

William of Malmesbury on Pagan Slavic Oracles: New Sources for Slavic Paganism and its two Interpretations

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The article brings to the attention of the scholarly world a hardly known medieval source Gesta Regum Anglorum written by William of Malmesbury. Who was an early 12th century English benedictine monk from Malmesbury in Western England. The article revolves around the outmost relevance of William of Malmesbury to the study of pre-christian Slavic religion, and provides two interpretations of William's account.

Many years ago, the Croatian slavist Vatroslav Jagić said that it would be worthwhile to hand over all the contemporary studies concerning Slavic religion for some new and truthful mediaeval texts, relevant to that topic. In 1982 Polish historian Aleksander Gieysztor expressed the same opinion.¹ Unfortunately in the course of the 20th century no new sources about the Slavic religion have come to light. Today however, the Australian scholar Roman Zaroff discovered that William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum* is a text for which Jagić, Gieysztor and no doubt many others were searching. *Gesta Regum Anglorum* is of course a very well known source, but as far as we know nobody has introduced it into Slavonic religious research.

William of Malmesbury was a medieval English monk and historian of the 12th century. He was born sometime between 1090 and 1096 at Wiltshire and he was educated at the Abbey of Malmesbury.² According to the tradition, the abbey at Malmesbury was founded in the first half of the 7th century by the Irish monk Meildub. In the 11th century the abbey became renowned in England for its large library and for being an important learning centre of the time. After completing his education, William became a Benedictine monk, librarian and later a precentor at the Malmesbury abbey. He was very well educated and knew most of the classical authors, continental medieval chroniclers, hagiographies, charters, letters as well as works of the Church Fathers. It has been shown by Rodney Thomson that he knew around 400 works written by about 200 authors.³ He is regarded as one of the most outstanding and reliable English historians since Bede. He never travelled outside England but often visited other English abbeys and monasteries, where he had access to local libraries and records. He died in 1143 or shortly after.⁴ In the second book of his *Gesta Regum*

¹ A.Gieysztor, *Mitologia Słowian* (Warszawa, 1982), p.12.

² J.A. Giles, in: *William of Malmesbury's Chronicle of the Kings of England* (London, 1904), p. VII ; and A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, c. 550to c. 1307* (London, 1974), p. 166.

³ R. Thomson, *William of Malmesbury* (Woodbridge, 1987), pp. 7 &13 & 16. For full list of works known to William, see: *ibid.*, pp. 197-207.

⁴ D. H. Farmer, 'Two Biographies by William of Malmesbury', in T. A. Dorey, ed., *Latin Biographies* (London, 1967), pp. 157-159; and A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England...*, p. 170 and R.Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, p. 2-3.

Anglorum we find an interesting passage of great relevance for a better understanding of Slavic religion. William described the reign of German emperor Henry III who ruled between 1039 and 1056. In this chapter, entitled “De Henrico Imperatore”, we read as follows (for Latin text see Appendix 1):

“This emperor (Henry III) possessed many and great virtues; and nearly surpassed in military skill all his predecessors: so much so, that he subdued the Vindelici and the Leutici, and the other nations bordering on the Suevi, who alone, even to the present day lust for the pagan superstitions: for the Saracens and Turks worship God the Creator, looking upon Mahomet not as a God, but as his prophet. But the Vindelici worship Fortune, and putting her idol in the most eminent situation, they place a horn in her right hand, filled with the beverage, made of honey and water, which by a Greek term we call ‘hydromel’. St. Jerome proves, in his eighteenth book on Isaiah, that the Egyptians and almost all the eastern nations do the same. Wherefore on the last day of November, sitting round in a circle, they all taste it; and if they find the horn full, they applaud with loud clamours: because in the ensuing year, plenty with her brimming horn will fullfil their wishes in everything: but if it be otherwise, they lament. Henry made these nations in such wise tributary to him, that upon every solemnity on which he wore his crown, four of their kings were obliged to carry a cauldron in which flesh was boiled, upon their shoulders, to the kitchen, by means of levers passed through rings”.⁵

It is worth stressing an interesting similarity between William’s description of Slavic divination and that of later Saxo Grammaticus’ account in *Gesta Danorum* (end of 12th century) concerning the Rugian cult of the god Sventovit. Saxo’s text is of course much larger, and the ritual of divination from the alcoholic beverage kept in the horn is only one of many religious ceremonies described (for Latin text see Appendix 2). But precisely this ritual had for a long time no parallel in written sources for Slavic religion until Williams’ account came to light.⁶

“There stood in the temple a huge image bigger than any man, astonishing for its four heads and four necks, two facing the front, and two the back. And one gazed to the right, and one to the left, both before and behind. He was made to be clean-shaven and crop-headed, so you would think the ingenious craftsman had imitated the Rugian style of hair-dressing. In his right hand he bore a horn decorated with various sorts of metal, which the priest skilled in his worship used to fill every year with drink, in order to foresee the next year’s crops from the state of the liquor. On the left side, the arm was represented as bent inward with a bow. A tunic was carved reaching down to the shanks, which were made of different kinds of wood, jointed to the knee so inconspicuously that the place of the join could only be discovered on minuter inspection. The feet appeared level with the ground, their bases lying under it”.⁷

⁵ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, Book II, Chp. XII (pp. 208-209); J. A. Giles translation.

⁶ Indoeuropean context of that ritual was shown in A. Gieysztor, ‘Opfer und Kult in der slawischen Überlieferung’, *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, vol. 18, 1984, p. 262.

⁷ Saxo, Book XIV.39 (p. 494); English translation in: *Danorum Regum Heroumque Historia, Liber X- XVI*, in E. Christiansen, ed. and transl. (Oxford, 1984).

After description of the idol Saxo, described priest's preparation and the ceremonies at the temple:

"The next day, the people kept watch outside the door, and he took down the cup from the image, and inspected it closely; if any amount of the liquor he had put in had gone away, he thought that this meant a dearth in the following year. Noting this, he would order the corn in hand to be kept for the future. If he saw no lessening of its usual fullness, he would prophesy a good season. Depending on this augury, he warned them to use this year's harvest either sparingly or liberally. Then he poured out the old wine at the feet of the image as an offering, and filled the empty cup with fresh; and playing the part of a cupbearer, he worshipped the statue and petitioned him in a ritual incantation for increase of wealth and victory for himself, his country, and its people. After this, he put the cup to his mouth and emptied it excessively fast in one draught, putting it back into the right hand of the statue refilled with new drink".⁸

Then follows an account about ritual cake and the final celebration of a communal feast:

"...they spent the rest of the day feasting greedily, using the sacrificial meat for their merriment and gluttony and making the sacred victims of the God subservient to their unbridled appetites. In this feast drunkenness was reckoned pious, sobriety infamous".⁹

Both authors, William and Saxo, reported use of a horn and an alcoholic beverage in foretelling the future prosperity. Saxo explicitly referred there to the harvest, while William no doubt meant the same using the term prosperity, as Ranove's economy was based on farming. Both mentioned the feast at the end of the ceremony. The discovery of William's account brings to mind two fundamental questions of outmost relevance for research concerning Slavic religion. First, can we still acknowledge that Saxo's account originated from his Danish informants, who were eyewitnesses (or rather main actors) in the destruction of the temple at Arcona in 1168, and not from his knowledge of William's text (or his sources). If so, William's text reinforces the credibility of Saxo's account. Second, did William's text describe the divination among the Ranove of Rügen, perhaps at Arcona, as the similarity to Saxo's account suggests, or does it rather concern the Luticians, as suggested by the fact that only the name of this tribe (apart of the name *Vindelici*) appeared in William. In such a case the similarity to Saxo's account could be attributed to similar forms of ritual, common to all Polabian Slavs.

Rugian Interpretation by Roman Zaroff

First of all, we have to look when William of Malmesbury wrote his *Gesta Regum* and what sources he used. Taking into consideration that the first three books of *Gesta Regum* were completed around 1120 or shortly after,¹⁰ and the passage we are concerned with refers to the middle of the 11th century, we can assume that William used some written

⁸ Saxo, Book XIV.39 (p. 494-496) Eric Christiansen translation.

⁹ Saxo, Book XIV.39 (pp. 96) Eric Christiansen translation.

¹⁰ J.A. Giles, in *William of Malmesbury's Chronicle of the Kings of England*, p. VIII n.

sources for this account. The construction of the entire passage about Henry III's reign, subjugation of the *Vindelici* and *Leutici* and about pagan Slavic ceremonies suggests that it comes from the same source. According to Antonia Gransden it comes from a now lost German source of the 11th century written at the time of Henry III.¹¹ It is worth noting that the bias in this story points to a German source also. This is so, because Henry III struggled to subdue the Lutician Union but he was not altogether successful as claimed in *Gesta Regum Anglorum*.¹² Neither did he manage to fully subjugate the other Polabian Slavs. The Luticians were independent until at least 1030, when the Empire had been involved in conflict with Mieszko II of Poland (reigned 1025-1034). There is a possibility that the Luticians even participated in the conflict on the Polish side.¹³ Between 1033 and 1035 (according to Łowmiański in 1036) emperor Conrad II fought at least two campaigns against the Luticians. In 1035 (or 1036) the Luticians agreed to pay a tribute, but it is unlikely that they delivered it every year and in full.¹⁴ In the year 1045, Conrad II's successor Henry III campaigned against the Lutician Union again, but they continued to raid German territory. In 1056 the Luticians severely defeated the Saxons at the battle of Prizlau. This clearly indicates that the Luticians were far from being defeated and fully subjugated. The decline of the Lutician Union began in the year 1057 when civil war erupted between northern and southern tribes of the union. This, however, took place after the death of Henry III and during the minority of Henry IV and regency of Henry III's wife and Henry IV's mother Agnes of Poitou. In 1067 or 1068 the temple at Radogoszcz was destroyed by a German expedition led by bishop Burchardt of Halberstadt.¹⁵ Although the Lutician Union (the Redarove and Dolenzhane tribes only) still survived and continued its existence until the early 12th century, they did not play any significant role in the region anymore.¹⁶

The oracle and associated ceremonies described by William of Malmesbury leave no doubt that he was referring to the Polabian Slavs. The question remains as to which branch the account applies. Identification of the *Leutici* poses no problem, as he certainly meant the Luticians or Lutician Union, a federation of Slavic tribes of the Redarove, Dolenzhane, Chrespyane and Khyzhane. Neither is the term *Vindelici* difficult to decipher. In the context of these accounts, no doubt, it meant the Wends. However the term *Vindelici*, the Wends, is a very broad one and it has been often used in sources to describe the entire Polabian Slavdom, between the Elbe-Saale and Oder rivers.

The question arises as to whom he was referring to in particular. Although William of Malmesbury himself was most likely ignorant about the division of the Polabian Slavs, he copied this story from some older German source. A few sentences before the description of the Slavic idol, William wrote: "... (Henry III) subdued the Vindelici and the Leutici...who

¹¹ A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England...*, pp. 171 & 178.

¹² see note 5.

¹³ *Annales Magdeburgensis*, G. H. Pertz, ed., Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores vol. 16 (Hannover, 1859), year 1030. On the controversy about the Lutician participation see: W. Bröske, 'Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Lutizenbundes', *Mitteldeutsche Forschungen*, vol.3 (Münster-Köln, 1955), pp. 54-74; and G. Labuda, *Mieszko II król Polski (1025-134). Czasy przełomu w dziejach państwa polskiego* (Kraków, 1992), p.67-71; and K. Wachowski, *Słowiańszczyzna Zachodnia* (Poznań, 1950), pp. 133-135.

¹⁴ Wipo, *The Deeds of Conrad II*, in T.E. Mommsen & K.F. Morrison, *Imperial Lives and Letters* (New York, 1962) Year 1033, 1035, 1036; and H. Łowmiański, *Początki Polski*, vol.5 (Warszawa, 1973), pp. 291-292.

¹⁵ *Annales Augustiani*, G. H. Pertz, ed., Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores vol. 3 (Hannover, 1839), Year 1068.

¹⁶ L. P. Stupecki, *Slavonic Pagan Sanctuaries* (Warsaw, 1994), pp. 56-57.

alone, even to the present day, lust for the pagan superstitions...”.¹⁷ It has to be pointed out that William’s source clearly and implicitly distinguished the *Vindelici* from the *Leutici*, that is the Lutician Union. On the other hand, in descriptions of the Slavic idol, ceremonies and oracle he implicitly used the term *Vindelici*. This indicates that the name *Vindelici* was applied to some other Polabian Slavs - Wends. Therefore, it must have been used in reference to some different Polabian Slavs than the Luticians. Consequently, the description of idol and ceremonies could not and did not refer to the Lutician deity of Svarozhich or ceremonies at Radogoszcz. We can also exclude the Sorbian tribes of the south, since by the middle of the 11th century they were well incorporated into the marches of the Empire. As for the Obodrites, from around 1031 until 1043 they were fully independent and ruled by prince Ratibor who maintained a friendly relationship with the Empire. Afterwards the Obodrite principality was recovered by Gotschalk a member of an Obodrite Nakonid dynasty that had ruled the land at least since the middle of the 10th century. Also Gotschalk remained on very good terms with both Saxony and the Empire and, although he recognized imperial authority and paid tribute, he ruled independently.¹⁸ Ratibor himself was a Christian and he allowed German clergy to preach Christianity in his principality.¹⁹ So was prince Gotschalk who officially promoted Christianity and has been praised for that by Adam of Bremen; and later by Helmold of Bosau and Saxo Grammaticus.²⁰ Therefore, the term *Vindelici* could not have been used in relation to the Obodrite state either. This leaves practically only the Ranove of Rügen island as the sole candidates for William’s *Vindelici*.

The above notion is reinforced by the account written by Saxo Grammaticus. The similarity of some parts of William’s and Saxo’s accounts is striking. In both cases authors reported use of a horn and an alcoholic drink as a medium for foretelling the future harvest. Knowing that wine in this part of medieval Europe was not a very common drink, it is more likely that fermented honey, mead, not wine was used in this particular Polabian ritual. Therefore, it is more plausible that on that instance William was better informed than Saxo.

Moreover, Saxo recorded that Ranove’s harvest celebration and divination from the drink in the horn took place annually after harvest,²¹ that is in autumn. In this context it is worth recalling Helmold of Bossau’s story about Sventovit’s high priest demanding that the German priest Gotschalk be sacrificed to the god for performing Christian service on the island. It is of great significance that according to Helmold this took place in November.²² Taking into consideration that the human sacrifice was the highest form of offering we may conclude that it was planned for a most important Rugian harvest festival and that it was held in November. This corresponds exactly to the timing of celebrations reported by William.

From William’s description only the name of the deity does not resemble Sventovit of Rügen. We may assume that William, unfamiliar with the name of Slavic gods, like many

¹⁷ see note 5.

¹⁸ Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, in: Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der Hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches, ed. W.Trillmich (Darmstadt, 1961), Book III. 19 & 50; English translation in F. J. Tschan, ed., *History of the Archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen* (New York, 1959); and Helmold of Bossau, *Chronica Slavorum*, in F.J. Tschan; *The Chronicle of the Slavs* (New York, 1966), Book I.18 & 21.

¹⁹ Adam of Bremen, Book II.71 & 79.

²⁰ Adam of Bremen, Book III.19; and Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, Book X. 17; and Helmold of Bosau, Book I.20.

²¹ Saxo, Book XIV.39 (p. 494-496): Eric Christiansen translation.

²² Helmold of Bossau, Book II.108.

other ancient and medieval historians before and after him, substituted it with the name of a classical deity. The choice of Fortuna seems to be an “*intepretatio romana*” as this ancient Roman female deity was a goddess of blind faith and had also provided oracles.²³ Therefore, in the light of the evidence presented it becomes evident that William of Malmesbury was referring to the ceremonies associated with cult of Sventovit of Arkona on Rügen island.

Returning to the source used by William, there is no evidence that the Ranove of Rügen were subdued by the Empire in the middle of the 11th century. In this context the story probably came to Germany from abroad. Most likely from the Danes, who were involved in the trade and piracy on the Baltic Sea, and no doubt were well informed about the religious matters of the Ranove of Rügen. Henry III married Gunhilda (Kunigunde) a daughter of Canute the Great, king of Denmark, Sweden and England in 1036.²⁴ It is very likely that the information about Ranove’s pagan cults was brought by Gunhilda herself or the members of her Danish entourage. There is another possibility that cannot be totally excluded. In 1045 Henry III campaigned against the Luticians, and according to *Annales Augustiani* this campaign was fought in the vicinity of Rügen island.²⁵ This is probably a mistake as most likely the imperial expedition did not reach the Baltic shores. However, it has to be remembered that Ranove’s principality included parts of the mainland known as the Tribsee and Bardo districts. Hence, the most likely location for the campaign are Lutician territories bordering the mainland domain of the Ranove. Whatever the case, the imperial army could come into contact with the Ranove or the other Baltic Slavs, and from them this information could have been obtained.

Saxo Grammaticus, like William, was very well educated and read in both classical and contemporary works. But there is no evidence that he knew *Gesta Regum Anglorum*.²⁶ Although both descriptions are very similar they are substantially different, making it extremely unlikely that Saxo based his account on William’s work. Hence the importance of William’s account lies in the fact that he authenticates Saxo Grammaticus’ description of Arkona, the Sventovit temple and associated ceremonies. At the same time, it also settles the dispute about Saxo’s credibility. Furthermore, William’s account shows that ceremonies similar to those reported by Saxo Grammaticus were performed at Arkona on Rügen island as early as the mid-11th century. This also demonstrates that the cult of Sventovit was fully developed by that time. Moreover, although there is no hard evidence to postulate this, the cult of Sventovit at Arkona might have emerged even earlier. Archaeological excavation has revealed that the internal rampart at Arkona was built in the first half of the 9th century and it probably did not serve a defensive purpose.²⁷ Therefore, it was most likely an enclosure for some sort of a cult centre. Unfortunately a lack of evidence for that period prevents us from postulating anything about the nature of this cult and the deity worshipped there.

²³ P. Jones, & N. Pennick, *A History of Pagan Europe* (London, 1995), p.39.

²⁴ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, Book II, Chp. XII (p. 207).

²⁵ *Annales Augustiani*, Year 1045.

²⁶ for Saxo’s biography, his work and sources, see: H.E. Davidson in Saxo Grammaticus, vol. I, p. 1 & vol. II, pp. 1-12; and E. Christiansen in Saxo Grammaticus, pp. 703-710.

²⁷ L. P. Stupecki, *Slavonic Pagan Sanctuaries*, p. 34.

Lutician Interpretation by Leszek Paweł Ślupecki

At the beginning of the chapter William talks about “Vindelici et Leutici” but in the fragment that follows and describes the divination he mentions only the *Vindelici*. From a German source he supposedly follows, William has correctly taken the name of the *Leutici* (Luticians). The name *Vindelici* however, as a name for a Slavic tribe is rather unusual. *Vindelici* was the name of a Celtic tribe that lived in Roman times in Raetia, in contemporary Tyrol and Bavaria. A Roman city, Augusta Vindelicorum, today’s Augsburg in southern Germany, was once situated there.²⁸ The name *Vindelici* appeared in William’s account perhaps because of his classical education and good erudition. He either misunderstood a similar name, Vinidi, used in the early Middle Age for the Slavs, or tried to interpret it using classical terms (this was quite a typical medieval practice). The name Vinidi was used quite often in early German sources (especially Frankonian) as a name for the Polabian Slavs.²⁹ However it sometimes was applied specifically for the Vilti (Veletians), the name for the branch of tribes that were later called the Luticians. The phrase “Vindelici et Leutici” could be also interpreted as a pleonasm, and it is of outmost importance to say here that the Luticians very often appeared in the sources under a double name.³⁰ If this is not the case, we may look for another similar sounding Slavic tribal name. A good candidate would also be the Wolinians, a tribe very well known to the Germans and the Danes; and famous for their city-port of Wolin (legendary town Vineta), that was still pagan in the middle of the 11th century.³¹

In my opinion, in William’s text the term Vindelici denotes the Polabian Slavs as a whole, that is Wenden in German and the Wends in English. From among these Wends, William, or his source, knew only the Luticians in particular. It appears that the description of the cult and ceremonies are attributed by William to all the Wends, but he is drawing from the example of the Luticians, known better to him. Additionally, the passage about four kings that Henry III compelled to pay tribute and do services could echo the very fact that the Lutician Union was composed of four tribes. Finally, as far as we know Henry III fought against the Luticians, and not against the other Polabians.

Consequently, the description of Slavic idol and pagan divination could refer to the Lutician temple at Radogoszcz. We know from Thietmar’s account³² that this temple held an oracle. The German chronicler described only lot-casting and horse-divination,³³ but said nothing at all concerning oracles from liquor in the horn. It was perhaps because this ritual was performed only once a year, namely in autumn, and the German envoys, who were supposedly Thietmar’s informants, visited Radogoszcz at another time, possibly in spring 1003. Hence they did not witness this major Lutician festival held there later in the year. On the other hand, at Arkona on Rügen island all these similar forms of divination (from the lots, horse and liquor in the vessel) were also practiced, but during the autumn festival only.

²⁸ R.Heuberger, ‘Vindelici’, *Paulys Realencyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft, Zweite Reihe*, vol.9, Part A1, (Stuttgart, 1961), col. 1-17; and J. Wielowiejski, ‘Raetia’, *Słownik Starożytności Słowiańskich*, vol.4, p.459.

²⁹ G. Labuda, ‘Wenedonia’, *Słownik Starożytności Słowiańskich*, vol.6, p.372-373.

³⁰ L.P.Ślupecki, *Wojownicy i Wilkołaki* (Warszawa, 1994), pp.183-184, with examples.

³¹ L.Leciejewicz, ‘Wolinianie’, *Słownik Starożytności Słowiańskich*, vol.6, p.564; and R. Kiersnowski, *Legenda Winety, Studium historyczne* (Kraków, 1950).

³² Thietmar, VI, 23-25: *Kronika Thietmara*, ed. M.Z.Jedlicki (Poznań, 1953), pp. 344-351.

³³ L.P.Ślupecki, *Wyrocznie i wróżby pogańskich Skandynawów* (Warszawa, 1998), p.143-145.

William's *Gesta Regum* immediately brings to attention the famous account by Saxo Grammaticus describing the Sventovit temple, the idol located at Arkona on Rügen island and all associated ceremonies. The question arises whether Saxo's account is original. He could have known William's work, which is at least a half century older, and we know that in his *Gesta Danorum* he used some English sources, including the works of Venerable Bede (explicitly quoted by Saxo) and Goeffrey of Monmouth.³⁴

Nonetheless, when we compare the passage from *Gesta Danorum* with a relevant fragment of *Gesta Regum Anglorum* there is in fact no trace of any copied sentence. In both texts we find totally different phrases and different words used. Only the expressions: "cornu dextrae" (William) and "dextra cornu" (Saxo) sound a bit similar. However, both descriptions are applied to similar events. Nonetheless, William's and Saxo's account are similar, though they are not the same. There are some small differences, the most important being, perhaps, that William talks about the use of mead (hydromellum), while Saxo reported wine, or rather "merum", that is pure wine, not mixed with water, an alcoholic beverage being very proper for pagan ceremonies.³⁵

Taking into consideration rarity of wine on the shores of Baltic Sea it could be reasonable to assume that the mead rather than wine was used by the Polabian Slavs in their ceremonies. Therefore, most likely William was right rather than Saxo. Wine, however, was also well known, even much further in the North than the Polabian lands³⁶ and there is a possibility that the Saxo account may also be correct in this respect. Whatever the case, both authors reported a horn filled with an alcoholic beverage being used in foretelling the future harvest. Also, both reported a communal feast associated with the festival.

In William's description of ritual only the name of the deity is problematic. We may assume that William, unfamiliar with the deity of foreign-sounding name - like other ancient and medieval historians before and after him - used the classical model and replaced it with the name of an ancient goddess. The choice of Fortuna is, however, significant as this ancient Roman female deity was the goddess of blind faith and had also provided oracles. Hence, the substitution of Fortuna for a Slavic deity may simply be a result of William's association of a strange sounding Slavic god with oracles. On the other hand, that might have been a deeper reason for such an interpretation. Fortuna not only sounds different as Svarozhich or Sventovit. Fortuna is of different sex. Therefore, we can also postulate that originally the story was linked to some Slavic female deity responsible for oracles and divinations. Unfortunately, Slavic goddesses are very poorly attested in written sources.³⁷ In Thietmar's Chronicle however, there is a fragment (without mentioning the name) about a Lutician war-goddess appearing to be of great importance; who was represented on their war-standards.³⁸ Furthermore, Thietmar reported that at Radogoszcz, apart from main idol of Svarozhich, there were many statues of other gods and goddesses.³⁹ And, as comparative

³⁴ I.Skovgaard-Petersen, 'Saxo Grammaticus', *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformationstid*, vol.15 (København, 1970), col.54-55.

³⁵ L.P.Słupecki, *Einflüsse des Christentums auf die heidnische Religion der Ostseeslawen im 8.-12. Jahrhundert: Tempel-Götterbilder-Kult*, in print.

³⁶ See Gieysztor 1984, p. 261; The knowledge of wine in the North is also attested in plenty of Norse sources.

³⁷ L.P. Słupecki, 'Au déclin des dieux slaves', in: *Clovis. Histoire et mémoire. La baptême de Clovis, son écho à travers l'histoire*, vol.2 (Paris, 1998), pp. 295-296.

³⁸ Thietmar, VII. 64 (pp. 559-561).

³⁹ Thietmar, VI. 23 (p.345).

studies into pagan religions show, the divination about prosperity was a domain of female deities rather than male gods.⁴⁰

Conclusion

The question of William's account referring to the Luticians, Radogoszcz and a cult of Svarozhich or some female deity of unknown name - or alternatively to Arkona on Rügen, and the temple of Sventovit located there - must remain open. It has to be acknowledged that it is possible to find arguments in favour of both such hypotheses. Whatever the case, William's account shows that ceremonies similar to those reported by Saxo Grammaticus were performed as early as the middle of the 11th century. This also shows that such pagan rituals in Polabian lands were fully developed by then. Religion, like any other social phenomenon, is a long term and complex process. Hence, it could be assumed that the Western Slavic ritual of divination about future prosperity from an alcoholic drink in the horn, and performed in such a complex and sophisticated form, developed not later than the late 10th century - if not much earlier.

Yet there is another important implication deriving from William's account. He stated that the ceremony, that was identified here with the cult of Sventovit at Arkona on Rügen island was performed at the end of November, during the annual harvest festival. This timing brings to mind Adam of Bremen's descriptions of the martyrdom of Bishop John of Mecklenburg in 1066 after the pagan uprising in the Obodrite principality. An uprising in which the Luticians were heavily involved.⁴¹ What is worth noting is that Bishop John of Mecklenburg was captured and taken by the Luticians in June, but was sacrificed to the Svarozhich of Radogoszcz on the 10th of November that year.⁴² The question arises for what purpose he was kept alive for so long a time. Although the issue requires much more investigation and research, it could be postulated that Bishop John was sacrificed to the Lutician deity during a similar harvest celebration at Radogoszcz. In turn, this notion reinforces the hypothesis that the Polabian Slavs shared many religious concepts.

Finally, William of Malmesbury's account provides proof of authenticity for Saxo Grammaticus' description of Arkona, the Sventovit temple and associated ceremonies. Nonetheless, in spite of all this, the possibility remains for some hypercritical historian to argue that Saxo used William's account in composing his story about the fall of Arkona, just to praise and to glorify Bishop Absalon and King Waldemar I of Denmark.

⁴⁰ L.P.Ślupecki, *Wyrocznie i wróżby pogańskich Skandynawów*, passim.

⁴¹ W.Bröske, 'Untersuchungen...', pp. 81-83.

⁴² Adam of Bremen, Book III. 51. Helmold of Bosau copied the description of Bishop John's martyrdom from Adam's work; the author of Old-Icelandic *Hungrvaka*, although he undoubtedly knew and used Adam's account, could have additionally consulted some other sources concerning Bishop John and his martyrdom; cf G.Turville-Petre, *The Origins of Icelandic Literature* (Oxford, 1967), p.72-73.

Appendix 1

William of Malmesbury's account about the Polabian Slavs:

“Erat imperator multis et magnis virtutibus praeditus, et omnium pene ante se bellicosissimus, quippe qui etiam Vindelicos et Leuticios subegerit, ceterosque populos Suevis conterminos, qui usque ad hanc diem soli omnium mortalium paganas superstitiones anhelant; nam Saraceni et Turchi Deum Creatorem colunt, Mahumet non Deum sed ejus prophetam aestimantes. Vindelici vero Fortunam adorant; cujus idolum loco nominatissimo ponentes, cornu dextrae illius componunt plenum potu illo quem [variant: quod] Graeco vocabulo, ex aqua et melle, Hydromellum vocamus. Idem sanctus Hieronymus Aegyptos et omnes pene Orientales fecisse, in decimo octavo super Isaiam libro confirmat. Unde ultimo die Novembris mensis, in circuitu sedentes, in commune praegustant; et si cornu plenum invenerint, magno strepitu applaudunt [variant: plaudentes], quod eis futuro anno pleno copia cornu resdponsura sit in omnibus; si contra, gemunt. Hos ergo ita Henricus tributarios effecerat, ut, omnibus sollempnitatibus quibus coronabatur, reges eorum quatuor, lebetem quo carnes condiebantur, in humeris suis, per anulos quatuor vectibus ad coquinam vectitarent”.⁴³

Appendix 2

Saxo Grammaticus' account about Sventovit, his cult and associated ceremonies:

“Ingens in aede simulacrum omnem humani corporis habitum granditate transcendens, quattuor capitibus totidemque ceruicibus mirandum prestabat, e quibus duo pectus totidemque tergum respicere videbantur. Ceterum tam ante quam retro collocatorum unum dextrorsum, alterum levorsum contemplationem dirigere videbatur. Corrasae barbae, crines attonsi figurabantur, ut artificis industriam Rugianorum ritum in cultu capitum aemulatam putares. In dextra cornu vario metalli genere excultum gestabat, quod sacerdos sacrorum eius peritus annuatim mero perfundere consueverat, ex ipso liquoris habitu sequentis anni copias prospecturus. Levea arcum reflexo in latus brachio figurabat. Tunica ad tibias prominens fingeatur, que ex diversa ligni materia creatae, tam arcano nexu genibus iungebantur, ut compaginis locus non nisi curiosiori contemplatione deprehendi potuerit. Pedes humo contigui cernebantur, eorum basi intra solum latente.”

“Postero die, populo prae foribus excubante, detractum simulacro poculum curiosius speculatus, si quid ex inditi liquoris mensura subtractum fuisset, ad sequentis anni inopiam pertinere putabat. Quo annotato, praesentes fruges in posterum tempus asservari iubebat. Si nihil ex consuetae fecunditatis habitu deminutum vidisset, ventura agrorum ubertatis tempora praedicabat. iuxta quod auspiciu instantis anni copiis nunc parcius, nunc profusius utendum monebat. Veteri deinde mero ad pedes simulacrui libamenti nomine defuso, vacuefactum poculum recenti imbuat, simulatoque propinandi officio statuam veneratus, tum sibi, tum patrae bona civibusque opum ac victoriarum incrementa sollempnium verborum

⁴³ *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis Monachi De Gestis Regum Anglorum libri quinque*, in W. Stubbs, ed., *The Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages*, vol. 90, part 1 (London, 1887), Book II.189 (pp.230-231).

nuncupatione poscebat. Qua finita, admotum ori poculum nimia bibendi celeritate continuo haustu siccavit repletumque mero simulacri dextrae restituit.”

“reliquum diei plenis luxuriae epulis exigentes, ipsas sacrificii dapes in usum convivii et gulae nutrimenta vertere, consecratas numini victimas intemperantiae suae servire cogentes. In quo epulo sobrietatem violare pium aestimatum est, servare nefas habitum”.⁴⁴

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⁴⁴ Saxo Grammaticus, XIV, 39, 3-7 (pp. 823-825): *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, ed. J.Olrik (Hauniae, 1931), pp.465-466.

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William iz Malmesburyja o prerokbah poganskih Slovanov: nov vir o slovanskem poganstvu in njegovi interpretaciji

Leszek Paweł Słupecki in Roman Zaroff

Članek razbira tisti del poročila Williama iz Malmesburyja o vladavini nemškega cesarja Henrika III, ki opisuje poganski kult in obrede polabskih Slovanov. Gre za krajevno podrobneje nedoločeno vsakoletno praznovanje žetve, pri katerem so s pomočjo medice v rogu prerokovali, kakšna bo naslednja letina. Praznik so sklenili z vsesplošno gostijo.

V nadaljevanju avtorja vsak zase interpretirata Williamovo poročilo. Roman Zaroff povezuje te obrede z Rugijci z otoka Rügen (Rujane), z Arkono in Sventovitovim kultom. Leszek Paweł Słupecki pa vidi v poročilu Ljutiče (ljudstvo Veletov), ki so imeli središče v Radogostu (Retri) in so častili božanstvo z imenom Svarožič. Oba avtorja se strinjata, da je Williamovo poročilo pomembno za proučevanje slovanske religije in še posebej za delo *Gesta Danorum* Saksa Gramatika. Strinjata se, da Sakso ni poznal Williamovega dela *Gesta Regum*. Zato je Williamovo poročilo, ne glede na to, kateri skupini Polabskih Slovanov pripada opisani obred, dokaz za pristnost Saksovega poročila.