

# Europe's Captive. Medieval Baltic Torn between Thalassocratic and Continental Principles of Exploitation

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## I. SIZE AND FATE OF THE BALTIC

The Baltic Sea covers some 400 000 km<sup>2</sup> with just one passage out into the World Ocean through Kattegat and Skagerrak. Some twenty major rivers and countless smaller streams add freshwater from a drainage area in Finland, Russia, Belarus, East Balticum, Poland, Germany, Denmark and Sweden. Hence, the Baltic is contained within present day Europe<sup>1</sup>. Similar conditions may apply to the Black Sea, and the Caspian Sea may be even more a prisoner of its surroundings – but they have what the Baltic does not: they constitute borders between major historical, conceptual entities, since both of them separate Asia from Europe. Since the Mediterranean divides three continents, and the North Sea is wide open to the Atlantic, the Baltic is the true *Mare Nostrum* of Europeans – the one Sea which is contained by a single continent. So she is Europe's captive.

Add thereto that her size is tiny for a sea – Hudson Bay is actually three times larger. Add also that her average depth is merely some 60 meters and that her water is salt only to a modest degree: what we end up with seems not to be much of a sea at all. And her status as such may in fact depend on ignorance and misunderstandings. During Classical Antiquity and far into the Middle Ages it was generally thought that Europe ended in the vicinity of Jutland and that the Baltic was a vast northern ocean, called *Oceanus Germanicus* and other names. Also it was supposed to be full of islands, most notably the island *Scandza*<sup>2</sup>. In the latter part of the 9<sup>th</sup> century Rimbert noted that according to Ansgar, who had actually visited Sweden, »almost all of this country consists of islands« and furthermore that »the northern end of the World lies in the territory of the Swedes«<sup>3</sup>.

1) The Quarternary History of the Baltic, ed. by Vytautas GUDELIS/Lars König KÖNIGSSON, Uppsala 1979; Hansjörg KÜSTER, *Die Ostsee. Eine Natur- und Kulturgeschichte*, München 2004.

2) JORDANES, *Getica. De origine actibusque Getarum*, ed. with Swedish translation by Andreas NORDIN, Stockholm 1997, c. 9, 16–25.

3) Rimberti *vita Anskarii*, ed. Georg WAITZ (MGH SS rer. Germ. 55), Hannover 1884, c. 25: *omnis fere patria illa in insulis est constituta [...] finis mundi in aquilonis partibus in Sueonum coniacet regionibus*. A survey of Sweden's provinces in a document, probably produced for Calixt II in 1123, has *Nomina in-*

The first geography of the Baltic was provided by Adam of Bremen just after 1075. He quoted many of her ancient names, but also two that were used by his contemporaries: *mare quod vocant Orientale* as well as *mare Balticum* – names that »entered« modern day German as »die Ostsee« and English as »the Baltic Sea« respectively<sup>4</sup>). When contemporaries sometimes contradicted the Ancients, Adam did his best to harmonize the statements. He had heard that ships from Schleswig were dispatched *usque in Greciam*. Knowing that there was a lot of land in between, he ingeniously claimed an explanation to the adjective *Balticum*: »it is stretched like a belt through the Scythian lands all the way down to Greece«<sup>5</sup>). Even after locals had told him that the way to the Greeks was mainly over-land and along rivers, he stubbornly maintained his view: »People who know these parts claim that some have travelled all the way from Sweden to Greece overland. But the barbarian tribes in between pose obstacles to this route, which is why they prefer to take their chances by ship«<sup>6</sup>). So Adam began the shrinking of the Baltic, by seeing it as a long gulf, often calling it *sinus* in Latin<sup>7</sup>).

The shrinking was to continue. But to Classical Antiquity and Early Medieval Europe the Baltic was as much a mental barrier as any other sea. Master Adam was aware of this: »having passed the isles of the Danes, *alter mundus* appears in Sweden and Norway«, he wrote, »two vast realms in the north, which are hardly known yet to our world«<sup>8</sup>). The word »yet«, *adhuc*, suggests a forthcoming change. He was perfectly right. Almost as he concluded his History the process was beginning, by which Europe step by step assumed

*sularum de regno Sueuorum* as its headline, albeit only one true island is mentioned among its 15 entries, Gotland. See Kjell KUMLIEN, Sveriges kristnande i slutskedet – spösmål om vittnesbörd och verklighet, in: (Svensk) Historisk tidskrift 82 (1962), pp. 249–297; David G. KIRBY/Merja-Liisa HINKKANEN, The Baltic and the North Seas, London-New York 2000, pp. 60–64. As late as 1583, in Waghenauer's map of the North and East Seas, a sound was depicted to connect the Gulf of Bothnia with the Arctic Ocean.

4) Adam von Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, ed. by Bernhard SCHMEIDLER (MGH SS rer. Germ. 2), Hannover-Leipzig <sup>3</sup>1917. Adam devotes book IV entirely to the geography of the north under the headline: *Descriptio Insularum Aquilonis*, »Description of the Islands of the North«. Cf. Adam II. 18.

5) Adam IV. 1,10 (as n. 4): *eo quod in modum baltei longo tractu per Scithicas regiones tendatur usque in Greciam*. Philologists have considered Adam's explanation of the name »Baltic« as one of several possible etymologies, however with reference to the Danish Belts, cf. Elof HELLQUIST, *Svensk etymologisk ordbok*, Lund 1922 sub verbo Bält. For the naming of the sea, see also Kristian GERNER/Klas-Göran KARLSSON, *Nordens Medelhav. Östersjöområdet som historia, myt och projekt*, Stockholm 2002, p. 26 f.

6) Adam IV. 15 (as n. 4): *Asserunt etiam periti locorum a Sueonia terrestri via permeasse quosdam usque in Greciam. Sed barbarae gentes, quae in medio sunt, propterea navibus temptatur periculum*.

7) Adam IV. 16 (as n. 4): *Multae sunt insulae in hoc sinu, quas omnes Dani et Sueones habent, aliquas etiam Sclavi tenent*. »There are many islands in this sea: the Danes and the Swedes control almost all of them, but the Slavs have a few too«.

8) Adam IV. 21 (as n. 4): *Transeuntibus insulas Danorum alter mundus aperitur in Sueoniam vel Nortmanniam, quae sunt duo latissima regna aquilonis et nostro orbi adhuc fere incognita*.

its present shape<sup>9</sup>). Hence the Baltic shrank into a landlocked captivity: a modest, brackish little sea, but at the same time an east-western maritime highway – the mother of trade, according to a Dutch saying. Her contribution to the medieval history of Europe in the making was after all important, which is why she qualifies to be studied alongside the more renowned and greater waters.

## II. THE STUDY OF SEAS AS A HISTORICAL TOPIC

In his epoch-making book about the Mediterranean in the times of Philip II, first published in 1949, Fernand Braudel laid the foundation for a new field of scholarship: the study of different flows of time in a given great geographic area. The object of his analysis was the Mediterranean basin.

The slow formation of collectively shared ways of thinking and acting in everyday life over the »longue durée« was seen as an underlying bass note, which to a great deal depended on the landscape itself: the regions around the Sea shared a common climate and formed a unity by the communications the waterways so greatly facilitated, but its eastern part had different qualities than its western, the surrounding mountains had different qualities than the flat countries; all distinctive features had their own history of man relating to his surroundings.

On top of the »longue durée« played a livelier melody of collective destinies and movements of economy, politics, social categories and higher culture which followed movable shorter and longer »conjunctures«. They appeared on a time-scale of decades up to centuries, forming fairly similar curves around the Sea. These slower rhythms meant much more than the ambitions and capacities of the individual actors in seemingly decisive »événements« such as the Battle of Lepanto in 1571. Against this background, Braudel views man as formed by his circumstances, the ones he inherits as a social being and the ones provided by his landscape.

This work raised the aim of the historian far above the occupation with individual heroes and scoundrels and their activities hitherto dominating history writing of the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One might say that he incorporated history among the social sciences. He was not alone in doing that, but rather an exponent of the »Zeitgeist«, and not least of the *Annales* group to which he belonged. Furthermore, Braudel was open to the occurrence of »Mediterranean situations« elsewhere around the World<sup>10</sup>.

9) Nils BLOMKVIST, *The Discovery of the Baltic. The Reception of a Catholic World System in the European North (AD 1075–1225)* (The Northern World 15), Leiden 2005, pp. 3–31.

10) Fernand BRAUDEL, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, Paris (1949) 1966; FERNAND BRAUDEL & al., *Medelhavet. Rummet och historien* (La Méditerranée, l'espace et l'histoire), Stockholm 1990; Fernand BRAUDEL/Georges DUBY & al., *Medelhavet. Människan och arvet* (La

In this he has found many followers over the years, with the effect that »Mediterraneans« and seas in general are thought to shape and develop civilizations around their shores on a global scale. To exemplify: apart from the Classic Mediterranean, David Abulafia lists and to some extent compares not only a Mediterranean of the North (to which I shall soon devote myself), but also a »Mediterranean Atlantic« circumscribed by the shores of northwestern Africa, the Iberian peninsula, the Madeira group, the Azores, the Canaries and so forth, another »trans-oceanic« one in the Caribbean, not to mention the »Japanese Mediterranean« or the Indian Ocean<sup>11</sup>.

Although widely admired, Braudel's issue has also been disputed and criticized, not least for being more visionary and literary than scholarly. The reduction of man to a prisoner of his circumstances has not been accepted by everyone, and Braudel's perspective has been accused of determinism. Also he has passed over aspects of collective mentalities that seem characteristic to the Mediterranean world, such as honour, shame and masculinity, as well as religiousness<sup>12</sup>.

More recent studies, such as Peregrine Horden's and Nicholas Purcell's much discussed new approach to the Mediterranean, have addressed a few of these omitted issues, *inter alia* by addressing some of the collective mentalities just mentioned. By focussing on more basic structures of society they break up the Sea into a set of spaces with particular characteristics open to the comparative study of human ecology, which they claim to provide history *in* rather than history *of* the Sea<sup>13</sup>. In any case the environmental perspective is likely to problematize and potentially refine the study of the »longue durée«.

In fact, seas provide many different ecological situations, so any one of them can be broken up into many water regions, providing dissimilar opportunities. The particular connectivity offered by seas facilitates various kinds of exploitation of such inequalities. For such and other purposes the notion of a sea may be mentally construed. But seas certainly remain helpful in the spreading and blending of cultures, and they tend to become monitors of World history<sup>14</sup>.

However, I find it misleading to view these newer contributions as a major breach with the visions of Braudel, as has been suggested by some. If anything, they represent quite welcome endeavours to continue and develop the thalassological »histoire totale«

Méditerranée, les hommes et l'héritage), Stockholm 1990; cf. Peter BURKE, *Annales-skolan. En introduktion* (The French Historical Revolution; The Annales School 1929–1989), Göteborg 1992, pp. 57–69.

11) David ABULAFIA, *Mediterraneans*, in: *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, ed. by William V. HARRIS, Oxford 2005, pp. 64–93.

12) BURKE, *Annales-skolan* (as n. 10) pp. 64–69.

13) Peregrine HORDEN/Nicholas PURCELL, *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History*, Oxford 2001.

14) Cf. in particular: *Rethinking the Mediterranean* (as n. 11); see also Rainer F. BUSCHMANN, *Oceans in World History* (Explorations in World History), New York 2006.

that Braudel once introduced<sup>15</sup>). They help to fill some of the lacunae that quite naturally remain in his holistic macro-approach, as well as offering improvements to the scholarly tools that may be applied in a truly interdisciplinary and comparative study of seas in times to come.

### III. POINTS OF DEPARTURE

The Baltic Sea and its rim obviously qualify as a »Mediterranean situation«, which has been observed many a time. As to the Middle Ages, the inventive economic historian Robert Lopez has however launched the idea that the Baltic and the North Sea should be seen as a unit, and that they together constitute a »northern Mediterranean«, showing considerable similarities to the original. In his view continental Europe is a triangle jutting out into the Atlantic; to the south it is bounded by the classical Mediterranean, to the north by its mirror image »the other Mediterranean« – in which Denmark plays the role of Italy as a watershed between an inner market around the Baltic and an outer one around the North Sea. As Venice and Genoa directed the interchange of commodities between the Orient and continental Europe, the great emporia of the northern seas were grouping together around the root of the Jutland peninsula<sup>16</sup>).

Lopez also remarks that during the Middle Ages the circulation of goods was slower, the crafts were coarser, the towns and cities more primitive on this northern Mediterranean<sup>17</sup>). Colours and fragrances were different too, instead of shimmering silk and brocade, the Baltic offered the brownish nuances of hemp and rough homespun, whereas the aroma of wine and exclusive spices was replaced by thick odours of beer and herring<sup>18</sup>).

But if one takes a closer look however, it seems evident that much more is different. Braudel's great clockwork showing the rhythms of history does not work well if one applies it to the northern seas. Here there is need for a dimension between »conjuncture« and »longue durée«, which may be termed »qualitative change« (or »change qualitatif« to give it a Braudelian touch)<sup>19</sup>). One example will suffice: as to the classical Mediterranean

15) Cf. Peregrine HORDEN/Nicholas PURCELL, *Four Years of Corruption: A Response to Critics*, in: *Rethinking the Mediterranean* (as n. 11), pp. 348–375. See also the assessment of Braudel's legacy by W[illiam] V. HARRIS, *The Mediterranean and Ancient History in: Rethinking the Mediterranean* (as n. 11) pp. 3–7.

16) Robert S. LOPEZ, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages 950–1350*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1971 pp. 20, 23.

17) *IBID.*, p. 95.

18) *IBID.*, pp. 113–117 and p. 136; cf. ABULAFIA, *Mediterraneans* (as n. 11) pp. 76–80.

19) Nils BLOMKVIST, *Is the Europeanization of the Baltic a Conjuncture or a Phenomenon of the Longue Durée? Or is there Something missing in »Braudel's History Rhythm Machine?«*, in: *Der Ostseeraum und Kontinentaleuropa 1100–1600*, ed. by Detlef KATTINGER/Jens E. OLESEN/Horst WERNICKE, Schwerin 2004, pp. 9–16.

geographically all-round and all-year-round connectivity has been claimed to have existed as far back as historians have sources<sup>20</sup>). By contrast the development of maritime seamanship on the Baltic (and the North Sea) was a historical process by and large belonging to the Middle Ages. Hence we must here also consider the capacity of seas to separate lands from each other. Its function as a barrier and definite border still prevailed in the wake of the Middle Ages. By then it had, however, functioned as a catchment area for thousands of years, and the earliest attempts to cross sounds to near-lying islands for fishing and seal-hunting, may be at the roots of coastal shipping.

The focus of the present article will therefore be on the emergence of Baltic Rim connectivity, and for what reasons various groups of actors endeavoured to use it. The problem I raise deals with human beings endeavouring to come to terms with their sea. Their special challenge in doing that follows from the fact that man is a terrestrial animal.

#### IV. MARITIME SOCIETIES AS OPPOSED TO TERRESTRIAL ONES

In northern Europe, the Roman heritage was almost entirely land based. Its core was the wide agricultural plains, suitable for large-scale production with the use of mass slavery. Settlements of the plains were in turn centred on cities, built for elegant luxury life. After the Empire's collapse, northern Europe remained land based in essence. The Franks more or less turned their backs upon the North Sea. The same can be said about Charlemagne's empire, and with some reservations that I will comment on later, also about the German version of the Roman Empire. Only when the coastal peoples began to take the seas into systematic use, change occurred.

In a theoretical sense, I think, the medieval period witnessed a struggle between two major principles of human organization: a terrestrial or continental one versus a maritime or thalassocratic one. Their parallel development may throw light on why the Baltic on the one hand failed to develop a cultural »Balticness« on the level of the »longue durée« in the sense that Braudel claimed for the Mediterranean<sup>21</sup>), whereas on the other hand it had been transformed – together with the North Sea – from European fringe to European front side by the end of the Middle Ages. Such problems can be studied by some well established geographical theory complexes with their well-tested operational methodology.

Some words to define the two principles. Due to trade and hierarchies of power, agriculture and the other industries of the firm land tended to be organized in systems of centre and periphery also in the Middle Ages. Their focal points became cities too, which

20) HORDEN/PURCELL, *Four years* (as n. 15), pp. 366–369.

21) BLOMKVIST, *Is the Europeanization* (as n. 19), pp. 12–15.

minimized costs of transport and facilitated territorial control and social stratification<sup>22)</sup>. Societies turned towards the sea were characterized by their larger freedom. Shore owners had difficulties to safeguard more than the most important sea routes and the harbours of rich hinterlands. One could easily avoid the check points by choosing other routes. But those who wished to build up long term relations had better establish friendly connections. Hence the maritime principle was to organize network systems, presupposing a higher degree of mutuality, and unlikely to be combined with subjugation<sup>23)</sup>.

## V. THE BALTIC RIM 500 AD

In the so called »making of Europe«, the year 500 AD very much resembles a point zero. The affluent, brilliant Roman civilization had imploded. In the mixed zone along its *limes*, which had acted as a filter and intermediary towards the north, barbarian kingdoms formed, expanding towards the south, leaving the people of the north pretty much to themselves. Migrations began, crossing the continent like huge ant-tracks. Whole parts of northern Europe seem to have been deserted. Population was low, apparently<sup>24)</sup>. It is evident that something new was in the making.

At that time, the coasts of the Baltic were mere fringes of the Continent and had thus been spared much from the chaos. In Denmark and Sweden, Scandinavians already filled the major flatlands. Around the Gulf of Finland various Finno-Ugrian tribes had settled, further to the south, Balts were coming in. Today's Russia was sparsely populated by

22) The function of centre-periphery systems have been studied by a huge body of research, following upon the groundbreaking work of Walter CHRISTALLER, *Die Zentralen Orte in Süddeutschland*, Jena 1933. For the intense discussion that was to follow in the 1950s and 1960s, see e.g. B[arry] J. GARNER, *Models of Urban Geography and Settlement Location*, in: *Socio-Economic Models in Geography*, ed. by Richard J. CHORLEY/Peter HAGGETT, London 1970, pp. 303–360; for its adaptation to north European medieval studies, cf. Hans ANDERSSON, *Zentralorte, Ortschaften und Städte in Skandinavien – Einige methodische Probleme*, in: *Frühe Städte im westlichen Ostseeraum. Symposium des SFB 17 »Skandinavien- und Ostseeraumforschung«*, ed. by Hinz HERMANN (Kiel Papers 72), Kiel 1973, pp. 23–31.

23) James VANCE, *The Merchant's World. The Geography of wholesale*, Englewood Cliffs 1970; Poul HOLM, *Coastal Life, »Nordic Culture« and Nation State*, in: *People of the Northern Seas. Research in Maritime History 3*, ed. by Lewis R. FISHER/Walter MINCHINTON, St. John's 1992, pp. 191–204; KIRBY/HINKKANEN, *The Baltic (as n. 3)*, pp. 55–59; Nils BLOMKVIST, *The Skattland – a Concept Suitable for Export? The Role of Loosely Integrated Territories in the Emergence of the Medieval State*, in: *Taxes, Tributes and Tributary Lands in the Making of Scandinavian Kingdoms in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Steinar IMSEN, Trondheim 2011, pp. 167–188.

24) John C. RUSSEL, *Population in Europe 500–1500*, in: *The Fontana Economic History of Europe. The Middle Ages*, ed. by Carlo M. Cipolla, Glasgow 1972, pp. 25–41; for the stand of research on migrations, see Michael BORGOLTE, *Das Langobardenreich in Italien aus migrationsgeschichtlicher Perspektive*, in: *Transkulturelle Verflechtungen im mittelalterlichen Jahrtausend. Europa, Ostasien, Afrika*, ed. by DEMS./Matthias M. TISCHLER, Darmstadt 2012, pp. 80–119.

forestall Finns, whereas eastern Slavs had begun working their way up here. Other Slavs were settling down on the south coast, to some they are known as Vends, others prefer to call them Polabian Slavs. In the far north, Sami peoples lived since time immemorial – continental scholars already knew of the fabulous ski faring *skridifinni*.

All these coastal societies enjoyed an Iron Age culture, constituted by free men, dominated by chieftain families. Most lived in large villages, but a slow colonization process was afoot. All were foremost cattle breeders, hunter-gatherers and to some extent cultivators and some were able to make iron. Slavery existed, but not on any mass scale. A wide pantheon of gods was invoked, but we also see traces of animism and ancestor cult. In the east, people may have relied on slash-and-burn cultivation, which made them live more isolated. A recent change should be noted, namely the emergence of central places – Lejre by Roskilde and Ancient Uppsala are famous examples. They testify to the assumption of official leadership by arranging cultic feasts, diets and markets. Similar places among West Slavic, Balt and West Finnish tribes appeared later and were often fortified<sup>25</sup>.

It is not likely that maritime contacts were of great importance in those days. Not even the Romans, familiar with Mediterranean navigation, had challenged the fog-shrouded wilderness of the northern seas. The conquest of England had called for shipping, of course, but the effort to push further north soon came to a halt. They are unlikely ever to have reached the Baltic. The Sea remained a barrier so far.

## VI. NEW BEGINNINGS

The exchange during Late Roman times between the *limes* and the peoples of the north had come to an end. As the new society was finding its form, an interest awoke to get something similar going, not least since the Franks had been able to recover some of the production from Roman time (wine, metallurgy). Previous trade had chiefly been land-borne. Thanks to the initiative of the Frisians, this renewal was mainly carried out by ship. From the 7<sup>th</sup> century on, they had begun to revitalize the surviving cities in the Frankish

25) Birgitta HÅRDH, Grunddragen i Nordens förhistoria, University of Lund, Archaeological Institute, Report 47, Lund 1997; Archaeology East and West of the Baltic, ed. by Ingemar JANSSON, Stockholm 1995; Origins of Central Europe, ed. by Przemysław URBAŃCZYK, Warsaw 1997; Andrzej BUKO, The Archaeology of Early Medieval Poland. Discoveries – Hypotheses – Interpretations, Leiden-Boston 2008; Przemysław URBAŃCZYK/Stanisław ROSIK, The Kingdom of Poland, with an Appendix on Polabia and Pomerania between Paganism and Christianity, in: Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy. Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900–1200, ed. by Nora BEREND, Cambridge 2007, pp. 263–318, here pp. 300–318; Vladas ŽULKUS, Der Wechsel des Weltbildes bei den heidnischen Balten, in: The Reception of Medieval Europe in the Baltic Sea Region (Acta Visbyensia XII), ed. by Jörgen STAECCKER, Visby 2009, pp. 223–239; Jukka LUOTO, Die wirtschaftlichen Veränderungen während der Epoche AD 800–1200 im Ostseeraum (Archaeologia Baltica 2), Vilnius 1997, pp. 41–58.

realm and to connect them with harbours in England, along the North Sea coast and all the way to Jutland and across the peninsula into the Baltic<sup>26</sup>.

This virtually new exchange system made use of a kind of regulated trading places, called *wichs*, proto-towns and other names by researchers, for which Dorestad in the Rhine estuary was the great model. The phenomenon soon spilled over to the north, where they became the first urban creations. Actually they were specialist settlements akin to the ones emerging in between churches and monasteries in the cities left by the Romans, but they were established in areas where the Romans had not been, in the free territories of Iron Age culture, where at the same time a certain political order began to emerge. During the 8<sup>th</sup> century settlements of this kind were spreading all around the Baltic; some have become famous like Hedeby, Birka, Rerik, Menzlin, Jumne, Truso, Ladoga town and the first Novgorod, but there were many more.

During the 9<sup>th</sup> century, a sea route system was established. It is worth noting that the system already tended to integrate both major northern seas: the Baltic as well as the North Sea. The gateway to the Baltic was Hedeby in today's Schleswig-Holstein, where the distance over land from the North Sea is negligible. The routes were extremely close to the coasts. From the Schlei on, one could follow the Vendic coast. A journey to Truso on the Wisla is described in a text from around 900<sup>27</sup>. A second route via the Swedish east coast and Gotland reached the East Baltic over the Sea. A third route followed the Swedish coast towards Birka in Mälaren (then still a bay of the Sea), and eastward to the Gulf of Finland and the first Novgorod<sup>28</sup>.

## VII. THE SCANDINAVIAN EXPANSION IN THE EARLY VIKING AGES

Around 800, the Scandinavians began an extraordinary expansion. Not only did they penetrate vast stretches of northern Eurasia and the equally vast North Atlantic, but they also forced their way through the established world: England, the Carolingian empire, they even challenged Byzantium. Scandinavians undertook plunder expeditions, which is the simple aspect of the epoch, but they also organized colonization, founded cities and polities, wherever they settled. The Viking ship was the symbol of the era. Another distinguishing mark of the period is several thousand silver hoards that have been retrieved along the Russian rivers, around the Baltic and on its large islands. It is remarkable that

26) Detlev ELLMERS, *Die Bedeutung der Friesen für die Handelsverbindungen des Ostseeraumes* (Acta Visbyensia VII), Visby 1985, pp. 7–54.

27) King Alfred's Orosius, ed. by Henry SWEET, Oxford 1883, c. 1, pp. 19–21.

28) Detlev ELLMERS, *Frühmittelalterliche Handelsschiffahrt in Mittel- und Nordeuropa*, Neumünster 1972, pp. 227–253; Richard HODGES, *Dark Age Economics. The origins of towns and trade AD 600–1000*, London 1989, pp. 87–103; Helen CLARKE/Björn AMBROSIANI, *Towns in the Viking Age*, Leicester-London 1991, pp. 46–89, 107–182.

the finds almost entirely have their provenance in the Islamic Caliphate. On Gotland alone, more than 150 000 Arabic coins from the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries have been retrieved. The river Elbe constitutes the western border for this kind of hoard findings. There is little doubt that it represents trade.

In the west, however, the period is described as a disaster. Yet the image of the »Northmen's fury« is in some ways exaggerated. Looting was not all they did. Most of it occurred in the 830s to 890s, after which they settled down in societies of their own in England, France and elsewhere. At the same time, the realm of the Rus was created in the east, also it seems by Northmen. The major part of the 10<sup>th</sup> century passed in relative peace. If one compares the periods of plunder with the hoard finds it is striking that they by and large coincide with a decline in the silver flow, when the chain of exchange did not function very well.

The Scandinavian expansion in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries holds an exceptional place in the history of the Baltic, since the region's peripheral relation to Western Europe suddenly was transformed into dominance. It is obvious that the Sea had been drawn into an early wave of globalization, along the Russian rivers all the way down to the Caspian Sea, where contacts had been established with Arabian cross-border trade. It has been suggested that the building boom and demand for luxuries in Bagdad had got the whole thing going<sup>29)</sup>.

#### VIII. THE MAKING OF MULTI-REGIONAL REALMS ON THE BALTIC

Also from the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century multi-regional polities were established in the homelands of Danes and Swedes. These were ruled by kings, who however were far from the absolute rule of a Carolingian monarch, but had to answer for their management at thing assemblies; yet in warfare everybody obeyed them, and they could bring fleets against foreign peoples. Trading places like Hedeby and Birka belonged to the kings. When the missionary Ansgar visited Birka, he came as an emissary from Louis the Pious. King Björn of the Svear expressed his gratitude in a personal letter »written in the peculiar characters that were used by this people«, Ansgar's biographer Rimbart tells us<sup>30)</sup>.

The Danish realm had its core around Öresund and the Belts, but stretched out both towards eastern Norway and towards the Vends. The realm of the Svear was centred around Mälaren and stretched out towards Blekinge, Öland, Gotland and Curonia;

29) Richard HODGES/David WHITEHOUSE, *Mohammed, Charlemagne and the Origins of Europe*, London 1989; Nils BLOMKVIST, *Traces of a Global Economic Boom that Came and Went*, in: *The Spillings hoard – Gotland's Role in Viking Age World Trade*, ed. by Ann-Marie PETTERSSON, Visby 2009, pp. 155–183.

30) Rimbart (as n. 3) c. 12.

probably also towards the Gulf of Finland. It is striking how the extension of both kingdoms coincides with the sea routes. Hence they were true thalassocracies – the Danes controlling all passages from the North Sea, the Swedes controlling all routes towards Russia. The connection between the formation of these realms and the safeguarding of trade seems obvious. The need of the merchants for safe trading places, secured sea routes and foreseeable political and legal conditions seems to be important motives for their coming about.

In the east, the realm of the Rus was much akin to those of the Danes and Swedes, even if keeping river routes and portages open was the main objective here. As Arabian trade deteriorated, the Rus turned their attention to Byzantium. Their annual journey to »the Greeks« was described with insight by Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus around 950: safe and sound through the land of the Rus down to the Dnepr rapids. While handling them they were often attacked by the Petjenegs who remained a threat until they reached the Danube Bulgars. Hence the narrative emphasizes that trade was safe in settled realms, but risky where authority was unclear<sup>31</sup>.

#### IX. THE GLOBALIZATION THAT FAILED

Towards the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, a shift of trends occurred. The influx of Arabian silver ceased around 975, coins of western making began to reach the Baltic, and Catholic Christianity suddenly expanded, a fact demonstrated by the baptism of pagan kings in Poland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, etc. These shifts may have had a common explanation in the simultaneous rise, starting in Western Europe.

For a while, however, Scandinavians continued to rule the waves, now typically by large-scale enterprises, led by princes. Denmark began to haunt England systematically from around 990. Canute the Great and his son Hardacnut became kings of England and Denmark (1016–1042); Canute's rule also included Norway and an unspecified part of Sweden for some time.

Swedes continued to go East, but met with a more developed Rus, leaning on Byzantium and in contact with all of Europe. Visiting Northerners (known as *Varangians*) began losing influence. The expedition of Ingvar in 1041, a joint Swedish-Rusic venture to re-establish communications with the Caliphate, became a disaster to judge from more

31) Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, Greek text ed. by Gyula MORAVCSIK, English Translation by R[omilly] J. H. JENKINS, Dumbarton Oaks 1967, c. 9; BLOMKVIST, *Traces* (as n. 29), pp. 164–179.

than 25 runic monuments in Mid-Sweden. Around 1050 the Danish influence ended in England<sup>32)</sup>.

The rupture between Catholicism and Orthodoxy of 1054, however, came to the Baltic with a delay. In some churches on Gotland traces remain of East meeting West in the 12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>33)</sup>. Only in the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century did a definite and mutual dissociation come about, as Rus fell under the Mongol yoke, whereas the rest of the Baltic Rim began to be roped in by a way of life common to all Western Europe.

#### X. THE BREAKTHROUGH OF A NEW CONTINENTAL CENTRE-PERIPHERY SYSTEM

How Western Europe achieved its high medieval rise is debated, but it was not by military expansion, as in the days of Charlemagne. The German Ottonians may have done their best, but just as to their Carolingian predecessor, disintegration threatened as soon as they ceased expanding. In other words, the rise of Western Europe was basically peaceful, a series of interacting economic and social changes that made society develop in several dimensions. Agriculture entered a gigantic colonization movement, the growth of trade led to several thousand urban foundations, whereas rationalized organization was applied to the production of elegant textiles highly in demand for status purposes. All this subsumed into economic and demographic growth and spatial expansion.

Parallel to these innovations, the Church of Rome was sharpening its profile, launching an offensive against the Empire and other realms, demanding emancipation from worldly interference (*libertas ecclesiae*). This had important socio-cultural consequences, which were to have an impact on growth as well. Christianity became the basis for a common European culture. Xenophobia was removed from the laws, which tended to simplify the border crossing activities of merchants a good deal<sup>34)</sup>.

All this, of course, happened far beyond the Baltic. But you cannot describe its medieval experience without putting it in this European context. An entirely new civilization emerged on the Continent – very much a terrestrial centre-periphery system. But it gradually learned to make use of the improving seamanship on the northern seas. During the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries many specialized types of craft were introduced. The sea routes

32) Mats G. LARSSON, *Vikingar i Österled*, Stockholm 1997, pp. 9–98; G[eorge] O. SAYLES, *The Medieval Foundations of England*, London 1966, pp. 131–168; Gillian FELLOWS-JENSEN, *Of Danes – and Thanes – and Domesday Book*, in: *People and Places in Northern Europe 500–1600. Essays in Honour of Peter Hayes Sawyer*, ed. by Ian WOODS/Niels LUND, Woodbridge 1991, pp. 107–121.

33) John LIND, *The Martyria of Odense and a Twelfth-Century Russian Prayer: The Question of Bohemian Influence on Russian Religious Literature*, in: *The Slavonic and East European Review* 68/1 (1990), pp. 1–21; Erland LAGERLÖF, *Gotland och Bysans. Bysantinskt inflytande på den gotländska kyrkokonsten under medeltiden*, Visby 1999.

34) BLOMKVIST, *The Discovery* (as n. 9), pp. 73–93.

still touched the coasts but traffic was intensifying, new actors appeared and several hundred towns were founded on the Rim where a few dozen trading places had existed before. During the latter part of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the sea route system began to be rationalized, as more widebodied ship types relying solely on wind power but with larger cargo capacity – first and foremost the cog – began to choose straighter courses across the open sea. These ships contributed to qualitative change, by allowing the transport of bulk cargo – iron, copper, butter, fish in barrels, as well as grain.

Trade left its random character behind and an actual commodity market emerged, in the sense that merchandise from all over Europe, and to some extent from a longer way off, was available in the towns in a predictable way. But the superior capacity of shipping slowly but surely made the economical centre of gravity move from meeting points in Champagne and Burgundy towards the coast<sup>35</sup>). The mental map of Europe began to be redrawn: the coastal zones of both northern seas gradually were transformed from outer fringes of the Continent into its front side. Even if Baltic Sea trade began to arrange itself in a more organized pattern, one cannot claim this had been the fruit of its own inborn conditions. It was rather the continental growth that had integrated the northern seas in its centre-periphery relations. Cities like Cologne and Bruges became projecting outposts of the core area towards the North Sea and the Baltic.

## XI. ENTER THE GERMANS

As to the Baltic, the major conveyor of all these novelties was the German merchant and the German pilgrim (crusader). Their expansion into the Sea is an epical topic, which has caused one of the longest historical debates we have, seemingly still not solved, but nowadays brushed under the carpet. I shall touch upon it from a helicopter view. German military expansion in the 11<sup>th</sup> century was obviously followed by merchants travelling over land, not least via Soest towards Schleswig and other Baltic ports, which were not German at that time. There already existed a fairly brisk trade on the Baltic, carried out actively by the Western Slavs, Danes mingled with Frisians, Swedes, Norwegians, the Novgorod Rus and not least the Gotlanders.

When the counts of Holstein got access to the Baltic, they founded Lübeck. But no later than 1159, Duke Henry the Lion took control of the city. He of course was a leading political figure on the all-German scene, whose authority helped the city to form national and international network contacts. The duke welcomed all extant active traders on the

35) Guy FOURQUIN, *Histoire économique de l' Occident médiéval*, Paris 1971; Georges DUBY, *Krigare och bönder. Den europeiska ekonomins första uppsving 600–1200 (Guerriers et paysans, VII<sup>e</sup> – XII<sup>e</sup> siècles. Premier essor de l'économie européenne*, Paris 1973), Stockholm 1981; BLOMKVIST, *The Discovery (as n. 9)*, pp. 35–93 with ample further references.

Baltic to visit it. Most important of all, he entered an alliance with the Gotlanders, which in due course made German immigration to Visby possible. One apple of scholarly discord has been whether the Germans immediately took the lead. A balanced overview would however reveal that it took at least three developmental steps: at first the association with the Gotlanders who were already established on all markets from Novgorod to King's Lynn; secondly the launching of a crusade towards Livonia and letting it spread to Prussia, which gave political advantage and an all-German support; and finally the shifting of their policy to a kind of nationalism, forming an exclusive network among German merchants, not letting anybody else in<sup>36</sup>).

During the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a sort of struggle was fought with the local powers in which the Germans – rather an association of cities, »Landesherren« and crusaders – then got the upper hand, and could begin to organize their own »proto-Hanseatic« system. Its backbone was the series of agreements that Lübeck concluded with Hamburg and other fully or partly German seaports: the Vendic cities as well as Visby, Riga and other cities outside German territory. In turn these cities interplayed with regional seaports, of which almost every region around the Baltic in due course got its own. The main connection stretched all the way to Novgorod, where the supply of furs, wax and hemp remained affluent – the demand for which kept the door ajar between the two halves of Christendom. The system's fundament was the control Lübeck could exercise together with Hamburg over land transports between the Baltic and the North Sea. Loyalty was enforced by sanctions, blockades and the emergence of maritime law. In the latter part of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the urban network made forceful efforts to eliminate competitors: Frisians, Norwegians and Gotlanders were among their victims. Many nations converted to passive trade<sup>37</sup>).

Claiming that the approach had an all-German spirit, is far from saying that the »Reich« was an active agent. In fact the expansion on the Baltic coincided with the breakdown of German central power, culminating in the so called »Kaiserlose Periode«. Considering nationalism is thought not to have been »invented« yet, the national spirit of the expansion is remarkable. It seems to arise in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Why would more or less independent cities propagate the nation? At least they were in favour of safety along the roads, peace between regions, respect for private property and so forth. So if the political level failed to provide such things, it had to be invented anew. May the nationalist turn have grown out of difficulties to mobilize forces in a country divided against itself? At least, Klaus Friedland has suggested that it was a deliberate effort to make the most of Lübeck's promotion to »Reichsstadt« in 1226<sup>38</sup>). In any case it proved a challenge to the

36) BLOMKVIST, *The Discovery* (as n. 9), pp. 279–714.

37) Philippe DOLLINGER, *La Hanse*, Paris 1964; Klaus FRIEDLAND, *Die Hanse*, Stuttgart 1991; Heinz STOOB, *Die Hanse*, Graz 1995.

38) Klaus FRIEDLAND, *Gotland Handelszentrum – Hanseursprung*, in: *Gotland. Tausend Jahre Kultur- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, ed. by Robert BOHN, Sigmaringen 1988, pp. 57–64; BLOMKVIST, *The Discovery* (as n. 9), pp. 665–668.

ancient thalassocracies of the North. A fact is that these fairly loose network polities, which had their roots in the Viking Age, precisely now began to transform into territorially defined, socially differentiated, ethnically and linguistically uniform Christian states with a resolute central power.

## XII. EUROPEANIZATION OF THE BALTIC – WINNERS AND LOSERS

After losing its North Sea Empire, Denmark was weakened and several of its kings paid homage to the German Emperor. Whether the Church should follow Rome or remain feudalized as in Germany was a recurrent problem. But in 1178, King Waldemar I forced his childhood friend Absalon on to the archiepiscopal see of Lund, after which kingship and church began a policy of crusading expansion among the Vends and in the East Baltic. This so called »Waldemarian epoch of grandeur« provided sharp competition to German trading and crusading. From 1201 on, Waldemar II managed to achieve political control over a large portion of northern Germany, including the cities of Lübeck and Hamburg. Leading a crusade, he also conquered the four northernmost regions of Estonia in 1219. Through a coup, involving his imprisonment by one of his German vassals, he was compelled to give up his possessions in northern Germany and was definitely defeated in 1227 by a German coalition headed by Lübeck. In Denmark, kingship and church began their power struggle anew, opening the country for north German penetration<sup>39</sup>).

Among the Svear, Viking Age conditions remained well into the 12<sup>th</sup> century, whereas Götaland had been fully Christianized. A separate Göta realm was proclaimed in the 1120s. After repeated civil wars Sweden in express terms was made into a double monarchy of Svear and Götar in the 1170s. The gathering of both regions under the archbishop of Uppsala in 1164 had prepared for this solution. In the 1190s Sweden lost its position on the Novgorodian market, was marginalized as a trading nation, and hence welcomed German merchants. The country began to be Europeanized under Jarl Birger around 1250 and by the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it was at the same level as other realms in northern Europe<sup>40</sup>).

Gotland belonged to Sweden, but as a commercial centre it was fairly independent. Its leading inhabitants were countryside merchants. The immigration of Germans began under the condition that they became Gotlanders too, and they were included in the concept of *gutenses* in a handful of privileges up until the mid-1200s. As the Germans of

39) Kai HÖRBY, Valdemar (I) den Store; Valdemar (II) Sejr, in: Dansk Biografisk Leksikon XV, København <sup>3</sup>1984, pp. 234–238. Michael H. GELTING, The kingdom of Denmark, in: Christianization (as n. 25), pp. 73–120.

40) BLOMKVIST, The Discovery (as n. 9), pp. 572–623; ID./Stefan BRINK/Tomas LINDKVIST, The kingdom of Sweden, in: Christianization (as n. 25), pp. 167–213.

Visby, in accordance with Lübeck's nationalistic politics, sought independence, a civil war broke out in 1288, which ended both the island's and the city's importance<sup>41</sup>).

The Vends were active at sea in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Their paganism was fairly sophisticated, which made them resist Catholic influences. The Christian kingdom of Poland tried to incorporate their Polabian relatives several times, but met stiff competition from Germans and Danes. In 1147, the Second Crusade was directed not only towards the Holy land and the Moors in Spain, but also against the Vends. In the end, they were Christianized by the Danes, yet later transformed into the German principalities of Mecklenburg and Pomerania, where they gradually became Germanized<sup>42</sup>).

Beyond Christianity remained the Balts and Finno-Ugrians, who virtually preserved an Iron Age culture in the east. Their conversion started a competition. In the 1180s, missionaries were sent out from Bremen via Lübeck to Livonia. Around 1200, this escalated into a crusade. As a result, the so called Order state comprising Livonia and Prussia was created over the heads of the neophytes. From around 1240, it was run by the Teutonic order and the bishops of the region. Concerning this historical process there is another longstanding scholarly dispute afoot, whether the German penetration of Livonia in the first place brought European culture to the East Baltic or whether it in fact instituted an early version of colonial rule<sup>43</sup>). This virtually post colonial problem area is not to be settled in this paper, but clearly there are arguments for both cases. The above-mentioned sovereigns conferred conquered territory to German vassals, whereas the toil was tilled by natives, referred to as »Undeutsche«. In Danish Estonia, too, German bred vassals came to play a dominant role, until the Order bought it in 1346. Sweden's integration of Finland was less dramatic. Immigration occurred, but Swedes and Finns lived side by side as freemen<sup>44</sup>). Behind the Christian zealotry one may find expectations on the Russian market, and on the gathering of good soil.

All in all, the high-medieval development had been a triumph for the terrestrial principle. As a representative of the European core area, western Germany by multifarious means had cut a large piece of the Baltic shore for itself. To the Scandinavians, Europeanization had meant a fundamental change from the thalassocratic network realm into a more centralized, land controlling, socially differentiated Christianized and fairly feu-

41) BLOMKVIST, *The Discovery* (as n. 9), pp. 377–503.

42) URBAŃCZYK/ROSIK, *Poland* (as n. 25), pp. 300–318.

43) *Historiographical Approaches to Medieval Colonization of East Central Europe. A Comparative Analysis against the Background of other European Inter-Ethnic Colonization Processes in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Jan M. PIKORSKI, New York 2002; BLOMKVIST, *The Discovery* (as n. 9), pp. 623–678.

44) Friedrich BENNINGHOVEN, *Der Orden der Schwertbrüder*, Köln-Graz 1965; John H. LIND/Carsten Selch JENSEN/Kurt Villads JENSEN/Ane L. BYSTED, *Danske korstog. Krig og mission i Østersøen*, København 2004; William URBAN, *Tyska orden. Nordens korsridare (The Teutonic Knights)*, Stockholm 2006; Nils BLOMKVIST, *12<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> Century European Expansion and its Reception in the Baltic North. Summing up the CCC project*, in: *Reception of Medieval Europe* (as n. 25), pp. 431–486.

dalized monarchy of continental type. For the Vends, Balts and Finno-Ugrians, however, Europeanization meant cultural and economic subordination, which may have come close to a colonial experience, which was to last for half a millennium.

Hence the Baltic had not been able to resist the solid centre-periphery system of the Continent. This is when its capture began. But concealed in this defeat, so to say, was also its triumph. It had served Europeanization as a means of communication, but by doing so, it had oriented the centre-periphery expansion down into the coastal zones. Good evidence of this would be the emergence of a particular maritime Germany – as expressed in phenomena like the »Rostocker Landfrieden« of 1283<sup>45)</sup>.

By the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, tribes on the inner Gulf of Finland were loyal to Novgorod, by the Curonian Lagoon other tribes supported pagan Lithuania. Here a culture border was building up. This suggests that – due to the sea routes – the easily gained Catholic, European integration of the Baltic Rim was coming to a halt. So what would happen then?

### XIII. OUT OF CHAOS INTO A NEW ERA

The latter part of the 14<sup>th</sup> century saw expansion turn into profound crisis. Its most evident expression was the plague that reached the northern seas in 1349–50. Several sources claim that it took one third of the population. Its outbreak may have had something to do with previous over-expansion. All the same, it seems to coincide with the beginning of climate change towards colder and damper conditions, repeatedly causing failure of the crops. As other pandemics were to follow at intervals of about ten years, population may have fallen to 50 % in some regions by the end of the century.

Against this background, various kinds of social antagonism broke out. The decrease in population had enhanced the supply of uncultivated soil, with the consequence that the landed aristocracy found difficulties in recruiting tenants. If they endeavoured to maintain their previous domination by coercive means, it often led to social unrest. Also in the bigger cities, tensions began to grow between mercantile elites and the lower strata. Many controversies also saw intensified ideological dimensions, some of which had their roots in previous success. The authority of churches and monasteries were questioned by spiritual reformers. The position of the papacy as an exalted arbitrator virtually collapsed; its taxation rights were questioned, as was its cynical sale of indulgences. Value judgments and codes of conduct lost credibility on the western European scene, trends reaching the Baltic Rim a bit later<sup>46)</sup>.

45) Стооб, *Die Hanse* (as n. 37), p. 158 characterizes the »Rostocker Landfrieden« as »[...] keine fürstliche, sondern eine bürgerlich-bündische Vormacht«.

46) The most readable account of the late medieval crises I know of is Barbara W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror*, New York 1978.

A comprehensive result of these changes was that the maritime parts of northern Europe little by little began to disengage themselves from their dependence of the Mediterranean world. As the socioeconomic trends began to turn upward again by the end of the Middle Ages, they developed into a new era. The returns of landed property could not cope with the yields of wholesaling and manufacture. This was a deathblow to the feudal world view. Others were delivered by the transformations of warfare. As gunpowder came into use, the notion of feudal aristocracy was turned upside down on a fundamental issue, their imperturbable prerogative security behind walls and armour-clad costumes. The coming of this new world was accelerating during the latter part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, as more and more capital was invested in trade, as the machinery of power of the states was centralized and growing, and as the economic centre of Europe definitely went over from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic and North Sea coasts<sup>47)</sup>

#### XIV. THE LATE MEDIEVAL STRUGGLE FOR BALTIC CONTROL

During the Late Middle Ages, less and less soil was used for the cultivation of cereals in Western Europe, and there was a shortage of forests. Grain began to be imported from Poland and the East Baltic, whereas wood was brought from Scandinavia. Since the richest and most densely populated areas began to depend on imports, it became vital that shipping should function. The control of shipping on the Baltic, however, was not in their hands.

In 1358, the network of German cities had definitely joined forces in the *Bund van der düdeschen Hanse*, which controlled the sea trade from Novgorod and Riga to Bruges and London. This definitely was a thalassocracy of sorts, operating as an urban estate in every land. However, it enjoyed support from the north German principalities, whereas its monopolistic aim was a thorn in the flesh of the non-German countries. Hence signals were blown to a struggle between maritime and terrestrial principles of power<sup>48)</sup>.

The opposition spectacularly took the shape of two huge unions. In 1386, Queen Jadwiga of Poland married Grand Duke Jagiello of Lithuania, who converted to Christianity and became king of their united realms. The union had its edge against Germany and its military strength contributed to the liquidation of the Order state which began with the sensational victory at Tannenberg in 1410. As to internal consolidation, however, it proved difficult to gather the two realms under a strong central government. The Polish aristocracy had been strengthened during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, having won political privileges

47) It is the emergence of this new world that makes the point of departure for Fernand BRAUDEL, *Civilisation matérielle et capitalisme*, vol. 1–3, Paris 1967–1979.

48) DOLLINGER, *La Hanse* (as n. 37), pp. 85–345; FRIEDLAND, *Die Hanse* (as n. 37), pp. 125–175; STOOB, *Die Hanse* (as n. 37), pp. 158–268.

and exemption from taxes, whereas the warlords of Lithuania began to transform into a Europeanized noble estate. In the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century these elites became ever more politically dominant through the establishment of the parliament (*sejmen*). For centuries to come, the Jagellonian double state however remained the most forceful power to the east of the Baltic. In two steps – 1454 and 1466 – the Prussian part of the Order state subordinated itself under Polish-Lithuanian vassalage<sup>49</sup>).

The unification of the Scandinavian kingdoms was the work of another queen, Margareta, daughter of the Danish king Valdemar IV. Its backgrounds were the weak finances and the far reaching German penetration of all three realms. The table had already been laid for the making of a union when Magnus Eriksson inherited Norway in 1319, and the same year was elected king of Sweden. Its realization however only began in 1363 as Margareta at the age of ten, was wedded to Magnus' son Håkon VI of Norway. In the same year, Magnus was chased out of Sweden, where his nephew Albrecht of Mecklenburg – staunch friend of the Hanse – had been elected king by dissatisfied aristocrats. After the death of her father in 1375 and that of her husband in 1380, Margareta began a project to gather all three kingdoms, showing extraordinary political talent. After crushing Albrecht's power by military means in 1389, she reached her goal when, in 1397, her grand nephew and adopted son Erik of Pomerania was crowned king of all three realms in Kalmar. Their politics focused on the Öresund region, where Erik started to levy passage customs in 1419, leading to a long war with the north German friends of the Hanse (1420–35)<sup>50</sup>.

During the 14<sup>th</sup> century the so called *ummelandsfart* – the route around Jutland – had become more frequently used. By this approach Dutch, English and Scottish competitors to the Hanse were led directly into the Öresund and to the Scanian fairs, held under the protection of the Danish crown. They could also continue to Baltic ports that were not entirely controlled by the Hanse. This was how Gdansk, belonging to the Order state until it fell under Polish-Lithuanian protection in 1454, was able to challenge Lübeck, who in turn made all it could to close the passage through the Öresund. So the Hanse was to outlive the Middle Ages, and the struggle of *dominium maris Baltici* was to continue, but from now on between stronger and stronger shore owning states<sup>51</sup>.

49) Stephen C. ROWELL, Forging a Union? Some Reflections on the Early Jagiellonian Monarchy (Lithuanian Historical Studies 1), Vilnius 1996, pp. 6–21; Edvardas GUDAVIČIUS, Lithuania's Road to Europe (Lithuanian Historical Studies 2), Vilnius 1997, pp. 15–24.

50) Lars-Olof LARSSON, Kalmarunionens tid. Från drottning Margareta till Kristian II, Stockholm 2003.

51) Kultur und Politik im Ostseeraum und im Norden 1350–1450, ed. by Sven EKDAHL (Acta Visbyensia IV), Visby 1971; Ships, Guns and Bibles in the North Sea and Baltic States, c. 1350–c.1700, ed. by Allan I. MACINNES/Tomas RIIS/Frederik PEDERSEN, East Linton 2000.

## XV. CONCLUDING WORDS

To make a long story short then, the coastal zones of the Baltic had entered the Middle Ages as cultural fringes. But by developing connectivity they transformed into networks that were to play a side show to the agricultural, feudal and centre-peripheral development on the European Continent, which in turn discovered and Europeanized the Baltic Rim. By offering the comfortable means of shipping to their terrestrial activities, the coastal zones were able to turn Europe inside-out, becoming its front side from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries on. And by integrating the Baltic Rim with the one of the North Sea, a domestic market *cum* power system was emerging by the end of the Middle Ages that was strong enough to break away from Rome and eager enough to look for other continents.

## SUMMARY: THE MEDIEVAL BALTIC AS EUROPE'S CAPTIVE

The paper examines changes of the economic and social appropriation of the Baltic during the Middle Ages. Entering the Middle Ages as a cultural fringe, it soon became a place of intense connectivity between the riparian states in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The integration of the Baltic Rim with that of the North Sea led to a strong domestic market which was able to break away from Rome and to head for other continents at the end of the Middle Ages. The history of the riparian states is embedded within two opposing principles, one terrestrial, separating between center and periphery, and one maritime, connecting the coastal zones. The Baltic on the one hand was entrapped by this European center-periphery system. On the other hand the maritime principle is the reason why this center-periphery system was modified along the coastal zones, creating a special maritime Germany alongside the other – older – riparian territories, and an economic, social and political system far from Rome – another Mediterranean.