, but it seems to have had a rather different nature
to the trading going on further north. The Prague market was of comparatively recent
provenance, possibly only operating since the 920s and there are no hoards of dirhams in the
Czech lands. Instead Ibn-Ya’qub draws attention to a system of exchange through cloth.

In Bawaymah they make light cloths shaped like a half moon and having the form of a net.
They do not fit to anything. At every time their value is of ten cloths for a qinshar. They use
them for purchases and transactions and possess entire jars of them. For them, they are
money and the most precious thing with which one can buy wheat, slaves, horses, gold,
silver, and all the rest.

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42 D. Třeštík, ‘Great Moravia and the beginnings of the state’ in J. Panek and O. Tuma (eds.), A History of the
43 Barraclough, Origins, 41.
44 Kłoczowski, Polish Christianity, 11: Dobosz, ‘Mesco dux Polonie baptizatur’. 46-7.
Jankowiak has suggested that there were in effect two discrete trading systems. His evidence for this is another Arab geographer, Ibn Hawqal who, writing around 977, but describing a decade previous to this, describes western Slavs arriving in Andalucia through France, Lombardy and Calabria and another route leading east into Central Asia. The divide is so absolute that the writer posits an imaginary sea which divides up the Slav lands. However, in the late 960s Mieszko seems to have breached that divide by being able to access the Prague market with its links south to Muslim Spain. There are traces of a tenth century mint in Prague and hoards of the first Bohemian coins, minted in the late 960s and early 970s were not found anywhere near Prague, but near modern Wrocław and even more in the region of Poznań and Gniezno. One possible explanation for this is that the Prague slave market had grown up in recent decades and was initially supplied by its own dukes and their immediate followers exchanging slaves to be sold in Andalucia for luxury goods. The famous cloths Ibn Ya’qub noticed may have been a form of exchange in quite a small community which trusted each other. The Bohemian hoards in Piast lands suggests that Mieszko had entered the market and that transactions had become more complex requiring goods to be paid for in silver. By this time the demand for slaves from the Samanids was starting to falter (see below) so Mieszko needed an alternative outlet while the Přemyslids could charge him and others for access and be under less pressure to campaign and supply the goods themselves.

Certainly Mieszko was not the only new arrival in Prague. Ibn Ya’qub reported that the Rus and Slavs arrived there from “Karakwa” (Kraków) while from the country of the Turks and

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of the Muslims “come...Jews and Turks to carry away slaves.” 49 Kraków was a younger trading settlement also under the control of the Přemyslid dukes of Bohemia and Ibn Ya’qub’s evidence is early evidence of a route east to Kyiv and beyond. 50 The “Turks” mentioned are Magyars and this also may point to a community with eastern connections. While there were local Magyars in modern Hungary, the Byzantine emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus writing in the 940s or early 950s relates how their merchants from the West still have contact with the original Magyars in “Persia” and bring back official messages from them. 51 As for the Jewish merchants, they had emerged in the time of the Khazar empire earlier in the century and maintained links with the east although there were also connections to Spain. 52

Conversion to Christianity therefore allowed forceful rulers like Mieszko to consolidate their power with, in his case, a level of recognition, military help and commercial advantages, besides any spiritual rewards. 53 Yet the Přemyslids were still rivals and the presence of Rus and Magyars in the more cosmopolitan market into which he had entered may have made it all the more obvious how potentially precarious his position was. Byzantine intelligence had recorded that when the Rus or Magyars were absent on campaign and presumably collecting captives themselves, the Pechenegs could easily enslave their women and children. 54 Even with Boleslav’s cavalry, Mieszko was not able to impose himself on Wolin, so he had good reason to worry that he and his followers could still be a potential “harvest” for any one of their neighbours. Gallus Anonymus reported Dąbrawka’s reluctance to marry Mieszko, her

49 Jankowiak, ‘Two systems’, 140 and n.15. Mishin, ‘Ibrahim ibn - Ya'qub’, 186, has “Moslems, Jews, and Turks come there from the country of the Turks.”
50 Jankowiak, ‘Two systems’, 142; Buko, Archaeology of Medieval Poland, 295-7.
51 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De Administrando Imperio, 172-5.
54 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De Administrando Imperio, 50-3.
accompaniment by a large retinue of Christian followers and her insistence on Mieszko’s conversion. These may all have been insurance policies on entering what was a very insecure world indeed.\textsuperscript{55}

So both ambition and the search for security were ample reasons for Mieszko’s push towards what we might recognise as state formation and this intimately involved slave ownership and disposal. The activities of the saintly duke of Bohemia, Wenceslas (921-35) illustrated the conduct of a Christian ruler. According to the hagiographical \textit{Legenda Christiani}, at the end of the tenth century; when he had no catechumens at Easter, Wenceslas was able to purchase boys for baptism at short notice from the slave market and there is no evidence he freed them after the ceremony.\textsuperscript{56} Wenceslas did not object to slavery itself, indeed he gave slaves as gifts to those clerics who flocked to him from Bavaria, Swabia and elsewhere, along with the other accoutrements of prestige recognised in the region: gold, silver, furs and garments. The reference is part of a longer passage emphasising Wenceslas’s qualities as duke; he was generous, learned, pious, but victorious in many battles; slave owning and bestowing was therefore not an obstacle to Christian rulership, but an attribute of it.\textsuperscript{57}

One problem which the historian has in tracing the establishment of states in central Europe is reconciling the formality of such descriptions of rulership and Ib Ya’qub’s description of material wealth with other evidence, both archaeological and textual, of arbitrary violence. Economic models offer one way of envisaging the situation. For Mieszko had probably started as an acquirer of slaves to be sold on to the Scandinavian traders who operated on the Baltic coast in Wolin and Truso in the late 950s or early 960s. A more formal arrangement

\textsuperscript{55} Gallus, \textit{Gesta}, 28-31.
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Legenda Christiani}, 60. Kantor, \textit{Origins}, 185.
with his followers was both more profitable and safer for him as he became a major dealer in his own right and this is what Ibn Ya’qub described on his visit to Prague with his mention of taxes, “salaries” and family support. The relationship resembles a “firm” in the technical sense outlined by Ronald Coase; “the contract is one whereby the factor, for a certain remuneration (which may be fixed or fluctuating), agrees to obey the directions of an entrepreneur within certain limits.”, replacing the previous arrangement whereby a whole series of short-term contracts is negotiated every time the entrepreneur wishes to take action. Moreover, there is the advantage that the “suppliers” or workforce can be multi-purposed. 58

There are hints of a similar arrangement with Olga and her Rus followers where the same people seem to have won the military victory, traded slaves and then collected a subsequent military tribute for Olga from the Derevlians referred to earlier. This may not be entirely coincidental as Mieszko’s following was undoubtedly a mixed bunch requiring those with local knowledge and fairly mobile hired muscle. The existence of what look like contemporary Scandinavian settlements close to the Piast heartland at Sowinki and Bodzia point to a significant Varangian contingent whose loyalty and that of their families Mieszko’s arrangements were designed to secure.59

Bishops may well have been part of these “firms”. Only a few years after Mieszko got his bishop, one was appointed to Boleslav of Bohemia’s Prague and both leaders were strengthened and legitimised by a representative of the divine on hand. Both Mieszko and Boleslav would have been aware of the great imperial episcopal foundation by Otto I at Magdeburg, announced in the days after the imperial coronation in 962 by Pope John XII and finally established in 968 and they would have seen the implications of its aim of extending

59 J. Shepard, ‘Conversions and Regimes Compared’, 270. For Sowinki see Michalska and Krzyszowski, ‘Chronology of Multicultural site Sowinki’. For Bodzia see Buko, Bodzia.
German Christianity into the Slav lands.\textsuperscript{60} The foundation of the Polish and Bohemian bishoprics are usually seen as an attempt to avoid the jurisdiction of the Saxon emperors and their episcopacy, but there may also have been an element of imitation.\textsuperscript{61} Otto I had lavished economic resources on his church at Magdeburg in preparation for its elevation; silver workings, forest clearings, iron deposits, stud farms and full control over the town’s market and mints.\textsuperscript{62} Moreover, the church’s “advocatus” had jurisdiction over both Christian and Jewish merchants both in Magdeburg and almost everywhere they went. The latter in particular were heavily associated with the slave trade, but undoubtedly there were Christian and pagan traders as well.\textsuperscript{63} Those merchants would have participated in Magdeburg’s thriving slave market and many of the “goods” were probably Mieszko’s and Boleslav’s former subjects.\textsuperscript{64} Otto I’s arrangements gave every incentive to Magdeburg’s bishops to maximise their revenue through encouraging trade, including that in slaves, and also gave a prominent role to the bishop or his representative in judging disputes between merchants, both Christian and non-Christian.

Thanks to the martyrdom and canonisation of Adalbert/Wojciech (956-97) we know much more about an unsuccessful bishop in the Slavic region than about successful ones. Prague itself, the market town near the confluence of the Vltava and the Elbe was subject to the archbishopric of Mainz, also a market at the confluence of two rivers and visited by Ibn

\textsuperscript{60} Mayr-Harting, ‘The church of Magdeburg’.

\textsuperscript{61} Thietmar is ambivalent about bishop Jordan’s reason for being present at the installation of the new Archbishop of Magdeburg, \textit{Chronik}, Bk 2.22, Trillmich, 56, Warner,107-08. He could have been there as suffragan or as a neighbouring bishop. There was also a direct link to Rome, notably, the lock of the infant Bolesław’s hair sent by Mieszko. See Shepard, ‘Conversions and Regimes compared’, 254, 275, n.1 and Berend et al. 387.

\textsuperscript{62} Mayr-Harting, ‘The church of Magdeburg’, 136-7, 141.

\textsuperscript{63} Mayr-Harting, ‘The church of Magdeburg’, 139, 141.

\textsuperscript{64} Mayr-Harting, ‘The church of Magdeburg’, 141. For commercial involvements of other German bishoprics, especially Mainz, see Eldevik, \textit{Episcopal Power}, 112.
Ya’qub. Dietmar, the first incumbent, consecrated in 976, died in 982 and was succeeded by Adalbert, who had been educated in Magdeburg. According to the *Life of Saint Adalbert*, written only a few years after the saint’s death in 997, the bishop had considerable revenues, allowing him to engage in generous support for the poor after the decoration and upkeep of the church, providing for the canons and a small sum for his own needs. Perhaps unwisely in the political circumstances, he also issued his own coins. He eventually left Prague in 989 due in no small degree to the trade in slaves which is suggested by his flock’s attachment to polygamy and confirmed by the captives and slaves bought by a Jewish merchant with “unhappy gold” which were “so many that the bishop could not redeem them.” The implication is that on previous occasions Adalbert had indeed used episcopal revenues to redeem slaves. According to the chronicler, Długosz, admittedly writing centuries later, but with access to sources not available to us, on his return to Prague three years later in 992, one of the first moves Adalbert made was to buy some Christians being sold to Jews in the market place.

There were many reasons why Adalbert may have felt uncomfortable in Prague. To begin with, he was from the Slavnik clan in a town dominated by the ruling Přemyslids, and he also expressed concern for the immorality of cities and their consequent need for prayer in the sermon he preached at Sant’ Alessio’s monastery in Rome on the saint’s birthday. His fellow citizens may have been irritated by the bishop’s interference in the lucrative slave market, presumably driving prices higher and simultaneously resulting in many freed slaves in Prague, some of them doubtless the recipients of Adalbert’s charity. As for the duke, any

67 Berend et al. *Central Europe*, 141.  
70 Adalbertus Pragensis, ‘Homilia In Natale Sancti Alexii’ col. 898.
reservations that he had about Adalbert’s intervention in the slave market would have been increased by the knowledge that the bishop’s tithe income came directly from his own fisc. Moreover, Boleslav had introduced the custom of holding town markets on a Sunday, ostensibly so that it was then easier to get the populace to attend Mass, but Adalbert objected to it as an abuse of the Sabbath.\footnote{Sommer et al., ‘Bohemia and Moravia’, 244, 230.} While there is no evidence of Adalbert having jurisdiction or control over the market on the Magdeburg model, the closeness of the bishop to the ruler and commercial life made him an important part of the ‘firm’. When Cosmas tells the story of the abortive appointment of Boleslav’s brother, Strachkvas to the bishopric during Adalbert’s absence, it may well have been Boleslav’s attempt to get someone more reliable into the post.\footnote{Cosmas, Chronica, 1:30, 54; Wolverton, Chronicle, 82-3.}

Further light on the role of Mieszko’s bishop in the ‘firm’ may come from other rulers operating in a similar political and economic context further east. Early legislation in Kyiv, attributed to Vladimir the Great (980-1015), a former ruler in Novgorod who had spent time in Scandinavia, stated that: “given [over] to the holy bishops is every kind of measuring in the town[s] and for trading, and [all] measures and weights” The Church and particularly the bishop, also had jurisdiction over freed and manumitted slaves. The difficult textual tradition of the princely statutes makes the date of this uncertain and some scholars attribute the legislation to the twelfth or thirteenth century.\footnote{Feldbrugge, History of Russian Law, 145-57.} Nonetheless, it is a persistent theme: an early statute issued by ‘Vsevolod, prince of Novgorod’ with no indication which, takes the Vladimir provisions and essentially mirrors them, with the addition of the specification ‘at the market’ (na torgu).\footnote{Angus Russell, ‘Fiscal dues of early Rus between “church” and “state”?’ unpublished conference paper delivered at The World of the Slavs: Forgotten Meeting Place of Different Cultures: Christian Russia in the Making: in memory of Professor Andrzej Poppe (12 July 1928 – 31 January 2019), Warsaw, 30th Jan- 1st Feb.}
Slightly more certain is the attribution to Iaroslav the Great (1015-54) of legislation stating that:

I have given to the Metropolitan and bishops [jurisdiction over the following]: divorce [cases] in all towns; the customs duty each tenth week (myt) [is to go] to the church and the Metropolitan; and his people are not to pay the customs duty anywhere, nor the duty levied on goods entering a town; and I have given [the church the revenue from] the "eighth" [exact from weighed goods brought into town for trade].

It does seem plausible that these early rulers of Rus would look to their local bishops for administrators and arbiters in relation to commerce – or at the very least, this is what later drafters understood to be an integral part of ecclesiastical activity. If such laws were the enshrinement in writing of already successful practice, then this is what Mieszko and possibly Boleslav, may have had in mind as part of the responsibilities taken on by their bishops a decade or two earlier. From Magdeburg to Kyiv there was a role for ecclesiastical officials to lend their skills in literacy and numeracy and their spiritual prestige to arbitrate on disputes, assess taxes due and in return to take a cut of the proceeds.

Mieszko’s early bishops are obscure. The first, Jordan, was at the consecration of the first archbishop of Magdeburg in 970 and was probably German. His residence at Poznań is based on Thietmar’s information and backed by the discovery of what seems to be a palace and cathedral complex in a Piast stronghold. It was positioned on the River Warta, a tributary of the Odra which had Wolin at its mouth. Although far smaller than Magdeburg or Prague, Poznań was a trading centre with both north-south and east west links. Lumps of amber

77 Buko, ““Tribal” Societies”, 440-41.
demonstrate connections with the Baltic coast, while corkscrew bronze headdress ornaments originating from the Danube regions have also been found.  

From the east came the many hoards of dirhams found in the vicinity, far more than, for instance around Gniezno, and there was one huge hoard discovered in the town itself. A clay mould to cast grzywny silver bars also suggests a centre for exchange, so there was plenty of commercial activity. The discovery of a rare goldsmith’s workshop adjacent to the suggested palace is an indicator of the town’s success. This may have been Mieszko’s Magdeburg, to which there was a route to the west, ultimately not as successful as he had hoped, but built with grand ambition. The wider point here is that for both Boleslav and especially Mieszko, spiritual, economic and political gains combined when they created the institutional presence of the bishop and his church within a market. Bishops could be granted tolls, protect merchants or resolve disputes, the ruler could take one step back giving less incentive for rivals to replace him. Bishops’ responsibilities would have applied to all goods, but particularly to the most lucrative merchandise of all, slaves.

3. The Rise and Fall of a family slave trading firm

That trade was to become notably more difficult in the decades after 970 and it is a testament to Mieszko’s acumen that he maintained his dominance. In 977 his spouse, Dąbrawa died and the relationship with the court at Prague seems to have died with her. Without too

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78 Kóčka-Krenz et al. ‘The beginnings, development’ 141-42.
79 Adamczyk, Srebro i Władza, 205-06,342.
80 Buko, Archaeology of Early Medieval Poland, 236.
much delay Mieszko, married Oda, the daughter of one of his western neighbours, Dietrich, margrave of the North Mark (later Brandenburg). It is tempting to view Oda as another of Mieszko’s captives, since he reputedly abducted her from a nunnery, but the subsequent alliance suggests her father was complicit. That alliance also offered a safe route to the market at Magdeburg and thus makes sense of Thietmar of Merseburg’s defence of Oda that she reduced human traffic even though she had offended bishop Hildeward of Halberstadt in whose diocese the nunnery lay (and who had also lost much of his diocese to create that of Magdeburg). Thietmar’s language, especially the use of the word “servitus” is significant:

Namque ab ea Christi servitus omnis augebatur, captivorum multitudo ad patriam reductur, vinctis catena solvitur, reisque carcer aperitur.  

For by her was increased the whole servitude of Christ; a multitude of slaves are returned to their homeland, for the conquered the chain is loosened and for the guilty the prison is opened.

Oda’s entry into Mieszko’s court came at a crisis in the slave economy. The trade with the east was coming to an end because the Samanid state based around Samarkand and Bukhara, home to a number of wealthy buyers, was beginning to disintegrate. The archaeological evidence from Europe shows a drastic decline in dirhams from the 980s, ceasing entirely around twenty years after Mieszko’s death in 992. There was still some resilience with relatively local German silver being used to pay for slaves and goods from the Slavic lands on the first steps to the slave markets in Constantinople and Muslim Spain. However, the long distance aspects of this trade were in the hands of Jewish and western merchants and it made access to and control of local market centres all the more important so it is no surprise

84 Adamczyk, Srebro i Władza, 48-52.
that over the next two decades the Piasts made efforts to establish control over first Kraków and then Prague.86

The first step towards this was a reconciliation with the government of the infant Otto III of Germany and Mieszko reminded them of both his wealth and his eastern connections with the gift of a camel at Easter 986.87 Otto was then nearly six years old and cared for by his powerful Byzantine mother and regent, Theophanu. Again the great number of Mieszko’s followers and exotic quality of his gifts were noted.88 He may have captured Kraków before his death in 992, it was certainly in Piast hands by 1000 and his son, Bolesław Chrobry, gained power in Prague, in 1003, holding onto it until driven out the following year.89 At least briefly, almost the entire supply route for slaves and other trade described by Ibrahim Ibn-Ya’qub was under Piast control.

Even without Prague, in the early part of his rule Bolesław continued to be able to afford ostentatious displays of wealth. In 997 he had recovered the body of Adalbert for his weight in gold, according to Gallus, but more credibly silver, according to Długosz, from the Prus whom the former bishop had unwisely attempted to convert.90 With this Bolesław announced his Christian credentials, but it was also a natural accompaniment to slave trading and acquiring a retinue; buying and selling people was what he did. The dead saint had been

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87 S. Ottewill-Soulsby, ‘Camels of Charles the Bald’, 291-2. Mieszko had some ground to make up having supported Henry II, Duke of Bavaria, Otto’s cousin who almost certainly desired the throne. Camel milk has long been held to have health properties for children, especially against diarrhoea. Kaskous, ‘Importance of camel milk’ 158.
recruited to the “firm” and the shrine at Gniezno was his salary. He proved to be a shrewd acquisition: in an extraordinary pilgrimage visit in the early months of 1000, Otto III made Gniezno, the fortification Mieszko favoured in the later part of his career, a metropolitan and made the bishops of the trading towns of Kołobrzeg, Kraków and Wrocław subject to it.

Bolesław, not unlike his father, may have undergone a change of status in that Otto may have gone as far as placing a crown on his head. Both the main sources for the meeting emphasise Bolesław’s wealth. Thietmar mentions that after Otto’s visit to the shrine Bolesław presented him with rich presents and even more pleasingly, three hundred warriors. The anonymous French monk is more detailed:

Every knight and every woman of the court used precious fabrics for linen and wool cloths, and furs, however precious, even if they were new, were not worn in his [Bolesław’s] court without precious fabric and decorated gold embroidery.[my translation]

Gallus also again chose to emphasise the Piast ruler’s disposable wealth, as the gold and silver crockery from three days of feasting were cleared up and presented to the emperor along with the table cloths and wall hangings.

While it is true that twelfth century chroniclers loved writing extravagant descriptions of feasts in the distant past, there is enough in Gallus’ account to suggest that Bolesław, like his father, had abundant supplies of liquid wealth. Between the ransom of Adalbert’s body and the feast is the monk’s famous assessment of Boleslaw that ‘For gold in his days was held by all to be as common as silver, and silver deemed as little worth as straw.’

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92 Thietmar, Chronik, 4:46, Trillmich, 162, Warner, 184.
93 Gallus, Gesta, 34, 36.
94 Gallus, Gesta, 38-9.
95 Gallus, Gesta, 36-7.
This is commonly taken as an exaggeration, but again there are parallels with Anglo-Saxon England in that there have been relatively few archaeological finds of gold there, and perhaps that should not surprise us since, whatever Gallus Anonymus says, it was far more valuable. However in both places it often appears in writing as an unambiguous international indicator of wealth and a medium for high value transactions. Only when Gallus turned towards the aftermath of the visit, did he silently concede that the visit may have made a hole in even Bolesław’s purse. His story immediately following is the famous lucrative assault on Kyiv, in fact dated by most historians to 1018. In Gallus’s narrative it is notable for the ravishing of the ruler of the Rus’ sister by Bolesław, not as his wife (she had been denied to him), but as a humiliated “single use” concubine (concubinali singulari vice tantum) and ten months of shipping money back to Poland. The journey back laid bare old insecurities and possibly reveals that the chronicler had a fair idea of the trade in slaves. When the ‘rex Ruthenorum’ tries to ambush the returning army on the River Bug, eleven months after Bolesław’s initial assault, Boleslaw is made to warn his followers that should they be defeated “they and their sons would be the Ruthenes’ slaves”. Although it is assumed that Bolesław actually returned further south by way of modern Terebovlya in Ukraine, crossing the Bug would make perfect sense if you were following the trade route from Kyiv to Kraków and thence to the market in Prague.

While Gallus may have had sources at his disposal of which modern historians are unaware, it is a fair assumption here that he is re-creating past events rather than recording them. In which case the close association of sex, money and slaves signifies where he thought the riches necessary to entertain the German emperor might have come from. Other sources are

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97 Gallus, Gesta, 40-3.
98 Gallus, Gesta, 44-7 and 45n.
also suggestive: the Russian Primary Chronicle records Bolesław’s raid of 1018, but confines details to the abduction of Yaroslav of Kyiv’s two sisters and the appropriation of the Cherven towns now believed to be on the Bug on the route to Kraków and commercial centres in their own right.\(^99\) Thietmar also places the campaign in 1018, multiplies the king of Rus’s sisters to nine and refers to “unspeakable treasure” distributed to friends and supporters and sent back home and also gifts sent to win emperor Henry II’s favour.\(^100\) He also refers to messengers sent to the Byzantine emperor, Basil II (976-1025).\(^101\) Constantinople was, of course one of the chief slave markets in Europe and had long standing links with the middle Dnieper region, especially Kyiv which Thietmar describes with eight markets and inhabited by “fast Danes” and runaway slaves.\(^102\)

While there is nothing on the scale of the Islamic dirhams there is circumstantial evidence of Byzantine wealth and consumer goods making its way to Piast territory. Byzantine coins, mostly dating from the reigns of Constantine VII (913-59) and John I Tzimisces (969-976) are found in mixed hoards in former Piast lands along with money from England and western Europe as well as hack silver.\(^103\) As with the dirhams, they decline steeply towards the end of the tenth century. In the territory of the Rus itself, the chronological range runs later, as might be expected given the stronger trade links between Kyiv and Constantinople.\(^104\) However, coins may not have been the prime import from Byzantium as Bolesław and his followers looked to impress visitors such as Otto not only with the wealth, but the sophistication of their court, for this consumer goods rather than currency were more

\(^{99}\) Wołoszczyn et al. ‘Cherven before Cherven towns’, 711.
\(^{100}\) Thietmar, *Chronik*, 8:32, Trillmich, 474, Warner, 384.
desirable. One unusual feature of Gallus’s description of Otto’s visit is the description of his warriors arrayed in ranks *quasi choros*, ‘like choirs’ with each battle line set apart by the distinct and varied colour of its apparel. The author goes on to stress that there was no cheap stuff among the ornaments, ‘but whatever could be found most preciously from peoples anywhere.’\textsuperscript{105} Shepard has already suggested that the variety of expensive colour could be Byzantine dyed silks which had very wide circulation at this time.\textsuperscript{106} If so it would tie the Piast court closely to the Viking trade routes which linked both to Kyiv the river routes to the Black Sea and Scandinavia and the sea trade with Dublin and York. Gallus’ description of the expensive tableware given to Otto III has parallels with an example from this route where silks for ceremonial dress and tableware were acquired by Gudleik Gårdsk on a similar shopping trip to Novgorod for Byzantine goods on behalf of King Olaf of Norway.\textsuperscript{107} It is therefore possible that when Gallus described necklaces worn by the nobility and jewellery with which the women of the court were weighed down they may not only have been real, but have had Byzantine origins.\textsuperscript{108}

In contrast to Gallus’s account of a raid on Kyiv, in the immediate aftermath of the emperor’s visit, Bolesław seems to have tried to recoup his losses by turning west to raid the German Slav lands. In political terms Bolesław’s strategy was complex as he sought to ensure a flow of revenue to satisfy the high overheads and outlay in maintaining his retainers and noble associates, but the now familiar ingredients of wealth, captives and violent struggle for control of trade routes tell their own story.

\textsuperscript{105} Gallus, *Gesta*, 34.
\textsuperscript{107} Roslund, ‘Crumbs from the rich man’s table’, 290.
\textsuperscript{108} Gallus, *Gesta*, 56-7.
In the interregnum in early 1002 between the death of Otto III and the accession of Henry of Bavaria as king, Bolesław had allegedly tried to bribe the inhabitants of the trading city of Meissen on the river Elbe to open their doors to him which sparked Thietmar’s famous criticism of Otto III that he should never have made a lord out of a tributary and that Bolesław would dare to trap his superiors “enticed by the most vile hook of his transient wealth to the detriment of servitude and liberty.”

Thietmar may have intended his words to be taken literally because wealth was indeed passing through his region not far from Merseburg on its way elsewhere. As the new king Henry II (1002-24) sought to establish himself Bolesław did not receive Meissen, but was put in charge of the March of Lausitz and the Milzeni to the north. His ally Gunzelin, possibly also his brother-in-law, was made margrave of Meissen and Bolesław set to work attacking the settlement of Strehla, just north of Meissen, setting fire to it and abducting a large number of its inhabitants. The following year he returned to administer a similar fate to the fertile region of Lommatzsch. Bearing in mind that by now Bolesław had control of Prague on a tributary of the Elbe, the fate of the abducted inhabitants can be surmised.

By then Gunzelin seems to have been regretting his alliance and its possible consequences in terms of losing royal favour, so Bolesław made contact with the disinherited nephews of Gunzelin, the sons of the previous margrave of Meissen and married his daughter Regelinda to the elder brother, Hermann. The war between Hermann, supported by his brother,
Ekkehard against their uncle was unusually vicious and only ended in 1009 with the intervention of Henry II and disgrace of Gunzelin; he was alleged by families complaining to the king, to have sold dependants to the Jews and besides to have paid more heed to Boleslaw than was fitting for the Piast ruler or himself.\(^{115}\) This makes sense of Henry’s previous attempt to impose a settlement three years earlier by pursuing Boleslaw’s forces almost as far as Poznań so that Boleslaw had to sue for peace with inevitable compensation. Henry follows this with some distinct actions. Trouble makers among both the Germans and Slavs are summarily hanged, meetings with Slavs are held at Werben, north of Magdeburg on the Elbe and matters brought to a conclusion whether they were willing or not. Bolesław’s money may have been used to restore Arneburg, destroyed in a Slav raid nine years earlier. Then, having taken action on his own account, Henry called a synod which, according to Thietmar, by canonical and apostolic authority banned irregular marriages and the selling of Christians to heathens.\(^{116}\) The king’s concerns were similar to bishop Adalbert’s before his resignation. Significantly, Henry did not forbid the slave trade, but tried to restrict it and bring an end to irregular liaisons passed off as marriages. However, when it came to the sale of Christians as slaves, he turned to churchmen to regulate this, with the strong implication that they may be used to dealing with both these matters.

The slave trading enterprise with Bolesław at its centre was a family firm with transactions among relatives and associates eventually leading to major international markets. It is therefore no surprise to find an Anglo-Danish connection in evidence from England from William of Malmesbury, the twelfth century chronicler. He claimed that Cnut of England’s sister had been struck by lightning around 1018 and that this was divine punishment because


she was said to buy parties of slaves in England and sell them to Denmark, girls especially, whose youth and beauty would enhance their price, so that by this “hideous traffic” she could accumulate vast wealth. Identifying the sister with certainty is difficult, but in all probability she was Bolesław’s niece, Thietmar having recorded that Mieszko’s daughter had married Sveyn Forkbeard and produced two sons, Harold and Cnut. While William terms her “Thyra Sveynsdottir”, her Slavic origins are demonstrated in the Liber Vitae of New Minster, Winchester, dated to around 1031, where she is termed “Santslave soror CNUTI regis nostri.”

The post-Samanid trade saw Scandinavians still dominant in the transport of slaves to market, but drawing from a varied network of suppliers in both the Baltic and the British Isles, Dublin was particularly prosperous. Most of the later hoards in Piast and neighbouring territories have predominantly German coins drawn from the new silver supplies in the Harz mountains, and these exceed even the numbers of dirhams found, but of course may well also relate to trade in different commodities over shorter distances. Long distance trade is more certainly represented by the persistent presence of Byzantine miliareia and Anglo-Saxon pennies within the boundaries of modern day Poland and beyond.

This article began by trying to analyse the sources of Mieszko’s precocious riches, it will conclude with the role of the trade in slaves in the collapse of the Piast state in the early

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118 Thietmar, Chronik, 7:39, (Trillmich, 396; Warner, 334), partially corroborated by Adam Bremen, Gesta, Bk. 2, ch. xxxv (33), Schol. 24 (25) Tschan, 78 and n., although Adam posits a previous marriage of the Polish princess to Erik of Sweden. See also Sawyer, ‘Swein Forkbeard and the historians’. 35-6 and Prinke, Świętosława. Sygryda, Gunhilda’, 103.  
119 New Minster Liber Vitae, 26v.  
1030s and the vicious internecine conflict which followed. The coronation of Bolesław in Gniezno at Easter 1025 with the assent of Pope John XIX marked the apogee of the early Piasts’ attempts to insure themselves against the unstable politics and economics of the region. Despite Bolesław’s death just weeks afterwards, his son succeeded as Mieszko II and was crowned in his turn. Yet the economic indicators were not good: the Quedlinburg Annals prefaced Bolesław’s coronation with reports of famine and fire in many places. Gallus Anonymus laconically dismissed Mieszko as unequal to his father in life, customs or copious riches. The new Polish king found himself between the vigorous Kyivan prince, Yaroslav the Wise (1019-54) and the new German ruler Conrad II (1024-39). As has been made clear, early Piast rulers thrived through their ability to access the huge flows of silver crossing their territory. While the export of traditional goods from the area such as furs, wax and honey had benefited from the improvement in trade routes and settlement, participation in the trade in slaves was still extensive as is suggested by the presence of Anglo-Saxon coinage at a time of the last great period of Viking raids on England. However, the trade relied on the military ability to enforce tributes. Bolesław and his family had been probably been living off the proceeds from his immensely profitable raid on Kyiv and Mieszko had neither the force of personality or military ability to enforce existing agreements or access further supplies. Moreover, Gallus Anonymus mentioned that he attracted the ill will of neighbouring peoples because of his father. While the act of coronation was a means of ensuring the succession and took advantage of Conrad’s relative weakness it may itself have stirred up discontent. As first among equals among the raiders and traders Bolesław and his family may have earned respect, but by ascending to royal status they may have triggered great unease, particularly after the commanding figure of Bolesław had departed the scene.

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123 Gallus, Gesta, 74-5
124 Ibid.
Accounts of the political collapse of the Piast state was that of a slave-owning society with reports of masters made into slaves and their wives violated. First Mieszko was neutered, metaphorically, then literally, when his territory was invaded by the Rus, the Czechs and an imperial army causing him to flee to Bohemia, where he was castrated. According to the Russian Primary Chronicle entry for 1031, Mstislav of Chernihiv and Yaroslav of Kyiv invaded Poland, recaptured the Cherven towns and captured many Poles. Interestingly, the Chronicle suggests they did not sell them, but used them as colonists in various places. Yaroslav put his along the river Ros, a tributary of the Dnieper and began to found towns there. No such ambiguity is attached to the Czech army since the case ended up at the papal curia and they were condemned for selling captive Christians “like brute animals”. Cosmas wrote in the early 1120s and his language foreshadowed that of the Council of Pisa in 1135, but the incident demonstrates that even in the century before churchmen were becoming more interested and more disapproving of the trade in the area since there were now so many more professing Christianity there.

Foreign invasion was accompanied by domestic chaos. Given the weight of evidence that the ruling class of the early Piasts were heavily involved in the slave trade, there is no reason not to take Gallus Anonymus’s account at face value:

For the slaves raised themselves to lords, freedmen raised themselves to dominion against nobles, some were detained in servitude in their turn; some were killed, their wives were seized incestuously, their offices [seized] most wickedly.

In the next sentence the chronicler describes the rebels’ turning away from the catholic faith and attacking bishops and priests, and following that he laments Poland stripped of wealth

and population. The Bohemians destroyed Poznań and Gniezno, ridding themselves of a rival market and recapturing the body of their newly valued former bishop.\footnote{Gallus, \textit{Gesta}, 78. My translation.}

**Conclusion**

In the end, for all the energy and ambition of the first Piasts, and their attempts to institutionalise themselves their fate was similar to what they had probably done to others many times over. Moreover, given the premium on fit young men and women, the more successful the Piast realm became the more tempting an economic target it offered. In one sense the political structure created by Mieszko I and Bolesław represented a moment in time, the fruit of access to Muslim silver from the east and to international markets to the west and south. When that came to an end and economic conditions became more difficult, the centrifugal forces which had been held in check by the sheer wealth of the early Piasts, reasserted themselves. Yet the fact that this was not the end of the Piast state which by the end of this period we can start to call Poland demonstrates a more lasting legacy. The region still had the natural assets of fertile countryside and an increased population to cultivate it. Although weakened by a “pagan reaction” in the 1030s, the Church founded by Mieszko and his son provided a structure through which an agricultural society could be administered as well as preserving the institutional memory of a secular state to protect it. When Mieszko II’s son, Kazimierz (1040-58) earned his title of ‘Odnowiciel’, the renovator or restorer, the state he re-established began to look more like Poland’s western neighbours.

This is not to say that Piast involvement in slave trading came to an end. One of the advantages Kazimierz Odnowiciel would have gained from switching his base to Kraków rather than Poznań or Gniezno was a secure station on the trade route west and the ongoing
slave trade may explain why Polish rulers seemed in no hurry to re-Christianise Pomerania for so long after its return to paganism. Bolesław II seems also to have faced a slave revolt after a lucrative raid on Kyiv.\textsuperscript{128}

The trade in slaves was not just part of the rise of the early Piasts, it was integral to it. It was the means by which a leader based in an undefined region of Europe was able to obtain both wealth and power and to gain a share of the unprecedented monetary flows coming into Europe from the east. The same trade was also a source of inherent violence and insecurity. The Piasts’ genius was that they were able to adapt: firstly in becoming the owners of markets as well as “produce”, secondly in formalising their relations with their immediate followers, making a commitment to them and their families, turning them into a “firm” and thirdly in making themselves indispensable to the wider international community, through their involvement in imperial politics and the Christianisation of the region. In this way they were able to weather economic downturn and the re-orientation of the trade and though in the 1030s they finally succumbed to internal tensions and outside intervention, the skills and mechanisms of the slave trade they had mastered were inherited by their successors to provide the future Polish state with a well-oiled commercial culture.

There are wider implications which should also be considered. In his stimulating article on ‘The Importance of the slave trade for the Slavic princes of the early and high middle ages’ Matthias Hardt described Ibn Ya’qub’s description of MieszkoI’s resources as ‘an invitation to think about the beginnings and structures of princely rule in the Slavic countries.’\textsuperscript{129} In accepting the invitation historians might give more consideration to the implications of the

\textsuperscript{128} Roach and Marshall, ‘Dynamics of the drugs trade’, 88-89.  
\textsuperscript{129} Hardt, ‘Importance of the slave trade’, 81.
involvement of the Slavic princes in the slave trade. Firstly, Mieszko’s “state” was as much about moving people around, both armies and slaves, as much as it was about exploiting agricultural resources. Secondly, the Slavic states which emerged in the tenth century amid the inrush of eastern silver may be considered more commercialised than their western counterparts. For someone like Mieszko or Boleslav access to markets was not a way of mobilising the surpluses produced by landed wealth, it was the essential means of articulating his power over other people as both slaves and followers. Finally, while the spiritual and long term aspects of conversion and Christianisation should not be underestimated, the role of churchmen as secular agents and institutionalisers of this kind of princely power deserves further study.

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