

THE BALTIC AND THE BLACK SEA IN MEDIEVAL TRADE

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The object of this paper is to give a short outline of the history of Black Sea and Baltic trade during the Middle Ages, and to examine the reciprocal action of these two important historical phenomena. Considerations of space exclude the possibility of making an exhaustive study of the enormous complex of problems connected with the subject, and hence no attempt will be made to deal with matters which do not appear to be of primary importance.

There is already a very copious literature dealing with the history of trade on the Baltic. The outstanding works are those of Daenelle, Schäfer and Rörig, but there are many other German, Dutch and Scandinavian writers whose works merit attention. Amongst the Polish writers on the subject, Kutrzeba, Widajewicz, Wachowski and Koczy have done much to extend our

knowledge of the history of Baltic commerce. The literature on Black Sea trade is hardly less extensive: W. Heyd's works are probably the most important, but much valuable information is also given in the writings of F. Bruun, Manfroni, G. Bratianu and Canale. The periodical publications *Atti della Società Ligure di Storia Patria* of Genoa, and *Zapiski Odeskago, Obshestva, Istorii i Drevnostiei* (Records of the Historical and Antiquarian Society of Odessa), likewise contain material of great interest. A certain amount has been written concerning the Black Sea by Polish authors, but economic history has so far received little attention. Kutrzeba's *Handel Krakowa z Wschodem* (Cracow's trade with the East), and the writings of Dąbrowski, Kolanowski, Halecki, Charewicz and Górka are among the more important works on this subject.

I

BALTIC AND EUXINE TRADE IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

TRADE IN THE VIKING ERA

The first animated contacts between the Black Sea and the Baltic appeared in early medieval times and lasted more or less from the middle of the 9th to the middle of the 11th century. Of the many European peoples who endeavoured to establish commercial relations between the Black Sea and the rest of Europe, the Vikings showed most enterprise and energy. According to A. Bugge, and H. and A. Schück, there was an important mercantile centre on the Baltic as early as in the 8th century: this was Björkö (or Birca), situated on a small island in Lake Mälär, in Sweden. These investigators suppose that this trading settlement was the point of issue for the expeditions of the Swedish Vikings to the south-east, and they find support for their surmise in the names of some settlements in Finland and in the Ukraine, for there is a Björkö on the Gulf of Finland and a Berezany at the mouth of the Dnieper. They take this affinity as evidence that Swedish Björkö served as a model for the organization set up by the Vikings, but this theory would not appear to be very well grounded.

The great inland waterways were used by the Vikings who penetrated into the heart of present-day Russia and Ukraine, and reached the Black Sea. Scandinavian historians affirm that this advance towards the south-east was conducted according to a set plan directed by the rulers of Svealand. But this supposition likewise appears to be highly problematical, since it is improbable that the rulers of such a small realm, and one constantly harrassed by warlike neighbours, could have developed such far-reaching and comprehensive plans. It is much more likely that various small companies of warriors effected the conquest of the Russian and Ukrainian lands on their own initiative; they proceeded along the most convenient routes, occupied the richer districts and founded settlements at the most important economic, strategical and political points. It is, therefore, much more probable that the internal logic of conquest rather than any previously conceived plan, was the decisive factor at work in this case.

The chief inland line of communication from the Baltic to the south led from the Gulf of Finland, along

the Neva and Lake Volkhov, to Novgorod, thence to the Dnieper, along that river to Kiev, and by land to the Crimea and Kherson. There the Vikings embarked and so reached Miklagård (the Great City), as the Vikings called Constantinople, which so strongly attracted them with its power and fabulous riches. There was another route which branched off at Novgorod and ran to the Volga, towards Itil and Bulgar, thence by the Caspian Sea to Persia and the other Asiatic countries. The third route ran from Novgorod to the sources of the Don, and down that river to the Sea of Azov.

In time, such townships as Rostow and Kiev were founded by the Vikings, who forced the subjected native population to pay regular tribute in kind. According to Rostovtsev and Pokrovsky, the stocks of merchandise thus accumulated served as the basis of a lively barter trade with the suppliers of oriental produce. In addition, however, goods of western European and Baltic provenance were transported overland and disposed of in the East. The Norsemen kept northern Europe supplied with the produce of the East, as witness the numerous articles of Byzantine and Arabian origin found in the Baltic region. The chief centres of this trade were Kiev, Itil and Bulgar, where Greek, Arabian and Persian merchants traded with their Slavonic and Scandinavian colleagues; it was there that the delicate fabrics, spices, essential oils and the other valuable goods of the Orient and Near East were exchanged for furs, wax, certain metals, and slaves. At times, traders from Kherson or from Asia Minor penetrated farther inland, whilst the Varegian boats appeared on the waters of the Bosphorus. The Vikings did not always come to Constantinople as merchants: many of them made the journey especially to enlist in the Varangian Guard. The Russ dukes, Oleg and Sviatoslav, made an unsuccessful attempt to subject Constantinople in the year 859 and again in 907, but more amicable relations were established soon after. The first Russo-Byzantine treaty of commerce was concluded in 912, and after the conversion to Christianity of Vladimir the Great, the ties between Russia and Byzantium became much closer and relations more intimate.

DECLINE OF RUSSIAN TRADE WITH THE EAST

The conquest of the Black Sea region by the Piechengy and the Polovtsy in the 11th and 12th centuries caused a radical change in the situation. The invasion of the nomads virtually stopped communication between northern Europe and the Eastern Empire. Solovyev, Kliuchevsky and Pirenne consider that the incursions of the Turanian peoples caused an interruption in commercial relations between north-eastern Europe and the Near East which lasted for many centuries: they certainly plunged the Russian lands into

barbarism and cut them off from the sources of their Byzantine civilization. Rostovtsev and Pokrovsky, however, point to the influence of other factors. They surmise that the trade of the Russian towns with the Near East had been chiefly based on the products exacted as tribute from the subjected rural population, and that the country had, as a result, been so impoverished by many centuries of this practice that trade was already dying out, in the 12th century, owing to the insufficient supply of goods. To-day it is difficult to decide which of these views is more in accordance with the facts: in any case, the point with which the present paper deals is the decline in this trade as having been the cause of a rupture in the economic relations between the Baltic region and the Greco-Byzantine and Turanian lands. This was of enormous significance, as from that time the vast stretches of eastern Europe lost their great importance to the economic life of the Middle Ages, and commercial intercourse between western Europe and the Near East was maintained through the intermediary of quite other countries and trade routes.

BALTIC TRADE IN THE 11th AND 12th CENTURIES

In the meantime, far-reaching changes also occurred on the Baltic. Björkö was pillaged and burned to the ground by the Norwegians c. 1000; the old Swedish emporium never recovered from the disaster, and Sigtuna, also situated on Lake Mälär, supplanted it and throughout the 11th and 12th centuries remained one of the most important ports of call for the transport of oriental goods to the Danish city of Heidebu. Swedish merchants were not the only traders who proceeded to Denmark in pursuit of their calling: the chronicles also mention merchants from Novgorod who journeyed to Jutland. At this period, the merchants of Gottland began to play a more and more important rôle in Baltic trade. Their island was exceptionally well situated for international trade, and it became the chief centre for northern commerce during the 12th and 13th centuries, especially after the ruin of Sigtuna by a pirate raid in 1187. The Gottlanders went as far afield as Novgorod, and we know that they built a church there in 1156. They later established their 'factories' and warehouses (*Götenhof*) in that city—a move of the utmost value to them, as Novgorod was at that time the chief emporium for north Russian trade. Valuable furs, forest and agricultural products, and metals from the Urals were bought and sold, as were also oriental goods, for the city maintained relations with the Asiatic countries. It is difficult to state how far the Gottland merchants contributed to restore commercial relations with the Black Sea lands, whose economic life was, for that matter, then passing through a period of decline. The sparse source-material available contains no clue which might elucidate this point.

II

THE HANSEATIC PERIOD

THE HANSA IN BALTIC TRADE

Visby, the capital of Gottland, was undoubtedly the most important mercantile centre on the Baltic in the first half of the 13th century, but this period of great prosperity was not of long duration. Thanks to the zealous support of the Counts of Saxony, Lübeck began to assume greater and greater importance. The merchants of Lübeck had begun to trade with Gottland during the 12th century, and some of them even settled on the island. A hundred years later, the Baltic littoral was again inundated by a wave of German immigration: Riga and many other towns in Livonia and Prussia were founded; Danzig and Stockholm received large contingents of German inhabitants; even distant Finland saw the arrival of numbers of immigrants from northern Germany. This tide of immigration was conducted under the aegis of Lübeck, and Rörig considers that the process of settlement was entirely subordinated to the economic interests of that city as the headquarters of the Hanseatic League. The new towns at first modelled their laws and organization on those current in Lübeck; it was only later that Magdeburg law gained the ascendancy, a change which was accompanied by a gradual, but steady enfeeblement of Lübeck influence on the Baltic. In contradistinction to the great Italian City-states, Lübeck failed to maintain its hegemony over the trading settlements founded by its citizens. Very soon after their foundation, the Prussian and Livonian towns broke away and assumed independent status, which they were able to do thanks largely to the support given them by both the great German knightly Orders.

Towards the end of the 13th century, the Lübeckers strove to turn to account their predominant position on the Baltic by penetrating into the interior of eastern Europe. They secured a charter from Ladislas the Short of Poland in 1298, whereby they were authorized to settle and trade in Poland. They were presumably less interested in these prerogatives than in the possibility of entering into economic relations with Hungary, who at that period exported copper. It is not unlikely that they also expected to establish commercial relations with the Black Sea regions, which were again rising to importance as centres of international trade in the Near East. Which of these objectives the Hanseatic League had most at heart, it is not possible to determine, but in both cases the attainment of transit rights through Poland was an essential condition of success.

The Lübeckers soon abandoned this plan, however, and the Toruń merchants then decided to adopt it. Casimir the Great of Poland granted them the right of

unrestricted trade in all Poland and in Red Ruthenia, which he had just annexed. Great economic possibilities now awaited the burghers of Toruń: they aimed consistently at the organization of commerce so that the produce of northern Europe could be exchanged for oriental goods brought in from the Crimea, then partially in the hands of the Genoese merchants. Toruń's success in this venture was, however, entirely dependent on the attitude taken up by Poland.

ITALIAN SETTLEMENTS ON THE EUXINE

The establishment of a great Mongol empire stretching from the eastern frontier of Poland to the shores of the Pacific Ocean had an enormous influence upon the economic development of the world. The Khans maintained model conditions of law and order on the routes leading through their territories, and so helped to set up and stabilize direct economic relations between Europe, Central Asia and the Far East. The Venetian and Genoese merchants had traded far within the interior of the Tartar lands as early as the 13th century, and the Khans extended every facility to the enterprising Italians, one of whom was Marco Polo. The Crimea served as the gateway for European trade with Asia. Venetians had journeyed to Soldaia, on the south coast of the peninsula, during the times of the Latin Empire. Genoese and Venetian merchants settled at Tanais, a thriving commercial centre at the mouth of the Don. Somewhat later the Pisa merchants founded Porto Pisano (Siniavka) on the same river, but rather nearer the Sea of Azov.

Controversy has been rife regarding the beginnings of Genoese settlement in the Crimea. Canale, basing his work on the misleading assertions of Bohush-Sietshentsevich, stated that these settlements were founded during the first Crusade. This was disproved by Heyd, who, on the basis of Byzantine source-material, demonstrated that Kaffa (on the site of ancient Theodosia and of the modern Feodosia) was founded as late as 1266 on the strength of a charter granted to the Genoese by Mangu-Khan. The result of this was that Genoa became paramount in Crimean trade, the more so since the Venetians had left the peninsula after the fall of the Latin Empire. It is true that the Venetian merchants returned to Tanais later on, but their Genoese rivals had established themselves too firmly to lose their leading position in the Black Sea trade. Tanais initially played a most important rôle in trade with the East, since it was the terminal point of the direct route leading from Central Asia and Cathay. The Italians came to Tanais to buy oriental goods (chiefly fabrics, silks, and spices), which were

then transported by sea to Constantinople, Italy and western Europe. According to Barbaro,¹ at least four to six Venetian galleys came to Tanais every year, apart from the Genoese merchantmen which also touched at that port. Those who traded with Tanais primarily used maritime communication; the overland route through Red Ruthenia and Poland to western Europe and Italy was much less popular owing to the hazards of travel. None the less, some of the Ruthenian and Polish towns, particularly Włodzimierz Wołyński (Vladimir Volynski) and Lwów, owe their rapid development in the middle of the 14th century to their trade with the East.

There is much more information to hand regarding the Genoese settlements. Mention has already been made of Kaffa. There were also trading posts at Constantinople and at Pera, so that the Genoese could at one time dream of attaining hegemony over the whole of the Black Sea trade. They gained a foothold in many important ports on the Black Sea, and strove to concentrate the trade between the eastern and the western world in their own hands as middlemen. This was quite a feasible plan, as most of the Asiatic exports to Europe passed through Astrakhan and the Crimea, and not via Asia Minor and Syria as was the case in the 15th century. Tanais was, of course, a danger to these far-reaching plans, but the Venetian merchants there were forced to share their authority and influence with the Genoese traders. Kaffa became an important city inhabited by a cosmopolitan population chiefly composed of Italians, Greeks, Armenians and Tartars. Amongst this medley of peoples there were many Poles, Ruthenians and Wallachians who served in the garrison or occupied minor posts in the administration.²

Kaffa was essentially a commercial centre. Slaves were exported thence to Egypt and to Italy, and although Constantinople was the chief market for Crimean foodstuffs, some corn and fish were also sent to Italy. Silks, spices and other oriental goods occupied a subordinate position in Genoese export from the Crimea. The trade was almost exclusively maritime, but the land route to Italy (through the Ukraine, Poland, Silesia, Bohemia and Austria) was also utilized to some extent, and this helped to develop the economic life of the transit countries, and hence of Poland, too. The Armenians showed the greatest enterprise in this overland trade; many of them lived in Kaffa, Lwów and in a number of other south-eastern European cities. They brought silk and spices to Lwów chiefly from Kaffa, Trabzon (Trebizond) and Sinop. Their chief purchases in Lwów were English, Flemish and German woollens, sold there by merchants from Poland,

Silesia and Toruń. The trade in oriental products and woollens on the Kaffa, Cetatea Alba (Akkerman) and Lwów route was primarily in the hands of the Armenians, who in time became the chief traders between the countries of the Black Sea and Lwów. They encountered the rivalry of other nations (Poles, Lwów and Crimean Jews, and Germans) but these could not successfully compete with them. There were several reasons for this, but among the chief ones was that the Polish and Prussian merchants were hampered by the great struggle between Poland and the Teutonic Order. It was the same factor which inhibited commodity exchange between the Black Sea and the Baltic countries, although this had at first given every promise of remarkable development.

Tanais and Kaffa were both sacked and destroyed by Tamerlane in 1391. The latter was soon rebuilt and regained its former significance, but the prosperity of Tanais never returned. The invasion severed its contacts with the East, because the ancient trade route from the Don country through Turkestan to Cathay was no longer available. This was, of course, a blow for Kaffa too, but the merchants of that town had long ago been buying oriental goods in Trabzon and in other ports on the south coast of the Black Sea. Nevertheless the chief commercial centres in trade with the East were shifted to Syria and Alexandria; Tanais was deserted and Kaffa had to be content with the rôle of the chief supplier of slaves and of Crimean agricultural produce.

THE STRUGGLE FOR ACCESS TO THE BLACK SEA

The great development of the Black Sea trade in the 13th and 14th centuries attracted the attention of the merchants of northern Europe and encouraged them to make expeditions to 'the lands of Tartary'. Mention has already been of Lübeck's unsuccessful attempt to secure passage through Poland to Hungary and the East. The Toruń merchants had much better chances since, thanks to the support of Casimir the Great, they established contact with Lwów and Włodzimierz Wołyński, whence they had an open way to Tanais and Kaffa. But Casimir soon realized how his revenues would grow and how much his subjects would gain if Polish merchants could become the only middlemen in trade between the Baltic and the Black Sea. The King inaugurated a new policy in 1352, his intention being to transform Cracow and, to some extent, Lwów, into great mercantile centres serving both East and West. He forbade foreigners to use the trade routes passing through his realm to Hungary and the Black Sea, and when the Breslau merchants complained, he stated that

¹ Ramusio: *Navigazioni e Viaggi*, Vol. II, p. 97.

² Massaria Caphe: *Archivio di Stato*, Genoa.

he had conquered Ruthenia solely in order to enable his subjects to benefit by the route leading through the newly annexed territory. From that time onwards, only the merchants of Cracow and Lwów were to import goods from Tartary and sell them to foreign traders visiting these cities, or export them to western countries.

This ambitious plan failed, however, and the King finally abandoned it in 1354, the more willingly since the Prussian merchants had secured the aid of the Teutonic Order in pushing through Lithuanian territory to the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. From this time, too, dates the fierce competition between Cracow and Toruń for access to Hungary and Ruthenia. Both sides applied the principles of staple trade; they retaliated by barring each other from penetrating areas beyond those normally served, etc. One of the most interesting episodes in this conflict took place in 1390-91: Ladislas Jagiello, who was then at loggerheads with the Teutonic Knights, expelled the subjects of the Order from his kingdom and simultaneously concluded an agreement with Boguslas, Duke of West Pomerania, in respect of transit rights for a new trade route to the Baltic. This line of communication — the 'Flanders road', as it was called — branched off at Łęczycza from the old route leading from Cracow to Toruń, and ran along the Warta and Oder to the West Pomeranian ports of Stralsund, Stettin, Greifswald, Anklam and Rügenwalde. The object of this new departure was to enable the Polish merchants to export Polish, Hungarian and oriental goods to Bruges without the necessity of passing through Toruń, where staple laws were enforced in restraint of trade. The new route, however, was found in practice to be too long and inconvenient a line of communication, and to the end of the Middle Ages, Poland made no further serious effort to participate as a middleman in the trade between the Levant and western Europe.

The wars between Poland and the Teutonic Order in the 15th century hindered the former's communication with the Baltic countries. Toruń was cut off from its natural hinterland for many years, and its importance as a trading centre declined to such an extent that it finally withdrew altogether from international commerce. In later times, it was supplanted by Danzig, which very soon acquired a virtual monopoly for the export of Polish corn and forest products to England and the Netherlands. But these were not the only profound changes taking place on the Baltic at that epoch. Lübeck, with the Hanseatic League, lost its predominant position in Baltic trade during the second half of the 15th century and was superseded by the English and the Dutch. A lack of foodstuffs and of timber was felt in England and the Netherlands at that time, and these countries therefore imported commodi-

ties direct from the Baltic countries and re-exported oriental goods to that region. This was a very serious blow to the direct trade between the Baltic and the Black Sea, the more so since the English and Dutch satisfied their needs in the way of oriental goods in Bruges, Antwerp, Amsterdam and London, which were in turn kept supplied by the Italian merchants, the western European merchant-mariners preferring not to risk the inconvenient and costly voyage to the Crimea. The trade between the Black Sea and the Baltic was already rapidly declining, and the era of the great discoveries was imminent, with all the enormous changes which they wrought in the direction and significance of trade routes.

DECLINE OF THE BLACK SEA TRADE

During the second half of the 15th century, trade with the Black Sea region entered upon a period of decline. The disintegration of the Khanate of Kipchak and the rapid advance of the Turks in Asia Minor and the Balkans brought about an entirely new situation. The Turks occupied Salonika in 1430, and began to build up their naval power, although at first they were no match for the Venetians and the Genoese. The chief object of the Turks was to capture Constantinople, which vainly tried to find allies in western Europe. Venice endeavoured to support the moribund Empire, but could do nothing decisive, as its forces were preoccupied with conflicts in Italy itself. Genoa, weakened by civil wars, did everything, possible to conciliate the Sultans, and to avoid their enmity. Every attempt at a crusade against the Turks under these conditions was foredoomed to failure. The catastrophic outcome of the Battle of Varna (1444), largely due to the defection of the Genoese, marked the decisive triumph of Islam over Byzantium. Constantinople, unsupported by the Christian world, fell in 1453. The Venetian merchants suffered enormous losses. The Genoese population of Pera, believing the promises of Mohammed II that he would respect their ancient rights and privileges, remained neutral during the siege. Their hopes, however, were doomed to disappointment: when the capital of the Greek Empire fell, the Sultan imposed his authority on the Italian merchants, and forced them to pay tribute and to demolish part of their fortifications. The main trade route joining the Black Sea with the western world was now under the absolute control of the Turks, and the Sultan soon found means of turning this advantage to political and financial account. Pera rapidly declined in importance, and the chief centre of Genoese trade in the Near East was soon after transferred to the island of Chios.

In the case of Venice, trade with the countries of the Black Sea ceased to play any rôle in its economic life after the fall of Constantinople. True, the Senate

endeavoured in 1459 to reform the state of affairs in Tanais, remembering that *viagium Tanae erat unum ex principalioribus viaggiis et utilioribus*,³ but their action yielded no results worthy of mention.

The Genoese settlements in the Crimea were in a rather better position, but from 1450 onwards they were also forced to pay tribute to the Sultan; for the time being, they were neither oppressed nor attacked, the Sultan turning the whole force of his strength against the Hungarians and the Morean Greeks. He kept Kaffa in check by means of an alliance with Hadji-Ghirey, the first Khan of the Crimean Tartars, and this understanding was an ever present menace which kept the merchants in constant fear of invasion. The population began to leave Kaffa, and trade soon dwindled away entirely. The Bank of St. George, which had governed the Crimean settlements since 1453, was most unwilling to spend money on their maintenance: corruption began to spread like wild-fire, and the morale of the population, under the influence of economic failures and political disasters, sank to a low ebb.

In 1461, Mohammed II occupied the whole of the south coast of the Black Sea (including Trabzon), and so inflicted another heavy blow at Crimean trade with the East. It is even possible that the Sultan also intended to seize the Crimea at the same time, but a war with Uzun-Hassan, the Turkoman ruler of Persia, caused him to abandon this plan for a while. Two years later (1463), the outbreak of the great war with Venice turned the Sultan's attention to a different quarter.

The war between the Sublime Porte and Venice gave the Genoese merchant communities in the Crimea a sorely needed breathing space. Not wishing to force the Genoese into the arms of Venice, the Sultan ceased to harass them. Genoa, on its part, prized its trade with the East and strove at all costs to remain on a peaceful footing with Turkey. Genoa made only a mere pretence of preparing for the crusade proclaimed by Pope Pius II, and in reality kept Turkey supplied with munitions of war and other goods in keen competition with the merchants of Florence and of Arcona. The result was that the economic situation of Kaffa improved vastly. It is true that the Turkish garrison in the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles greatly hindered maritime communication with Italy, but this was largely nullified by greater use being made of the overland route from Cetatea Alba (Akkerman), at the mouth of the Dniester, thence through Hungary or through Poland, Silesia, Bohemia to Germany, Austria or Italy. According to the state archives of Genoa, merchants of that city passed through Lwów and Cracow with slaves and goods, and concluded commercial agreements with the inhabitants of the Polish towns upon their route.

This could not but attract the attention of Polish merchants to trade with the East, the more so that the Genoese settlements in the Crimea maintained the best of relations with Poland; they had, in fact, recognized her suzerainty in 1462, in order to checkmate Turkey and Hadji-Ghirey, who was then the ally of Casimir IV of Poland.

It is no easy matter to depict the state of trade between the Baltic and the Black Sea at this period. The Genoese had lost all interest in it, particularly because they received their goods of western European manufacture from Flanders, England and the Netherlands direct. But it can be supposed, with a high degree of probability, that the Cracow and Lwów merchants sent Polish and other merchandise to Kaffa through the intermediary of their colleagues in Cetatea Alba. Their trade with the Baltic countries, however, was seriously hindered by the Thirteen Years War between Poland and the Teutonic Order, which was concluded only in 1466 by the Peace of Toruń.

The situation of Kaffa deteriorated greatly after 1471. Mohammed II, flushed with his victory over the Venetians and by the conquest of Euboea, forced Kaffa to pay a much larger tribute, and in 1475 concluded an understanding with the Tartar murzas in rebellion against the Khan Mengli-Ghirey, the ally of the Genoese merchants in the Crimea. The Sultan's chief aim at that time was, however, the conquest of Moldavia and the subjection of Kaffa was only a tactical move designed to facilitate the seizure of Cetatea Alba with its rich hinterland. Mohammed fully realized the enormous economic and political advantages he would gain by securing Turkish hegemony over the whole Black Sea; the plan outlined above offered him every opportunity of attaining this end. The Turkish fleet appeared before Kaffa on June 1, 1475, and the town capitulated five days later, virtually without firing a shot. The same fate overtook Soldaia, Tanais and the other trading settlements on the Crimean and Azov coasts. Henceforth, only Cetatea Alba and Chilia maintained economic relations with the East, but these towns were finally forced to submit to the victorious forces of Bayezid II in 1484. The Black Sea trade dwindled away to vanishing point, and only partially regained its former volume and significance at a much later epoch, with the final stabilization of Turkish hegemony on the waters and coasts of the Black Sea, and when amicable relations between Poland and the Sublime Porte made it possible to restore the system of international commodity exchange upon these ancient trade routes.

CONCLUSION

The above outline of commerce between the Baltic and the Black Sea regions makes it possible to

³ Senato Mar. I. R, folio 169, Venetian State Archives.

arrive at the following conclusions. First of all, it is obvious that the Baltic trade and the Black Sea trade represented two distinct and separate economic entities. The most animated relations between the two systems existed during the Varegian era, when the inhabitants of northern Europe and the merchants of the Orient and the Near East merchants sought economic collaboration upon the trade routes of the Baltic-Euxine land-bridge. These commercial relations shrank towards the middle of the 12th century, but acquired fresh force a hundred years later, although in rather changed form. Baltic trade in the 14th and 15th centuries was an integral part of the Hanseatic trade, and the Black Sea trade of the Levant system. The Italians occupied a predominant position in the Black Sea trade and were interested rather in attaining contacts with Central Asia than in developing trade with the Baltic countries. This caused the Prussian and Polish merchants to restore direct communication with the centres of

oriental trade on the Black Sea. The keen competition between Cracow and Toruń, and the wars between Poland and the Teutonic Order, made it difficult for the Poles and Prussians to make the fullest and best use of their favourable geographical location: by the time that these conditions were replaced by more normal and peaceful ones at the mouth of the Vistula, fundamental changes were already taking place in the structure of Baltic trade, and the period of decline of the Black Sea trade had already commenced. The shifting of the great trade routes of the world which accompanied the era of discoveries in the 15th century would in any case have been fatal to the development of commercial relations between the Baltic and the Black Sea. None the less, it is evident that Poland's policy was not without effect upon the shaping of commodity exchange between the two seas, whilst this transit trade contributed to arouse the economic energy of the Polish burghers during the Middle Ages.

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