

Andrzej Gaca

Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń

agaca@umk.pl

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5051-3486>

Baltic Slavs fighting at sea from
the ninth to twelfth century.
The phenomenon of over a hundred
years of Slavic domination over
the Baltic Sea

<http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/SIT.2019.003>

The term “Dominion over the Baltic Sea” (*Dominion maris Baltici*) began to appear in Polish sources as early as in the 15th century. Initially, it was used primarily in the context of defending one’s own ports and coasts¹. It should be remembered, however, that the phenomenon of defending one’s own coastal territories against Baltic tribes, or their maritime expansion in the form of pirate expeditions undertaken to plunder or seek to conquer areas on the other side

¹ At the beginning of the previous century, Adam Szelągowski, a student of the eminent Polish historian Tadeusz Wojciechowski, claimed that the battle for the *Dominion maris Baltici* had begun already in the middle of the 13th century, i.e. from the establishment of the first commercial and political power on the Baltic Sea, which was the Hanseatic League. This struggle lasted continuously until the first half of the 18th century as a form of competition between the northern powers: Sweden and Denmark, Moscow and Sweden, Poland and Sweden and Moscow, id., *Walka o Bałtyk (1544–1621)*, in: *Sprawa północna w wiekach XVI i XVII*, part 1, Lwów 1904, pp. IX–X.

of the Baltic Sea, had been present in the history of our continent much earlier, dating back at least to the early Middle Ages.

The influx of Slavic peoples into the territories between the Oder River and the Lower Elbe, Saale and Weser, abandoned by Germanic peoples, took place in the period of the fourth-sixth centuries A.D., with the Western Slavs occupying the southern shores of the Baltic Sea between the sixth and seventh centuries, gradually forming tribal bonds constituting the oldest forms of their statehood. Although the Baltic Sea Slavs living in the lands of the future Polish state were primarily farmers and cattle breeders, under the influence of various geographical and economic factors they sometimes formed coastal settlements whose origins date back to the first centuries of our era². However, it was only at the end of the first millennium A.D. that the links between the southern and northern coasts of the Baltic Sea were intensified. In the ninth century Western Slavic tribes began to engage in long-distance trade in Central, Northern and Eastern Europe³. Undoubtedly the fast-growing Slavic port cities of this period were becoming increasingly powerful trade competitors for Danish cities, as their trade with the Scandinavian countries gradually began to intensify, mainly through the wealthy Swedish Birka and Danish Bornholm⁴.

However, it is difficult to determine accurately when the sea voyaging of Baltic Sea Slavs, both for trade and military purposes, started on a larger scale. According to K. Ślaski, in the eighth

² The development of maritime shipping has led to the creation of numerous ports along the entire southern coast of the Baltic Sea. The choice of the location of the settlement was most often dictated by the usefulness of natural conditions from the point of view of navigation. K. Lepszy, *Dzieje floty polskiej*, Gdańsk-Bydgoszcz-Szczecin 1947, p. 34.

³ Foreign trade conducted by the Baltic Sea Slavs was concentrated mainly in the coastal ports. It was there that their contacts with the East, Scandinavia, Carolingian Europe, and Byzantium developed. We have more detailed information about the trade traffic in two ports: Wolin and Szczecin; L. Leciejewicz, *Początki nadmorskich miast na Pomorzu Zachodnim*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 1962, p. 48; G. Labuda, *Problematyka badań wczesno-dziejowych Szczecina*, „Przegląd Zachodni” 1952, z. 3-4, pp. 540-542.

⁴ K. Ślaski, *Stowianie zachodni na Bałtyku w VII-XIII wieku*, Gdańsk 1969, p. 163; R. Kiersnowski, *Legenda Winety*, Kraków 1950, p. 30 et seq.

century their share in this kind of sailing, mainly coastal, was still quite modest. It was not until the middle of the ninth century that Western Slavic sailors became more and more involved. At that time, maritime trade on the Baltic Sea was mainly the domain of the Scandinavian peoples⁵. The same statement can be applied to the war expeditions in this area, associated primarily with the expeditions of the Vikings⁶.

The external expansion of the Normans, called the Vikings, along the shores of Western Europe began at the end of the eighth century and lasted until the middle of the eleventh century⁷. Originally no distinction was made between Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes. Probably the first expeditions started from the territory of today's Norway. Sailors from the North reached numerous places on the continent, sometimes very far from their own dwellings. These overseas expeditions were carried out on relatively small, long, and narrow boats, which could accommodate from forty to sixty people with adequate supplies. Initially, the Vikings were mainly engaged in robbery, rarely acting as merchants.

After the middle of the ninth century the Norman expeditions began to change in their nature. Their goal was increasingly to colonize and develop the conquered areas⁸. Individual troops conquered new settlements, which sometimes transformed into separate states or dependent territories (including England, Iceland, Normandy, or

⁵ Ibidem, p. 26.

⁶ The first documented fact of the Slavs' participation in sea battles was their participation in the sea battle in 986; Z. Binerowski, *Nadbałtyccy Słowianie i ich walki morskie w okresie wczesnohistorycznym*, Gdynia 1966, p. 11.

⁷ G. Labuda, *Dzieje polityczne (VI–XII wiek). Ekspansja państwa polskiego na Pomorze (X–XII wiek)*, in: *Historia Pomorza*, G. Labuda (ed.), Vol. 1, part 1, Poznań 1969, pp. 314–316; W. Chrzanowski, *Słowianie i wikingowie*, Kraków 2007, pp. 75 et seq.; A. Gaca, *Prawo Jutlandzkie Waldemara II (Jyske Lov) z 1241 roku*, Toruń 2007, p. 240.

⁸ Apart from the relative overpopulation and unfavourable conditions for the development of agriculture, the reason for these Norman expeditions was the social and political evolution, which the Germanic tribes in Scandinavia underwent at the time, creating larger state organizations. In addition, the Normans were brave sailors, also reaching beyond the European continent, and the sea was their native and well known element from the very beginning.

Sicily). In the tenth century, in this ever better organized expansion of the Normans, Denmark began to lead the way, probably united, as it is assumed, in the first half of this century by King Gorm the Old⁹. The Danes attempted to gradually settle in England as early as in the second half of the ninth century, leading to the usurpation of the English throne in 1016 by their ruler, Canute the Great, the creator of the Scandinavian empire, maternal grandson of the Polish prince, Mieszko I. It is also known that in the years 1019/20 and 1022 this ruler organized two sea expeditions to the Slavic coast¹⁰.

Although there are no written accounts of sea battles involving Slavs in the Baltic Sea in the last centuries of the old and first centuries of the new era, verified by sources, they undoubtedly took place, as can be confirmed in particular by numerous archaeological discoveries, especially the preserved fragments of the Slavic war units of that time. Already in that period the Baltic tribes inhabiting the southern shores of the sea built special boats of strake construction, mainly used for carrying warriors and fighting at sea¹¹. These boats differed from the ancient Mediterranean ships, which, often forming large naval fleets, were used in numerous sea battles, sometimes determining the fate of the wars.

One has to agree with Krystyna Pieradzka, Lech Leciejewicz, and Kazimierz Ślaski that both archaeological discoveries and written

⁹ H. Zins, *Historia Anglii*, Wrocław 1979, p. 51 et seq.; B. Zientara, *Historia powszechna średniowiecza*, Warszawa 1994, p. 156 et seq.; T. Manteuffel, *Średniowiecze powszechne*, Warszawa 1958, p. 113 et seq.; A.E. Christensen, *Vikingetidens Danmark paa oldhistorisk baggrund*, København 1969, p. 132 et seq.

¹⁰ Z. Binerowski, *Nadbałtyccy*, p. 12.

¹¹ In the early Middle Ages, the Pomeranians used for more distant trade and war expeditions larger rowing boats and ships of strake construction, (approximately 11 to 14 m long and about 2 to 4 m wide) built with the use of iron rivets or wooden pegs. According to chronicle reports on the destruction of Konungahela in 1136, Pomeranian war boats could hold as many as 44 crew members and two horses. About 650–750 units (boats, ships) were to take part in this expedition led by Prince Racibor; K. Leciejewicz, *Główne linie gospodarczego rozwoju w VI–XII wieku*, in: *Historia Pomorza*, G. Labuda (ed.), Vol. 1, part 1, Poznań 1969, pp. 273–275 and 278; E. Kosiarz, *Bitwy na Bałtyku*, Warszawa 1981, pp. 12–13.

sources indicate that the views prevailing until recently, especially in German and Scandinavian historiography, that the Pomeranian Slavs' shipbuilding skills had been entirely borrowed from Scandinavia¹², are not sufficiently grounded. A similar point of view is presented by Edmund Kosiarz, an expert in warfare on the Baltic Sea throughout its history, who claims that "ships in the Slavic countries were built similar in size to the average Scandinavian ships, but different in many details, proving the development of the Slavs' own boatbuilding art"¹³.

However, despite their achievements in the field of shipbuilding and the advancement of sailing technology, the Slavs of the Baltic Sea, by undertaking, just like the Vikings, pirate expeditions in the tenth or early eleventh century, were not yet able to effectively oppose the well-organized fleets of magnates or Scandinavian monarchs. It is worth noting that the latter engaged more and more often not only in corsair raids to gain rich loot and slaves, but also in sea expeditions to achieve certain political goals.

However, a frequent phenomenon was probably the participation of sailors from the southern coasts of the Baltic Sea in attacks undertaken jointly with the Vikings¹⁴. Slavic pirates, cooperating with the Normans, among other things supported the Danes in their campaigns to England. For example, they probably participated in the Battle of Canterbury (1012). One of the documents issued in England in 1026 mentions a prince named Warcisław¹⁵.

Gradually, however, starting from the tenth century, as the activity of the Normans occupied mainly with fratricidal fights decreased, the Slavs, especially Pomeranians, Obodrites and Rani, began to organize their own plundering raids, mainly to the northern Baltic coasts, becoming for over one hundred years, from the second half of the eleventh century, the terror of the Scandinavian coasts. I will be returning to the problems of the Slavs' battles in the Baltic

¹² K. Pieradzka, *Walki Słowian na Bałtyku w X–XII wieku*, Warszawa 1953, p. 47 et. seq.; K. Leciejewicz, *Główne*, pp. 273–274; K. Ślaski, *Słowianie*, p. 23.

¹³ E. Kosiarz, *Bitwy*, p. 17.

¹⁴ K. Ślaski, *Słowianie*, p. 75 et seq.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 76.

Sea in the tenth-twelfth centuries and their consequences later in this article.

The development of sea navigation also raised the issue of the establishment and development of appropriate harbours and ports¹⁶. In general, the choice of settlement location was dictated by the usefulness of natural conditions from the perspective of navigation. Unfortunately, we do not know anything more about their origins and functioning in the early Middle Ages. The first centres on the southern coast of the Baltic Sea in an early urban form were established and formed as defensive and port settlements probably in the tenth and eleventh centuries¹⁷. Eastern Pomerania, belonging to the state of Mieszko I and Western Pomerania, subordinated to this ruler, witnessed the development of such castles as: Gdańsk, Szczecin, Wolin, Kolobrzeg, Kamień and Białogard. Their development took place to a significant extent thanks to the connection with the land base, the development of trade and craft, Baltic exchange (also long-distance), and fishing (mainly for herring). Therefore they were primarily important as an essential element of economic activity, but at the same time they played an important role in the military system of the societies inhabiting these lands¹⁸. It is often overlooked that, among other things, owing to

¹⁶ L. Leciejewicz, *Początki*, p. 199 et seq., 212, 221–224, 229–230 and 234; idem, *Główne*, pp. 275–276; W. Kowalenko, *Starostwiańskie grody portowe na Bałtyku*, „Przegląd Zachodni” 1950, R. 6, No 5–6, p. 378 et seq.; idem, *Dalsze badania nad starostwiańskimi portami na Bałtyku w IX–XIII w.*, „Przegląd Zachodni” 1955, No 1–2, p. 164 et seq.; idem, *Związki polityczne i gospodarcze Słowian zachodnich i Polski z Bałtykiem od X do XV wieku*, in: *Pomorze Zachodnie – nasza ziemia ojczysta*, K. Ślaski (ed.), Poznań 1960, p. 102 et seq.

¹⁷ L. Leciejewicz, *Początki*, p. 54 et seq.; idem, *U źródeł bogactwa i potęgi Pomorza Zachodniego w średniowieczu*, in: *Szkice z dziejów Pomorza. Pomorze średniowieczne*, G. Labuda (ed.), part 1, Warszawa 1958, p. 8 et seq., 20 et seq.; W. Filipowiak, *Wolin – największe miasto słowiańszczyzny zachodniej*, in: *Szkice*, G. Labuda (ed.), pp. 40–44, 49 et seq.

¹⁸ As it follows from, among others, the accounts given in the Scandinavian sagas, the accounts of Ibrahim ibn Jacob, the lives of St. Otto, the Bishop of Bamberg and Saint Ansgar, the Bishop of Bremen, or the chronicle records of Thietmar, Bishop of Merseburg, the Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus, and Gallus Anonimus, the life of Western Pomerania at the beginning of the

the previous inclusion of Western Pomerania, which was probably the richest of its districts¹⁹, in the borders of his state, Mieszko I could attain, at the end of his reign, the later Lesser Poland with Cracow, then belonging to the Czech Republic, and a significant part of Silesia²⁰.

It is worth mentioning, at least in an outline, of the ties between Poland and Western Pomerania during the reign of the Piasts and the first Jagiellonians. Western Pomerania (also called Nadodrzańskie) is a historical district, including the present Szczecin and Koszalin provinces and the eastern parts of Mecklenburg and Vorpommern, subjugated (including Wolin and Kołobrzeg) by Mieszko I around 967–972. The victorious battle at Cedynia fought in June 972 against the army of Margrave Hodon, consolidated the rule of Mieszko I over the whole area of Western Pomerania. The establishment of a bishopric in Kołobrzeg around the year 1000 was also to strengthen the Piast rule over these lands. However, at the beginning of the eleventh century they became temporarily independent from Poland and their inhabitants returned to their

late Middle Ages was concentrated primarily on the coastal areas, with these richly inhabited and wealthy centres taking part in both internal trade and long-distance trade, which contributed to the faster and faster development and wealth of their inhabitants. L. Leciejewicz, *U źródeł bogactwa i potęgi Pomorza Zachodniego w średniowieczu*, in: *Pomorze średniowieczne*, G. Labuda (ed.), Warszawa 1958, pp. 8–10, 13–15; 23–30; L. Leciejewicz, *Główne*, pp. 273–278; B. Dopierała, *Polskie losy Pomorza Zachodniego*, Poznań 1970, p. 22.

¹⁹ For example, in the 10th century Wolin was one of the largest urban centres in the Baltic Sea, which developed thanks to its participation in long-distance trade. This is confirmed by both source materials and archaeological findings. The latter also confirm the important role of Kołobrzeg and Szczecin as crafts and commerce centres taking part in the goods trade. The wealth of their inhabitants is evidenced by numerous resources of coins and ornaments discovered both in the city centres themselves and in their vicinity; B. Dopierała, *Polskie*, pp. 17–18; L. Leciejewicz, *Początki*, pp. 54 et seq., 84. et seq., 99 et seq., 158 et seq., 351–362; K. Jażdżewski, *Gdańsk X–XIII w. na tle Pomorza wczesnośredniowiecznego*, in: *Szkice*, G. Labuda (ed.), pp. 76–78; W. Filipowiak, *Wolin*, in: *Szkice*, G. Labuda (ed.), part 1, p. 36 et seq.; K. Lepszy, *Dzieje floty polskiej*, p. 35.

²⁰ B. Dopierała, *Polskie*, pp. 16–28.

old Slavic beliefs. The sovereignty of the Piasts over Pomerania was restored by Kazimierz Odnowiciel (ca. 1047), and then lost again by Bolesław Śmiały (ca. 1070). They were briefly regained by Władysław Herman (ca. 1090).

At the beginning of the twelfth century, Western Pomerania was united under the rule of Prince Warcisław I, who from about 1121/23 recognized the sovereignty of Bolesław Krzywousty over his district, and undertook to become baptized, pay tribute, and provide military aid to Poland. Bolesław, on the other hand, owing to the unfavourable political situation in his country (e.g. the failure of the battles against Hungary and the Czech Republic), paid homage to Emperor Lothar from Pomerania and Rügen. In spite of this, Polish sovereignty did not raise any significant objections in Western Pomerania, and the princes of West Pomerania gradually took over the Polish administrative system, based on castellany, the fiscal system, and introduced the Polish court and official hierarchy at their seats²¹.

According to the last will of king Krzywousty (1138), Pomerania was to be governed by princes, but after Bolesław's death the ties between these lands and Poland became weaker. The policy of maintaining the West Pomeranian district in Poland was continued by Mieszko Stary. However, after he was dethroned, the princes of Western Pomerania, fearing the partitioning aspirations of Brandenburg, paid homage to Emperor Frederick I of Barbarossa in 1181, and in 1185 they subordinated themselves to Denmark, earlier periodically dividing them into two principalities, the Duchies of Demmin and Szczecin. The feudal disintegration and particularly the social and national conflicts contributed to the fact that in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the West Pomeranian princes first recognized themselves as vassals of the Brandenburg margraves (around 1250) and then became increasingly dependent on German emperors. In the fourteenth-sixteenth centuries, attempts were made to bring Western Pomerania closer to Poland (e.g. during the reigns of Kazimierz Wielki, Władysław Jagiełło, and Kazimierz Jagiellończyk), yet after the death of the last West

²¹ L. Leciejewicz, *Początki*, p. 281 et seq.

Pomeranian prince, Bogusław XIV, Western Pomerania was taken over by the Swedes, while the eastern part came under the rule of Brandenburg (1653). It was not until 1945 that the eastern part of Western Pomerania returned to Poland under the Potsdam Treaty.

At this point, we should return to the issue of maritime activities and the importance of the naval fleet in the politics of the West Pomeranian dukes. From their coastal towns, as it was said earlier, from the middle of the tenth century (most abundantly in the twelfth century) Slavic fleets departed, reaching the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish coasts, often achieving military success there and gaining rich spoils. These usually pirate expeditions were typically organized by wealthy subjects of Slavic princes, who had adequate resources at their disposal. It was they who usually sent their ships together with their crews. However, it occasionally happened that such sea expeditions, called *chąsy*, were led by territorial princes themselves, or by subordinate commanders²². For example, Scandinavian sources dating back to the second half of the tenth century confirm the participation of “hosts of Weneds”, as the Slavs were then called, in a great sea battle fought between the Danes and Norwegians in the fjord at Hjorungavaag (986)²³. Another battle at sea during the Norwegian battles with Swedes and Danes was the battle in the Sunda near Solveder (1000) in which the Slavs fought on their own ships²⁴. From the preserved fragments of Nordic sources it can be assumed that at the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries the battles between Slavs and Danes were fought almost constantly, but usually it was mainly the Danes who aggressively and consistently, although without any lasting success, sought to control the Oder estuaries²⁵. In these

²² K. Ślaski, *Słowianie*, p. 103.

²³ K. Pieradzka, *Walki*, p. 55; L. Koczy, *Jomsborg*, „Kwartalnik Historyczny” 1932, p. 312 et seq.; G. Labuda, *Główne momenty dziejów Bałtyku*, „Jantar” 1947, No V, z. 4, p. 314.

²⁴ K. Ślaski, *Słowianie*, pp. 73–74; K. Pieradzka, *Walki*, pp. 55–56; W. Czaplinski, K. Górski, *Historia Danii*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1965, p. 40.

²⁵ During these battles, the Danish king Sven Forkbeard (986–1014) was twice taken prisoner by the Slavs; K. Pieradzka, *Walki*, p. 56 et seq.; W. Czaplinski, K. Górski, *Historia*, p. 39.

wars, the Slavs effectively defended their coasts, preventing them from being conquered by the Danish invasions and at the same time undertaking numerous retaliatory campaigns against Denmark.

At the beginning of the eleventh century, the Slavs of the coastal area becoming a decisive factor in the Baltic Sea not only, like the Vikings before them, harassed coastal countries with their pirate attacks, but what is more important, they also often reached far into their territories, as mentioned by numerous Danish and German sources both from that period and beyond²⁶. In such cases, the participants of these expeditions fought at sea, especially during boarding, but after being dropped ashore they were the equivalent of today's infantry supported by the cavalry troops transported on ships. The Scandinavians organized in the *Leding* system did it similarly at that time²⁷. Also the armament of Slavic warriors, as Krystyna Pieradzka claims, did not differ significantly from that used by the Nordic peoples at that time, and in some cases, for example, "when it comes to throwing machines in towns, even surpassed them"²⁸.

Lech Leciejewicz pointed out, citing the words of Bishop Adam of Bremen, that: "The Slavs attacked Denmark after the death of Canute [1035 – p.a. – A. G.]", and "Magnus [the Norwegian king who took over Denmark – p.a.] in retaliation destroyed Wolin in 1043"²⁹. In turn, as he goes on, the Pomeranians organized an expedition, which ended in a bloody battle at the Danish Haithab [located on the Jutland Peninsula – p.a.], which allowed them to maintain their positions in the Baltic Sea until the first half of the twelfth century³⁰.

²⁶ These events were, among other things, described in detail by Adam from Bremen and Saxo Grammaticus.

²⁷ This system will be referred to in more detail later in this article.

²⁸ K. Pieradzka, *Walki*, pp. 33–38.

²⁹ L. Leciejewicz, *U źródeł*, p. 29; W. Filipowiak, *Wolin*, p. 66.

³⁰ Idem, *U źródeł*, p. 29; for example, as a result of a sea expedition undertaken in 1135, mentioned by numerous Danish sources, the then capital of Denmark – Roskilde was destroyed, and a year later the Slavs invaded Scania, Zealand, and Bornholm and plundered the islands of Aero, Langeland, and

One such expedition was led by the brother of the Pomeranian prince Warcisław I and his successor, prince Racibor, who plundered the rich port city of Konungahela, located near the present capital of Norway, and took thousands of captives (1136). His fleet consisted of 650–750 ships, which means that nearly 30 thousand people took part in this expedition, more than a thousand of whom were cavalry transported on ships³¹. This expedition was not an easy undertaking, as the Slavic fleet had to travel about 300 nautical miles, twice crossing the Danish straits. The brave defence of the besieged town residents, who were helped by relieving troops from the outside, was also extremely fierce. However, the pillaging of the Konungahela conquered by the Slavs was one of the last great successes of the Pomeranian princes.

In the second half of the twelfth century the situation in this Baltic region changed radically³². During the reign of Danish king Erik Emmune (1134–1137) an alliance between Denmark and the German Empire against the Western Slavs was initiated and then renewed in 1147. Even so, the failed Danish-Russian “crusade” in Western Pomerania, organized from the land and sea, ended in

Fyn; References to the battle of Haithab can be found in many Scandinavian sources; cf. K. Pieradzka, *Walki*, p. 56 et seq.

³¹ The fear of Slavic pirates resulted in the fact that crews of Scandinavian ships often avoided fighting with them; B. Dopierała, *Polskie*, p. 54–55; K. Lepszy, *Dzieje*, p. 35; E. Kosiarz, *Bitwy*, pp. 22–23; in the thirteenth century, Scandinavian chroniclers wrote down stories derived from the old oral tradition and preserved in the form of Nordic sagas, i.e. stories about the history of old rulers and great feudal lords. One of these works is *Heimskringla* based on old sagas from the first half of the 13th century by the Norwegian Snorre Sturlason, containing a detailed description of the Slavic expedition to Konungahela in 1136; K. Pieradzka, *Walki*, pp. 8–9 and 64–67.

³² During this period, the Danes often tried to conquer the Baltic Sea region in alliance and with the explicit support of the Saxons and Brandenburgers. Poland also participated in land warfare activities aimed at restoring its sovereignty over Western and Eastern Pomerania during the reign of Bolesław Krzywousty. According to Zbigniew Binerowski, in the years 1159–1185 the Danes, with the collaboration of the Germans, carried out twenty-one expeditions to the Slavic coast, which ultimately led to the end of the domination of Western Pomerania over the Baltic Sea; idem, *Nadbałtyccy*, pp. 13–15.

a fiasco. In retaliation, as Saxo Grammaticus recalls, the Slav fleet destroyed two port strongholds in Zeeland and Fyn (1151)³³, and two years later the Slavs once again plundered the island and captured the former capital of Denmark, Koge and Havn (Copenhagen) and once again threatened the then Danish capital – Roskilde. But the huge expedition organized by the Slavs in 1157, which according to the source data consisted of up to 1500 ships, ended with the loss of almost all the ships (about 1000–1500 units) as a result of a violent storm in the Kattegat on the Norwegian coast. In addition, Denmark began to recover from the prolonged decline caused by civil wars, which had been mainly due to dynastic conflicts.

A few years after the energetic Waldemar I (1157) ascended the throne, a Danish offensive on the cities and ports of the Western Slavs began. The *Leding* expeditions to Rügen and Oder Pomerania started in 1159 and continued almost every year³⁴. They were commanded by the king himself, or archbishop Eskil, or bishop Absalon. At the same time, aggression from the German border principalities intensified. The large-scale retaliatory actions of the Slavs did not stop the Danes from further attempts to conquer the Slavic territories. After several earlier unsuccessful expeditions, Rügen was conquered and had to recognize Danish sovereignty (1169)³⁵. After the conquest of Rügen, the Danes began to take control of the lands located opposite the island and conquer Slavic settlements at the estuary of the Oder River. In 1170, they made a failed attempt to invade Wolin and Kamień, which was unsuc-

³³ The attacks of the Baltic Sea Slavs devastated the Danish coast to such an extent that in the same year a special association, also known as the “Order of Knights”, was formed in Roskilde to combat Slavic piracy. The members of this organization supervised the coast and protected merchant convoys; K. Ślaski, *Związki z Polską i walka z agresją saską i duńską*, in: *Historia Pomorza*, G. Labuda (ed.), Vol. 1, part 2, Poznań 1969, p. 64; idem, *Słowianie*, p. 113; K. Pieradzka, *Walki*, p. 70.

³⁴ The Danes, aware that their maritime forces at that time did not allow them to permanently conquer Slavic lands, turned to the Saxon prince Henry the Lion, offering him joint actions against the Slavs; K. Ślaski, *Słowianie*, pp. 97 and 118; W. Czaplinski, K. Górski, *Historia*, p. 63.

³⁵ W. Czaplinski, K. Górski, *Historia*, p. 63.

cessful owing to the well-prepared and determined defence of the citizens, and effective counter-attacks on the part of the Slavic fleet. Similar expeditions were undertaken by the Danes in the following years, mainly in the regions of Wolgast, Kamień, and Szczecin. The Pomeranians not only continued to resist the Danish attacks, but, as confirmed in many fragments of the chronicle of Saxo Grammaticus, they also undertook numerous retaliatory attacks on the Danish coast³⁶.

Soon, however, in 1184, the Pomeranian fleet of Prince Bogusław I, consisting of about 500–600 ships, suffered the greatest defeat in its history in the Gryfino Bay off the coast of the island of Kostno (Koos), inflicted on it by the Danes (1184). They destroyed 447 Pomeranian ships and destroyed their base, Wolin, and other Pomeranian ports³⁷. Deprived of protection in the Baltic Sea, Pomerania after several destructive expeditions had to capitulate to Denmark. The dominance of the Danes and the imposition by them of the Danish King Canute (1186) on Bogusław I prevented the further development of the Pomeranian fleet, while also putting an end to the political independence of the Pomeranian people and their reign at sea in this region. As Kazimierz Lepszy emphasizes, “this was the end of the heroic sea period of the former Slavs”³⁸. Summing up the assessment of the effects of these events Kazimierz Ślaski said that the “Pomeranian and Oder fleets never again recovered from this disaster, all the more so because clouds began to gather on the historical horizon, which would darken the further development prospects for the sailing of Western Slavs” with the idea of creating a powerful Hanseatic union, which soon took over the main sea routes in the Baltic Sea³⁹.

At the end of the twelfth century the process of the gradual pushing-out of the Baltic Sea Slavs from commercial sea shipping by both Scandinavian and German merchants began. At the end of

³⁶ K. Ślaski, *Słowianie*, pp. 122–124.

³⁷ K. Lepszy, *Dzieje*, pp. 34–35; W. Filipowiak, *Wolin*, p. 71; K. Górski, *Polska*, pp. 49–50; K. Ślaski, *Związki*, p. 64; B. Dopierała, *Polskie*, p. 56.

³⁸ K. Lepszy, *Dzieje*, p. 36.

³⁹ K. Ślaski, *Słowianie*, pp. 132 and 166.

the first half of the thirteenth century they gave rise to the North European association of cities called the Hanseatic League, which had already gained a gradual advantage in the western Baltic Sea. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Hanseatic League achieved considerable military and economic power by monopolizing trade both in the Baltic Sea and the North Sea.

As has been said earlier, since the middle of the eleventh century, Western Slavic pirates, known as *chąśnicy*, have taken the initiative in the Baltic Sea and for more than a century became the terror of the Scandinavian coasts. Their domination was associated with the end of the Viking era and frequent dynastic battles in Denmark itself, which led to a significant weakening of the monarch's power there⁴⁰. This made it much more difficult for that country, at least until the beginning of the second half of the twelfth century, to effectively resist the threat from the Western Slavs.

Kazimierz Ślaski recalls in his excellent study that the Slavs of the Baltic Sea, initially at an early stage of early feudal statehood, gave way to the Scandinavian monarchs in terms of military potential at sea. He also mentions the Nordic *Ledung* system, which imposed an obligation on individual districts to deliver a certain number of armed ships at the King's request and made it possible to mobilize significant naval forces if necessary⁴¹. He also claims that the vessels in these fleets exceeded the size and armament of the Slav boats, which predetermined the results of a direct confrontation between the two sides at sea. In these conditions, in his opinion, the success of the Slavic *chąśnicy* was either due to difficulties in launching the *Ledung* apparatus, especially in the period of internal conflicts, or due to the skillful avoidance of encounters with the ships of the court fleet, or finally to further achievements of the Slavs in the field of navigation and armament⁴².

⁴⁰ The weakness of the Kingdom was also reflected in the fact that in 1134 Denmark became an imperial fief; W. Czaplinski, K. Górski, *Historia*, p. 57; W. Czaplinski, *Dzieje Danii Nowożytnej (1500–1975)*, Warszawa 1982, p. 11.

⁴¹ K. Ślaski, *Słowianie*, p. 95.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 95.

Krystyna Pieradzka, on the other hand, believes that the Slavs' strategy in fighting the Danes was, among other things, to destroy economically and militarily important sites on the enemy's coast, especially shipbuilding centres for the Danish fleet. These included, in addition to the more important port towns, the areas from which "the people, according to the system established in Denmark, were obliged to supply ships and crews for the navy. She also presumes that although we have no evidence that shipbuilding on the Slavic coasts was similarly organized, this is not excluded. Regardless of this possibility, it must be assumed that Slavic warships were built by the wealthy, especially princes, who used the work of dependent and slave populations"⁴³.

Let us therefore try to present briefly the principles and practical functioning of the sea military service (*Leding*) organization in Denmark, as its fleet was the most successful in the Baltic Sea, at least until the middle of the eleventh century, and it is the surviving Danish sources that provide the most complete picture of the functioning of this system when compared with sources from other Scandinavian countries.

The previously mentioned father of Canute the Great, Sven Fork-beard, already had a great naval power when he began the systematic plundering of the southern coasts of England at the beginning of the eleventh century. The prominent Polish historian Karol Górski states that the Danish fleet transported 8 to 12 thousand armed men on expeditions⁴⁴. One hundred years later, according to the

⁴³ K. Pieradzka, *Walki*, pp. 50 and 72.

⁴⁴ W. Czapliński, K. Górski, *Historia*, p. 40; cf. E. Arup, *Danmarks Historie*, t. 1, København 1925 (reprint 1961), t. II, København 1932 (reprint 1961), p. 131. It seems that the significant increase in the power of the Danish fleet during the reign of Sven is related to the failure of the first stage of the Danish invasions and the unsuccessful attempts at permanent settlement of the Vikings in England. Not only did the change in the organization of the English ground forces, but also the expansion of the English fleet during the reign of King Alfred the Great (871–899), called by some historians "the father of the English Navy", contributed significantly to the halt of their further expansion and subsequent recovery of the areas under Danish occupation by the rulers of Wessex, see H. Zins, *Historia*, p. 52; A.E. Christensen, *Vikingetidens*, p. 244 et seq.

calculations of the Danish historian Ole A. Hedegaard, the author of the most important monograph on the subject, this fleet had about 500 ships, which means that it could carry about 20 thousand warriors, and around 1269 it consisted of 850 to 940 ships⁴⁵.

It is assumed that such a significant expansion of the naval force in Denmark, as well as in Sweden and Norway, may have involved the transformation of the Viking troops' robbery expeditions into a military service organization at sea improved, inspired, or created by the rulers with the involvement of rallies, known as *Leding* (Swedish *Ledung*, Norwegian *Leidang*)⁴⁶. Danish literature

⁴⁵ O.A. Hedegaard, *Leding og Landeværn*, Vedbæk 1985, pp. 49 and 78; W. Vogel in the biographical sketch on the Leding war fleet, based on Gest Danorum, the chronicle of Saxo Grammaticus from the beginning of the 13th century, mentions the number of 661 ships under the rule of Sven Forkbeard (ca. 985–1014) and Canute the Great (1016–1035) and the number of 1100 ships at the disposal of the Danish King Erik Emune in 1035; idem, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, J. Hoopss (ed.), Strasbourg 1915–1916, p. 110 et seq.

⁴⁶ The vast majority of Danish researchers agree that in order for a new compulsory organization of military service at sea to be established, as confirmed by sources, encompassing the whole Kingdom, it was necessary for the state and its rulers to take appropriate action. It does not seem that maritime expeditions of the Waldemar fleet to the southern and eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea would have been possible without regular military conscription and that the ruler would not have had a decisive influence. This view is not shared by the Danish historian Erik Arup, who claims that the service appeared at first without state interference, mainly for the purpose of making loot expeditions by the wealthy, and for a long time it was voluntary and only with time did it become a compulsory service to the state, in accordance with the royal order. It seems that, contrary to appearances, these two positions are not mutually exclusive. Because if we agree with E. Arup and acknowledge that in its beginnings the *Leding* grew up in narrower, local conditions, without the interference of the authorities of the time, then JL certainly demonstrates it at the stage of total subordination to the monarchs; idem, *Leding og Ledingskat i det 13. aarhundrede*, in: "Historisk Tidsskrift" 1914, R. 8, t. 5, p. 142 et seq.; idem, *Danmarks*, p. 187 et seq., 242 et seq., 286 et seq.; P. Johs. Jørgensen, *Dansk Retshistorie*, København 1947, p. 252 et seq.; idem, *Anmeldelse af Erik Arups Danmarks Historie*, in: "Historisk Tidsskrift" 1925–1926, R. 9, t. 4, p. 336 et seq., p. 337 et seq., 340 et seq.; F.H. Jahn, *Almindelig Udsigt over Nordens, især Danmarks Krigsvæsen i Middelalderen indtil Krudtets Anvendelse i de nordiske Krige*, København 1825, p. 62 et seq.; J. Skovgaard-Petersen,

is dominated by the view that the institution of the *Leding* existed here from the middle of the eleventh to the middle of the fourteenth century, with its development culminating in the thirteenth century⁴⁷. The first twenty provisions of the Third Book of Jutland Law of Waldemar II (*Jyske Lov* – abbreviation: JL), an official collection based on the customary law of Jutland, issued by the ruler as lawmaker in 1241, date back to the beginning of the fourth decade of this century. The above mentioned provisions of the JL are at the same time the most extensive preserved source of information concerning the medieval institution of the Danish *Leding*⁴⁸.

This Nordic military service organization at sea can be considered the equivalent of modern marines, i.e. forces that require maritime transport to travel to the destination areas in order to fight on land⁴⁹. It was therefore a formation whose main task was to build, arm, crew, and equip ships with food supplies, the purpose of which was not so much to fight at sea as to transport military troops to the attacked or defended coast.

Probably initially of an offensive character and established on the principle of mobilization in order to conduct aggressive fighting

A.E. Christensen, H. Paludan, *Danmarks historie*, Vol. 1, København 1977, pp. 195 and 391; W. Czaplinski, K. Górski, *Historia*, p. 40; J. Andersson, *Dzieje Szwecji*, Warszawa 1967, p. 44; A. Bereza-Jarociński, *Zarys dziejów Norwegii*, Warszawa 1991, p. 46.

⁴⁷ P. Johs. Jørgensen, *Dansk*, p. 242, idem, *Leding*, p. 230 et seq.; H. Chr. Bjerg, *Ledingsbestemmelserne i Jydske Lov*, in: *Jydske Lov 750 år*, O. Fenger and Chr.R. Jansen (ed.), Viborg 1991, p. 195.

⁴⁸ Much more brief is the other source text on the order of the *Leding* found in the undated, probably dating from the second half of the thirteenth century, supplement to the collection of the district law of Skånske Lov, quoted below according to: *Skaanske Lov og Jyske Lov*, issue E. Kroman, S. Juul, København 1956, pp. 97–98; A. Gaca, *Duńskie źródła prawa w średniowieczu*, "Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici. Prawo XVII" 1979, z. 105, pp. 39–55; idem, *Organizacja służby wojskowej na morzu (Leding) w Prawie Jutlandzkim Waldemara II z 1241*, in: *Historia integra. Księga Pamiątkowa ofiarowana Profesorowi Stanisławowi Salmonowiczowi w siedemdziesięciolecie urodzin*, Toruń 2001, pp. 95–109; idem, *Kodeks duński króla Chrystiana V z roku 1683*, Toruń 1992, pp. 7 and 11–13; idem, *Prawo*, pp. 239–267.

⁴⁹ A.O. Hedegaard, *Leding*, p. 4; cf. J. Skovgaard-Petersen, A.E. Christensen, H. Paludan, *Danmarks*, p. 391.

outside the country, the *Leding* service was an important part of the armed forces of the Kingdom at the time of the creation and consolidation of the feudal state. The Danish system of military organization at that time, apart from the *Leding*, consisted of royal forces, troops of the wealthy and of the bishops, and, in the event of a land invasion, mass mobilization.

From the aforementioned provisions of the Jutland Law of Walde-
mar II it is evident that when they were issued in March 1241, the obligation of military service at sea and the related duties applied to all Danes having land belonging to rural land communities (*Landsbyens fællesskaber*). The *Leding* was based on the territorial division of the individual districts of the Kingdom into groups of farms known as *Havne*⁵⁰. Unfortunately, JL did not define precisely who was part of a *Havne*. Perhaps only the property owners and landowners with a certain amount of lands belonged to a *Havne*. Each *Havne* provided, armed, and supplied one warrior for the time of the campaign and participated in the common expenses of the expedition. Most of the time about 40 *Havne* formed a larger unit called *Skipæn* (Latin: *navigium*), each of which provided a ship, commanded by a helmsman (*Styrismand*). He was also responsible for the construction of the ship, and the enforcement of all the obligations of the inhabitants of the *Skipæn* related to the *Leding* and the mobilization⁵¹. According to JL, the helmsman was responsible for

⁵⁰ The costs of building and equipping the vessel and the other burdens of the *Leding* obligation were divided proportionally according to the value of the land cultivated by the individual *Havne* farms, based on the land valuation. The *Havne* area as a territorial-military subdivision usually consisted of three farms with land worth one gold *grzywna*. The farm constituted therefore 1/3 of the *Havne* (*Tredingshavne*) and provided one man to the *Leding* every three years (assuming that the *Leding* expeditions took place annually). In case when the *Havne* area was divided into more smaller farms, the obligation to provide a man for the *Leding* and the expenses related to the expedition were divided according to their size: e.g. 1/6 or 1/12 *Havne*; H. Matzen, *Forelæsninger over den danske Retshistorie, Qffentlig Ret*, part I: *Statsret*, København 1893, p. 21.

⁵¹ JL III – 5 (quote according to: *Skaanske og Jyske Lov*, issue E. Kroman and S. Luul, København 1956); the helmsman was also entitled to a certain degree of disciplinary and judicial authority over the crew; J. Skovgaard-Petersen, A. E. Christensen, H. Paludan, *Danmarks*, pp. 195 and 391.

building the ship⁵². However, the costs of construction, equipment, and shields were to be borne by all the inhabitants of the *Skipæen*. After the ship was built, the crew was obliged to launch the ship on a certain day, and after the expedition – to pull it ashore and probably maintain it during the period when it was not in use⁵³.

According to the Jutland Law, personal service in the fleet was the responsibility of the free peasants, described by JL as *Havnebonde*, whose land belonged to a *Havne*⁵⁴. They could be both its owners and tenants. Inhabitants of the *Havne*, as a certain circle of people who were responsible for the above mentioned duties related to the *Leding*, together, according to JL, formed the so-called *Havnelag*⁵⁵. The decision to choose a person who would take part in the expedition was left to the *Havne*. If there were enough volunteers, they were given the highest priority in terms of participation in warfare, before those who were obliged to do so⁵⁶.

In providing one man for the ship's crew from among themselves, the *Havne* equipped him with a shield, an iron helmet, and

⁵² JL III – 5. In Norway, according to the resolutions of the surviving legal books, peasants themselves built the ship by concluding contracts with shipmasters and also punished those who evaded participation in the costs of the above mentioned project. They were also responsible for mobilization, *Frostatingslov* VII – 2, VII – 8 and *Gulatingslov* 296; cf. *Jütsche Recht*, issue K.v. See, p. 2.

⁵³ JL III – 5. Failure to comply with these obligations was subject to a fine of an amount determined by the crew themselves. It was meant for their needs and not for the benefit of the king or the helmsman. The obligation to carry out winter maintenance work on ships is also regulated, among other things, by five *Frostatingslov* provisions concerning the Norwegian *Ledung*.

⁵⁴ C.A. Christensen, *Et Bidrag til Fortolkningen af Ledingsatserne og Betegnelsen Havnebonde and Jyske Lov*, in: *Med Lov skal Land bygges*, E. Reitzel-Nielsen (ed.), København 1941, p. 306 et seq.; cf. E. Arup, *Leding*, p. 178 et seq.; idem, *Danmarks*, p. 243 et seq., 286 et seq.; p. 306 et seq.; cf. P. Johs. Jørgensen, *Anvendelse*, p. 338 et seq.; idem, *Dansk*, p. 212 and p. 382; *Skaanske Lov og Jyske Lov* issue. E. Kroman and S. Iuul, København 1956, p. 287; S. Bolin, *Ledung och frälse*, Lund 1934, p. 112 et seq.

⁵⁵ JL III – 1; *Den jyske Lov. Text med Oversættelse, Kommentar og Ordbog*, issue P. Skautrup, København 1933–41, p. 202.

⁵⁶ JL III – 1.

a spear⁵⁷. When it was the turn of a farm owned by a minor, an elderly person, a woman, or a clergyman, they had to send a “suitable man” in their place⁵⁸. If the *Havne* did not appoint a warrior within the specified time, it was up to the helmsman to decide⁵⁹. If a designated member of the ship’s crew could not participate in the expedition, he had to, according to JL, send a suitable person in his place, but it could not be, as a rule, his servant or slave⁶⁰.

Outside the *Leding* order was also a group of the wealthy, from whom the knighthood, known as *Herremænd*, gradually developed. They took part in naval expeditions at their own expense, receiving compensation from the king in return. Poul Johs. Jørgensen believes that they did not serve in turns, but appeared in person each time a *Leding* was announced⁶¹. The word *Herremænd*, which cannot be found in other sources from that time, appeared for the first time in JL in connection with the organization of the *Leding*⁶². It described a man who took on the duty to respond to the call fully armed, in exchange for tax exemption with regard to all of his lands⁶³. Known as *homines minorum* or “people of the master” (king, prince, bishop, royal vassal), they formed units of armed

⁵⁷ JL III – 1; cf. JL III – 4.

⁵⁸ JL III – 1.

⁵⁹ JL III – 1. However, he had no right to force anyone who had previously participated in a *Leding* to take part in the expedition in person if there was a man in the same *Havnelag* who had not yet taken part in the war.

⁶⁰ J. Skovgaard-Petersen, A. E. Christensen, H. Paludan, *Danmarks.*, p. 194; E. Arup, *Danmarks*, p. 187; O. A. Hedegaard, *Leding*, pp. 12 and 38; H. Chr. Bjerg, *Ledingsbestemmelserne*, p. 195.

⁶¹ P. Johs. Jørgensen, *Dansk*, p.382 et seq.

⁶² JL III – 15, JL III – 18; K. Erslev, *Valdemarernes Storhedstid*, København 1898 (reprint 1972), p. 228; P. Johs. Jørgensen, *Dansk*, p. 533 et seq.; *Das Jütsche Recht*, K. v See, p. 184.

⁶³ JL III – 18. The state of *Herremænd* began to transform itself into an hereditary nobility in Denmark only in the 15th century. However, it follows from JL that, as a rule, the economic privileges enjoyed by such families passed from father to son, because it stipulates that after *Herremænd*’s death his land lost its tax-free status if he did not leave a son or the son did not want to perform military service; J. Skovgaard-Petersen, A. E. Christensen, H. Paludan, *Danmarks*, Vol. 1, p. 391; P. Johs. Jørgensen, *Dansk*, p. 378 et seq., p. 532; *Das Jütsche Recht*, K. v See, p. 184.

cavalry. In contrast to the members of the royal regiment, they could exempt themselves from the obligation of personal service in the *Leding* by paying the king a tax from each farm they owned. If they failed to do so, they lost their economic privileges by becoming ordinary (i.e. free) peasants (*Innebonde*), obliged to bear all the burdens and duties associated with a *Leding*⁶⁴.

The question which is still lacking an clear answer is: who made the decisions to mobilize the *Leding* forces. Danish academia is dominated by the view, usually based on the Saxo chronicle, that until the middle of the twelfth century it was decided only by district rallies (*Landstings*). Although the initiative to undertake a sea expedition usually belonged to the king. It was only after some time that the appointment of armed peasants on ships gradually became the right of the monarch himself, which was related to the significant increase in the royal power at that time⁶⁵. Now the ruler not only decided whether to organize a maritime expedition (usually from the thirteenth century without the prior consent of the rallies), but usually was also the chief commander of the armies summoned to the *Leding*, thus having at his disposal armed forces, which cost him nothing, and could even in the case of military successes, be a source of additional income⁶⁶.

It should be clearly emphasized that it is not possible to determine with sufficient accuracy, using the surviving sources, when the personal duty of military service at sea (nowadays referred to as *Krigsleding*) was replaced by the *Leding* tax (*Ledingsskat*,

⁶⁴ JL III – 7; P. Johs. Jørgensen, *Dansk*, p. 386 et seq.

⁶⁵ E. Arup, *Danmarks*, pp. 181, 187, 288; cf. P. Johs. Jørgensen, *Dansk*, p. 253.

⁶⁶ According to Poul Johs. Jørgensen, as long as the *Leding* system was intended solely to defend itself, the King himself decided when to use these forces. In the case of an offensive war, however, he always had to have the permission of the *Landstings*. Otherwise, if the expedition was not approved by the district rallies, the king's call to the *Leding* could be opposed. In the times of the Waldemars, when the royal power was significantly strengthened, the right of the people to co-decide on a sea expedition was weakened in favour of the consent of the wealthy; idem, *Dansk*, p. 256; idem, *Armenndelse*, p. 337 et seq.; cf. E. Arup, *Danmarks*, pp. 139, 245.

Ledingspenge)⁶⁷. JL was probably established during a transitional period, since it regulates both systems at the same time: a partly older one, consisting of personal participation in naval expeditions and related obligations, and a partly newer one, concerning only the *Leding* tax. It seems that already at the beginning of the thirteenth century, when, as a result of the further increase in royal powers, changes came in the art of war and the methods of warfare, the importance of the *Leding* decreased and the ruler, if he did not organize a sea expedition in a given year, charged those who were obliged to participate in it a certain amount of money. There are also provisions in the Jutland Law concerning the rules of the personal service in the *Leding* and related benefits⁶⁸, but in addition to those provisions there are new ones which refer exclusively to the tax which replaces it⁶⁹. It was not until the fourteenth century that the old duty to serve at sea was completely abolished, but the *Ledingsskat* tax, the substitute for it, was still in operation⁷⁰.

To summarize and at the same time to attempt to answer the question of what were the most important reasons for the more than a century-long domination by the Baltic Sea Slavs at sea, and then its sudden decline, it is necessary to point out a number of factors that could have had a significant impact on this.

From the beginning of the ninth century it was first the Vikings and later the Danes who reached the Slavic coast, whether destroying competitive trade centres, or trying to conquer the Oder estuaries, especially the rich Wolin, and create bases on the southern shores of the Baltic Sea for further expansion. Already in this period, the Slavs were not only successfully defending their territories,

⁶⁷ E. Kjersgaard, *Leding*, p. 128 et seq.; K. Erslev, *Valdemarernes*, p. 141 et seq.; E. Arup, *Leding*, p. 141 et seq.

⁶⁸ JL III – 1 to 8.

⁶⁹ JL III – 9 to 20.

⁷⁰ P. Johs. Jørgensen, *Dansk*, p. 542. E. Arup believes that the king, still at the end of the thirteenth century, sometimes summoned the *Leding* but actually did not use it as a military means. The main aim of the monarch, in his opinion, was in such cases to obtain the resulting tributes and benefits in kind; idem, *Leding og Ledingsskat i 13 aarhundrede*, in: "Historisk Tidsskrift" 1914, R. 8, Vol. 5, p. 230 et seq.; cf. H. Chr. Bjerg, *Ledingsbestemmelserne*, p. 195.

but often organized retaliatory expeditions, both on land and at sea, consistently repelling attacks of the Danish fleet and fighting many victorious battles against it, also on the Danish coasts. The constant Slavonic-Danish battles fought at the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries allow us to assume that already then the Slavs of the Baltic Sea had reached a high level of war art and had considerable experience in the field of shipbuilding, sailing technique, and navigation. Perhaps it was also thanks to this that at the beginning of the eleventh century they could participate together with the Vikings, as their important allies, in expeditions to e.g. England.

The fundamental change in the power structure in the Baltic Sea basin took place as the Norman activity decreased. Already at that time, the Baltic Sea Slavs were building various types of ships adapted for war purposes, not inferior to the quality of construction and manufacture of the Scandinavian units of that time. If necessary, they formed extensive fleets of ships, excellently trained, armed, and commanded. They often spread terror both in defence of their coastline and in the territories belonging to the enemy. It is possible that already at that time, as some Polish researchers believe, by organizing their armed forces at sea and imitating the undoubtedly very well-known Nordic *Leding* system, which had existed for a long time in the Scandinavian countries, they created a similarly organized form of shipbuilding on the Slavic coasts through specially designated territorial units. It is beyond dispute, however, that already at that time they had reached a high level of war art, which allowed them to both effectively oppose Danish aggression, and frequently surprise the enemy on its waters and lands.

At the beginning of the eleventh century, the Slavs of the coastal area who were becoming a decisive factor in the Baltic Sea not only, like the Vikings before them, harassed coastal countries with their pirate attacks, but what is more important, they also often reached far into their territories. In such cases, the participants of these expeditions, often undertaken on a large scale, fought both at sea, especially during boarding, but also after being dropped ashore. Therefore, they were the equivalent of today's infantry supported

by the cavalry troops transported on ships, similarly to how the Scandinavians, organized in the *Leding* system, did it at that time.

This allowed them to maintain a dominant position in the Baltic until the first half of the twelfth century, when Slavic fleets reached not only the Danish, Norwegian and Swedish coasts, but also often, as has been said earlier, far inland. This might have been the result, to a large extent, of the difficulties arising from the use and operation of the *Leding* military service organization itself, which was facilitated by numerous internal conflicts both in Denmark itself and in the other Nordic countries. As far as Denmark is concerned, after the death of Magnus the Good (1047), son of Canute the Great, the battles for the throne and foreign interventions began, leading to the weakening of royal power and significant disorganization of the Danish military system.

However, the situation in the Baltic Sea region changed radically in the second half of the twelfth century. After the enthronement of Waldemar I (1157), who transformed the former weakened Viking kingdom into a centralized early feudal monarchy, royal power in Denmark was gradually strengthened. His successor Canute IV imposed his rule on Western Pomerania and Mecklenburg, and his country regained its dominance over a vast part of the Baltic Sea. The time from the beginning of the reign of Waldemar I to the death of his younger son Waldemar II (1241) is widely known in literature as “Waldemar times”, a golden period in the history of medieval Denmark, the period of consequent reconstruction of its power over the Baltic Sea.

The deterioration of the former position of the Baltic Sea Slavs resulted also from the anti-Slavic alliance of Denmark and the rulers of the border marches, supported by German emperors, which had begun already in the first half of the 12th century. Despite clear competition and mutual disputes, they cooperated at least several times in conquering lands inhabited by Slavs. Another important factor was the further weakening of political ties between West Pomerania and Poland, which had been taking place since the 11th century. This was also influenced by the deepening of feudal fragmentation in Poland, which, despite its attempts, could not provide effective help to the Baltic Sea Slavs in resisting external aggression.

The ultimate end to the further development of the Pomeranian fleet and its numerous victories providing the Slavs with domination over the Baltic Sea was the result of the severe defeat of their squadron commanded by Prince Bogusław I in 1184. Two years later he recognized the sovereignty of the king of Denmark and after the defeats suffered by the fleet in the years 1223–1227 West Pomerania was again subjected to the authority of German emperors. However, before this came about the Danes made Holstein and Lübeck dependent upon them, and at the beginning of the thirteenth century, also a part of Estonia and Gdansk Pomerania. Thus, at the end of the twelfth century, they gained a decisive advantage in this region of the Baltic Sea, which meant the end of the past glory of the navy of the Baltic Sea Slavs.

STRESZCZENIE

Walki Słowian nadbałtyckich na morzu w IX–XII w.
Fenomen ponad stuletniej dominacji słowiańskiej
nad Bałtykiem

Początki osadnictwa Słowian na południowych wybrzeżach Bałtyku i tworzenia przez nich związków plemiennych sięgają VI w. W IX w. plemiona te zaczęły brać aktywny udział w handlu obejmującym Europę Środkową, Wschodnią i Północną. Szczególną rolę w tej wymianie handlowej, zwłaszcza z krajami Półwyspu Skandynawskiego, odgrywały zachodniosłowiańskie grody portowe. Z czasem zaczęły one mieć również coraz większe znaczenie, jeśli chodzi o morskie wyprawy wojenne. Ekspansja ludów skandynawskich wzdłuż brzegów bałtyckich Europy Zachodniej rozpoczęła się u schyłku VIII i trwała do połowy XI w. Wiąże się to z tzw. erą wikingów. Pod koniec tego okresu Skandynawowie zaczęli organizować wyprawy morskie na tereny zamieszkałe przez Słowian, przede wszystkim Pomorze Zachodnie, najlepiej rozwinięte gospodarczo. Zarówno zachowane źródła, jak i odkrycia archeologiczne potwierdzają, że ludy słowiańskie zdobywały stopniowo coraz większe umiejętności zarówno w sztuce budowy okrętów wojennych, jak i doświadczeń w zakresie prowadzenia walk na morzu. Z czasem to piraci słowiańscy oraz uczestnicy wypraw łupieżczych organizowanych przez książąt i możnowładców zachodniopomorskich zaczęli nękać skandynawskie wybrzeża Bałtyku, docierając niekiedy daleko w głąb atakowanych terytoriów. Od połowy XI do schyłku XII w. to oni stali się postrachem północnych

wybrzeży, odgrywając dominującą rolę nad Bałtykiem. Publikacja stanowi próbę wyjaśnienia tego fenomenu z uwzględnieniem sytuacji politycznej tego okresu w państwach Północy. Przede wszystkim podkreślone zostało jednak znaczenie bardzo prawdopodobnego wzorowania się Słowian w organizowaniu tych wypraw na powszechnie występującym w Skandynawii systemie służby wojskowej na morzu, określanym jako *Leding* w Danii czy *Ledung* w Szwecji.

Słowa kluczowe: Słowianie; Skandynawowie; Bałtyk; grody portowe; żegluga wojenna; system służby wojskowej na morzu; *Leding*

SUMMARY

Baltic Slavs fighting at sea from the ninth to twelfth century. The phenomenon of over a hundred years of Slavic domination over the Baltic Sea

The beginnings of the Slavic settlement on the southern shores of the Baltic Sea and the formation of their tribal communities date back to the 6th century. In the 9th century, these tribes began to actively participate in trade in Central, Eastern and Northern Europe. A special role in this trade, particularly with the countries of the Scandinavian Peninsula, was played by West Slavic port cities. With time, their importance in terms of maritime war expeditions increased as well. The external expansion of Scandinavian peoples along the Baltic shores of Western Europe began at the end of the 8th century and lasted until the middle of the 11th century. This is connected with the so-called Viking era. At the end of this period, the Scandinavians began to organize sea expeditions to the most economically developed areas inhabited by Slavs, primarily Western Pomerania. Both the preserved sources and archaeological findings confirm that the Slavic peoples gradually gained more and more skills both in the art of warship building and the experiences of fighting at sea. With time, it was Slavic pirates and participants of raid expeditions organized by West Pomeranian princes and magnates who began to plague the Scandinavian shores of the Baltic Sea, sometimes reaching deep into the attacked territories. From the middle of the 11th century to the end of the 12th century, they were the nightmare of the northern coasts, playing a dominant role on the Baltic Sea. The paper is an attempt to explain this phenomenon, taking into account the political situation of this period in the countries of the North. However, what has been emphasized above all

is the importance of the very probable imitation of the maritime military service system commonly known in Scandinavia as *Leding* (in Denmark) or *Ledung* (in Sweden) by the Slavs, when organizing their own expeditions.

Keywords: Slavs; Scandinavians; the Baltic Sea; port cities; navy; sea military service system; *Leding*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Andersson I., *Dzieje Szwecji*, Warszawa 1967.
- Arup E., *Danmarks Historie*, t. 1–2, København 1932 (reprint 1961).
- Arup E., *Leding og Ledingskat i det 13. aarhundrede*, in: "Historisk Tidsskrift" 1914, R. 8, t. 5.
- Bereza-Jarociński A., *Zarys dziejów Norwegii*, Warszawa 1991.
- Binerowski Z., *Nadbałtyccy Słowianie i ich walki morskie w okresie wczesnohistorycznym*, Gdynia 1966.
- Bjerg H.Chr., *Ledingsbestemmelserne i Jydske Lov*, in: *Jydske Lov 750 år*, eds. By O. Fenger and Chr.R. Jansen, Viborg 1991.
- Bolin S., *Ledung och frälse*, Lund 1934.
- Christensen A. E., *Vikingetidens Danmark paa oldhistorisk baggrund*, København 1969.
- Christensen C.A., *Et Bidrag til Fortolkningen af Ledingsstatserne og Betegnelsen Havnebonde and Jyske Lov*, in: *Med Lov skal Land bygges*, E. Reitzel-Nielsen (ed.), København 1941.
- Chrzanowski W., *Słowianie i wikingowie*, Kraków 2007.
- Czapliński W., *Dzieje Danii Nowożytnej (1500–1975)*, Warszawa 1982.
- Czapliński W., Górski K., *Historia Danii*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1965.
- Das Jütsche Recht*, K. v. See, Weimar 1960.
- Den jyske Lov. Text med Oversættelse, Komentar og Ordbog*, issue P. Skautrup, København 1933–1941.
- Dopierała B., *Polskie losy Pomorza Zachodniego*, Poznań 1970.
- Erslev K., *Valdemarernes Storhedstid*, København 1898 (reprint 1972).
- Filipowiak W., *Wolin – największe miasto słowiańszczyzny zachodniej*, in: *Szkice z dziejów Pomorza*, G. Labuda (ed.), Warszawa 1958.
- Gaca A., *Duńskie źródła prawa w średniowieczu*, "Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici. Prawo XVII" 1979, z. 105.
- Gaca A., *Kodeks duński króla Chrystiana V z roku 1683*, Toruń 1992.
- Gaca A., *Organizacja służby wojskowej na morzu (Leding) w Prawie Jutlandzkim Waldemara II z 1241*, in: *Historia integra. Księga Pamiątkowa ofiarowana Profesorowi Stanisławowi Salmonowiczowi w siedemdziesiątciu urodzin*, Toruń 2001.

- Gaca A., *Prawo Jutlandzkie Waldemara II (Jyske Lov) z 1241 roku*, Toruń 2007.
- Hedegaard O.A., *Leding og Landeværn*, Vedbæk 1985.
- Hedegaard O.A., *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, J. Hoopss (ed.), Strasbourg 1915–1916.
- Jahn F.H., *Almindelig Udsigt over Nordens, især Danmarks Krigsvæsen i Middelalderen indtil Krudtets Anvendelse i de nordiske Krige*, København 1825.
- Jażdżewski K., *Gdańsk X–XIII w. na tle Pomorza wczesnośredniowiecznego*, in: *Szkice z dziejów Pomorza*, G. Labuda (ed.), Warszawa 1958.
- Jørgensen P. Johs., *Anmeldelse af Erik Arups Danmarks Historie*, in: "Historisk Tidsskrift" 1925–1926, R. 9, t. 4.
- Jørgensen P. Johs., *Dansk Retshistorie*, København 1947.
- Kiersnowski R., *Legenda Winety*, Kraków 1950.
- Koczy L., *Jomsborg*, „Kwartalnik Historyczny” 1932.
- Kosiarz E., *Bitwy na Bałtyku*, Warszawa 1981.
- Kowalenko W., *Dalsze badania nad starostwianскими portami na Bałtyku w IX–XIII w.*, „Przegląd Zachodni” 1955, No 1–2.
- Kowalenko W., *Starostwianские grody portowe na Bałtyku*, „Przegląd Zachodni” 1950, R. 6, No 5–6.
- Kowalenko W., *Związki polityczne i gospodarcze Słowian zachodnich i Polski z Bałtykiem od X do XV wieku*, in: *Pomorze Zachodnie – nasza ziemia ojczysta*, K. Ślaski (ed.), Poznań 1960.
- Labuda G., *Dzieje polityczne (VI–XII wiek). Ekspansja państwa polskiego na Pomorze (X–XII wiek)*, in: *Historia Pomorza*, G. Labuda (ed.), Vol. 1, part 1, Poznań 1969.
- Labuda G., *Główne momenty dziejów Bałtyku*, „Jantar” 1947, No V, z. 4.
- Labuda G., *Problematyka badań wczesno-dziejowych Szczecina*, „Przegląd Zachodni” 1952, z. 3–4;
- Leciejewicz K., *Główne linie gospodarczego rozwoju w VI–XII wieku*, in: *Historia Pomorza*, G. Labuda (ed.), Vol. 1, part 1, Poznań 1969.
- Leciejewicz L., *Początki nadmorskich miast na Pomorzu Zachodnim*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1962.
- Leciejewicz L., *U źródeł bogactwa i potęgi Pomorza Zachodniego w średniowieczu*, in: *Szkice z dziejów Pomorza. Pomorze średniowieczne*, G. Labuda (ed.), part 1, Warszawa 1958.
- Lepszy K., *Dzieje floty polskiej*, Gdańsk–Bydgoszcz–Szczecin 1947.
- Manteuffel T., *Średniowiecze powszechne*, Warszawa 1958.
- Matzen H., *Forelæsninger over den danske Retshistorie, Offentlig Ret*, part I: *Statsret*, København 1893.
- Pieradzka K., *Walki Słowian na Bałtyku w X–XII wieku*, Warszawa 1953.
- Skaanske Lov og Jyske Lov*, issue E. Kroman, S. Juul, København 1956.

Skovgaard-Petersen J., Christensen A.E., Paludan H., *Danmarks historie*, Vol. 1, København 1977.

Szelaǳowski A., *Walka o Bałtyk (1544–1621)*, in: *Sprawa północna w wiekach XVI i XVII*, part 1, Lwów 1904.

Ślaski K., *Słowianie zachodni na Bałtyku w VII–XIII wieku*, Gdańsk 1969.

Ślaski K., *Związki z Polską i walka z agresją saską i duńską*, in: *Historia Pomorza*, G. Labuda (ed.), Vol. 1, part 2, Poznań 1969.

Zientara B., *Historia powszechna średniowiecza*, Warszawa 1994.

Zins H., *Historia Anglii*, Wrocław 1979.