

Water in pre-Christian beliefs in Pomerania (northern Poland) of the early medieval period

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Based on written sources and archaeological evidence, ethnographic and linguistic material, and the knowledge of the rest of Slavonic-occupied regions, the authors research early medieval Pomeranian communities in which water played a significant role. Water, as a life-providing element on the one hand, and a destructive element on the other, was not only essential for the economy, but also indispensably carried symbolic meaning and played an important role in religious ceremonies and magical rites. An attempt at characterizing Pomeranian water ritual also defining the sacred spaces of pre-Christian sanctuaries is made in the following article.

KEYWORDS: water, pre-Christian beliefs, Pomerania, Poland, Slavonic beliefs, pre-Christian rituals, archaeology

1. INTRODUCTION

The area of Pomerania, the north-western part of modern Poland, is symbolically restricted by three major rivers: the Vistula from the east, the Oder from the west, and the Noteć from the south. The northern barrier of this post-glacial area is the southern coast of the Baltic Sea. One of the dominant features of this type of landscape is numerous, relatively small lakes and a predominantly longitudinally-oriented network of rivers. As drinking water reserves, as well as habitats of species utilized by the early medieval economy, they must have played an important role in the cultural landscape and religious ideas. In the following article, we intend to take a closer look at the significance of water in pre-Christian Pomeranian beliefs of the early medieval period, i.e. from the arrival of the Slavs to the region (ca. 6th–7th century AD) to the mid-13th century (which conventionally mark the end of the early Middle Ages in Poland). Due to the limited amount of information on the native religion of the Slavs, we will need to draw widely from the written sources and archaeological data from nearly all regions of Western *Slavia*. We will also use ethnographic records as a major source, which in many instances allow for a better understanding of the ancient customs and rituals.

Water occupied a vital position in the spiritual world of Slavonic societies. The earliest mention of this fact is contained in the words of the chronicler Procopius of Caesarea, who writes that the Slavs "... also worshipped rivers, nymphs and some other divine beings" (Procopius VII, 14, § 24).

2. IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS WATER

Every religious system includes explanations for the origin of the world. These are referred to as cosmogonic myths. Unfortunately, we do not know what this may have been for the Pomeranians, since no records of the old religion written by Pagan authors have survived, while Christian writers, whose works contain passages on the local beliefs, focus mainly on descriptions of sanctuaries and customs, which they must have perceived as especially peculiar.

Scholars, however, have reconstructed a believable version of the above-mentioned myth, based on oral folk tradition. In the mythical story, water as one of the main life-giving forces occupies a key position. The world (Earth) was believed to have been raised from the bottom of the ocean by the Devil, who acted on the request of God. The two actors later engaged in a fight, a consequence of which the Devil, driven away by the thunder (the weapon of his opponent), finally retreats to the water.

The mythical beings are presumed to have remained opponents, since the chthonic power tends to strive to dominate the waters by absorbing them. The first thunder strike in the spring is popularly believed to mark the victory of the uranic being and, therefore, the freeing of the waters as rain (Conte 1992: 30).

3. RAIN

For agricultural societies, good annual crops are the guarantee of survival. The quality of crops is significantly related to satisfactory amounts of rainfall. Traditional thought identifies rain with the act of procreation, which takes place between the uranic character and the female Earth, who makes plant life flourish (Conte 1992: 72).

Rainwater was also used in divination and healing. Water that gathered in hollow places found on rocks was especially prized, which was recorded e.g. in central Poland (Jasiewicz 1967: 493–494).

Lightning occupies a special position in the aquatic symbolic domain. A spot where lightning has struck is generally regarded as a sacred one and especially chosen as a place for religious ritual connected with offering sacrifices. Trees struck by lightning have a special status, believed to guard off demonic forces and possess purifying power. If a house is set on fire by the lightning one should not extinguish it (Moszyński 1967: 486). Such magical behaviour would stem from the belief that "heavenly" fire simply cannot be put out by water. The only remedies were believed to be sand or milk (Majer-Baranowska 1995: 158). The Polish press reported in 1959 the sensational information that in one

village in the Rzeszów region in eastern Poland a “superstitious extravagance” took place: no fire brigade was called when someone’s barn was set on fire. A naked virgin was said to have walked around the flaming building three times, carrying a Catholic icon (Pełka 1963: 76). This example may be considered a proof of the persistence of ancient beliefs.

4. LAKES

A fascinating record on the Polabian sanctuary in Riedegost, by Thietmar of Merseburg, has survived to the present day. An unusual lake was located there: *An ancient but equally false tradition also testifies that, if the harsh savagery of a long period of internal warfare is imminent, a great boar whose teeth are white and glistening with foam will emerge from that same lake and appear to many witnesses while happily distorting itself in the mire with a terrible shaking.* (Thietmar VI.24). In one of the written sources on St. Otto of Bamberg’s stay in Wolin, it is said that a local temple was built on a spot surrounded by water and swamps and that the only way leading there was a wooden bridge (see: Filipowiak 1993: 29).

The proximity of lakes and rivers to Pagan sanctuaries seems to suggest a possibility that water was also used in religious rituals. Unfortunately, there are no reliable sources on this topic. We can only support this thesis with Scandinavian analogies, where washing statues of Pagan gods or just their attributes is well documented. Such behaviour was aimed to symbolically regenerate the vital forces of these objects (Ślupecki 2003:161). Apart from washing statues, it at least some participants of the Pagan religious ceremonies could have undergone a form of ritual cleansing (Moszyński 1967, p. 506). This function of washing with water has survived in folk custom. On Easter Day, until recently, in some villages, people would gather near lakes, streams or rivers at dawn, in order to perform symbolic ablutions to wash away their sins. Those who suffered from skin diseases entered the water three times, uttering a plea for health in the form of a simple prayer (Moszyński 1967: 507). There was a prohibition of bathing in rivers and lakes before the 23rd of June (St. John’s Eve) in the region of Kashubia. Water on St. John’s Eve and the night before was believed to possess certain magical qualities connected with divination or its healing properties (Keller 1920: 9; Torliński 1938: 8; Kukier 1968: 251). According to Pomeranian beliefs, lakes on that special day also demanded offerings (Krüger 1936: 50).

Like rivers, lakes are frequent sites of death by drowning. From among 500 unnatural deaths analysed by Stomma, which according to popular belief could result in the person’s becoming a demon, 101 (20.2%) were deaths by drowning (Stomma 1986: 161). In contrast, from among 284 graves of people who were believed to become demons after their death, only 25 (8.8%) were buried near rivers or lakes (Stomma 1986: 162). Modern Poland has preserved the names of demonic beings dwelling in waters: *wodnica*, *utopiec*, and *topielica* or *topielec*. These beings were believed to be spirits of people who drowned or children who were cursed by their mothers. Other recorded categories of spirits include *boginka*, *wieszczycza*, *mamuna*, *siubiela*, *odmieniec* and *lamia*, or *lamija* (Gieysztor 1982: 225). In Kashubia (East Pomerania), to the present day, legends and

tales are told of spirits of drowned girls called *jezörnice* or *redunice*, who lead people astray. Their marine equivalents are names *mórzęce*, and in swamps, *blotniczi*, said to look like men dressed in black and carrying a lantern (Borzyszkowski, Mordawski, Treder 1999: 182). These beings may have originated in ancient beliefs. Their archaic character, however, is relatively unclear. It seems that one thing is sure in this case: they do reflect a traditional, non-Christian, outlook on the world.

Houses in proximity to water were especially prone to demonic attacks. For protection, in Masuria (north-eastern Poland) a wooden pile carved like a head was placed on the gate to the farmstead, which was generally believed to guard the human abode against the *topielec* (Szyfer 1968: 107; see: Kajkowski 2007:74).

Islands are an inseparable element of many lakes of Pomerania. Their isolated position in the landscape has a special influence on human psychology. Islands are simultaneously associated with paradise (*raj*) and treated as a kind of prison. Their isolation makes the relationships between people who stay there acquire a new, unusual character. They facilitate intimate relations both with the place and with other human beings (Hag 2006). In the case of Pomerania, there is some archaeological data that confirms the peculiar use of some islands in the early Middle Ages.

Żydowo near Koszalin is an unusual place. On the island of Lake Kwiecko, during excavations, stone structures were discovered and determined to be a place of “Pagan worship”. It seems, however, that they are relics of something else: seriously damaged *kurgan* sepulchres. It is unknown why some of the graves were purposely isolated. It is

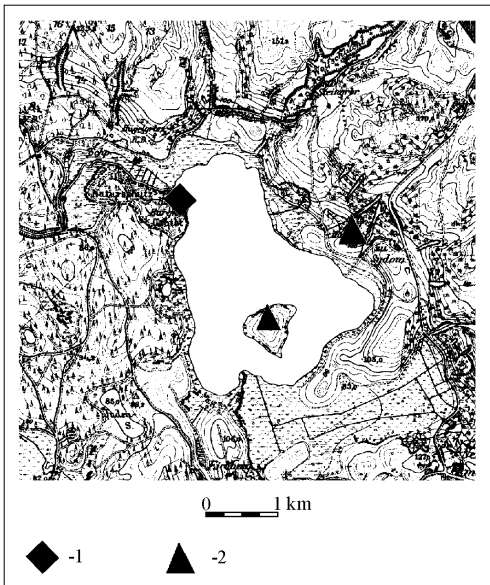


Fig. 1. Early medieval settled micro region in Żydowo: 1 – burgh hill, 2 – burial site.

notable that on the bank of this lake there is another burial site of this type. As there is no precise dating for the chronology of these burial sites,¹ whether they could have been used simultaneously remains unknown. Perhaps they both belonged to one, more complex religious and symbolic site (Kuczowski 2009, pp. 63 – 64).

Apart from the unusual, for Pomerania, sepulchral function of the island, they also played other social roles. Here, it is worth referring to Scandinavian data, since there exists good evidence for the sacral function of islands. As an example, the island of Enhälga, located in the southern part of Uppland (Sweden), was originally named *Øin helgna* (“Holy Island”). There used to be a place named *Öbolund* (meaning “thing”

¹ The burial site on the lake’s bank is believed to have been constructed approximately in the 11th century (Członkowski 1967: 47).

or gathering place of the local community). Further west, there was a village of Gåde, which means “Island of the Gods”. All this suggests the existence of a larger complex with religious and social function (Brink 2001: 95). Toponymy suggests the existence of more, similar islands.

In the case of Pomerania, the analysis of local toponyms would not be very effective.² It turned out, however, that archaeologists discovered structures that appear to have been gathering places for local communities on several locations. Descriptions of these sites follow.

In 1863, during the drainage of the lake in Parsęko in Central Pomerania, numerous wooden structures were accidentally discovered. Archaeological examinations were conducted within the same year. The discovered relics were decided to have been homes. For many years in literature, this site would be referred to as a “settlement”. As late as in the 1980s a German scholar, Hinz, decided that these structures were a wooden embankment that had reinforced the island’s bank. Recent excavations on this island, and another one, about 60 km away, on the lake Zarańsko in the village of Żółte, have brought about new, unexpected results, which facilitated further verification of what is known of these islands: it appears that the structures uncovered in the 19th century can be found only in the north-western part of the site, whereas further the south-eastern part, where foundations of a building sized 3×3 m. In the northern part of the site, remains of wooden platforms leading deep into the lake were found.

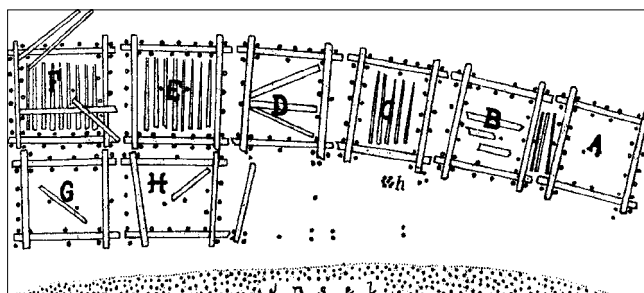


Fig. 2. Parsęko. The schematic of wooden structure relics on the island (after: Chudziak, Kaźmierczak, Niegowski, 2007: 148, fig. 3)

Examinations performed on the island on Zarańsko Lake in the village of Żółte near Drawsko Pomorskie produced interesting results. Wooden structures, dated to the period between 1046 and 1083, turned out not to be relics of human dwellings but rather remains of an embankment of the island’s waterside. Additionally, the banks were reinforced with a small wooden palisade. In Żółte, at the palisade, three horse skeletons were discovered; possibly they had been offerings. One of the skeletons was placed next to a wooden post of

² Original toponyms have been lost in the discussed area. Since the mid-13th century, a settlement action under the Magdeburg law was performed there, leading to the gradual Germanization of place names. After Pomerania was handed over to Poland in 1945 a special commission for their re-Slavization, or re-Polonization, was formed. The actions of this commission frequently were quite carefree and entirely independent from historical facts.

some metres in length,³ while the other two were inside clamps of stone of natural origin, where other objects were discovered, including a head of a battle axe. Moreover, under the embankment, a foundation offering was discovered: a clay pot, a sickle, a mare skull, and a sheep skull. These findings had been located below the water surface, which means that in early Middle Ages the level of water in the lake was significantly lower. In that

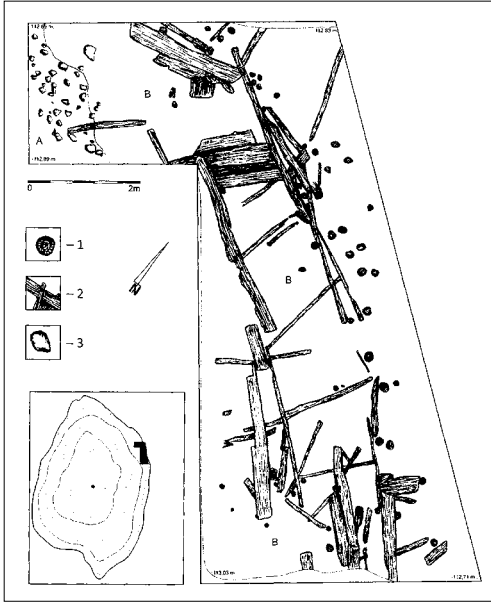


Fig. 3. Żółte – scheme of the uncovered relics of the development of the island (after: Chudziak, Kaźmierczak, Niegowski 2007: 160, fig. 13)

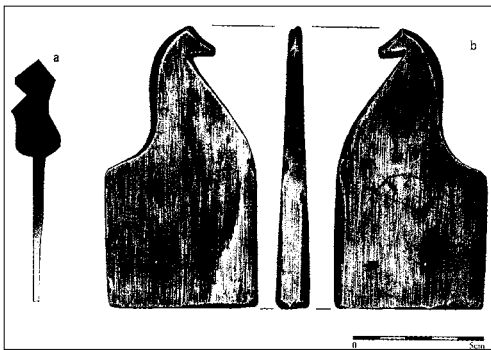


Fig. 4. Wooden reliefs from Parsecko (a) and Żółte (b) (after: Chudziak, Kaźmierczak, Niegowski 2007: 163, fig. 13)

period, the highest spots on the islands in Parsecko and Żółte were additionally covered with cobblestones, which formed a kind of stone lots. On the latter site, there were additionally five large hearths. Both islands had relics of buildings in the central part. The one in Żółte, however, had stone foundations (4×5 metres in size), and the one in Parsecko had a wooden structure located outside the paved lot. In either case, no traces of the use of these islands as places of residence were found. Wojciech Chudziak, the author of examinations in Żółte, also recalls a wooden relief of a horse, which seemed to have been placed on the crest of a roof. A similar zoomorphic relic also comes from Parsecko. Drawing analogies from the descriptions of Pagan temples in Pomerania, the researcher decided these two objects were ornaments on the roofs of a temple, which he deems existed on both islands. Were these islands really places of worship? It can be assumed that they played a set of roles connected with religion and worship, the *thing* rallies, or ritual exchange (on both sites see: Chudziak, Kaźmierczak, Niegowski 2007).

As a rule, the objects discovered in lakes and rivers are believed to have been offerings made to the water as an element, or to supernatural beings that inhabit it. However, anthropological studies suggest

³ This finding is similar to the Pagan offering from a horse made by Slavs who, between 1134 and 1157, besieged the town of Guldborg on the Danish island Langeland in. In front of the gate, the remains of a horse were found. The horse sacrifice had been impaled through the rectum (see: Skaarup 2001).

yet another possible interpretation: in the case of excessive rainfall, in some areas inhabited by Slavs broken pots or bricks would be tossed into water. It was believed that objects that had been made in fire would be “extinguished” in this way and, at the same time stop, rainfall (Conte 1992: 80). Additionally, anthropomorphic images of wood or stone would also be found in water. They are popularly believed to be early medieval Slavonic idols. In Pomerania, only one isolated example is currently known. In Lake Rakowskie, near the town of Szczecinek, a severely damaged stone figure was discovered and nicknamed “Belbuk” (Skrzypek 1998/99).



Fig. 5. The so-called “Belbuk” sculpture (after: Skrzypek 1998/99: 166, fig. 1)

Such artefacts are commonly assumed to be Pagan idols tossed into water during the Christianization period. However, there are numerous records of destroying images of supernatural beings in traditional cultures, such as early medieval Scandinavians (see: Saga 1968:179) or the Rus (Uspienski 1985: 170). This would occur when the deity would not hear the people’s pleas. To punish the statue, they would shout obscenities and threats at it, flog it, and – when that did not help – destroy it. Dropping the statue into water was probably connected with the symbolic removal of the statue from the ecumene, into the environment regarded as the domain of the chthonic power.

5. SPRINGS AND FOUNTAINS

An exquisite description of the role of springs in pre-Christian religion of the Slavs is that of the spring named Głomacz, located somewhere in Polabia and being the center of the sanctuary of the tribe Głomacze (Dolimici). According to Thietmar: *Lommatzch [(Głomacz)] is a spring located not more than two Miles from the Elbe. It is a source of a pool which often produces marvels, so the local populace claims, and many others have verified this with their own eyes. If a good peace is to be expected, and the earth does not falsely promise its fruits, it is covered with wheat, oats, and acorns. This brings joy to the hearts of the populace which frequently gathers there. When the savage storms of war threaten, it gives a clear indication of the outcome with blood and ash (Thietmar I.3).*

One characteristic of this spring is stressed here: its fortune-telling ability. Let us focus on two aspects: firstly, during the time of peace, Głomacz was said to abound in grain and acorns. This may suggest that it was located in an oak grove, perhaps also in proximity of fields. Another possibility is that such products were brought there by people, as offerings. Another interesting detail is the spring’s ability to predict war by *blood and ash*, said to appear on the surface. It seems that a natural phenomenon is to blame. It could have been interpreted as “supernatural”. Later chroniclers often mention that

water in certain lakes can change to blood – which probably indicated red colouring of the water. This phenomenon occurs when a deep earthquake takes place, but the tremors are not perceivable on the surface (see: Gałczyńska 2001).

One biographer of St. Otto of Bamberg named Herbord recorded a note on a spring in Szczecin: *There was also a large and shady oak with a delightful fountain underneath, which the simple-minded people regarded as rendered sacred by the presence of a certain god, and treated with great veneration* (Herbord II.32).

What was the origin of belief in the supernatural power of certain springs? From some detailed chemical studies, it is known that the water in some of them is rich in different minerals, which have positive impacts on health. This “marvel” was then manifested in the healing properties. Probably also the early medieval Slavs were aware of the healing properties of mineral waters. Recognizing a given spring as miraculous was likely based on long-term observation. It is also possible that an unusual event would result in such recognition.

Archaeology generally does not possess any tools to identify specific springs as those that could be sanctified in the early Middle Ages. In Borzestowo (Kashubian Lakeland), reportedly an early medieval pit containing fragments of clay vessels and charcoal was discovered next to a fountain (Łuka 1973: 41). This made the researchers connect the pit with the Pagan religion. However, there is no reason to see this as purely a hypothesis.

The proposed sanctuary in Trzebiatów also includes the notion of a fountain. At this location, on the so-called Hill of David, two circular ditches around the site where statues of deities are believed to be uncovered (Filipowiak 1957). The aforementioned fountain is located some distance from the site; therefore, the connection to the ditches not so obvious.

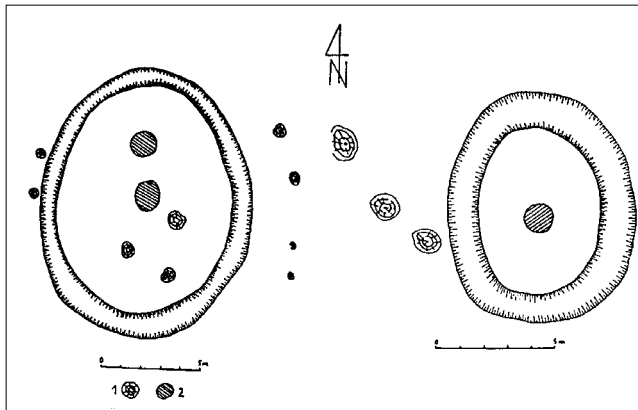


Fig. 6. Trzebiatów – David’s Hill. Scheme of the proposed Pagan sanctuary (after: Filipowiak 1967: 6–7, fig. 1–2)

The Church was struggling with the “worship of springs” throughout the Middle Ages. It was stigmatized by many Christian authors (see: Olszewski 2002: 25). All attempts to put an end to their sacred position in the Pagan perspective failed. Thence a need to “Christianize” water bodies another way, by means of placing churches, chapels or at least crosses next to them. The springs themselves were included in the Christian vision

of history, acclaiming them to have been places of revelations: of saints or the Virgin Mary, or miraculous healings (see: Michalska 2001). One of such springs was located in Binowo (Central Pomerania), where in the Middle Ages a chapel with the image of the Virgin Mary was placed (Buske 1972: 28). A fountain, which according to common belief had healing properties, was also found at the feet of the Holy Mountain in Polanów, where there was a pilgrimage centre in the Middle Ages (see: Siemiński 2002).

Furthermore, wells could have a supernatural status. In several locations in Pomerania, tales of digging them have been preserved in which the digging was said to result in water springing so violently that the whole vicinity was nearly flooded. It was only dropping a black animal to the spring (a bull, calf, etc.) that prevented catastrophe (Knoop 2008: 26, 63).



Fig. 7. Polanów – Holy Mountain. The miraculous spring (Photo by K. Kajkowski 2009)

6. RIVERS

We have already included some information about rivers in the section on lakes. In many cases, some ideas are connected with both types of water bodies. Below, we will focus solely on rivers.

One would look for examples of deification or anthropomorphization of rivers in Pomerania, or even the whole Slavia, in vain, despite the popularity of such imagery in the ancient world. Rivers are connected with another type of religious and magical belief: spatial ones, which make rivers the borderlines between the world of the living and the afterworld. Rivers, as water that is constantly moving, possess purifying powers: their current washes away all impurities (Kowalski P. 1997: 91). Therefore, as it seems, the key role of the river as a symbolic line between the dead, whose domain was represented by cemeteries, and the living.

Rivers and streams in some cases directly mark the border of early medieval burial sites. It seems that such localization was not accidental, and the flowing water was here a meaningful aspect of the sepulchral space. This was the case, for example, on the kurgan burial ground in Strzykocin (municipality of Brojce), where the River Mołstowa marks its western border. The southern border of the spacious kurgan field at the Hangmen's

Hill in Wolin is the river Dźwina. In Gacia Leśna (municipality of Słupsk), the kurgan burial ground⁴ and the local burgh hill are separated with a small stream running on the bottom of a deep ravine. Inside the ravine, there is a rock (sized ca. 1.5 m in length, 0.5 m of height and 0.5 m in width) with a smoothed, flat surface. Whether the aforementioned objects composed an intentionally created complex will become clearer once archaeological examinations are performed on the site.

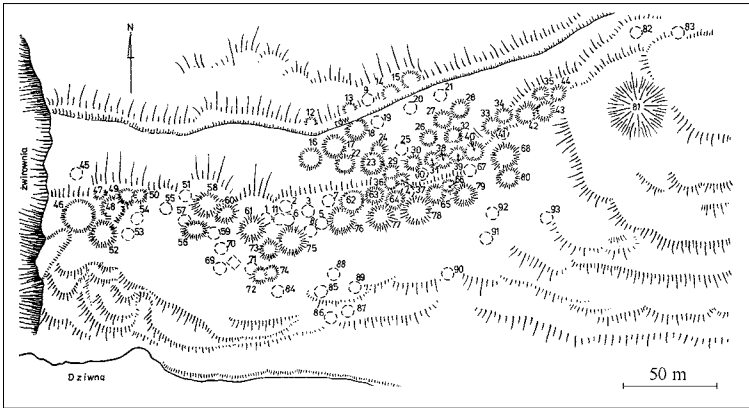


Fig. 8. Wolin – Wzgórze Wisielców (eng. Hangmen's Hill. The scheme of the kurgan burial site over the river (after: Zoll-Adamikowa 1975: 260, fig. 135)

Since there is no more detailed information on the religion or mythology of the Slavs, because of some possible similarities in religious thinking (common to the communities inhabited around the Baltic Sea), we need to resort to the Scandinavian religion. The River *Gjoll* was believed to separate the worlds of the dead and the living and the River *Thund*, to run around the land of the fallen in battle, *Valhalla* (Potkowski 1963: 34). Such views on running water were probably connected with it as a symbol of transience (Majer-Baranowska 1995: 153). Rivers are also a mythical road leading directly into the afterworld (Kowalski A. P. 1998: 504). Such symbolism of water is common in traditional beliefs recorded by anthropologists. The soul in need to pass to the chthonic world is helped by wooden footbridges over streams and rivers (Kowalski A. P. 1998: 504). In contrast, to prevent the dead from returning to the world of the living, after taking them to the burial

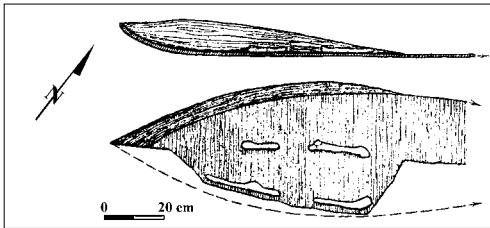


Fig. 9. Góra Chełmska – boat burial (after: Janocha 1974: 132, fig. 5)

site, the mourners would pour water over them (Bylina 1995: 12).

The motif of the river as a symbolic barrier seems to be confirmed by the marine burials in boats. Graves of this type were discovered, for example, on the mountain Chełmska near Koszalin.

Rivers also played a role in the geography of Pagan sanctuaries. On the

4 The chronology is still not entirely settled in the case of this burial site.

top of Góra the mountain Chełmska near Koszalin, in the early medieval period there was a sanctuary with a large wooden building as the main object, with an irregular circle of hearths around it. In one of these hearths, remains of a dog inside a clay vessel were found. The hearths marked a large lot probably used for tribal gatherings and a burial site. Additionally, in the discussed period, the mountain was surrounded by wide, swampy river valleys and swamps. On the sides of the mountain were numerous springs, which, as the 18th-century chronicler from Koszalin, Wendland, wrote, did not freeze even during the bitterest winter frosts. All of this made Chełmska difficult to reach, and water was the main obstacle on the way to the peak (see: Kuczkowski 2008).

The river, as a transportation route in the Middle Ages, was also a barrier blocking passage. This made it necessary to build bridges. Ethnographic records speak of the custom of offering sacrifices during their construction (Moszyński 1967: 508). Some researchers see the elements of weapons discovered during underwater exploration of the lake in Lednica as similar offerings (Słupecki 2006: 68).

Certain rivers can even be said to have demanded sacrifice. Such information was recorded, for example, in the case of Rega (Boose 1932: 62) and Radew (Asmus, Knoop 1898: 16). The situation was similar with lakes. Lake Drawsko was said to demand between one and three sacrifices per year (Rogge 1927: 210). The early medieval Polabia must have practiced similar customs, as the Arabian traveller and geographer al-Istakhri noted that outsiders were afraid to travel on the Elbe, since the locals had the custom of killing strangers and sacrificing them to the river (Spekke 1938: 156).

7. THE SEA

We cannot be sure of the position of the sea in the Pagan religiosity. Pomeranians belonged to the populations that thoroughly used their access to the Baltic Sea. Numerous findings of wooden boats, fishing net floats, or various fishing tools testify to this. In the 11th and 12th centuries, Slavonic pirates were a real menace in Denmark. Tiny boats made of tree bark found in coastal settlements make it clear that sailing was an important part of life even for children. The sea had to play a significant role in the life of the epoch and, therefore, in the collective imagination.

The preserved records contain only one fragment capable of shedding some light on the symbolic significance of the sea in the discussed period. In the year 1000, the bishop Reinbern arrived in Kolberg as a newly

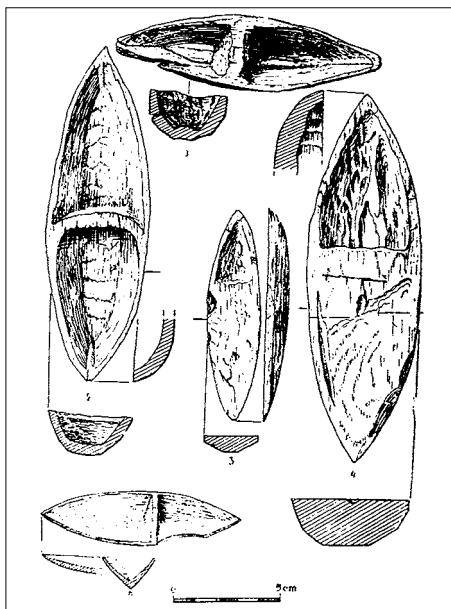


Fig. 10. Gdańsk – early medieval miniature boats (after: Kunicka-Okuliczowa 1959: table 5)

appointed head of the new diocese. He started with a rite of banishing the demons of the Baltic. Thietmar of Merseburg, the German chronicler, describes this in the following manner: *He destroyed the shrines of the idols by burning them and purified the lake inhabited by demons, by throwing into it four rocks anointed with holy oil and sprinkling it with consecrated water* (Thietmar VII.72).

This could have resulted from the fact that Pagans believed that the sea was inhabited by supernatural beings, which the missionary perceived as “demons”.

We do not possess any reliable information on whether any of the Slavonic deities were closely related to the sea. It seems though that the Sventevit of Arkona could have been such a being. The Rani, who were typical islanders, did not undertake any marine expedition without consulting this god – three times (Ślupecki 2003b: 78). It is noteworthy that during the digs in Arkona, some remains of fish were found. Their presence was detected only in the layers from between the 9th and 11th centuries (Miś 1997: 139). Possibly the Rugian god had some powers in the aquatic sphere, which in time were reduced in favour of his warlike characteristics. Also, Triglav, whose temples were located in Wolin and Szczecin, apparently had certain connections with the Baltic Sea. The “marine powers” of this god would stem from the fact that, just as it would happen in Arkona, also the Wolinians considered the opinion of Triglav before they ventured both into land and sea (VP II.11). Moreover, this god has been noted to receive a thanksgiving offering from Herman the merchant for saving his life on the sea (Ebbo III.1).

The early medieval Pomeranians, especially those who lived in the coastal trade centres, in all likelihood ran some observations of the Baltic. It is possible that the correlation between the phases of the moon and the ebb and flow of the sea were known at the time. It could have been reflected in applying some symbolic lunar characteristics to this water body.

The sea also possessed certain magical properties. The Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus noted on the 1160 negotiations between the Danes and the Pagan Rani that the latter tossed a rock into the sea and swore that just as this rock sunk into the depth of the sea so let it happen to anyone who broke the agreement (see: Miś 1998: 123).

8. TIME OF DROUGHT, TIME OF FLOOD...

The excess of water, as well as its shortage, poses a danger to people, and even more so for a community of farmers. It is a common belief among Slavs that during a lasting dry period it is necessary to strengthen water directly. Therefore, live animals would at times be drowned in rivers and lakes, animal blood poured into the water, or even human-shaped dummies dropped there (as it was done in Belarus) (Moszyński 1967: 246). Also, during flood seasons, water would receive sacrifices (Moszyński 1967: 508).

Ensuring an adequate rainfall was bound to be a matter of importance for the community. In Pomeranian beliefs, the call of the black kite (*Milvus migrans*) causes drought. In order to prevent the bird from causing drought, the ritual of “slaying the kite”, recorded in detail in the 19th century, was performed on St. John’s Day in Eastern Pomerania (Rompski 1973).

9. CONCLUSION

Water is both a life-producing and life-destroying force. It gives and takes. It gave the origin to the world itself. Water was home to numerous daemons. It offered great transportation routes but at the same time an obstacle difficult to cross. It was indispensable for building settlements, but in the case of a flood it would wipe out everything in its way.

In the vertical world-perception, the cosmic order of the early medieval Pomeranians (and Slavs in general), was defined by the balance between the uranic and chthonic spheres. The penetration of their influences led to the creation of the world, the rise of earth and people at all. There are many indications to suppose that mediation between these worlds, as well as contact with supernatural beings, was enabled by the water bodies. We can assume that water also had a physical and symbolic function as a kind of barrier, a barrier delimitating the world of the sacred, separating it from the sphere of the profane; separating the domains of living and the dead. The importance of water and its high position of the chthonic/aquatic sphere in the pagan worldview of Pomeranian Slavs are attested to by written sources. However, much of the human behaviour connected with water cannot be preserved as archaeological evidence. It is especially so in the case of religious behaviour, which in a major part happens without any material manifestation. This produces many difficulties for researchers, since relics discovered during archaeological digs often bear no clear meaning to the digger. Only deeper studies based on comparative material and ethnographic data allow us to describe the role of water in ancient Pomeranian belief more clearly.

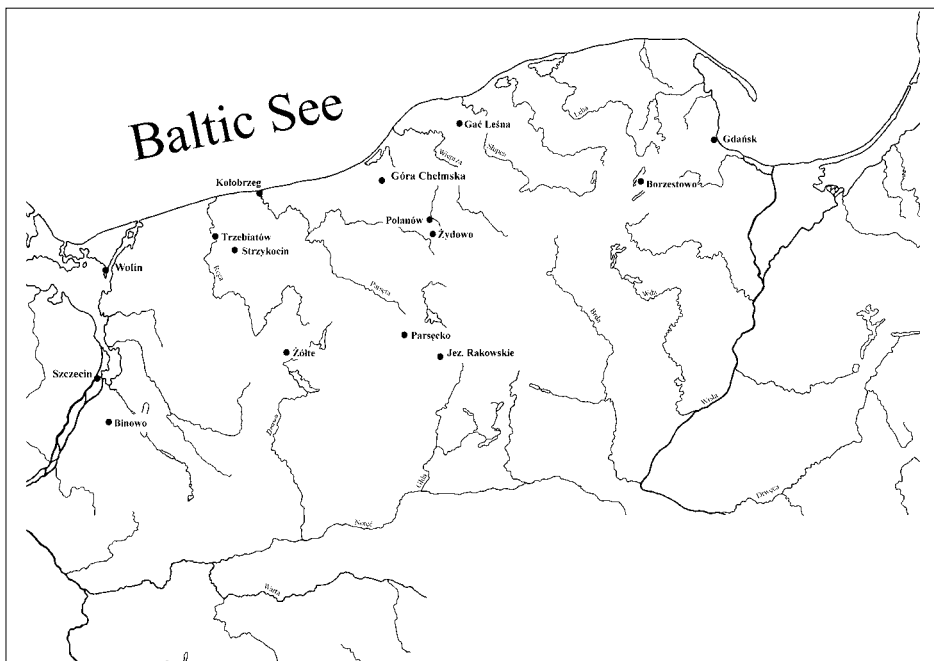


Fig. 11. Map of Pomerania with the places mentioned in the text (drawn by Kamil Kajkowski)

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WODA W PRZEDCHRZEŚCIAJŃSKICH WIERZENIACH NA WCZESNOŚREDNIOWIECZNYM POMORZU (PÓLNOCA POLSKA)

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Obszar Pomorza (północna część dzisiejszej Polski) charakteryzuje się polodowcowym krajobrazem obfitującym w liczne zbiorniki i ciekły wodne. Nie ulega wątpliwości, że woda była niezbędnym składnikiem życia i rozwoju gospodarczego społeczeństw wczesnośredniowiecznych. Odgrywać też musiała ważną rolę w symbolice i życiu religijnym ludności tego okresu. W jakim jednak zakresie? Na podstawie źródeł pisanych i analizy materiałów archeologicznych, w oparciu o materiały etnograficzne i językoznawcze oraz wykorzystując informacje z innych obszarów Słowiańszczyzny, autorzy starają się znaleźć odpowiedź na pytania związane z rolą wody w życiu religijnym mieszkańców Pomorza wczesnego średniowiecza. Poruszają tu zagadnienia czy i w jakim zakresie można dla tego regionu próbować rekonstruować znany z innych terenów Słowiańszczyzny mit kosmologiczny, w którym środowisko chtoniczne odgrywało najistotniejszą rolę. Innym zagadnieniem jest rola wody opadowej (deszczu) w działaniach religijno – magicznych nawiązujących do czynności o charakterze agrarnym. Analizie poddano także informacje nawiązujące do sakralnej roli akwenów. Przekazy kronikarskie dotyczące terenów niedalekiego Połabia opisujące niezwykłość zbiorników wodnych i wydarzeń w ich najbliższym otoczeniu, w konfrontacji ze źródłami archeologicznymi, pozwalają domyślać się podobnych praktyk i wierzeń na Pomorzu. Wydaje się również, że podobnie jak w Skandynawii okresu wikingów tak i na omawianym przez autorów obszarze zbiorniki czy ciekły wodne położone w bezpośrednim sąsiedztwie pogańskich sanktuariów mogły być wykorzystywane podczas obrzędów religijnych. Dostępne informacje wskazują również na fakt składania w nich ofiar. Z akwenami tymi wiąże się również szereg przekazów zanotowanych przez etnografów, które mogą nawiązywać do świata nadprzyrodzonego związanego z wyobrażeniami przedchrześcijańskimi. W podobnym kontekście przeanalizowano w tekście mniejsze zbiorniki wodne (źródła) oraz środowisko morskie. W przypadku Bałtyku podjęto również zagadnienie istnienia w wierzeniach pomorskich boskiej postaci związanej z żywiołem morskim, czy akwaticznym w ogóle. Uwaga autorów skupia się również na wodach płynących. Rzeka to woda znajdująca się w wiecznym ruchu stąd, jak się przypuszcza, w wierzeniach pogańskich przypisywano jej znaczenie oczyszczające. Powodowało to postrzeganie jej jako granicy pomiędzy światem żywych i zaświatami, których manifestacją były cmentarze. Być może wody płynące uważano również za drogę prowadzącą bezpośrednio w zaświaty. Rzeki czy woda w ogóle, stanowiły również w kilku przypadkach element bezpośrednio delimitujący sanktuarium przedchrześcijańskie.

Woda z jednej strony jako materia życiodajna, z drugiej jednak żywioł niszczycielski była nie tylko niezbędnym elementem rozwoju gospodarczego. Musiała

nieść szereg treści symbolicznych i odgrywać istotną rolę w obrzędowości i działaniach o charakterze magicznym. Próby ich charakterystyki na Pomorzu podjęto się w niniejszym tekście.

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