

SUMMARY

WROCLAW IN THE ECONOMIC SPACE OF EUROPE BETWEEN THE THIRTEENTH AND THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY: CORE OR PERIPHERY?

The expansion of the Mongol empire and the long-term economic development of Latin Europe with its climax in the 13th century entailed the emergence of intercontinental economic relations between the Far East, North Africa and Europe. The economic space of that third continent extended between two cores: Northern Italy and the Netherlands. Apart from these two cores, the rest of Europe's territory consisted of many economic zones, each of which was - in the words of H. Samsonowicz and A. Maczak - "a cluster of [more local] regions, whose economy depended on the same external factor [that is to say], on the same external market".

The present study considers the long-distance economic relations of the city of Wroclaw (Breslau in German) between the 13th and the 15th century. Wroclaw has been a center of the region of Silesia, one of the most economically advanced regions of Central Europe at this time. The self-governing city was situated at the crossroads of several trade routes extending from east to west, as well as from north to south. In the period under study, Wroclaw was ruled by the independent Polish dukes of the Piast dynasty, and, after 1327-35, associated with the Kingdom of Bohemia for almost two centuries, especially closely between 1335 and 1469, and again between 1490 and 1526. The affiliation with the Czech monarchy was tantamount to subjection to the Holy Roman Empire; although, between 1469 and 1490, the city of Wroclaw was subordinated to the king of Hungary.

The reconstruction of Wroclaw's long-distance economic relations focuses on the zones linked specifically to the North Italian core of the European economy. This part of the European economic space, which was intensively penetrated by Wroclaw merchants, embraced the area encompassing Silesia, south-western Ruthenia, Moldavia, Walachia, northern Italy, and southern and southeastern Germany.

The book concerns several major subjects.

One, developed in Chapter 1, is the primary sources and the historiography. The book is based on a wide range of published and archival primary sources. The latter include archives situated in Poland - in Wroclaw, Kraków, Lublin, and Poznan - and abroad, in Prague, Lviv, Salzburg, and Venice. The economy of the city of Wroclaw became a subject of research during the second half of the 18th century, with the work of S. B. Klose. During the 19th century, German historians in particular - H. Markgraf, K. Wutke, and M. Rauprich - but also the Polish researcher A. Mosbach, took up this subject. Investigation intensified after the publication of H. Wendt's monograph, *Schlesien unnder Orient*, in 1916. In addition to German scholars (including, among others, G. Pfeiffer and M. Scholz-Babisch), the Swiss historian H. Ammann has also greatly contributed to the field. Over the same period, several Polish medievalists who explored the economic history of the towns connected to Wrocław -

Kraków and Lwów - and who include, among others, S. Kutrzeba, J. Ptaśnik, and Ł. Charewiczowa, have helped elucidate Wrocław's long-distance economic relations. After the Second World War, the relevant studies were carried out by German and Swiss historians, especially during the 1950s and the 1960s, with a continued output by Ammann, and by several other scholars: H. C. Peyer, W. Kehn, and particularly W. von Stromer. After 1945 and throughout the 1950s, Polish medievalists, most notably K. Maleczyński, became interested in the long-distance economic relationships of Wrocław in particular. Following Maleczyński's classical study of the history of the medieval Wrocław (with massive amounts of economic evidence and interpretation), published in 1958, research on this subject virtually ceased in Poland until the end of the 1980s. The 1989 publication of the book about Wrocław's rural hinterland by the Canadian historian R. C. Hoffmann has ushered in a new series of relevant monographs, especially by M. Goliński and K. Kopiński, and of numerous case studies, both in Poland and in Germany.

The second subject, treated in Chapter 2, entails some reflections on the economic space of Europe: the different possibilities for dividing that space; the range of economic contacts established by Wrocław merchants; and the resulting network of trade routes. Following the models outlined by a significant group of Warsaw historians, the territorial range of Wrocław's economic activity is divided into five economic zones. The first, the so-called Sudeto-Carpathian zone (which included Wrocław itself) encompassed numerous regions of Central Europe: Silesia, Bohemia, Moravia, Little Poland (*Małopolska*), and most of the territories comprising the medieval Kingdom of Hungary. Second, the Black Sea zone encompassed, above all, south-western Ruthenia (including the city of Lwów), Moldavia, part of Hungarian Transylvania, Walachia. (I leave aside from this zone those territories associated with the Black Sea which were never directly reached by Wrocław merchants: the Crimean Peninsula, the Caucasus, Bulgaria, and the Byzantine empire.) The third zone embraced the southern regions of eastern Germany: Lusatia, Saxony, and Thuringia. The fourth zone, the so-called Upper-German, encompassed today's southern Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and one border region of today's France, Alsace. Finally, a crucial economic zone with which Wrocław merchants maintained long-standing economic contacts was northern Italy, with its rich and populous cities, especially Venice.

Apart from a brief description of these zones, Chapter 2 reconstructs the trade routes which were, or may have been, used both by Wrocław merchants, and by the foreign merchants who visited the city for economic reasons. Here I focus on the transport connections within each the aforementioned five zones. I depart from this approach a bit by reconstructing the trade routes to Prussia and to Lithuania, because of their special significance for the trade by Wrocław merchants in several specific kinds of merchandise, which was demanded in, and exported to, the south; and because of their role as outlets for transport of merchandise out of Wrocław in the course of blockades imposed by Polish kings.

The third subject, developed in the several subsections of Chapter 3, is the cultural dimension of the long-distance economic activity of Wrocław merchants. I define a "trade

culture" in terms of: the knowledge and the practical skills possessed by the merchants; a cluster of the tools the merchant employ; the forms of organization they adopt; and the modes of activity as well as ethical norms they observe under specific political and legal circumstances.

I begin by depicting the political and the ethico-legal conditions for economic activity in Wrocław. The economic policies toward Wrocław of the successive rulers were consistently supportive. The grant of staple rights in 1274, the numerous privileges of free commerce within the Kingdom of Bohemia, and between that kingdom and other countries of the Holy Roman Empire, the support offered to Wrocław merchants against other monarchs - all these policies attest to the protectionist attitude on the part of the Polish, Czech, and Hungarians overlords of this city. Also at the outset, the book outlines the economic authority and the specific role of the city council in the area of trade. It further depicts the legal framework of trade and of credit operations: the limitations on the sale of imported goods, quality control, and control over standardized measures and weights. Some ethical features describing the morally good merchant were formulated explicitly in the written records produced in Wrocław during the late Middle Ages. Another important agent in Wrocław's economic life, especially in the area of credit operations, was the local Jewish community.

The economic life of this city and of its merchants was organized in several frameworks. Its rhythm depended on annual and weekly markets: the former on the feasts of Saint John the Baptist, of Mid-Lent Sunday, and of Saint Elizabeth, and the latter on Saturdays. Chapter 3 presents also the history of the emergence and the development of markets. The three-fair annual cycle was supplemented by the fairs at the nearby city of Brzeg (Brieg in German) that began assume importance after the turn of the fifteenth century. The fairs of Brzeg retained their significance despite the successful establishment, in 1481, of a fourth annual fair in Wrocław, on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Salt and herring markets in Wrocław were also economically rather significant, because they served as an occasion for the sale and purchase of other important commodities.

The merchants' guild, established as an autonomous unit in 1339, did not play a major role in the long-distance economic relations of Wrocław. It performed auxiliary and social functions. Members of some craft guilds - especially the furriers - were involved in long-distance trade. Members of other craft guilds (the chandlers, for example) confined themselves to participation in the local distribution of imported goods. The earliest partnerships - which focused specifically on trade in land and in money rent, emerged in the second half of the 13th century - while the first now known reference to partnerships oriented to long-distance trade dates from the first quarter of the subsequent century. The merchants of Wrocław set up the latter type of partnership as: the unilateral *commenda* (the sleeping partnership), the bilateral *commenda*, the *societas maris*, and the general partnership. The partners were sometimes, but not always, related to each other. The unrelated partners originated from Wrocław itself, from other Silesian towns, or from abroad. In setting up the partnerships, Wrocław merchants recruited collaborators from the

Kingdom of Bohemia (Prague), the Kingdom of Poland (Kraków, Lublin, Poznań), the Kingdom of Hungary (Kremnica), Russia (Novgorod), Switzerland (Sankt Gallen), south and southeastern Germany (Regensburg, Nuremberg, Erfurt, Görlitz, Bautzen), Prussia (Gdańsk/Danzig, Toruń/Thorn), and Italy (Florence). The capital available to a single partnership did not exceed the sum of 20 thousand Hungarian florins. The trade partnerships either employed full-time employees (the *Diener*, in German), or made use of the services of independent agents sent on missions abroad. Wrocław merchants cooperated with the individual carriers, or with transport partnerships from Wrocław or from the other Central European towns.

Despite some basic education in parochial schools, practical economic activity was the most important experience for medieval merchants. Due to the preponderance of German citizens in Central European cities, in this region the merchants of Wrocław, both of German and Jewish origin, had no problems with verbal and non-verbal (written) communication. They do not seem to have been very much proficient in Latin, a few highly educated exceptions apart. Some wrote in Czech, and one supposedly spoke Italian.

Late-medieval Wrocław merchants possessed literate skills. They used business letters and receipts. Wrocław's Jewish inhabitants propagated the use of the bond (*littera obligatoria*). Their acquaintance with Italians familiarized the merchants of Wrocław with the bill of exchange (*littera cambii*). At the turn of the 16th century, double-entry bookkeeping came into use in Wrocław. During the last quarter of the 15th century, Arabic numerals came into use, though not without reservations, and with limits.

The long-run strategies of Wrocław merchants were directed at various aims. Certainly, most strove to become rich, and to attain an influential in the city council. They combined their practices of long-distance trade with credit operations. Many routinely bought and sold money rents in the cities, and bought estates in the countryside. A few among the richest invested in Silesian and Saxon mining. Some focused on making their career at the royal, or imperial, court, or, thanks to their high prestige, as holders of high office. Only a single documented merchant decided to abandon his developing business career, and to become a priest.

The economic culture of the later-medieval Wrocław was affected by a wide variety of influences, Upper-German above all, but also Jewish, Italian, Hanseatic, and Netherlandish.

Chapters 4 through 8 inquire into the long-distance economic relations of Wrocław merchants in terms of: trade in commodities; credit operations; and trade in money rents. They also take under consideration the social position of the participants in these activities. The history of these three areas of long-distance activity between ca. 1230 and 1497 fall into four sub-periods:

1. Ca. 1230-1335: the building of the basis of Wrocław's economy under the independent rule by the Polish dukes of Piast dynasty. During this sub-period, Wrocław merchants first entered into contacts with the merchants and the craftsmen of all the five zones considered in this monograph, and in addition of the northern core of the European

economy, the Netherlands. The earliest trade partnerships were established in Wrocław at the end of this sub-period.

2. 1335-ca. 1441: a time of the accelerated development, encompassing the reign of the kings of Luxemburg dynasty and the short-time rule of Albrecht of Habsburg. During this period, the earlier long-distance economic relations were developed and intensified; new contacts were established abroad; the merchants of Wrocław carried out their first credit operations outside of Silesia; their trade culture underwent a rapid development (new forms of business organization, the expansion of business literacy, the proliferation of non-cash payment instruments), and reached its climax. Meanwhile, the Hussite wars (although destructive, with the devastation of Wrocław's vicinity by Hussite troops between 1428 and 1434) did not prove harmful to the city's longdistance economic relations.

3. 1441-1459: a period of stabilization alternating with some symptoms of regression. Economic activities occurred over the geographical range as had been the case earlier. However, some negative phenomena emerged in Wrocław's contact with the Kingdom of Poland: the establishment of several competitive fairs, and royal grants of staple rights to several towns, in the Kingdom; and a gradual disruption in the bilateral trade between Wrocław and several Polish towns.

4. 1459 until the early modern period: a time of crisis - a war against the Bohemian king, Jiří of Poděbrady (1459-69, with some respites); a trade conflict with the Kingdom of Poland, beginning in 1490; a growing importance of the competitive city of Leipzig; a rise in criminality which threatened business travel; an increasing entrance of Nurembergers into the role intermediaries on behalf of Wrocław merchants. All these phenomena led to a crisis in the long-distance trade of the Silesian merchants. Although Matthias Corvinus was a powerful ruler and a supporter of Wrocław's trade, his reign did not reverse these adverse trends.

In terms of long-distance trade, during the period under study the city of Wrocław played several simultaneous roles. After all, it was a buyer's market, with a growing purchase power and absorption capacity. As we compare the Wrocław tariffs of 1266 and of 1327, we observe a rise of imported goods from about a dozen to about eighty. Later on, that number, essentially, did not grow further - although the volume of commodities themselves may have grown. Because of its very advantageous geographical location, Wrocław mattered as a nodal point and transit city, especially between Eastern and Western Europe. The merchants of Wrocław took advantage of this circumstance, and assumed full control over trade in certain commodities. For example, they began to reexport Russian furs to northern Italy at the end of the 13th century. Among all these trade links of the city of Wrocław, the most important turned out to be the routes of Lithuania), crossing Wrocław, continuing either to southern Germany or to Austria, and, finally, all reaching Venice. In that direction, Wrocław merchants transported principally natural products: furs, wax, and the red dye of Polish origin called *czerwiec*. From their sojourns to Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary, they brought in silver, and probably also gold and lead. Silesia, and Wrocław in particular, also played a transit role for the transfer of Hungarian and Russian oxen into German lands.

On the other hand, the merchants of Wrocław bought in the natural products of the Mediterranean area and the Orient - spices, aromatic substances, cooking essences, fruit, sweets, and a variety of specialty wines - in Venice, and presumably in the cities situated along the way to Italy, in Germany, Austria, Bohemia, and Hungary. In addition, they bought first-rate fabrics (silk and taffeta) and cotton in Italy, and some works made of metal in Germany. Because of the development of the textile industry in Wrocław during the 14th century, its merchants began to export the indigenously produced cloth (*pannus polonicalis*) to Bohemia, southwestern Ruthenia, the Kingdom of Hungary, and the cities of the Upper German economic zone, from the fourteenth century onward. Therefore, the structure of interchange of goods was fairly complex, and does not support the well-known historiographical dichotomy in the trade within Europe: the finished goods from the West versus the natural products from the East.

My research undermines and refutes some traditional views of trade relations in later medieval Europe. The contacts between the merchants of Wrocław and the Venetians were not entirely taken over by entrepreneurs from Nuremberg from the 1420s onward. Such contact seem to have been maintained directly by Wrocław merchants until the early modern period, although their intensity may have diminished after about the mid-fifteenth century. Moreover, among the Upper German merchants active in Silesia, the Nurembergers did not always dominate. Nurembergers were preceded by merchants from Regensburg, and grew in importance only quite late, from the 1420s onward. One of the most important countries in the trade relations of the city of Wrocław turns out to have been the Kingdom of Hungary - whose significance in this respect has thus far been underestimated by historians. Hungary played an important role not only as the source of supply of wine, copper, silver, and presumably gold. The merchants of Wrocław bought there Oriental and domestic spices (respectively, pepper, and saffron, grown in Slovakia), and furs. Simultaneously, the Hungarian cities were the outlet for the Wrocław and Silesian textile products (*pannus polonicalis*), for reexported Flemish cloth, and, a bit surprisingly, for Russian furs. The importance of the Ruthenian city of Lwów for Wrocław merchants was not a result of the Oriental merchandise sold in that city. Instead, the merchants bought there mainly the East-European natural products, such as fur and wax.

Despite the fact that credit operations were practiced in Wrocław at latest in the second half of the 13th century, this type of activity began to be carried out on a long-distance scale only quite late, around 1361 - if we leave aside the credits extended by the merchants of Wrocław to the Polish, Silesian, and Czech monarchs at the times of their lordship over this city. It is difficult to define the destination of the credits granted to, and taken by, the merchants of Wrocław. A part of such credits may have been used for investment in trade, or for outlays on the debtors' personal luxury consumption; another destination must have been a kind of banking operation (profits from the percentages). According to H. Samsonowicz, in the larger Central European cities the making of investment prevailed over consumption, although the most popular use of capital was its accumulation ($A > I > C$).

The more developed a given economic zone was, the less advantageous the credit balance with that zone was for Wrocław. With the Sudeto-Carpathian and the Black Sea zones the balance was active. On the other hand, the balances with the north Italian, Upper German, as well as the Lusatian-Saxon-Thuringian zones were passive. Overall, Wrocław's credit balance with all the five zones was active. The reason was the high intensity and the volume of the transfer between the city of Wrocław and the other cities and towns of Wrocław's own - that is to say, the Sudeto-Carpathian - zone: a state of affairs which was very advantageous to this central city of Silesia. Between 1361 and 1497, Wrocław merchants lent more than 30,000 Hungarian florins and borrowed about 28,500 in the same golden currency (not counting the transfers to made to monarchs, and to recipients within the city's internal market).

Wrocław merchants also practiced the purchase of money rents. In most cases, exact data on this is not mentioned in the intact primary sources. One can merely conclude that the most intense contacts in this particular field occurred between the merchants of Wrocław and their partners in Kraków and the other Little Polish cities.

The economic significance of the city of Wrocław depends on our standards for comparison. There is no doubt that, on the scale of the region of Silesia, Wrocław was, in every meaning of that word, a core. Within Central Europe, Wrocław may be counted among several of the most important centers. In the 14th century, it seems to have been second only to Prague, and may have been more important economically than the Hungarian capital, Buda. It also outdistanced also Kraków and Toruń. During the first half of the 15th century, this hierarchy changed. Prague lost its significance because of the Hussite wars. Gdańsk matched, and perhaps even surpassed, Wrocław's economic. At the end of the Middle Ages, Wrocław was outdistanced by Gdańsk and Kraków, while Prague, presumably, regained its former position.

On a scale of the Holy Roman Empire, Wrocław was, throughout the entire Middle Ages, secondary in relation to its own economic centers: Frankfurt am Main, Nuremberg, Cologne, and Lübeck. Yet the Silesian city does not seem to have been secondary in relation to Vienna. In the course of time the proportions of significance changed. In the 13th century, Wrocław was outdistanced by the influential Regensburg, but in the first half of the 15th century, the Silesian city blossomed, whereas the Bavarian center stagnated. Yet, on the other hand, at the end of the 15th century Wrocław began to be outdistanced by the developing Leipzig.

On the scale of Europe, the city of Wrocław was an active and ambitious satellite of the Venetian core of European economy. For most of time the Silesian center marked the northern range of the north Italian activity on the Continent. This upper limit of that range changed in the second half of the 15th century.

Generally, the city of Wrocław can be recognized as one of important nodal points within the area between Baltic and the Adriatic Seas, the Danube, and southwestern Ruthenia, especially during the 15th century. Its municipal authorities, and its individual merchants, did not limit themselves to the making of profit from the city's favorable

economic and geographic location. Having developed its domestic industries and trade culture, and having established contact with numerous foreign merchants and cities, they contributed to the economic integration of Europe in the later Middle Ages.