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THE RISE AND FALL OF 'THE WORLD OF ECONOMY': EASTERN EUROPE IN 9TH-12TH CENTURIES

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The concept of Immanuel Wallerstein¹ refers to the world before the times of European hegemony. It was not a homogeneous economy. Regardless the scale and forms of activity, there existed separate, greater regions that were basically self-sufficient. Apart from them there were areas where only local ties, based on the natural economy, functioned. Taking into account the above premises, Janet Abu-Lughod² discussed the eight macro-regions which existed in Europe, Asia and Northern Africa in the 13th-14th century. They were mutually linked by communication routes and by the activities of the major economic centres, i.e. towns. Among these regions, the author listed the European region, extending along the axis connecting England with Italy, the Mediterranean region (from Spain to Crimea), the Mongolian region (from Beijing to Kiev) and the Egyptian region (ranging from East Africa to the Indian coast at Calicut). Different countries partially belonged to spheres which were well constituted internally by world economic entities preceding the rise of a world system.

In the 13th century, however, relations in these regions depended, at least to a certain extent, on internal contacts. It is difficult to imagine the development of the Western European world without the latter's contacts with the 'Egyptian world.' Also in the earlier Middle Ages, there emerged macro-regions of homogeneous or similar economic systems, such as the Mongolian macro-region, which lasted as long as they played a role on a much larger, supra-regional scale.

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The lands of the *barbaricum*³ situated in Eastern Europe (Scandinavia, countries located to the east of the Laba and to the west of the Danube rivers) were inhabited from the times of the Great Migration to the 8th century by mutually connected local communities. In the 9th century, the situation underwent changes. Growing internal ties as well as greater influence of other economic regions on these territories could be noticed. These were vast territories. The European lands in the 8th century could be, very simply, divided into three parts, i.e. Carolinian, Byzantine and barbarian (not including Muslim territories of the Caliphate of Cordoba, almost deserted lands near the Polar Circle as well as taiga behind the Volga river and steppes inhabited by the Chazarian people). Among these three parts the largest was the barbarian one. It included the lands reaching central Scandinavia, the Finnish Gulf, the middle Volga basin—totalling circa four million km², as compared with 1,200,000 km² of the lands in the West and approximately 700,000 km² in the Byzantine part. Naturally, in the times when economic position depended on the density of population, Europe was the weakest. One could think that population density could have reached up to three persons per km², with thirteen persons per km² in the western part and not more than 7-8 persons in the eastern part.⁴

There are some criteria of the existence of ties connecting the barbarian world of Europe in the 9th century. The first were permanent trade routes, ensuring both the internal communication of these lands and their contacts with the outer world. The second one was a system of market centres, which operated on a similar basis, and were visited by merchants from Arabian countries, Byzantium and Rome. The third one was the structure of commerce, where the main commodity supplied from outside were slaves. The fourth criterion of unity were emerging social structures, where the importance of groups of merchants-warriors was growing. Originally they consisted of Norman Vikings.⁵ Later, probably already in the 9th century, also of other ethnic groups, mainly Slavonic, which is confirmed in the onomastics used in the whole Arabian world.⁶ Last but not least, the fifth common criterion was the territories' adoption of political and religious systems from the Christian countries, which was manifested in the form of emerging states.

During the 10th century the European political stage gained new lands, where new states were created in chronological order: Bohemia replaced by

Hungary, Ruthenia, Norway, Czechia, Denmark, Poland and Sweden.⁷ The emergence of all these new organisms was based on the inflow of means which made it possible for the formation of elites interested in building new social organisations.⁸ This was also supported, especially in later periods, from the mid-9th century, by the activities of bandits who were transformed into a group of merchants. They were the Vikings who traded mainly in slaves and transported them to the Muslim countries. It was also supported by new, thriving trade routes, which linked the whole territory with Rome and Byzantium.⁹ The main routes were laid along waters. First, the Baltic linked all the Scandinavian countries with the German, Slavonic and Baltic neighbours. At least from the 8th century, land routes were also made. There were crossing market centres where merchants met the local elites.¹⁰ Trade routes crossed the whole area of Europe, the most important route, it seems, being the water route along the Baltic. One could believe that it was originated in the Rhine delta, in Duurstede, where it merged with the routes heading south. From the Netherlands it went along a water route eastbound, through Schlezwig (Haithabu) to Old Lubeck, through Rugia (Arkona), Wolin, Koobrzeg, Truse, Wiskiauty to Stara Ladoga. Off the Baltic coast, there were routes heading south and, as a rule, using navigable rivers. The most important route was along the Volga river, through the Great Bulgar to the Chazarians at the Caspian Sea. Another one led more to the west, along Dniepr river, through Kiev to the Black Sea harbours. It was complemented partially by a water route, along the Vistula and Bug rivers, and partially by a land route, through Woy to Kiev. The oldest preserved customs tariffs¹¹ (Raffelstetten, Pomnichów) shows that the goods (i.e. slaves, weapons, salt, cloth, cattle) were transported in both ways. Additional data are included in a Carolinian capitulary, which bans transport of weapons to the Slavs and lists numerous land routes leading eastbound from the watch-towers situated at the border of the empire from Altona, Magdeburg and Erfurt.¹² The water route linking the east with the west was the Danube linking the Frankish States with Byzantium.

In the light of customs tariffs, capitularies and several archeological data, we can learn about the structure of trade linking Barbaricum with the Latin and Greek empires. Instead of slaves, and to a small extent, of cattle, fur and perhaps amber, products necessary for building social organisations, such as weapons for professional bands, which constituted the military power of the

country as well as all necessary capability of this social group whose interest was to create a new state system, were delivered to the north. There were Arabian, Byzantine, Frank and Anglo-Saxon coins (Ancient Roman coins were also circulating), with which it was possible for the elite to buy necessary services. Ideology (religion), chancellery, diplomatic and propaganda service (e.g. construction of monumental buildings) were essential for the operation of new organisations. It depended on the experts coming from the south and west of Europe.

The great trade carried out by the wealthy was forming the new power elites. Cemeteries from the 10th century¹³ reveal burials of people belonging to at least two social strata: the majority of graves were equipped traditionally. A minority had rich weapons, jewelry and decorative items.

There is a well-known, though contested by some researchers, opinion of Henry Pirenne about the influence of Islam on the consolidation of Western Europe. In the light of the latest research, this opinion could be corrected as the rise of the great world of Islam created a demand for the only product which could be taken out from a destroyed Europe, namely people.¹⁴ Similarly, in the 9th–11th century a circle of slave trade was created, this time situated in the territories beyond the Carolinian *limes*. There also emerged new forms of organisation of society.

A change was brought about in the following centuries, however. The raid of the Mongols, fall of Byzantium and gradual economic deterioration of the Muslim countries led to a decrease in the significance of the great exchange with the Mediterranean zone. The character of states was also changing. They were transformed from patriarchal monarchies into local powers. Simultaneously adopting the organisational patterns from the Western Empire or from Byzantium also led to tighter economic ties between the region and Western as well as Southern Europe.

During the period in which the states were emerging in the east of the continent from the 9th to 11th century we can talk about the emerging 'world of economy' which was internally linked, and, despite ethnic differences, creating similar forms of social ties. Adopting homogeneous forms of social organisation and common religion, led to the connections between Eastern Europe in the 13th century with neighbouring countries. Scandinavia, Poland, Czechia and Hungary became the peripheral territories of Western European macro-region. After Byzantium collapsed and Kiev Ruthenia was

conquered by the Mongols, the zone created in the 9th century ceased to exist in the 13th century.

ENDNOTES

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