

## ***The Scandinavians in Poland:* a re-evaluation of perceptions of the Vikings<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Resumo**

O presente artigo visa analisar as percepções dos vikings na Polônia em três níveis. As representações dos Vikings são primeiro desenvolvidas dentro do espectro da história e da identidade polonesa contemporâneas. Depois, através de um breve balanço historiográfico e arqueológico da situação geopolítica da Era Viking na Polônia. E finalmente, os Vikings são abordados através do imaginário geral, mais apresentado pelas coleções de museus e reconstruções históricas na Polônia.

Palavras-chave: Redes de Identidades Vikings; Historiografia Polonesa; Turismo de Patrimônio Viking

### **Abstract**

The present essay intends to analyse the perceptions of the Vikings in Poland following three levels. The Viking's representations are first developed under the scope of contemporary Polish history and identity. Then through a quick historiographical and archaeological overview of the geopolitical situation of Viking Age Poland. Finally, the Vikings are approached through the general imaginary, mostly presented by museum collections and historical reconstructions in Poland.

Keywords: Viking identities network; Polish historiography; Viking heritage tourism

Mentioning Poland in a publication dealing with Viking identities, diasporas and reception might be surprising. Even if western scholars are becoming more acquainted with the Scandinavian presence in some Eastern European countries like Russia, Poland is still looked upon as having a poor relation in Viking Age studies. Poland does not appear in works presenting the Viking Oecumene. The eastern world of the Vikings is seen mainly as the road from the Varangians to the Greeks and the Baltic trade area. Even if the latter is directly connected to Poland through the towns of Wolin and Truso, it is rare to find comment on any link with the early medieval Polish state.

Nevertheless, Polish scholars are not impervious to debates about Viking identities. In 2004, the publication of *Viking Rus*, a synthesis on the Scandinavian presence in Eastern Europe during the Viking Age, by the Polish archaeologist Duczko moved the enthusiasm of both researchers and a wider audience in Poland. Since then the Vikings have turned into a fashionable subject, now accessible through books, museums, festivals and re-enactment.<sup>2</sup>

This enthusiasm raises new questions for scholars who plan to study the Vikings in Poland. We cannot ignore the fact that the historical situation of Poland has been closely tied up with that of other Slavonic countries but it might be interesting to see if the contemporary Polish historiography can be understood apart from the older Soviet historiography. If questions concerning the Viking Age in Russia find their roots in the so-called Norman debate, it is worth testing the hypothesis that Poland might defy this pattern. First we need to present the Normanist controversy in historiography and try to determine the extent to which the Polish historiography was concerned with it. With this broader context established, I will try to present a view of the Scandinavian presence in Poland during the Viking Age based both on historical and archaeological evidence. I will try to see assess the kinds of people these Scandinavians were and their relations with the Polish 'tribes'. The analysis will focus first on the early Polish state of the Piast located in the hinterland of Poland and then on the Baltic coast. Finally, in order to begin to understand the relationships between academic scholarship and the wider public, I will analyze how popular culture perceives the Vikings in Poland through Viking heritage tourism. How deep is the gap between the *public* and the scholars? Promoted mostly by museums, theme-parks and festivals is this presentation of the Vikings close to historiography?

## **I. The place of Poland in the Norman debate**

### **A short presentation of the debate: Klein and Pritsak**

The Normanist/anti-Normanist controversy is an old problem which dates back to mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. It hinges around what Stender-Petersen identified as "the problem of the part played by the Nordic-Scandinavian ethnic element in the history of the political and cultural creation and early development of the ancient Russian State" (Stender-Petersen 1953: 5). The arguments of the Normanists were defined by Klein, a Soviet scholar in the mid-1960s:

1. The coming of Normans to Ancient East-Slavic area;
2. Foundation of Kiev's dynasty of Normans;
3. Norman origin of the name *Rus*';
4. Influence of Normans on the First East-Slavic state;
5. Normans as creators of the First East-Slavic state

6. Racial superiority of Normans as cause of their successes;
7. Political influences for the contemporary situation: Scandinavian ‘geniuses’ are the proper bosses; Slaves must be subordinates (Duczko 2004: 4; Klein 1999: 91).

On the other hand, the arguments of the anti-Normanists were conceptualized by Pritsak a western scholar in the beginning of the 1980s:

1. Slavic origin of the name *Rus*’;
2. No tribe or nation called Rus’ in Scandinavia;
3. In the episode of Ingelheim in 839 related in the *Annales Bertiani*, there is no proof that the Rus’ were Swedes. The Scandinavians were just “men of Rus’ descent”;
4. In his *Book of Roads and Kingdoms* (*Kitab al Masalik Wa “L-Mamalik”*) written around 849, Ibn Khurdadbeh calls the Rus’ a “tribe of the Slavs”;
5. The archaeological material indicates that few Scandinavians were present in Eastern Europe (Pritsak 1981).

So these different arguments were the origin of divisions and quarrels among the scholars for a long period. The debate found echoes in contemporary political and ideological excesses. Nevertheless it had the merit of leading to a growth in studies of the Viking Age and was a part of the Viking reception (Westrate 2007).

### **The controversy in the Polish historiography**

During most of the twentieth century, with the rise of the Soviet Union and of the communist period, the official line regarding the controversy in Poland was close to the ideas put forward by Soviet scholars. However it would be too simplistic to suppose all Polish scholars had ‘anti-Normanists’ views. Yet due to the political and ideological context their ideas were linked to the majority of the Soviet scholars’. But the specificity of Polish historiography produced a variation in its comprehension of the Viking phenomenon. They admitted the presence of Scandinavians in Eastern Europe as foreign elements who were involved in both mercantile and military functions. In this case the outline was similar to the rest of the Scandinavian Vikings in the East. They were either merchants in important trade places, or served as mercenaries for the powerful leaders of the Slavonic tribes like the Varangian Guard did in Kiev and in Byzantium or even bore this duality at the same time. These Scandinavians did not have any political functions among the Slavonic tribes of Poland and their presence had no relationship to the emergence of the Polish state under the Piast dynasty from 960 to 1198 (Urbanczyk 2005: 140-41). The historian Lowmianski was the main defender of this theory which endured wide support for almost three decades. According to Lowmianski, the emergence of the medieval state must be approached in national terms (Lowmianski 1960-1985). The national-democratic ideology derived from nineteenth-century ideas of the “nation state” is recognizable in such statements. In this notion of the early state formation, there is no place for a possible political role played by foreigners, like the Scandinavians.

Despite many changes in the twentieth-century’s geopolitical scene and the fall of Soviet Union in 1989-1990, the patriotic-nationalistic sentiments are still present in Polish historiography but often hidden within discussions of ethnicity<sup>3</sup>. Post-1990, ethnicity became one of the most important fields of research in Polish archaeology. Scholars adopted two different theoretical approaches towards the definition of ethnicity in general and towards the ethnogenesis of the Slavs in particular. On the one hand we have the so-called “autochthonic” school represented by Godlowski, Kostrzewski,

Parczewski, Piontek and Kurnatowska. It claims a genetic approach based on the fact that the ethnicity of an individual is a feature of given at birth. Ethnicity is very stable; it does not change during the lifetime of an individual. Primordial attachments can be perceived as the main factor that influences or even creates the social relationships within groups. On the other hand the “allochthonous” school, represented by Mamzer and Urbanczyk uses an “instrumental approach”, more akin to mainstream western European scholarship of the late twentieth century. The main stress here is put on the perception of one's group and self. Ethnicity appears to be the result of social negotiations. It seems to be very flexible because it depends on the economic and political situation. It can be formed and transformed all the time (Ciesielska 2005: 143-53). These two approaches show the importance of a hypothetical role played by an exogenous element in the ethnogenesis of the Slavs. Then the function of the Scandinavians in the development of the early Polish state can bear a new meaning as part of a Polish ethnicity. The main points of the Norman debate concerned the identity of the ethnic groups who met in Eastern Europe and their possible influences on state formations.

Aside from these approaches, the archaeologist Zak offers a kind of synthesis of both “genetic” and “instrumental” approaches. Indeed he perceives ethnicity as a phenomenon which consists in social relationships created within local societies, which are determined not only by biological factors but also by political and economic ones. His position hinges mainly on the mercantile function of the Scandinavians As principal merchants in the Polish territories; they open new trading connections, mainly around the Baltic coastline and the Polish rivers. In contrast, the archaeologist Buko published a huge work on the early Polish state. He seems less concerned with the questions of ethnicity and focuses on artefacts and buildings patterns to identify the formation of the early Polish state which he sees as mostly Slavic with a very little foreign influence (Buko 2007). The archaeologist Duczko has performed research using contemporary information, and takes an interesting position. He studied the Viking Age in Scandinavia and is well aware of the Viking phenomenon in the East. He wrote a major synthesis concerning the role played by the Scandinavians in the development of early Russia excluding the Norman debate. His opinions towards the size and long-term Scandinavian influence in Poland remain cautious (Duczko 2004).<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand some researchers pushed aside the previous theories of Lowmianski and tried to see the Scandinavian presence in Poland as substantial. The new discourse concerns rather the proportion of the Slavic or Scandinavian element in the major sites of the Pomeranian region along the Baltic coast and not the absolute presence or absence of Scandinavian influence (Bogacki & Franz 2007). Some recent archaeological finds add to this coastal perspective a more inland one that was hitherto accepted. The archaeologist Chudziak is currently the major proponent of the idea of a Scandinavian presence in the Piast Poland (Chudziak 2004).

## **II. The Scandinavian presence in Poland: a survey**

As highlighted above, the fall of the Soviet Union and the independence of Poland led to another era of research into the Scandinavian presence in Poland. If the Normanist debate has not been revived contrary to what happened in Russia, the influence of researchers like Lowmianski or Zak, who were close to the anti-Normanist theories, is still alive in Polish research. Ethnicity and the question of identity bore a new function for a Polish audience who, perhaps as a reaction towards the Soviet

Union, started to look to Europe. This might be the origin of the increasing fashionability of the Vikings. The recent reinvigoration of interest in Viking Age studies rose first in scholarly research but needs to be understood in the context of debates about Polish ethnicity. If scholars are not divided about the presence of the Scandinavians in the Polish hinterland they are involved in a controversy about two aspects of this presence: the identity of the Piast dynasty and the role played by the Scandinavians warriors in the emergence of the early Polish state. The question of the Scandinavians around the Baltic coast was more studied the last years and is more in line with the general Viking Oecumene (Melnikova 1996: 3-18).

### **A dynasty of foreign or local origin?**

The first argument is based on this question: was the Piast dynasty, who established the first Polish state, of foreign or local origin? The possible scenario of the ethnogenesis of Poland inherits from a kernel of tradition: the Wenskus model. It supposes that a small core of warriors preserved the ethnic memories of a people. Under favourable circumstances like the leadership of a successful warrior king, these memories could expand quickly (Pohl 2004: 24). The Polish debate concerning the Wenskus model of ethnogenesis is based on the ethnicity of the Piast.

The Normanist vision would assume that the Piast established a foreign dynasty of rulers among the Slavonic tribes. They suppose here the well-known state-building pattern of the Kievan Rus' within early medieval Poland. In this theory the Piast would mirror the Scandinavian Rurikids as state builders: an exogenous group of rulers establishing their domination over the endogenous group composed of divided Slavonic tribes (Ketrzynski 1950: 16). The obscure origin of the Piast dynasty represents the main *raison d'être* behind this possible Scandinavian *origo gentis*. This thesis is built up on various arguments picked at random, of which the main evidence is a written source called the *Dagome iudex*. Only a copy from 1080 has survived, in the form of a summary relating events which occurred in 991. In this text, Mieszko I, the ruler or "judge" (Lat: *iudex*) of Poland is given what seems to be a Scandinavian name: "Dagome" (ON: *dagr*), similar to other linguistic constructs, like king Dagobert of France (Kurbis 1962: 394-95).

In reaction to these positions, other scholars who can be called "anti-Normanists" and who represent the main school of Polish historiography propose other explanations. First, they contest the accuracy of the *Dagome iudex* and the interpretation made by the previous scholars. The name Dagome might come from an error of transcription; we are supposed to read "*ego Mesco dux*" (I duke Mieszko) instead of "*Dagome iudex*". Moreover Lowmianski proposes that Dagome should be equated with the Christian name Mieszko, using its similarity with the Frankish name of king Dagobert. Thus the Piast dynasty is of local, Great Polish, origin (Buko 2007). To bolster this view, Buko and other scholars before him, use the evidence of another written source: *The Chronicles and Deeds of the Dukes or Princes of the Poles* by Gallus Anonymus (Maleczynski 1952). This text was written around 1113-1116 and describes in its first part the emergence of the Polish state. It is considered to be a valuable source of knowledge for the history of Poland in the 11<sup>th</sup> and early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. The names of the semi-legendary ancestors of the Piast point to the native origin of the dynasty: Piast, Ziemovit, Leszko, Ziemomysl. The historical exactitude of the local dynastic legends concerning the early Piast should show a Slavonic tradition. Mieszko and his son Boleslaw are thus considered as descendant of this unifying family and part of this tradition. Following the model of ethnogenesis presented above, the

tribe of the Polonians established itself in Great Poland with their major settlements in Gniezo and Poznan and gave rise to the Polish state under the Piast dynasty in the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century (Buko 2005: 167). Knowing that this dominance depended mainly on the military support of the first rulers, it becomes obvious that the question of the identity their retinues appear as the second point of this controversy.

### **Scandinavian warriors in the early Polish leader's retinue?**

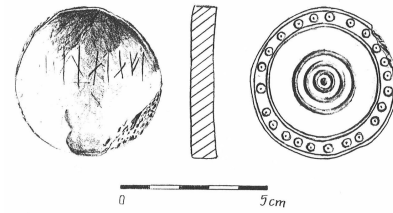
The existence of retinues or *druzhina* is well attested in the written sources. Mieszko and Boleslaw used retinues of warriors to impose their power in the Polish lands by subduing their neighbours. Yet some scholars are cautious about the retinues' ethnicity: "almost no evidence exists as to their ethnic composition. They perhaps consisted of members of tribal aristocracies and a few foreigners, mainly Scandinavians" (Shepard 2005: 285). This quote shows the difficulty to attribute an ethnic identity to this group of warriors.

Yet recent Polish views attempt to reduce the Scandinavian military role. Polish scholars contest the old Normanist view which consists to see in the Scandinavians a group of warriors and in the Slavonic people only farmers. Nowadays this "gross mistake" as Petrov labeled it some twenty years ago, also permeates archaeology. The excavations of strongholds composed of earthen and timber fortifications dating from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries show the existence of a "cultural compromise" in the building techniques. The strongholds could be seen to have their origins in both a foreign influence coming from Scandinavian through the Baltic area and in a local influence as a part of the Piast political actions (Buko 2007). Such buildings, found in many places in Poland and Northern Russia when the Scandinavian presence is attested, could signal an adaptation of these newcomers to the local conditions of the 9<sup>th</sup> century (Petrov 2005: 121-23). Polish scholars do not deny the military function of the Scandinavians but they underplay it. It seems to me that if Scandinavians had been hired for their warlike skills by local political leaders, it is possible that they shared these functions with other ethnic groups among the Slavs.

Other scholars support the hypothesis that the Scandinavians play an important military role in the conquests of Mieszko I. This argument is based upon both written and archaeological evidence. In 965 Ibrahim Ibn Yaqub, a Moorish traveller describes the princely retinue of Mieszko (Barford 2001: 8, 144). He notices a strong presence of professional warriors: "three thousands men in armour" at the ready and receiving monthly pay, "warriors of whom a hundred is equal to ten hundred of others" (Kowalski 1946: 147, 69-70). It is assumed by an extrapolation with Vladimir's Varangian retinue, that these warriors were mostly of foreign origin, i.e. Scandinavian. Yet we need to be cautious in attributing any ethnic characteristics to this retinue. Ibn Yaqub depicts later what is often supposed to have been Scandinavia, calling it the "island/peninsula of the Slavs" (*Yazirat as-Saqalab*). In the eyes of this traveller from Muslim Spain there were not many differences between a Slav and a Scandinavian (Lewicki 1949: 377-78; Duczko 2004: 22).

But curiously the hypothesis of a Scandinavian *druzhina* is reinforced by the recent archaeological discoveries. The excavations made at Ostrów Lednicki, a royal residence of the first Polish rulers mentioned by Ibn Yaqub in his diary, has so far produced many swords with Scandinavian-style hilts (Kurnatowska 2004). In Sowinski, near the princely centre of Poznan, many burial mounds of the late 10<sup>th</sup> and earlier 11<sup>th</sup> centuries offered remains of warriors with Scandinavian-style weapons, riding-gear ornaments, buckets and even silver coins. These warriors were accorded a possible Scandinavian

identity in death (Kara 1992). Not far from this area, in Kaldus, the excavations of the local cemetery revealed a significant number of Scandinavian artefacts which have been dated to the first part of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The key artefact here is a gaming piece inscribed with a runic inscription (Fig. 1). The current interpretation of the site supposes that it was a settlement of the Scandinavian troops enrolled in Boleslaw's army (Chudziak 2003).



**Figure 1: Drawing of the gaming piece from Kaldus, Poland. Reproduced with kind permission from W. Chudziak.**

The archaeological evidence can still be read as supporting the written sources for a Scandinavian presence. The retinues of the early Piast leaders were mostly composed of Scandinavian warriors. Some of them stayed in Poland as suggested by the burial mounds whether other might have sought fortune elsewhere as itinerant warriors in search of status and remuneration.

### The Scandinavians around the Baltic coast

The region of Pomerania is located along the Baltic coast, between the catchment basin of the Odra and the Vistula Rivers. It has been suggested that was inhabited by Slavic tribes, each politically independent from the Piast, but still forming one larger tribal community. The Scandinavians were in contact with the inhabitants of this area thanks to the Baltic trade and the ports of trade (*emporium*). The *emporium* are defined as places where people from different part of the Viking Oecumene met each other mainly for commercial activities. They were completely independent settlements, morphologically very different and unconnected with the local political military centres of the Piasts (Bogucki 2004: 102-03). The main problem faced by the scholars is based on the genesis of the Slavonic ports of trade and the part of the Scandinavian influence. There are three main hypotheses about their appearance (Losinski 1994).

The Slavonic 'thesis' is that the Slavs appeared in the coastal area of the Baltic Sea during the 6<sup>th</sup> century and caused the development of early urban settlements. This scenario is based on well-established tribal power structures and a good economic situation. The Slavs would use these *emporium* to import goods, increase the wealth of the area and fostered their evolution into fully urban settlements. The site of Kolobrzeg located at the mouth of the Parseta River is a good example of where this thesis might hold because it developed into an emporium early, in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Nonetheless most of the Pomeranian settlements have some interesting artefacts suggesting a hybridization of Slavic and Scandinavian cultures. The key artefact is the Netno find (Fig. 2). This object was found in the Netno Lake. It is a prestigious shaft of a spear, supposed to be of Scandinavian origin but most probably a product of Slavic-Scandinavian hybridization. So even if supporters of this Slavonic thesis reject the impact of Scandinavians in the development of the settlement they cannot ignore the



**Figure 2: right: The Netno find. Left: A spear's shaft. Available at: [http://znaleziska.org/wiki/index.php?title=Grot\\_%22ksi%C4%85%C5%BC%C4%99cy%22\\_\(N%C4%99tno\)](http://znaleziska.org/wiki/index.php?title=Grot_%22ksi%C4%85%C5%BC%C4%99cy%22_(N%C4%99tno))**

eventual cultural interaction between these ethnic groups (Chudziak 2003).

The second theory would assume an exterior interference in co-operation with the local political elite. Emporia are built as places of exchange and their inhabitants lived in organized communities composed mainly of merchants and craftsmen. This type of development is considered alien to the Slavonic model and in this case the Scandinavians would have played a role. The town of Truso in the Slavic-Prussian borderland is a representative of this model. It was excavated by the archaeologist Jagodzinski who found mostly artefacts of Scandinavian origin. Apart from the structures like a 'Viking' semi-circular rampart and a workshop, they were numbers of Arabic coins, pieces of scales, weights, weapons and pieces of metalwork from Scandinavian style (Jagodzinski 2000).

The third and most plausible theory combines the previous ones and presents the Scandinavian role as substantial. The newcomers would have developed an old local fishing settlement and changed it into a big town. This is best supported by the case of Wolin, an island closing the Szczecin bay and who is supposed to be the ancient settlement of the Vikings of Jomsborg. The written sources mention Jomsborg as a Viking emporium. In his diary Ibn Yaqub presents the inhabitants as a group of warriors "fighting with Mieszko" (Bogucki 2004: 104). Later Icelandic sources such as *The Saga of the Jomsborg Vikings* (*Jómsvíkinga saga*) reinforce the military aspect of these Vikings who controlled the waters of the southern Baltic Sea. Archaeological excavations brought up to date seven shipwrecks of Scandinavian style; the dendrochronological analyses of them indicate that they were built between 860 and 870 (Bogucki 2004: 108).

The Baltic coast of Poland was more influenced by the Scandinavian element than the rest of the Polish hinterland. These Scandinavians were not only involved in military and mercantile activities but were also taking part to the development of some early urban sites and ports of trade.

### III. The presentation of the Vikings in Poland today

We have so far examined the recent questions of Polish historiography concerning the legacy of Soviet history, the distinctive framing of the Normanist debate and the new perception of ethnicity. Then we drew up a survey about the research concerning the Scandinavian presence in Poland during the Viking Age. But research and scholarly works have a limited influence among a wider *public*. This is why we need to see at a larger scale how the Vikings are popularized nowadays in Poland. It is still the case that Viking heritage events take place mostly in Scandinavia but for the last two decades other European countries are hosting and incorporating a Viking dimension to their material. Wherever there is a Viking presence established we can see museums, theme-parks and trading fairs flourishing (Halewood & Hannam 2001: 568-69). In Poland there are many local Viking festivals – too many to analyze here – but below I analyze one significant festival and one museum exhibition explicitly representing Poland in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

#### **Poznan museum: "the world of Slavs and Vikings"**

In 2006, the museum of Poznan offered a temporary exhibition about Vikings in Poland. According to the advertisement, the exhibition was "a pretext to tell about



social structure, daily habits, customs, beliefs, way of fighting and art of people that met on Polish lands in 9<sup>th</sup> century” (Poznan 2006). It is interesting to notice how the exhibition was entitled: “the world of Slavs and Vikings” (*Świat Słowian i Wikingów*). Here, they make the common mistake to regard Vikings as a distinct ethnic group equivalent to Scandinavian and different from the Slavs in this case. The notion of ethnic group is suggested by the Polish word “people” (*ludzie*). The word *lud* means: “people who live on the same land, have common culture and language, but have no national awareness and government tradition.” Nevertheless the museum is cautious about terminology and conclusions concerning ethnic identity and the roles of the Vikings. Indeed, they reconstruct some aspects of Viking life (mainly military and religious) but based on reproduction of finds from Scandinavian museums. They seem to ignore archaeological finds from Poland found in recent decades. Moreover when it comes to the *druzhina*, they are wary to clearly identify the ethnicity of these members. They established an opposition between the basic Slavic farmer who possesses simple “Slavic” military equipment, a hunting and farmer armament composed of locally-produced and multi-purpose spear, axe and knife without sword and the professional warrior who possesses a Scandinavian equipment based on finds from Scandinavia. In this presentation of the retinue members, we are led to think that the Slavs were only farmers whereas the Scandinavians were warriors. Thus the caricature challenged by scholars like Petrov or Buko is retained. Even if this museum’s aim is to present the ethnic groups who met in Poland during the Viking Age, the result remains disappointing. Slavs and Scandinavians seemed to have lived together in the same land but the Scandinavian artefacts come from foreign excavations and museums, not from Poland. In this case the Viking specificity of Poland is drowned out by a standardization of culture. As in most European museums, we see a translation of a local phenomenon into a global one.

### **Theme-park and festival around the Vikings of Jomsborg theme: opening Poland to other countries.**

The town of Wolin known by the name Jomsborg in the Icelandic sources has developed a theme park, “the Center of the Slavs and the Vikings”. It is composed of a Viking Age village, seasonal trading fairs and markets supplemented by the activities of a Viking reenactment or “living history” society. The village is composed of various re-created structures from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries like dwelling houses and craft workshops. The managers want to give to the public a presentation of the daily life of the inhabitants of Jomsborg. The village is populated by a permanent re-enacting troop, dressed in archaeologically correct costume (Wolin 2008). In addition the village differs from a traditional museum due to its use of experimental archaeology. The public is asked to take part in the life of the park through various activities such as learning old craftsmanship, wearing historical clothes or playing historical games. These educational functions of the park allow many school visits where children are facing a living history (Wolin 2009).

The city of Wolin retains a local identity but simultaneously develops more international linkages. This is mainly thanks to the Wolin-Jomsborg-Vineta Slavonic and Viking Festival organized since 2000. The growing popularity of this international event came to its climax in 2007 with 1500 re-enactors from various countries. The festival was mainly composed of a Viking market, an occasion to present Viking Age to a wider public. It was essentially a craft fair or folk market accompanied by combat

displays, horse-riding displays and craft demonstrations. It attracts the same traders each year. The commercial dimension of the market place is also a reason for the growing number of tourists and traders. Although few traders make a living from it, many Polish craftsmen use this international event to present their work to a broader market. Most of them are well-known in the re-enactment community. Nieczarowski, for example, specializes in making helmets and facial masks or the group Tentorium which manufactures a range of replica tents (Nieczarowski 2009; Tentorium 2009). They talk up the quality and authenticity of their products as copies of actual finds or museum quality. As Halewood and Hannam noticed: “commodification is an issue that is closely tied up to the concept of authenticity” (2001, 576). Apart from the fun part of the festival the Polish archaeologist Bogacki, one of the consultants for the festival in 2007, invited around thirty-five European archaeologists and historians to an academic conference on the nautical archaeology and history of the Baltic region. The main point was to introduce these scholars to experimental archaeology and receive in return more recognition: “What kind of cut marks does a sword make on a shield? What's the life span of a thatched roof? What kind of pitch did Vikings use on their boats? How do postholes help support a structure? You can't have theory without practice this is a good way to take another look at material culture” (Curry 2007). Nevertheless most of the scholars remain impervious to these manifestations and the re-enactors' hypotheses.

### **Conclusion: Are the Vikings opening Poland to the European Union?**

The common themes of the festivals are set on the Vikings and the Slavs. In this case they separate Scandinavian ethnicity from the concept of Viking. Indeed, they argue that a Viking can be both Scandinavian and Slav. Their vision of the Viking is close to the example given by the Icelandic sagas. They use the figure of Egill Skallagrimsson to represent an ideal Viking: warrior, poet, merchant, craftsman and sailor. This position towards Vikings reflects the recent developments about ethnicity and medieval archaeology. Slavs and Scandinavians are categories invented in the post-medieval times. These categories were mainly employed by outsiders as an umbrella term for what was otherwise a very complex and diverse reality (Curta 2007). Even if one doubts the re-enactors are aware of debates about ethnicity – something this author's and Polish academics' contact with them suggests – they present the Vikings in Poland as a group composed of various ethnic groups like the Slavs and the Scandinavians. According to this, in Poland the concept of Viking can bear a new meaning of cultural hybridization. The Vikings introduced today to the *public* become holder of this double cultural heritage: Slavic and Scandinavian or in other terms Eastern European and Western European. Viking heritage tourism is closely perceived as a European phenomenon. It contributes to local economic and cultural identities but its scale makes it internationally. Thus Viking heritage is seen as a contribution to greater European integration for new countries or prospective members of the European Union (Halewood & Hannam 2001).

We examined the complex situation of Poland within the Norman debate, the new perception of ethnicity and the historical facts supporting the role of some Scandinavian elements in the early Polish state. The political situation has often shaped the historiography of the Scandinavian presence in Poland. Even if the debate is not well-known to the general Polish population the historical information learned for many decades at school or in books mainly supported an anti-Normanist ideology. In spite of an obvious Normanist position, the re-enacting festivals allow Polish people to be more

aware of Vikings and of the less-known Viking past of their country. But this presentation of the Viking can be seen as a tool that fosters a degree of European integration. These Viking heritage activities are mainly coming from strong needs to do something different from global, capitalist culture. But the growing standardization of these events becomes in fact an immanent part of this new European identity. When Poland joined the European Union in 2004 it was not because of the Vikings. Though the sharing of a common cultural identity one can trace back to the Viking Age might have made the cultural integration of Poland into the EU easier than it could have been before 1989.

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Wolin 2008 (re-enacting group): <http://www.jomsborg.pl>  
Wolin 2009 (theme park): <http://www.jomsborg-vineta.com>

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Editor’s Note : This paper was presented at the Viking Identity Network confence in Birmigham in December 2008 (VIN 3).

<sup>2</sup> I shall refer to Vikings in the same way the popular culture (re-enactment, cinema or even museum) does. I regard this term as a common noun meaning pirates sharing both a mercantile and military functions. Though these pirates have usually some association with the Scandinavian world, I will not use these terms as an ethnic denominator meaning mostly Scandinavians. Thus, the Vikings do not have to be Scandinavians, they can be anybody and in our case they can be Wends.

<sup>3</sup> Definition of ethnicity: “all those social & psychological phenomena associated with a culturally constructed group identity [...]. The concept of ethnicity focuses on the ways in which social and cultural processes intersect with one another in the identification of, and interaction between, ethnic group” (Jones 1997: xiii).

<sup>4</sup> The author of this present paper had the chance to establish a friendly correspondence with the Polish scholar Wladyslaw Duczko and this work is mostly based on reflections and considerations about Polish historiography that he kindly shared.