



*Bronze decorative plaque in the Jellinge style, found at Carwitz, near Neustrelitz, dating from the eleventh or twelfth century.
(2)*

THE NORTHERN SLAVS

THE FALL of the Roman Empire and the rise of the barbarian kingdoms in the fifth century AD mark the beginning of a new era in European history. It was not only the south and west of Europe that was affected; even outside the Empire, in eastern, central and northern Europe, the economic, social and cultural consequences of these events were far reaching. One of the groups to attain prominence as a result was the Slavs.

The Slavs, as a distinct linguistic and cultural division of the Indo-European family, seem to have crystallized as far back as the Neolithic, probably in the north European plain between the Vistula and the Dnjeper. In the east they were in contact with nomadic steppe tribes, who, among other things, transmitted a strong Iranian element to the Slav language. In the west, close relation with the coastal tribes of the Baltic had existed from remote times, and by the last centuries BC we find Slavs living as neighbours to Germanic peoples. The Germans called them 'Wends', a name also given to the east central European Veneto-Illyrian tribes. Tacitus, in the *Germania* (late first century), our earliest documented reference, calls them 'Venedi'.

In the first centuries AD some of the Germanic tribes moving south, for example the Goths and the Burgundians, encountered Slavs. There were skirmishes along the Vistula and occasionally in the area to

the east, between the Vistula and the Dnjeper. Some Slav tribes seem to have attached themselves to the Ostrogothic kingdom, or came under its sway. Others were in close touch with the Roman provinces on the middle and lower Danube and in Dacia. These relations were of considerable importance for economic developments in the region of the Vistula and in the eastern foothills of the Carpathian mountains. Roman industrial and craft traditions were transmitted from the provinces both indirectly, by way of the neighbouring Slav tribes who adopted Roman methods of manufacture, and directly by skilled craftsmen from the provinces who came to the Slav heartlands either as refugees or as captives. In some places formal economic centres developed. Around Crakow on the upper Vistula, for instance, a centre of industrial pottery production grew up in the second century. The iron mines at Swietekrzyskie Gory, which involved underground mining, were also worked. These mines supplied large tracts of the area in east central Europe covered by what is known as the Przeworsk culture, and there are even some indications that iron from Swietekrzyskie Gory reached the Roman Empire. An analysis of traded objects in central and eastern Europe has shown how many goods of Roman or provincial Roman origin were acquired by some of the Slav tribes. Seen in this light, the Przeworsk culture, which is at least partially Slav, belongs to the margin of the Roman world. Roman influence can be traced not only in the fairly obvious areas of metalwork, pottery and jewellery, but also in agriculture: the common introduction of rye cultivation among the Slavs and the use of iron tools, including the iron-shod plough in some areas, were decisive innovations.

These contacts with the developed Roman world were of great importance to the history of the Slavs in two respects. Social and economic advances, and consequent increased production potential within the tribes, led to a rapid growth of population in the fourth to sixth centuries. And this in turn was the main cause of

◁ **Arab coins** in staggering numbers have been found at many Slav as well as Scandinavian sites, bearing witness to the extent of the trade passing between north and south. The most outstanding of all finds was made at Ralswiek, on Rügen – a hoard of 2,270 coins (*opposite*). Most of them came from central Asia or Arabia and were probably brought by a merchant via the Volga and Staraja Ladoga. Arab traders usually came no further than Bulgar, at the confluence of the Kama and Volga rivers, and there exchanged their goods. By the same route the Viking mercenaries known as Varangians travelled south through Russia to the emperor of Byzantium. (20)

the Slav migrations and expansion from the fifth century onwards. The Roman provinces acted as a magnet to which new bands of warriors and tribal groups were constantly attracted. Slav incursions into the Balkan provinces began early in the sixth century. These were followed in the mid-sixth century by more substantial Slav settlement south of the Danube on the territory of the east Roman Empire. This opened a new corridor to Mediterranean culture, and in the centuries that followed cultural and economic impulses originating in this area were transmitted as far as the Slav tribes on the Baltic coast. The Mediterranean colouring thus given to Slav culture is of great importance in considering the part played by these tribes in the history of the southern Baltic.

Slav tribes reached the south coast of the Baltic at different times and under different conditions. From the fifth and sixth centuries onwards dense Slav settlement was established between the mouth of the Vistula and the Bay of Kiel, at times even stretching as far as the lower Elbe. This was the territory of the western Slavs, who can be divided into four main groups. Further west lived the Obodrites, an umbrella term for Obodrites proper, Wagrians, Polabs and Warnoi; the Poles, of the region of Gniezno and Poznan, were to play an important role in the history of the Baltic peoples, as the kingdom which emerged between the Oder and the Vistula in the tenth century was based on this tribe. The Wilti settled east of the Obodrite territory as far as the Oder; the Woliners at the mouth of the Oder, and the Pomeranians, so called because of their coastal settlements (*pomorżane* = seaside inhabitants), further east still. At times the Rugians or Rügen Slavs, the inhabitants of the island of Rügen, were a major factor in the western Baltic. The Venerable Bede in the eighth century knew of this tribe and names them alongside the Danes and the Huns. By that date the Rugians had presumably already come into contact with Willibrord's Anglo-Saxon mission.

Whereas the western Slavs occupied a long stretch of the Baltic shore as early as the sixth century, the eastern Slavs only reached the eastern side of the Gulf of Finland in the eighth and ninth centuries. During this little-known migratory and colonizing movement the Ilmen Slavs emerged as an identifiable group through a process of assimilation of tribes of Finno-Ugrian extraction. Important routes to central Asia and the Near East passed through their territory. Both the Volga and the Dnjeper routes began here, on the lower Neva, Lake Ladoga, and the Volkhov and Ilmen rivers. Staraja Ladoga, Beloezero and finally Novgorod became the dominant centres on this Continental trade and circulation route. The Krivichi created another point of access to the Baltic for the eastern Slavs by their general expansion towards Lake Peipus and by the foundation of Isborsk and Pskov.

Since time immemorial Baltic tribes, of which the Prussians, the Lithuanians and the Letts were the most important, had inhabited the area between the lower Vistula and the western Dvina. Finno-Ugrian tribes such as the Livonians, the Estonians and the Votes had settled to the north of the Dvina. These tribes would have preferred to adopt an isolationist policy, but for various poorly understood reasons they were unable to defend their territories in the south and south-east against the expanding Slavs. The Krivichi dominated such geographically crucial areas as the Smolensk region and the vicinity of Lake Peipus until the ninth and tenth centuries and at times even annexed them.

This ethnic pattern which emerged during the early Middle Ages has remained fundamentally the same until the present day.

Changing structures

These three groups – Slavs, Baltic and Finnish tribes – played various roles in the political and cultural development of northern and western Europe, depending on their social structures and the opportunities given them by their locations.

The western Slavs were undergoing important internal changes. Tribal customs were slowly lapsing from the sixth century onwards, yielding to a system that may be called 'military democracy'. Tribal chieftains and the nobility sought to establish their personal sphere of power. They created bands of armed followers, built private forts and increasingly kept more of the tribal wealth for themselves. Their power, however, was balanced by that of the free farmers on their freeholds, who accepted military obligations but had the right to speak on tribal matters at popular assemblies. Gatherings of these warrior-farmers were consequently just as much a feature of society at this time as the bands of personal followers of the tribal chieftains. A lower social stratum of slaves, villeins and serfs worked on the manors of the nobles and on the freeholdings of the warrior-farmers. The Slav languages still to some extent have words in common for these social strata. The tribal lord was known as *Knez* or *Knjas* and the later word for feudal princes developed from this root. For instance, a *Knez*, Jacza of Köpenick, as he styles himself on his coins, owned Berlin-Köpenick about 1150. The more important farmers were known as *Kmetz* or *Kmets*; smaller, more or less independent farmers were called *Smirdz*. These are the *Smerds* or *Smurds* encountered in medieval manuscripts from the Elbe-Saale region and Mecklenburg. Finally, the slave, villein or serf was known as *Cholop* (Cholp). These social groups are well known from ecclesiastical chronicles, above all those of Thietmar of Merseburg, Adam of Bremen (both of the eleventh century), Helmold of Bosau and the biographer of St Otto of Bamberg who travelled to the towns at the mouth of

Reconstruction of Slav block-houses at Meissen. These log constructions, built on wooden platforms without footings, have left few remains, but can be reconstructed from oak fragments. The carpentry was of a high order, the roof being laid directly on the topmost row of beams. Fireplaces seem to have been close to the door, and the smoke escaped through holes under the gables. (3)



the Oder. The states which emerged in the territories of the Obodrites and the Poles in the ninth century AD must be seen against this background.

It was a violent and troubled time. Neighbour fought neighbour, tribe fought tribe, kingdom fought kingdom for supremacy. From the documentary evidence we know of various Frankish incursions into Slav territory east of the Elbe from the seventh century onwards, at one point almost reaching the mouth of the Oder. Certain tribes were at times vassals, and some regions on the Elbe and Saale were even annexed to the Frankish Empire. In 929, under Henry I, the Germans began a great attempt to conquer the Slavs as far as the Oder. The archbishopric of Magdeburg was founded by Emperor Otto in 968; there were German bishops in Brandenburg and Havelberg from 948 and in Meissen and Oldenburg from 968. However, a great rebellion of Wilti tribes, who had formed a special alliance known as the Lutizen federation, put an end to German feudal rule beyond the Oder in 983. In the main the Obodrites and the Wilti managed to retain their independence until the middle of the twelfth century.

How did these events affect the social organization of the western Slavs and in what ways did they influence their relations with other tribes in the Baltic? As we have seen, their Mediterranean contacts gave them distinct advantages in technology and agriculture. The introduction of rye in the sixth century, one of the most important innovations, had an important stabilizing effect on Slav agricultural practice. Rye could be grown instead of barley and wheat every third year; we know that this happened, for instance, at the Slav fort of

Tornow, south of Berlin. In the climatic conditions which prevail in the Baltic region, rye is indeed a more reliable crop than wheat, even though the preparation of the soil before sowing requires greater care. It was presumably from here that it was introduced to Scandinavia in the ninth and tenth centuries. In other areas, Livland for example, slash-and-burn agriculture was only replaced by rye cultivation in about 1000.

The extraction of iron-ore, in the south, bog iron-ore, increased markedly in all countries around the Baltic from the mid-third century onwards. Iron sickles, scythes, axes, hoes, harness mounts and plough-shares have been found in abundance. In Norway and Sweden, as well as in the lands of the western Slavs, iron ingots commonly occur in the form of axes and other implements such as sickles and spades.

The use in some areas of the collar harness and the breast-strap harness made it possible to extend the use of horse traction considerably. The horse could now be used to pull the plough, as well as the heavy carts and sledges. The Slavs received the collar harness, originally a Chinese invention, from nomadic tribes to the south-east. The breast-strap harness occurs sporadically in late classical times. It was known in Scandinavia by the beginning of the ninth century at the latest. A form of horse collar, on the other hand, a wooden yoke which rests on the withers of the horse and takes the reins, is first attested in the tenth century. This wooden yoke is not depicted on the horse harnesses on the ninth-century Norwegian tapestry from Oseberg. The use of the horse collar alongside the breast-strap harness in Scandinavia is probably due to the influence

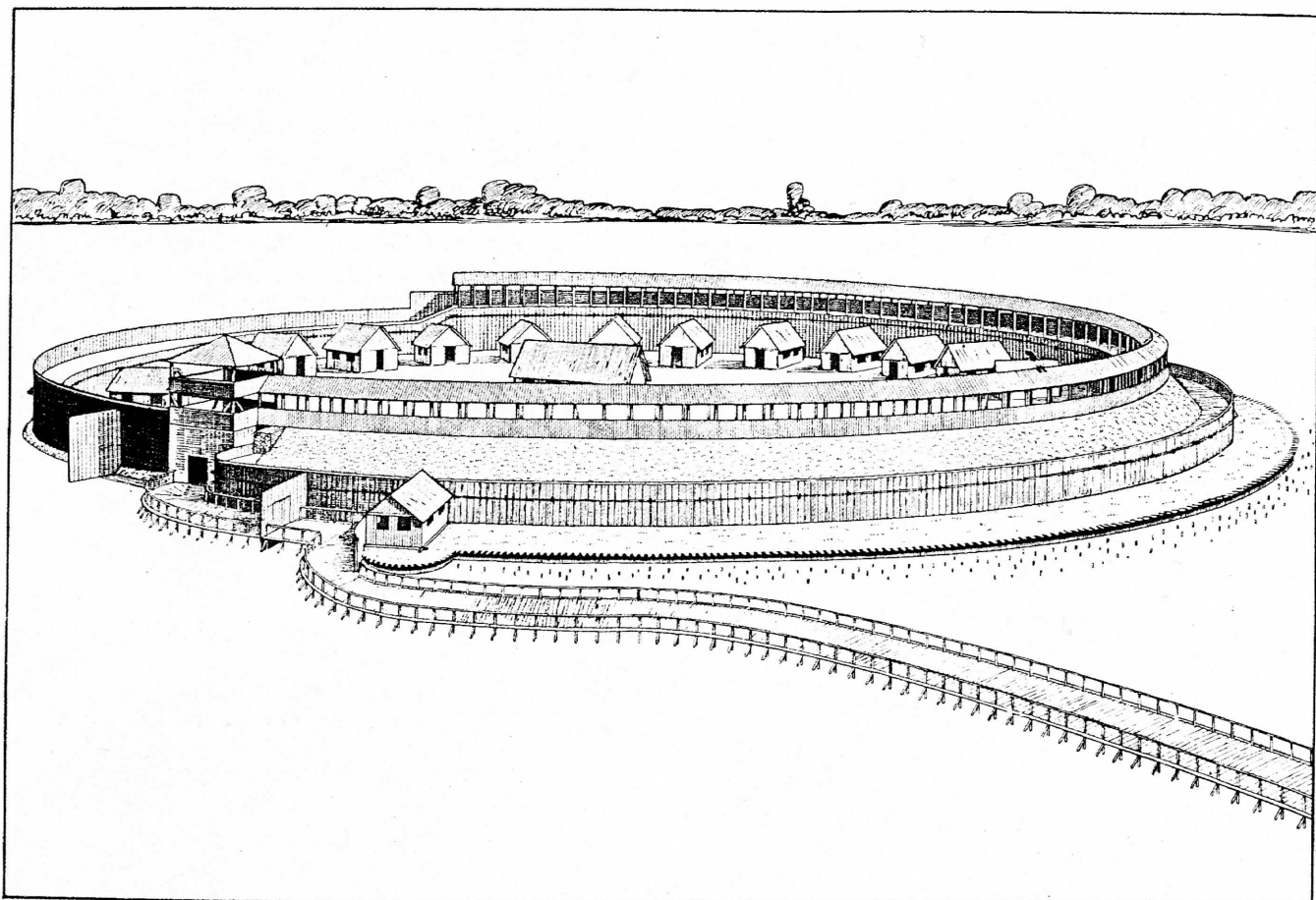
of the collar harness used by the eastern Slavs. Numerous finds from Novgorod date the use of the latter to the tenth century. Rich Scandinavian chieftains had horse collars ornamented with elaborate incised decoration and metal plaques.

The distribution of the various new types of harness in the various Baltic countries demonstrates how they adapted the basic innovation – horse traction – to their own indigenous farming traditions.

As horses are more effective than oxen it was possible to cut down on work hours and above all to plough faster. Such an improvement was essential to increased production, especially in regions with light soils where large areas had to be tilled. The horse-drawn plough was almost twice as fast as the ox-drawn, as the chronicler Helmold among others tells us in relation to Slav agriculture in Mecklenburg. With its introduction, the iron-clad plough-share became the basic agricultural implement in the lands of the eastern Slavs, Finns and Baltic peoples.

Other important changes were taking place: goods were being produced to exchange for local raw

materials; crafts and industrial activities were being concentrated in permanent centres; above all, production was being reorganized on a basis either of large manors or of the seigneurial establishments of the tribal nobility. Sources of iron ore were increasingly exploited, and salt mines began to be worked on a large scale from the seventh century onwards. One of the first areas to rise to prosperity on this industry was Kolobrzeg in lower Persenta. Other salt mines were located in Mecklenburg and in east Holstein. Quernstone quarries were opened up in suitable areas. Apart from occasional imported Rhenish quernstones and locally manufactured boulder quernstones, central German quarries apparently supplied large areas of the Elbe and Oder regions. Tar was essential to boat- and ship-building and archaeological finds demonstrate the growth of tar-burning in coastal areas later in the period. The extensive forests provided not only local requirements of honey and wax but also a surplus which was important in relation to trade with western Europe and the Arabs. The hunting of fur-bearing animals and the collection and working of amber were also of



The lake settlement of Behren-Lübchin, as it may have appeared in the eleventh century. Circular in plan, like Tornow and many other forts, it was given added security by being surrounded by water.

Access was only by a long bridge; the building of these bridges, several of which have been excavated, was one of the most remarkable achievements of Slav technology. (4)

economic importance. The tribal nobility and the emerging ruling class of feudal lords organized the extraction, working and distribution of such raw materials and natural products, and a great part of their wealth derived from them. The building of fortifications and defended manors, the choice of collecting points, and the establishment of merchant settlements, fairs and trading towns were all part of this organization.

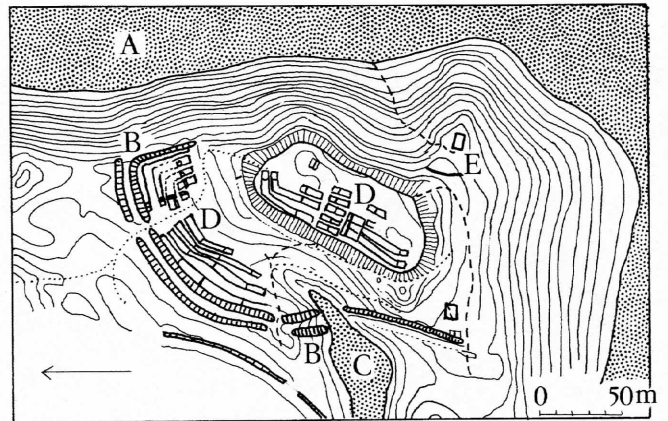
A land of forts

To the Scandinavians the territory of the eastern Slavs was known as the land of forts (*Gardarike*). This was an apt description of the Slav lands as a whole, particularly in the region south of the Baltic. The forts were the focal points of settlement and of economic, social, religious and cultural life. More than two thousand of them survive on the plain between the Vistula and the Elbe. The areas of settlement that grew up around these forts varied in size. Some consisted of between five and twenty villages and were known as *Opole* in Polish, *Gefilde* in German and as *civitates* in Latin. The inhabitants of such communities were bound together by common economic relations. The eastern Slavs and the Baltic tribes had a similar organizational pattern. Several of these units taken together were known as *regiones* in the Latin chronicles and often formed the territorial base of a tribe or clan. Physically they were cultivated clearings of varying extent surrounded by primeval forests.

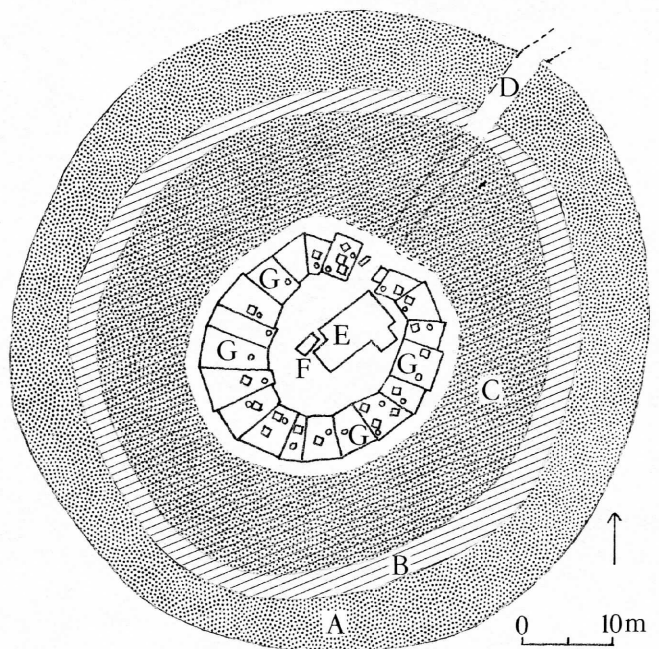
On the map the emerging settlement pattern in central and eastern Europe can be likened to the irregular spots of a leopard. A similar pattern is found in Scandinavia but here the forts and the associated social and economic organization had little importance.

Several forts of the Slavs and the Baltic tribes have been excavated, and it has been possible to gain an understanding of their construction and function. It is clear the different forts had different functions. The earliest and most common were tribal centres or places of refuge. Feldberg near Neustrelitz is an example of this type of fort, of which several have been excavated in Pomerania and Mecklenburg. Feldberg, with an enclosed area of five hectares, was at times inhabited by more than a thousand people. The houses were built in rows inside the fortified area. There was a small shrine or temple as well as a water source and a harbour. This type of fort occurred only in the period 600–800 and was then superseded by the forts of the emerging nobility.

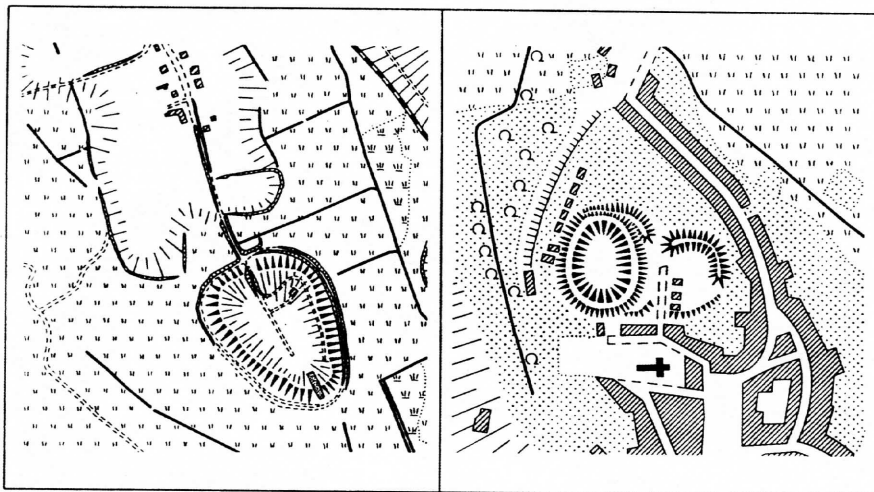
Another type of fort combined two functions, being both the seat of the tribal leader and a refuge. At Tornow in Niederlausitz both the fort and the village associated with it have been found; an eighth-century fort had been replaced by a later seigneurial castle. The main house was surrounded by nineteen store-rooms as



Plan of the fort of Feldberg, strategically placed on a headland partly surrounded by a lake (A). A double rampart with ditch between (B) defended the rows of houses (D), some of which were immediately behind it, some on higher ground further back. A pond (C) penetrated the defences, providing a water-supply. On the tip of the headland stood the temple (E). (5)



Plan of Tornow (see reconstruction on p. 187). The defensive works consisted of a ditch (A), a flat platform (B) and a rampart (C). The long entrance (D) was via a bridge and a passage. Inside the enclosure stood a house (E) probably belonging to the tribal leader, with a well (F) next to it. Occupying all the space round the wall were nineteen store-rooms (G) containing grinding stones and containers for grain. (6)



Far left: plan of the castle of Mecklenburg, near the Baltic, the seat of the rulers of the Obodrites. It was one of the largest of Slav defensive structures. The wall, timber framed and built of earth and stones, was more than ten metres high. (7)

Left: plan of the trading centre of Oldenburg, showing the ancient citadel in relation to the later Christian church and town. There was a German bishop in Oldenburg as early as 968. (8)

well as lodgings for the lord's retinue. The farmers living in front of the fort brought their grain to these store-rooms. More than seventy different parcels of grain, stored in wooden chests, clay containers, pottery vessels and sacks, were found during the excavations – obviously the last harvest before the destruction of the fort at the beginning of the ninth century. At a later date the seigneurial castle was rebuilt in front of the fort and the village. The fort itself was left in ruins.

At Gross Raden near Schwerin, the excellent preservation of parts of the wooden structures has enabled archaeologists to make a reliable reconstruction of a ninth- and tenth-century settlement and fort, including even details of the interior and of the implements used. One of the most spectacular finds was a ninth-century wooden temple situated on the periphery. The walls of the 10- by 7-metre building were constructed of vertical oak planking, the façade ends of which were carved into symbolic male and female heads. An aurochs head, the symbol of primeval force, was suspended over the door. A finely fashioned pottery drinking cup served as a chalice for ritual ceremonies. The seigneurial castles built after about 900 were of a different character and much better fortified. The castle of the rulers of the Obodrites was situated in Mecklenburg not far from the Baltic near Wismar. Mecklenburg is first mentioned as Michelinburg, in accordance with the Saxon way of speaking, in a document of 995. Latin chronicles call it Magnopolis, and an Arab traveller, Ibrahim ibn Jacub, probably recorded its Slavonic name, Wiligrad. The meaning is always the same, 'large fort'. This fort was indeed one of the largest Slav defensive structures on the whole Baltic coast; its wall, made of earth and stone and timber framed, was more than 10 metres high and 12 metres thick, and the area enclosed was about 15,000 square metres. Only the fort of the Polish rulers further south at Gniezno was of comparable size. Apart from a royal palace these forts also contained lodgings for the

rulers' retinue of warriors, farm buildings, stables and workshops, primarily for the manufacture of weapons and ornaments. Similar forts also existed in the lands of the eastern Slavs and of the Baltic tribes. Well defended and provisioned, they were virtually impregnable.

They needed to be. Inside them the whole wealth of the tribe, as well as the private treasure of the rulers, was concentrated, and they were the objects of repeated attacks by warrior bands from Scandinavia. One such attack in the 840s is described in the *Vita Anskarii*, a chronicle by Rimbert of the life and deeds of St Ansgar, a missionary to Denmark and Sweden. 'Then it happened that they [the Danes] had to go to a far distant fort in the land of the Slavs . . . There they made a surprise attack on the peaceful, unsuspecting inhabitants, captured the fort and returned to their homeland laden with stolen goods and many treasures.' In 852 a Danish fleet attacked Kurland: 'In this territory there were five regional forts. The inhabitants retreated to one of these after they had learnt of the Danish landing, in order to protect their territory by valiant defence. They were victorious and half the Danes were killed and half their ships destroyed. They won gold, silver and rich booty . . .' A renewed attack on Kurland by the Swedes under King Olaf led to the capture of the Seeburg. Another fort further inland resisted successfully and an agreement was reached during the siege. The Swedes withdrew with a ransom and a promise of tribute. These three instances could be considerably amplified. All the evidence shows that the elaborate system of forts protected the tribes on the southern coast from attacks by Franks, German feudal lords and Scandinavians. They were also refuges in times of inter-tribal feud and conflicts with neighbouring kingdoms.

The Slavs, however, did not merely sit behind their defences waiting to be attacked. The Obodrites for instance were within reach of such important centres as Hedeby across the narrow isthmus of Schleswig. At the end of the tenth century their army marched into

Hedeby and destroyed it. From the second half of the eleventh century the Rügen Slavs and the Pomeranians began to build fleets, beating the Danes several times and even settling on some of the Danish islands. Similar expeditions probably attacked Gotland, Öland and southern Sweden. Not only have many finds of Slav origin been made in these areas, but, from the mid-tenth century onwards, we find earlier strongholds being re-fortified, as exemplified by Eketorp on Öland. Mårten Stenberger, the excavator of Eketorp, reached the conclusion that the numerous finds of Slav origin were evidence of trade, 'but it may also mean that Öland was occupied by Slavs from the southern coast of the Baltic, as is indicated by Saxo and the Scandinavian *Knytinga Saga*'.

The western part of the Baltic was at times known as the *Mare Rugianorum*, on account of the activities of the fleet of the Rügen Slavs. However, the interaction of the Slav tribes and kingdoms with the Scandinavians was more or less intermittent and sporadic. The main concern of the Slav kingdoms of the Obodrites, the Pomeranians, the Poles and above all the Kiev Rus' was with territorial questions and national administration. There were never any serious national attempts to gain a foothold in Scandinavia.

But war between the Slavs and the Scandinavians was only one side of the coin. Economic, trade and cultural relations were of far greater importance.

'The way from the Varangians to the Greeks'

The migrations and tribal movements south of the Baltic coast during the fourth to sixth centuries disrupted traditional routes between Scandinavia and central and southern Europe, or at least made them dangerous to use. The Oder and Vistula routes to the Danubian countries and to the Balkans and ultimately to Byzantium were no longer the safe highways they had been during the first century AD. In the mid-sixth century, communications between Scandinavia and Byzantium along these routes broke down or were at least greatly reduced. It was some time before the Scandinavians became aware of the new situation and could begin to make arrangements with the new Slav tribes and kingdoms, but numerous archaeological finds show that this had been accomplished by the eighth century. Trade formed the basis of these new relations. The stage was set by about 700 when the new ethnic groups had established themselves in their territories south of the Baltic. The economic boom in these areas and the emergence of a class structure within the Slav tribes were also important factors.

Markets and industrial centres would often grow up next to the forts of the tribal leaders and nobility, from the second half of the eighth century onwards. In the kingdom of the Obodrites the trading port of Reric was

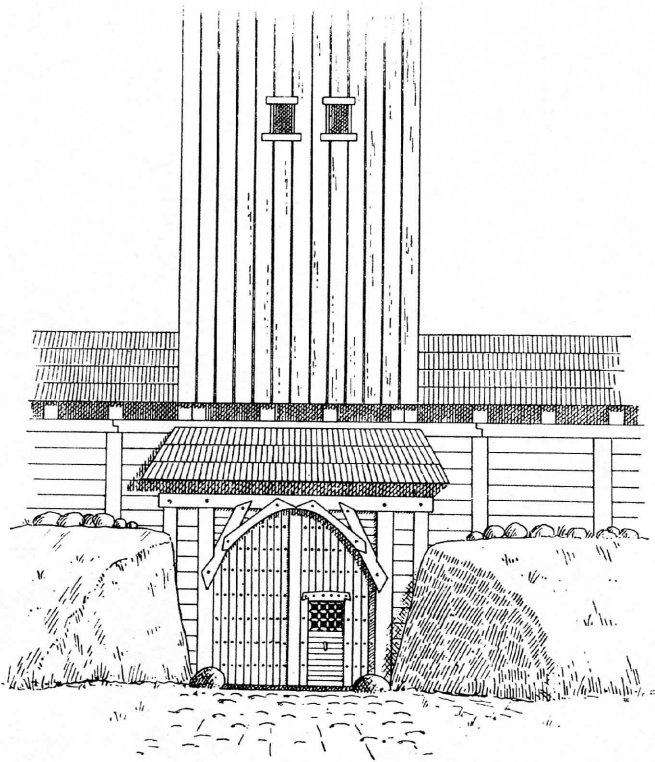
of great importance. Its exact location is not entirely clear, but most of the evidence points to its being at Mecklenburg and situated in the immediate vicinity of the royal fort. Already at the beginning of the ninth century there were traders here. This settlement was attacked by the Danish king Godfred in 808 and the merchants were abducted and forced to settle in Hedeby. Soon afterwards the Obodrite king was treacherously assassinated by Godfred's men in his own trading settlement of Reric.

There is no mention in our main source, the Frankish annals, of the nationality or number of these merchants. It is not unlikely that there were Saxons, Franks and Frisians among them, as Mecklenburg and its hinterland was the Baltic town closest to the Frankish kingdom. This does not exclude the possibility of Reric having become the main Frankish access point to the Baltic after the conquest of the Saxons by Charlemagne, assisted by the Obodrites, around 800. Relations between the Frankish emperor and the Obodrite leaders were very close in the decades around 800, due to the common Saxo-Danish enemy. The numerous finds of hoards with Arab coins are evidence of the importance of the trading settlement at Mecklenburg-Reric even at this early date.

Oldenburg (known as Starigard by the Slavs, and Brandehuse by the Scandinavians) was another trading centre in the territory of the Obodrites. In the eleventh century it was acknowledged as a *civitas maritima*. Excavations in Oldenburg itself and its Wagrian hinterland have brought to light a large number of goods of Scandinavian origin.

The trading centre of the Wilti was situated on the lower Peene near present-day Menzlin. Excavations here have revealed occupation levels with numerous imported artifacts as well as a cemetery containing some burials in boat-shaped stone settings. This burial type is alien to the Slav tradition and indicates the presence of Danes or Swedes who found their last resting place here. Their graves form an integral part of the cemetery, so one must assume that the Scandinavians were accepted as inhabitants of the town. But clearly they were in a minority: the predominant material remains are indigenous and Slav. Both in the settlement and in the cemetery, moreover, the evidence is purely of traders and craftsmen – there are no weapons. Weapons have, however, been found at a nearby settlement of the same date, located some 100 metres away on the river Peene. It is clear that this was the military and political centre, and that the port had grown up in its vicinity.

In recent years extensive excavations have taken place in Rügen, especially at Arkona and Ralswiek. At Arkona there is already evidence of connections with Scandinavia and north-west Europe in the ninth century. Among the finds was a merchant's hoard



Reconstruction of the town gate of Arkona. The wooden door occupied a gap in the earth rampart. It was surmounted by a tower, making any attack on the gate itself extremely hazardous. The top of the tower, for which no evidence exists, is not reconstructed. (9)

consisting of knives, axes, arrowheads, metal ornaments for drinking cups and a gilded bronze plaque bearing the sun motif, a symbol which probably originated in either Scandinavia or Ireland. The fort at 9 Arkona was the Rugians' religious centre. Many trading and market activities were associated with the harvest ceremony. The Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus gives a lively description of this festival, albeit later than the ninth century:

Once a year, after the harvest, all the people of the island gathered in front of the temple of the idol and, having sacrificed an animal, partook of a ceremonial meal dedicated to their religion. It was the custom that the priest, distinguished by his beard and long hair, should on the previous day carefully sweep the temple, which only he may enter, with a broom. He took care not to breathe out inside the temple and each time he had to take a breath or breathe out he ran outside so as not to defile the idol with mortal breath. On the following day when the people were gathered outside he examined the cup which he had removed from the idol with care. If there was less liquid than before he took it as an omen of a bad harvest the following year, in which case he ordered that the present harvest be stored in the temple. If all the liquid was still there he would prophesy times of plenty in the fields. In accordance with the prophecy he would admonish the people to be either more careful or more

generous during the coming year. After he had emptied the old liquid on the ground in front of the idol's feet he refilled the cup. When he had honoured the idol by pretending to drink to it, he prayed in solemn language, both on behalf of himself and the country, for wealth and victory for the inhabitants. When he finished his speech he emptied the cup in great gulps and replaced it in the safe-keeping of the idol. An offering was also made of an almost man-sized round cake made of honey. The priest placed the cake between himself and the people and then asked them if they could see him. If they replied that they could, he expressed the wish that next year he would be completely hidden by it.

Every man and woman had to pay a coin to the idol every year for the maintenance of the cult. The idol was also granted a third of all captured booty, since it had been gained with its help. The god also had 300 specially selected horses and their riders in his service and any treasure they obtained, be it in war or through robbery, was placed at the disposal of the priest. He then had various cult objects and temple ornaments made from the proceeds. He kept them in locked rooms which contained not only a great deal of money but also a number of purple robes decayed by age. . . . (ch 825)

Apart from all this the idol also owned a white horse and it was regarded as sacrilege to pull hairs out of its mane or tail. To ensure that the sacred horse did not lose its prestige through frequent use only the priest had the right to groom and mount it. The Rugians believe that Svantevit, for this is 15 the idol's name, wages war on the enemies of his sanctuaries on this horse. Sometimes, although it had been in its stable all night, the horse was found covered in sweat and dirt as if it had travelled a long way; this was regarded as specially significant. The horse was also used for prophecies. (ch 826)

Excavation results and the analysis of the animal bones show that feasts such as that described above were already held in Arkona at a much earlier date. There is also evidence of intermittent visits by traders from the ninth century onwards. But the settlement there seems never to have been permanently occupied.

That at Ralswiek, in the centre of the island of 10 Rügen, however, certainly was a permanent settlement. It was founded in the eighth century, and was on the sea route to the mouth of the Oder and the countries of the eastern Baltic. At that time all navigation hugged the coast. At Ralswiek a settlement consisting of fifteen to twenty-five house-plots was established on an island-like hill between the bay of Jasmund and a lake which today has silted up. Anchorages for ships were constructed on the lakeward side by digging channels from the lake to individual house-plots and by building jetties of piles and planks, some of which supported buildings. Seventeen of these berths have been identified to date.

The farmsteads consisted of one main house and other smaller buildings, some of which served as workshops for producing antler and bone artifacts, iron, wood,

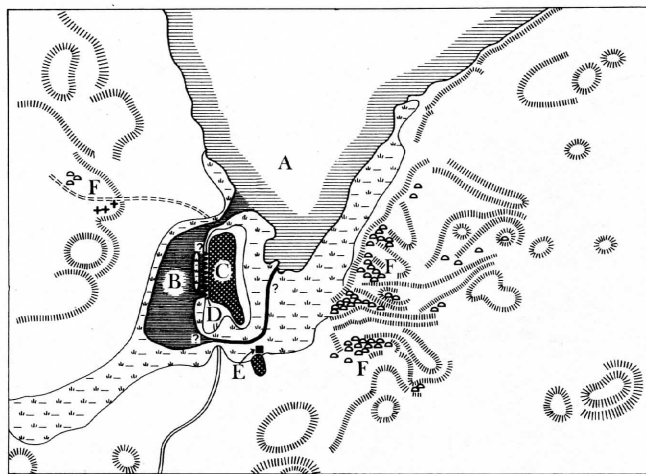
amber and, in some places, glass and silver goods. In the different settlement layers were numerous imports from Scandinavia and the Baltic countries, including Norwegian soapstone, annular brooches from Gotland, and disc brooches from Sweden. But the most
 20 spectacular find was a silver hoard consisting of 2,270 Arab coins, mostly from central Asia or Arabia (the largest number of pre-850 Arab coins so far discovered in the Baltic), and a bracelet of Perm type. They were in a woven basket in a house dated to the mid-ninth century. Probably belonging to a merchant permanently resident at Ralswiek, the hoard seems to have come from Bulgar on the Volga by way of Staraja Ladoga and the southern Baltic route.

From Ralswiek, too, three sea-going ships dated to
 7 the period 900–1100 are known. The best preserved is 14m long, 3.4m wide and could carry about 9 tons of cargo – that is, roughly the same as ship no. 3 from Skuldelev in Denmark, which is dated to the early eleventh century.

So far over four hundred tumuli have been identified at Ralswiek, of which nearly two hundred have been excavated. Certain differences in grave-goods indicate that even in Ralswiek foreign merchants, probably Scandinavians, lived alongside the native Slav merchants and craftsmen. Ralswiek was in the vicinity of the old tribal centre and the fort of the ruler of the Rügen Slavs at Rugard near Bergen.

We have seen that there were also trading centres at
 11 the mouth of the Oder, at Menzlin, and (from the latter half of the ninth century) at Wolin and Szczecin. During the tenth century Wolin became pre-eminent and in the eleventh was known as a metropolis throughout northern Europe. Adam of Bremen gives the following description of it: 'It is truly the greatest of all towns in Europe; Slavs and other tribes, Greeks and Barbarians live there; even strangers from Saxony have been granted equal terms of residence . . . For the town is filled with goods from all the northern countries and nothing desirable or rare is lacking . . .' Archaeological evidence from Menzlin and Ralswiek confirms that foreign merchants were permitted to reside and trade alongside the native merchants and craftsmen. Excavations over many years have elucidated the main development of the settlement to Wolin.

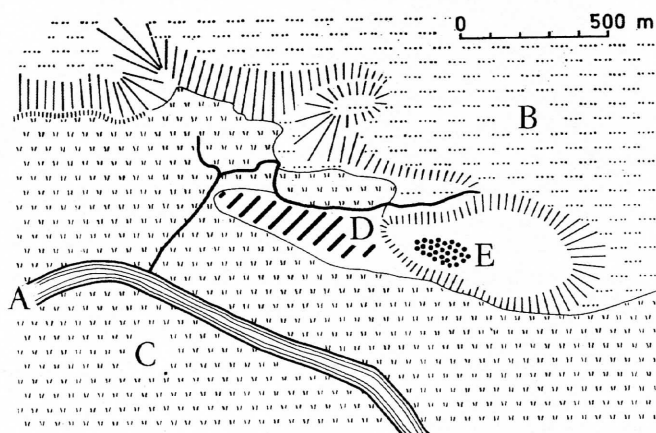
Another trading settlement which had colonies of foreign merchants or craftsmen grew up at the old salt centre of Kolobrzeg. At the mouth of the Vistula, on the borderlands between the Slavs and Baltic tribes, the Prussian trading settlement of Truso – known to us from the writings of the English king Alfred the Great – flourished in the ninth century. It must have been of some considerable importance as Wulfstan, a farmer and warrior merchant from northern Norway, sailed directly there from Hedeby without calling at any Slav, Danish or Swedish ports on the way. Similar settle-



Ralswiek, on the island of Rügen. Here, at the end of the eighth century, between an inlet (A) and a now dried-up creek (B), a settlement of about twenty houses (C) was established. Each house had its own jetty (D). Three boats were found slightly to the south (E). On the higher ground nearby were over 400 burial mounds and graves (F), of which more than 150 have been excavated. (10)

ments were situated on the lower Niemen and Dvina. An important trade route to the upper Dnjeper and on to Byzantium followed the Dvina.

Important trading settlements grew up along the route from the Baltic to Byzantium and on to the land of the Bulgars and central Asia. On Lake Ladoga stood Staraja Ladoga, a joint Finno-Ugrian Slav settlement, probably visited by western Slav, Scandinavian and Frisian merchants as early as the eighth century. Soviet scholars even hold that Frisian craftsmen lived here. From Staraja Ladoga one went on to the upper Volga and central Asia. Bulgar, situated at the confluence of the Kama and Volga rivers, was the capital of the kingdom of the Volga-Bulgarians and a meeting place for merchants from the Arab and the Baltic countries. Here goods from the Baltic and the Arab world were



Menzlin, an important Slav trading settlement at the mouth of the Oder (A). Here the town (D) was situated where dry subsoil (B) met wet (C). The burial mounds (E) are on higher ground behind. (11)

exchanged; it was rare for either party to venture further. An Arab geographer, Mohammed Mugaddosi, writing about 985, says: 'Sable, deer skin, ermine, steppe fox, fox, beaver skins, colourful pheasants, goat skins, wax, arrows, birch bark, coins, fish bones, fish teeth, castor, amber, shagreen, honey, hazelnuts, hawks, swords, armour, maple wood, Slav slaves, small livestock and cattle: all these things come from Bulgar.' Already sixty years earlier, about 921/922, the Arab geographer ibn Hauqal had witnessed in person the trading in Bulgar. He travelled in a caravan of 5,000 men and 3,000 horses, donkeys and camels which covered the 1,250 miles from Chorezm on the Oxus (now the Amu-Darya) to Bulgar in under two months. In Bulgar he met Rus' merchants who were selling furs 'from the Scandinavian countries of Gog and Magog'. From another of ibn Hauqal's books we know that some of the merchants from Chorezm even continued beyond Bulgar and the Volga route as far as Scandinavia.

Other Arab merchants reached central and northern Europe from Islamic Spain. One of these was Ibrahim ibn Jacub who described a journey of around 965 which touched at Hedeby, Mecklenburg, Magdeburg, Prague and other places. His account includes a description of the Polish kingdom and the land of the Obodrites:

To the west the land of Nakon [the king of the Obodrites] borders on Saxony and some of the Danes. His land has so many horses that they are exported. They [the Obodrites] have complete sets of arms, that is coats of armour, helmets and swords . . . The fort [i.e. Nakon's fort] is called Wiligrad which means the big fort . . .

As for the land of Mescheqqo [the Polish king] it is the largest of their lands and it is rich in grain, meat, honey and fish. Taxes are paid to him in coined money and this is used to keep his soldiers, each man receiving a set sum every month. He has 3,000 men-at-arms and 100 of them are the equivalent of 10,000 others. He provides the soldiers with clothes, steeds, weapons and all that they need. . . .

On the basis of these various snippets of information, Arab geographers made the first maps of eastern and northern Europe, noting down important towns and routes and above all river and sea communications. Only one collection of such maps survives, that made in the twelfth century at the court of Emperor Frederick II in Sicily by the Arab geographer Al Idrisi.

The northern trading settlements struck Arab merchants, used to the richness and variety of Arab bazaars, as poorly equipped and lacking in refinements. Ibrahim ibn Jacub wrote as follows of Hedeby: 'Schleswig is a very large town situated at the farthest limit of the ocean . . . The town has a dearth both of merchandise and the blessings of nature . . . Fish, of which there is an abundance, is the staple food of the inhabitants . . . Never have I heard less pleasing song

than that of Schleswig; it is a kind of growling emitted from the throat like the barking of a dog . . .' Yet for all their northern desolation and lack of social amenities, these south Baltic trading towns were for the Scandinavians the gateway to another world – western Europe, the Danube, Byzantium, central Asia and the Arab countries. And just as the southern merchants passed through them on the way north, so the northerners did, before setting forth on one of the great trade routes to the south and east.

Political control over these trade routes varied. Sometimes they existed in a power vacuum, and were independent communities under their own merchant warriors, who extorted tribute from the surrounding area. Some were so well established that foreign traders not only lived in them for long periods, but died and were buried. We have a very vivid and detailed description by the Arab chronicler ibn Fadlan of the funeral of a merchant of the Scandinavian Rus'. The dead man's ship is dragged ashore and propped up with stakes. Horses, a dog and a hen are sacrificed. Much of the ritual is directed by an old woman called the Angel of Death. On the ship's deck a tent is pitched. The body is laid in it and a slave-girl volunteers to die with him:

Then some men came who had shields and sticks, and they handed her a beaker of liquor; she sang over it and drank it up. The interpreter told me: 'Now with this she is bidding farewell to all her friends.' Next, another beaker was handed to her; she took it, and made her singing long drawn out; but the old woman hurried her, to make her drink it up and go into the tent where her master was. I was watching her, and she looked quite dazed; she tried to go into the tent, but stuck her head between it and the ship's side. Then the old woman took her by the hand and led her into the tent, and the old woman herself went inside with her. The men then began to beat their shields with sticks, so that no sound of her shrieking should be heard, for fear other girls should become frightened and not want to seek to die with their masters. Then six men went into the tent, and all made love with her. After this they laid her beside her dead master; two held her legs and two her hands, and the woman called the Angel of Death wound a cord with knotted ends round her neck, passing the ends out on either side and handing them to the two men to pull. Then she stepped forward with a broad-bladed dagger, and began to drive it in and pluck it out again between the girl's ribs, while the two men choked her with the cord, and so she died.

After this, whoever was the closest kinsman of the dead man came forward. He took a wooden stick and set light to it; then he walked backwards, with his back to the ship and his face to the people, holding the stick in one hand and with the other hand laid on his backside; he was naked. By this means, the wood they had put just under the ship was set on fire, immediately after they had laid the slave-girl they had killed beside her master. Then the people came forward with



wood and timber; each brought a stick with its tip on fire and threw it on the wood lying under the ship, so that the flames took hold, first on the wood, and then on the ship, and then on the tent and the man and the woman and everything inside the ship. Thereupon a strong, fierce wind arose, so that the flames grew stronger and the fire blazed even more . . . not much time passed before the ship and the timber and the slave-girl and her master had all turned into ashes and so into dust.

After this, on the spot where the ship had first lain when they dragged it up from the river, they built something that looked like a round mound. In the middle of it they set up a big post of birch wood, on which they wrote the name of this man and the name of the king of the Rus'; then they went on their way.

Similar scenes were no doubt enacted in Gnezdowo-Smolensk, Staraja Ladoga, Beloezero, Novgorod, Truso, Swielubie, Menzlin and Birka, where Frisians, Finns and Slavs lived and were buried among the Swedes.

The trading settlements on the coast and along the Continental trade routes were intertribal centres. It was here that people of different tribal and ethnic origin met and that cultural traits were exchanged. But within the tribal areas, where a strong political and social structure already existed, the development of these centres depended upon stable conditions in the host country. Here the trading settlements were in the first instance dependencies of their respective hinterlands. Hedeby remained a Danish town despite its multinational population; in the same way Reric-Mecklenburg was Obodrite, Wolin a town of the Wolin Slavs; Truso, Prussian; Staraja Ladoga, Slav and Finno-Ugrian; and Novgorod an international mercantile centre of the Ilmen Slavs.

Trade and culture

The cultural importance of the trading settlements has already been suggested. For Slavs and Scandinavians alike, they were the points of contact with the outside world, the places through which travellers and goods had to pass even if their final destinations were far away. Archaeology amply supports written history, and the tens of thousands of Arab coins that have been found in the vicinity of such settlements are alone sufficient to prove their commercial vitality. They would obviously have handled both utility and luxury goods, weapons and ornaments, raw materials and foodstuffs, but since not all these survive equally well, we shall confine ourselves to those goods that are most easily traced in the archaeological record.

Some trade and trade routes can be deduced from pottery. Frisian jugs from the lower Rhine, for instance, probably contained wine. Others, probably made to hold honey, wax, fats or other foodstuffs, are evidence

for the movement of these commodities. Much of the Slav pottery found in Scandinavian trading ports no doubt often arrived there as containers, but it may also have been in demand as tableware, for it was greatly superior, both in form and decoration, to the crude Scandinavian pottery. It appears to have been copied in south Scandinavia, possibly by Slav potters imported for the purpose. The distribution of Slav pottery in the earlier period therefore reflects the intensity of Scandinavian-Slav relations, even though it is not necessarily the result of direct trading. The so-called Feldberg and Fresendorf pottery of the seventh to tenth centuries produced by the Wilti copying classical pottery types was itself an object of trade. Carl Schuchhardt, one of the first scholars to identify it, called this pottery the 'Meissen of the Middle Ages' on account of its fine finish and high technical standard. Long-distance trade ensured its wide distribution in the countries around the Baltic.

In the eighth and ninth centuries silversmiths in the forts and trading settlements of Poland and Pomerania were greatly influenced by styles and fashions from the lands along the Danube and from Moravia. The Tempelhof type of earring, for example, can ultimately be traced back to Byzantine prototypes. They were most widely distributed in the tenth century, when they occurred in great numbers on Bornholm and Gotland, odd ones even reaching Sjoelland and Skåne. Silver basket earrings and silver belt and cloak clasps have the same pattern of distribution. Other metal artifacts such as crescent-shaped pendants, ornaments and female fertility symbols also reached the Baltic, generally by way of the territory of the eastern Slavs. Arab prototypes have even been found in the Slav heartland, where they were copied and elaborated further. Among these there were filigree-decorated crescent pendants, earrings with basket-shaped beads or beads ornamented with filigree.

The kaftan worn in Persia and the Arab world was very much in vogue in the Swedish town of Birka in the period from the late eighth to the tenth century. Here, as in Poland and even Pomerania, the native tunic was adapted, possibly due to the influence of the kaftan or of the Byzantine riding coat. Patterned linen shirts found in the earliest graves at Birka dating to the ninth century were foreign to Scandinavia and had obviously reached these parts from the lands of the eastern Slavs.

One specific problem has been much discussed, namely the trade in weapons, above all the supply of good quality swords. In the past, more on *a priori* than empirical grounds, it used to be maintained that only the Vikings supplied swords to eastern and central Europe. Such a theory ignores unequivocal statements in the Frankish sources. In 805, Charlemagne, in order to preserve the monopoly of the Frankish counts, issued a proclamation prohibiting certain towns from

selling weapons to the Slavs; the towns are listed by name, as are the places where merchants crossed the frontier. The fact that the prohibition had to be repeated on several subsequent occasions only proves how well established the trade had become. It is clear that not only weapons, but also a great many other goods reached Slav territory through trading centres located on important routes of circulation. Names such as Ulfberht, Ingelreht and Hilpreht are inscribed on their blades. The high quality of Frankish swords made them objects of great demand even in the Arab world. Slav, Baltic and probably even Scandinavian smiths attempted to produce swords of the same quality. 8 Swordsmiths sometimes even copied the names of the Rhenish masters, apparently taking them to be ornamental but inscribing their own names as well. One sword recently found in Foscevataja in the Ukraine bears an inscription in Cyrillic script: 'Ljudota the smith made this.'

A developed iron technology, the prerequisite for producing similar weapons, was known to the south of the Baltic; for example in Greater Moravia, Bohemia, Poland, in the Baltic countries and of course in the important early towns of the Kiev Rus'. The manufacture of steel, the welding together both of different types of steel and of soft forged iron with steel were known to Slav smiths as early as the seventh and eighth centuries, as they were in parts of Scandinavia.

A similar story is told by the leaf-shaped spear-head; originally of Rhenish manufacture, this weapon was later produced at many Scandinavian, Slav and Baltic centres, as was the battle-axe which was copied from late classical and Persian prototypes. It is at present almost impossible to gauge the volume of the trade in weapons on the basis of the available archaeological evidence, especially as no weapon workshop has yet been excavated.

It is easier to trace the origin and distribution of other items of trade, Norwegian soapstone, for example, amber, ornaments of the types mentioned above, certain pottery and mould types and coins. Some items can by their nature be known only from documentary sources, slaves for example. Slav, Baltic and Finno-Ugrian slaves were sold in large numbers at Bulgar, Magdeburg, Regensburg and other border towns, mainly to Arab countries.

The trade in furs was both widespread and extremely lucrative. It flourished particularly between Frisia and the Baltic countries. In the eleventh century Adam of Bremen raged against the trade in furs from Lapland 'which has brought the death-bringing poison of ostentation into our world . . . For we thirst for a marten fur coat at any cost as if it were eternal salvation. They therefore offer us marten furs in exchange for our woollen cloth which we call *falsones*.' As a consequence of the importance of the fur trade a few Old Russian

words crept into some Low German patois. In Old Russian the word *kuna* meant marten, marten-skin, money. In Old Frisian the word recurs as *cona* meaning coin. The Russian *sobol* found its way into Middle High German as *sabel* and *zobel*. In English it occurs as *sable*, meaning both the animal and its fur. The Old Slavonic word for fur, *kozycb*, is probably the origin of the medieval Latin *crusna*, *crusina* and the Old High German and Old Saxon *kursinna* and the Old Frisian *kersua*.

The slave trade and the fur trade were by far the most profitable in north-south and east-west trade. On the Volga, for instance, a marten skin cost about one dirhem, i.e. 3 grams of silver at the most, the value of one green glass bead. One could therefore buy a fortune in skins and furs for a handful of beads. In Arab markets this wealth could be realized at a profit of 1,000 per cent or more. This single example, which is one of many, shows how the mutually exclusive ranges of goods and price differentials between northern and eastern Europe and the developed world provided the incentive for a trade which was often hazardous. Some 150,000 Arab coins, most of which occur in more than 1,500 silver hoards found in the various Baltic countries, clearly show the extent of this trade in the ninth to eleventh centuries. Slav traders and Slav markets played an important part in this Baltic trade, merchants acting both as principals and as middlemen.

Only towards the end of the tenth century did trade with central and western Europe increase in importance; this is indicated by the eleventh-century concentration of coins, mainly of German origin, in the Baltic region.

Some trading settlements, as well as some trade and craft centres located outside forts which had emerged in the interior in the ninth to tenth centuries, formed the nuclei of medieval towns. Between 50 and 80 per cent of medieval towns on Slav territory and about 50 per cent of the German towns east of the Elbe can be traced back to these ninth- and tenth-century foundations.

Religion and temple cults

The territory of the north-western Slavs was one of the few areas in medieval Europe which retained pagan beliefs and cults well into the twelfth century – a stumbling block for the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the neighbouring feudal states, and to some extent a thorn in the side of Christian Europe. From about 700 onwards Christian missions, therefore, attempted to convert these areas and to integrate them under Christian control. The tribes of the north-western Slavs, however, were equally steadfast in warding off these attempts, the more so as they were more or less veiled pretexts for conquest and suppression by either the Frankish or the German kingdom. In such circumstances the pagan religion of the north-western Slavs also became the focal point of resistance to

foreign conquest. The display of religious and cult practices was therefore of great importance and was stressed by Christian apologists.

According to the chronicler Thietmar (c. 1015), each tribe had its own god: 'There are', he said, 'as many temples as there are tribes.' Some of the names of the gods can be traced back to old Indo-European roots. The Wagrians around Oldenburg worshipped a god called Prove; those at Plön the god Podaga; the Polabs had a god Siwa and the Obodrites at Mecklenburg the god Radigost. Swarozyc was the principal god of the Wilti. He was worshipped at a ceremonial fort at Rethra (Riedegost) in the vicinity of the modern town of Neubrandenburg in Mecklenburg. The temple is described as follows: 'The outer walls, as far as one can discern, are decorated with various splendidly carved images of gods and goddesses. Inside are statues of gods each inscribed with a name; they are awe-inspiring and clad in helmets and armour; the highest of the gods is called Swarozyc and he is specially revered and worshipped by all heathens. The standards may only be removed in times of war and then only by warriors on foot.'

One of the characteristics of the Slav gods was that they had many heads. In Arkona the Rugian god Svantevit is supposed to have been depicted with four heads. Other gods in Rügen are described as having had seven heads. Triglaw, a three-headed god, stood in Brandenburg, and the town of Szczecin also had a Triglaw as its special communal god. A few years ago a two-headed wooden statue was excavated on the island of Tollensesee near Neubrandenburg. At Wolin a miniature wood carving with four faces interpreted as Svantevit was associated with strata datable to the end of the ninth century.

Slav places of worship brought to light in excavations in Poland and the USSR show that in some regions the modes of worshipping gods in temples and by means of statues differed. The earlier places of worship of both the Slavs and the Baltic tribes usually consisted of a circular setting enclosing either symbolic posts or wooden figures. The best known of these sites is devoted to Perun at Novgorod. Archaeology shows that this type of site also occurred in Poland and east of the Oder. It is possible that the particular north-west Slav tradition of idols and temples may be due to Celtic influences from southern Poland and Bohemia.

From both documentary and archaeological sources we know of fertility and cattle gods such as Volos; gods of war and primeval power such as Svantevit; sky gods such as Perun; sun and fire gods such as Svarog and Swarozyc and war gods such as Gerovit. There were also numerous other divinities and demons. Rethra is an example of a place where a complete pantheon was created and priests or groups of priests established to serve it. Such priests were the religious leaders of the

community and influenced social and politico-military life.

The north-western Slavs and the Germans

The north-western tribes played a special role in the evolution of the German nation. Large parts of the medieval German territories east of Hanover and Bamberg were originally settled by Slav-speaking peoples; in some places this remained the case up to the sixteenth century. After the confusion of the Migration Period they had helped to bring the land into cultivation, and the Frankish and Saxon feudal lords welcomed their contribution. They suffered the same oppression as Frankish, Saxon and Thuringian farmers and enjoyed the same limited rights. Hence they became amalgamated with the German nation at an early stage.

East of the Elbe-Saale, however, things were different. The tribes that were settled here fiercely resisted the attempts of the German lords to subdue them. Developments here were consequently marked by serious strife and unrest which lasted almost 400 years. It was only in the middle of the twelfth century that Slav power really collapsed between the Oder and the Elbe, and the Slav tribal rulers paid allegiance to either German or Danish lords and became their vassals and intermarried with them. The ruling family in Mecklenburg until 1918 could trace its origins back to the Slavic Obodrites. Their arms bore a bull's head, the symbol of primeval force and fertility.

The ordinary people, who had to bear the burden of these wars, had developed the land, in some areas to a high degree of efficiency. From the twelfth century, however, farmers from Flanders, Saxony, Frankonia and Thuringia settled in and around their villages. Although often under great stress, the two elements gradually merged, and new German tribes such as Mecklenburgers, Pomeranians, Brandenburgers and 'new' Saxons emerged from this process of assimilation.

This historic Slav settlement is reflected even today by the many Slav place-names both in the land of the Wends around Hanover but above all to the east of the Elbe-Saale line. About half the villages in the German Democratic Republic trace their origin back to the period of Slav settlement and bear Slav names. The same is true of the towns – Schwerin, Rostock, Leipzig, Dresden, Brandenburg and Berlin-Spandau all originated in the Slav period and formed the nucleus of later medieval towns. The ethnic minority known as the Sorbs, distant descendants of the tribe of the Sorbs mentioned as living in the Elbe-Saale region by a Frankish chronicle in 630, still live in the Ober- and-Niederlausitz area in the midst of a German-speaking neighbourhood.