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The significance of the Premonstratensians for the Polabian and Baltic Slavs

Znaczenie norbertan dla Słowian Połabskich i Bałtyckich

Abstract: The Premonstratensian abbey of St Mary in Magdeburg exercised substantial direct and indirect influence on the foundation of further monasteries and cathedral chapters amongst the Polabian and Baltic Slavs. This contribution shows the importance of monasteries such as Gottesgnaden, Leitzkau, Jerichow, Broda, Grobe or Belbuck in the 12th and 13th centuries.

Keywords: premonstratensians, cathedral chapters, house abbeys, memorial places, parish organisation

Abstrakt: Norbertańskie opactwo św. Marii w Magdeburgu wywarło znaczący – bezpośredni i pośredni – wpływ na fundację kolejnych klasztorów i kapituł katedralnych wśród Słowian Połabskich i Bałtyckich. Jego znaczenie wskazuje, jak dużą rolę w XII i XIII wieku odgrywały klasztory w Gottesgnaden, Leitzkau, Jerichow, Broda, Grobi czy Białobokach.

Słowa kluczowe: norbertanie, kapituły katedralne, opactwa domowe, miejsca pamięci, organizacja parafialna

The Premonstratensians, an order whose 900-year anniversary has been celebrated in many quarters in recent years, were among the first religious communities to become active in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Friedrich Lüth's temporary sphere of activity. In the volumes showcasing the achievements of heritage management in this new German federal state, published during Lüth's tenure (Jöns *et al.* 2005; Jöns, Lüth 2005), the foundations in Grobe near Usedom and Broda near Neubrandenburg did not yet play a major role (Szczesiak 2005a; 2005b). Yet a much improved state of research, partly based on the monastery volumes for Brandenburg (Heimann *et al.* 2007) and Mecklenburg (Huschner *et al.* 2016) which have since appeared and also include archaeological and building historical contributions, now makes it possible to make much fuller statements regarding the importance of the Premonstratensians for the transformation processes in the areas settled by the Polabian and Baltic Slavs. The present contribution, written in honour of Friedrich Lüth, will investigate this in more detail.

Norbert of Xanten¹, born between 1080 and 1085 as the son of a Maasland aristocrat, and who had in his time served as the canon of St Viktor in Xanten (Alders 1984), as well as being a hermit, itinerant preacher, founder of abbeys, member of the royal court chapel and candidate for the episcopal sees of Cambrai and Würzburg (Felten 1984; Weinfurter 1984), arrived in Magdeburg on the 18th of July 1126, having been freshly elected as that city's archbishop in Speyer shortly before (Claude 1975, 3, 7–8; Schweineköper 1984). At the time, Magdeburg could still be described as a frontier town along the central reaches of the Elbe, with great but as yet unrealised ambitions. After its first mention in the Capitulary of Diedenhofen in AD 805 (Hardt 2005), where it was characterised as a border control post oriented towards trade with the Slavic world, a Mauritius abbey had been established there by Otto I and in AD 968 it was made an archbishopric with responsibilities for all the regions of the east already conquered, as well as those yet to be added (Althoff 2001; Hardt 2013, 364–366). Yet since then, in AD 983, the archbishopric had already lost its suffragan dioceses in Brandenburg and Havelberg, east of the Elbe. They had been swept away by an insurgence of the autochthonous population, rebelling against oppression by Saxon princes and warriors, as well as the burgwards they had built and the Christian clergy who had tried to stabilise this system (Fritze 1984). The state of decline which this rebellion had engendered was to last the entire 11th century. It was only the titular bishops of Brandenburg – otherwise often boarders at the archbishop's see or in other Saxon cathedrals, just like their Havelbergian brethren in *partibus infidelium* – who, from the court of Leitzkau located just opposite Magdeburg, upheld their claim to a return. Time and again, they hoped for the success of the armies occasionally drawn together in Leitzkau or Werben to march into the lands of the Polabian Slavs, but who always failed to lastingly break the influence of the Lutician federation and its priests (Belitz 2019).

At the beginning of the 12th century, this situation had again changed in as far as the campaigns of the king and the Margraves Udo of Stade and Albert of Ballenstedt increased the pressure on the Lutician princes in Havelberg and Brandenburg. They therefore proclaimed their willingness to adopt the Christian faith, but its acceptance was just as often thwarted by pagan rebellions (Claude 1975, 15–16). In AD 1108, Magdeburg even saw a summons to a crusade against its Slavic neighbours, but this found no followers. Indeed, the corresponding pamphlet, stuffed full of stereotypes, might even be a forgery written in connection with the Wendish crusade almost forty years later (1147), which really did take place (Knoch 1974; Constable 1999; Menzel 2015).

¹ Leinsle 2020, 20–29; Richter 2005, 29–31; Salewsky 1996; Elm 1993; 1984; Claude 1975, 3–7.

In spite of the rather modest prospects on the opposite bank of the Elbe, a whole set of clergymen had made themselves comfortable in this “frontier town” and carried out their duties in the cathedral chapter, the abbey of St Mary’s and the convent of St Johannes auf dem Berge, which had developed from the Mauritius abbey, as well as the abbeys of St Sebastian and St Nikolai and a whole host of parish churches². It is this clerical society which met the reformer and possible zealot Norbert, who with his followers – quite probably also including women – wanted to live and work following the example of the original Christian communities. In AD 1129, they planned to seize the abbey of St Mary’s and to reorganise it along the lines of Norbert’s foundation of Prémontré in the bishopric of Laon. In conjunction with disturbances in the cathedral chapter, this at first led to a failed rebellion of the Magdeburgians against Norbert, but ultimately his plan proved successful (Richter 2005, 31–33; Claude 1975, 9–14). Together with Norbert, who was however frequently abroad³, and his successors on the *cathedra*, the Liebfrauen abbey in Magdeburg, also called the “Prémontré of the east” (Puhle, Hagdorn 1996; Richter 2005, 33–34), soon developed a dynamism that was to impact the areas beyond the rivers Elbe and Saale.

As early as 1131, 21 canons and 18 lay brethren travelled upriver from Liebfrauen in order to resettle the convent of Gottesgnaden on the eastern banks of the Saale, opposite Calbe, which had originally been founded by Count Otto of Röblingen (*Fundatio monasterii*, 687–688; Claude 1975, 14, 33, 387–390). A location for Gottesgnaden was selected on the eastern bank of the Saale (Claude 1975, 388), not far from the Benedictine abbey of Nienburg on the west bank of the river, which had been granted extensive possessions in the territories of the Slavic Lusici in the 10th century (MGH D O III, 788, No. 359; Claude 1975, 326–329; Schrage 1990, 46; 1995, 83–84; 1998). Whether this was meant to proclaim future engagement in Slavic regions is unclear, as the abbey was initially only endowed with areas west of the Elbe and Saale (Claude 1975, 392). However, in 1147 the convent managed to acquire the settlement of Chörau, east of the Saale, through trade and established immigrant settlers there (UBM 262; Claude 1975, 392–393). Archbishop Wichmann opened up a promising source of income for the abbey by granting it the church of Jüterbog in 1174, the centre of Magdeburg’s early territorial expansion east of the Elbe⁴.

² Claude 1975, 36 characterises the archbishopric of this time as having “degenerated into obscurity”.

³ On Norbert’s reticence concerning the mission of Otto of Bamberg in Pomerania and in the area of the Havelberg bishopric, as well as his attempt to influence the Polish church, see Claude 1975, 18–25, 37, 41; on his engagement at the royal court and during the schism of the popes Anacletus II and Innocence II, where he supported the latter, 26–35.

⁴ UBM 344; Claude 1975, 393–394. On the early development of Jüterbog see Schich 1980, 209–217.

Only a few years later, in 1177, Provost Gunther of Gottesgnaden paid Count Frederik of Brehna 90 silver marks for 60 Flemish hides with a place on the Black Elster river to “stack and float timber”⁵, probably around Holzdorf and Mönchenhöfe near Schweinitz. If the abbey indeed planned to take part in territorial expansion there, then this interest did not last long. The complex was already sold on in the 13th century (Winter 1865, 84; Claude 1975, 394). However, the endowment of a mill near Calbe by Archbishop Frederick (UBM 323; Claude 1975, 395) and of the ferry across the Saale by Archbishop Wichmann in 1168 (UBM 326; Claude 1975, 395), alongside a further mill there in 1187 (UBM 420; Claude 1975, 395), indicate that the Premonstratensians did not so much establish, but could build on existing infrastructure in the immediate area. Indeed, the abbey itself was to become a victim of such infrastructural elements. Today, Gottesgnaden exists only as a hodonym, part of a system of road names in a suburb of Calbe east of the Saale, where only a few foundation walls and the former hospital church remain of the first Premonstratensian foundation east of Elbe and Saale. The Saale lock of Calbe now stands where the abbey once was (Schwineköper 1987, 144; Dehio 1974, 376).

If the choice of location for Gottesgnaden could already have had a programmatic character, then such an intention is even more likely for the ordination of Norbert’s companion Anselm as titular Bishop of Havelberg (Claude 1975, 35). Yet it was to be a long time before the latter could actually set foot in his see, given the presence of the resident pagans, and in any case he was mostly engaged in the royal service of Lothair of Supplingenburg in Italy (Lees 1998). Nevertheless, it seems that the Liebfrauen Premonstratensians in Magdeburg never quite lost sight of the eastern banks of the border rivers Elbe and Saale. In 1139 at the latest, they established a convent at the above-mentioned court of the bishops of Brandenburg in Leitzkau (Kahl 1964, 133, 142; Claude 1975, 19, 47; Scholl 1996; Springer 2005, 21; Richter 2005, 36–39). As early as the 16th of August 1138, a former canon of Liebfrauen, Wigger, had been ordained as Bishop of Brandenburg by Archbishop Konrad of Querfurt in Magdeburg cathedral (Claude 1975, 47). Wigger proceeded to promote the Leitzkau abbey and organised its relocation “in monte” (Richter 2005, 40–41; Scholl 2005, 53–54), in the vicinity of the former palace of the Brandenburg bishops. He also ensured that the canons of Leitzkau retained the right to elect the future bishops of Brandenburg from amongst their ranks. In addition, they were able to utilise Wigger’s good relations with the Christian prince Pribislav-Henry on the Brandenburg in order to take possession of a new convent near St Godehard church in Parduin,

⁵ Helbig, Weinrich 1, 230–231, No. 55.; *insuper et litus ad compositionem et colligationem lignorum addidit*; Claude 1975, 394; Winter 1865, 108.

in what was to become Brandenburg's old town, perhaps as early as 1147 (Schich 1980, 199–201; 1993, 53–55; 1995; Richter 2005, 42; Gahlbeck *et al.* 2007). It was from there that the first cathedral chapter, consisting of members of the Parduin foundation, moved to Brandenburg's cathedral island in 1165 (Richter 2005, 46–47; Schöbler *et al.* 2007), after Pribislav-Henry had died in 1150 and Brandenburg an der Havel, after a short interim rule by Jacza of Köpenik (Lindner 2012), had been taken over by Albert the Bear in 1157, who from then on named himself after this old Hevillian castle and the location of a lost Magdeburg suffragan bishopric as the “Margrave of Brandenburg” (Hardt 2020, 72).

Eventually, the Magdeburg cathedral chapter and the local abbey of St Mary's, following the example of Leitzkau, began to establish a preliminary cathedral chapter for the bishop's see of Havelberg, which remained inaccessible (Buchholz 1996). Although the future bishop Walo is already described as *prepositus Havelbergensis* in a charter dating to 1144, which is however only preserved as a 16th century copy (CDB 1843, 79, No. 1), one can assume that he first carried out this function in Jerichow in the Elb-Havel-Winkel region. In the same year of 1144, a further Premonstratensian abbey was established there through an endowment by Hartwig, a Magdeburg canon and heir to the Margraves of Stade, and canons from Liebfrauen were settled in it. Allegedly because it was located too close to the local market, the abbey was moved to a somewhat more remote location in 1148, and its church was finished in 1172 (Naumann 1996).

In the meantime, the Wendish crusade of 1147 (Kamp 2013) had enabled the titular bishop Anselm to personally come to Havelberg. According to a letter he wrote in 1149 to abbot Wibald of Stablo, in the short period of his presence in 1148/1149 he himself was involved in the work of building up the place, perhaps already together with further Premonstratensians from Magdeburg (Briefbuch Wibalds, 489–490, No. 229; Bergstedt 2000, 7, 55–56; Popp 2003, 47, 55; Lees 1997, 89, 92; Petersohn 1979, 509–510). In the same year, the Cardinal Deacon of the Roman church, Guido of Crema, who was then in Saxony, talked to Wibald of Stablo *de constitutione episcoporum in Leuticiam*, meaning the appointment of bishops in Brandenburg and Havelberg⁶. It is generally considered that the constitution of a Havelberg cathedral chapter was concluded by 1150 (Buchholz 1996, 72).

⁶ Briefbuch Wibalds, 345, No. 161; Lindner 2017, 51. See also Lindner 2012, 45; in contrast, Ruchhöft 2003, 179, suggests that it was the territories of the Tollensi and Redarians which were the subject of curial interest and assumes, quite contrary to the text, that Guido of Crema intended to establish only one “Lutician bishopric”.

It is from this background of the provisional Premonstratensian cathedral chapters in Leitzkau/Parduin/Brandenburg and Jerichow/Havelberg that one must interpret the decision of Henry the Lion, Duke of Saxony, to call members of the order to the re-established bishopric of the Polabians in Ratzeburg in 1154, after the intercession of Wichmann of Magdeburg (Petersohn 1979, 184–185; Bünz, Hillebrand 2016, 652–653). The first bishop at Ratzeburg was Evermod, who came from Gottesgnaden and had then been provost at St Mary's in Magdeburg, from where the convent that established Ratzeburg most likely came (Bünz, Hillebrand 2016, 653, 658). In 1158, Pope Hadrian IV confirmed the cathedral chapter's right to live according to Premonstratensian rule and to elect the bishops of Ratzeburg (MUB I, 62; Petersohn 1979, 185; Bünz, Hillebrand 2016, 653, 658). In 1180, Evermod was succeeded by Isfried, who had previously served as provost in Jerichow and had come to Magdeburg from Cappenberg in Westphalia, together with Norbert of Xanten (Petersohn 1979, 185; Bünz, Hillebrand 2016, 658). He was appointed to his duties by Henry the Lion, who soon after was deposed by a council of princes led by Emperor Frederick Barbarossa.

The 1150s also saw the establishment of a Premonstratensian abbey in the *villa Grobe in suburbio Vznomiensi*, in the suburbium, that is to say the surroundings of the stronghold of Usedom on the eponymous island in the western part of the Oder estuary⁷. The Wendish crusade of 1147 had also been aimed against Pomerania, even though its princes and parts of its inhabitants had already been missionised and baptised in the first third of the 12th century by the Bamberg bishop Otto (Petersohn 1979, 217–224). After the end of the war, in 1148, the Pomeranian prince Ratibor appeared at a princely council in Havelberg, where he once again proclaimed his allegiance to Christianity and promised to work for the spread of the new faith (Petersohn 1999, 37). It is undoubtedly to further this aim that he and his wife Pribislava, at some point before 1159, endowed the *villa Groben cum appendiciis suis et taberna*, as it is described in the charter in which Bishop Adalbert of Pomerania certified the prince's gift to the abbey (PUB 1, 48, 51–53; Hoogeweg 1925, 264–265; Petersohn 1979, 310; 1999, 34–35). The mention of a tavern, as well as shipping tolls recorded later, show that the abbey was built in a place where trade was carried out, given that *forum et taberna* were central elements of early urban agglomerations in the castle towns of the southern Baltic (Petersohn 1999, 57–61; Bollnow 1964, 230). The Premonstratensian community, composed of canons from Liebfrauen in Magdeburg and Parduin near the Brandenburg (Petersohn 1979, 507–512; 1999, 37),

⁷ Bollnow 1964, 230–235; Petersohn 1979, 310–311, 327, 358–363, 371–381; Petersohn 1995; Schich 1995; Behn 1996; Petersohn 1999, 56–57; Schmidt 2007b; Biermann and Rębkowski 2007, 70–71; Werlich 2012, 262–264; Biermann 2018, 326–327, 329, 335–336, 339, 346.

did not move into the immediate vicinity of the princely stronghold, but about 1200 metres distant to the western shore of Lake Usedom to a spot still known today as “Priesterkamp”, or priests’ field (Petersohn 1999, 38; Schneider 1999, 75; Biermann, Rebkowski 2007, 71). Yet in 1184, soon after the foundation, the canons – replaced by brethren from Havelberg in 1177 (PUB 1, 72, 94–96; Petersohn 1979, 360; 1999, 35, 38) – began to complain about the noise from the mass of people, the din of market trading, the small size of the rooms they inhabited, polluted water and foul air and asked to move their abbey (PUB 1, 96, 125; Winter 1865, 194; Bollnow 1964, 231). This was planned, but not immediately carried out (Petersohn 1979, 361–362; Schich 1995, 152, 155; Biermann, Rebkowski 2007, 71). It was only around 1307/1309 that the abbey was moved to Pudagla in the interior of the island (Hoogeweg 1925, 277–279; Petersohn 1979, 362; 1999, 38). From the 1160s onwards, Grobe was the “sacred centre of the Pomeranian diocese” (Petersohn 1979, 387) and also the home of the Pomeranian Bishop Conrad I until the latter moved to Cammin in 1175, probably as a result of his attempts to distance himself from the Premonstratensian-influenced archbishopric of Magdeburg (Petersohn 1979, 310–314, 359–360, 365, 386–387; 1992, 11–12; 1999, 50–52, 56; Schneider 1999, 73). The conflict with the archbishopric of Magdeburg, which concerned the independence of the Pomeranian bishopric, led to Grobe leaving the Saxon circary between 1182 and 1186 and being allocated to Tommarp in the then Danish province of Scania (Petersohn 1979, 360–361).

In 1170, on the occasion of the consecration of the cathedral, Casimir Prince of Pomerania visited Havelberg and gifted an endowment for the building of a Premonstratensian abbey at Broda (Hardt *et al.* 2016; Hardt 2019b, 423–425; Schulz 1996), on the north-western end of Lake Tollense. At this point, the southern end of the lake was still home to a Slavic settlement agglomeration centred on several islands in the Lieps. The archaeologist Volker Schmidt has presented good arguments⁸ for the view that this was Rethra, the centre of the rebellious Lutician alliance (Schmidt 2007a). However, the establishment of the abbey apparently only succeeded shortly before 1244, when a further certificate of ownership by Barnim and Wratislaw of Pomerania mentions the church of St Mary and St Peter in Broda for the first time (PUB 1, 508–510, No. 429; MUB 1, 541–542, No. 563). The chosen location lay immediately adjacent to the long-distance route across the Tollense, which led from Hamburg and Schwerin to Szczecin, and where the above-mentioned market and tavern (*forum et taberna*) granted for the abbey’s initial foundation also stood. The abbey’s name, Broda, also reflects this situation: it comes from the Slavic *brod*, meaning “ford” (Kühnel 1883, 9; Trautmann 1950, 32–33) (Figure Monastery property – Fig. 1).

⁸ Schmidt 1984; 1992. For other attempts at localisation, see also Ulrich, Sobietzky 2009.

Using a fake charter dated to the 11th of August 1170 (PUB 1, 63–67, No. 54; MUB 1, 89–96, No. 95; Wentz 1933, 215), the members of the Havelberg cathedral chapter laid claim to 14 sites on the western and a further 18 on the eastern shores of the lake. In addition, the document claimed that in order to endow the abbey, Prince Casimir had also granted the Havelberg canons the area around the Lieps at the southern end of the lake, alongside areas around the sources of the Havel and salt springs near a settlement named Cholchele (Schich 1981, 100). In contrast, a confirmation document by Bogislav of Pomerania, dated to AD 1182 and with less suspicion of forgery attached to it, only mentions the complex at the lake's north-western end, the Lieps and the adjacent area to the west up to the Havel and the saltern (PUB 1, 117–119, No. 90; MUB 1, 130–131, No. 135), so that reality and claim are more or less reflected in the relationship between the light and dark grey sections on Harry Schulz's 1999 map, published in the journal "Neubrandenburger Mosaik" (Schulz 1999, fig. 8, 27). The canons at Broda were granted further possessions by the Princes of Werle, who confirmed alleged older endowments by the Pomeranian princes attested in additional forgeries, and also added own gifts (Hardt *et al.* 2016, 90–92). Yet the impression created by Harry Schulz's map is misleading in as far as it shows the greatest extent of Broda's claims, but not an actually achieved reality. This is first and foremost connected to the political situation that formed the context for the development of the Broda convent. Ever since the Treaty of Kremmen of 1236, the influence of the Pomeranian princes in the region had been drastically reduced by their competitors, the Brandenburg margraves of the Ascanian dynasty (Hardt *et al.* 2016, 86). From then on, the region of Stargard on the eastern shore of Lake Tollense was Brandenburgian, and all the documents in which Pomeranian princes attested the possessions of the canons at Broda counted for very little as long as the former no longer controlled large parts of the area along the Tollense river and the lake of the same name. Indeed, the conflict between Pomerania and Brandenburg had apparently also resulted in local magnates extending their possessions into lands claimed by the abbey. In the course of these various processes, and concurrently with them, the cultural landscape was also being refashioned, Slavic settlements were deserted, relocated or measured and granted; new settlements of small plots (*Hagenhufensiedlungen*), recognisable by their names, were established (Schulz 1996). This means that from then on, a blending of diverse and divergent interests existed within which the abbey succeeded to secure a basis for monastic life, albeit one that was rather reduced compared to the claimed original endowments. In addition to the settlements, whose taxes satisfied the requirements for victuals, whether provided directly or acquired in the urban markets, this particularly included the mills which ground the grain now being produced in abundance for both the abbey's on needs and the exigencies of regional consumption patterns.

Finally, supply with the vital fasting food fish was guaranteed, alongside the salt used to preserve it and all other stored food (Hardt 2019a). Just as in the case of their ambition for possessions around the lake, the Broda Premonstratensians were also too late in another way; on the 4th of January 1248, Margrave John I of Brandenburg founded his town of Neubrandenburg in the immediate vicinity of Broda Abbey, and from then on until this day it was this urban foundation which played the role of a successor to the settlement agglomeration in the Lieps and thereby potentially Rethra (MUB 1, 566–568, No. 600; Hardt *et al.* 2016, 90). Yet the citizens of this ambitious new town, in their role as congregation in the parish churches under the patronage of the Breda canons, increasingly acted as donors in their own right and were among the most important funders of the Premonstratensian abbey (Hardt *et al.* 2016, 99).

The foundation of Belbuck near Treptow on the Rega can only be mentioned in passing here as an attempt by Prince Casimir to establish a convent at a place already used as a ritual site in pre-Christian times, as indicated by its name (Petersohn 1979, 452–453; Biermann, Rębkowski 2007, 75). In 1177, he induced a convent from the Trinity abbey of Drotten in Lund, then in Denmark, to settle at Belbuck (PUB 1, 84, 110–112; Hoogeweg 1924, 13–91; Petersohn 1979, 327; Biermann, Rębkowski 2007, 73–75; Simiński 2015). Apparently, the aim was to connect the abbey to sites with other central functions, in this case embodied by the nearby castle of Treptow, where the Pomeranian princess Anastasia resided in her widowhood (Biermann, Rębkowski 2007, 74–75). Yet the first foundation failed; a second, successful attempt was instigated in 1208 with canons from the Frisian abbey Mariengarde (PUB 1, 146, 184–186; Hoogeweg 1924, 17; Biermann, Rębkowski 2007, 73–74). Similarly, the establishment of a Norbertine nunnery in 1224, initially located in Treptow castle and later in nearby Marienbusch, proceeded sluggishly. It was only in 1235 that the arrival of Premonstratensian nuns from the Bethlehem convent near Mariengarde ensured that the foundation of the princely widow Anastasia was to endure (PUB 1, 222–223, 270–274; Hoogeweg 1925, 758–769; Petersohn 1979, 336, 503; Biermann, Rębkowski 2007, 72, 75).

It was probably the advantageous location along important routeways which induced Prince Bogislav of Pomerania to choose this place, part of the possessions of Grobe, for the endowment of Gramzow (Neininger, Schulz 2007) in what is now the Uckermark in 1177, settling minor conventual friars from Jerichow (Petersohn 1979, 363–364) and Ratzeburg (Bünz, Hillebrand 2016, 653, 675) there. Similarly, in 1231 Margrave Albrecht II of Brandenburg was guided by the location of the routes from the margraviate to Pomerania and Greater Poland when he tried to turn an existing hospital in Barsdin near Oderberg castle into an abbey proper, probably with friars from Gramzow, granting it the programmatic name of “Gottesstadt” (Schrage *et al.* 2007b).

Yet its development, too, stagnated (Petersohn 1979, 328) and it was consequently accorded to the neighbouring Cistercian abbey of Mariensee-Pehlitzwerder (Gahlbeck *et al.* 2007, 852), the precursor of Chorin, upon its foundation in 1258 (Schrage *et al.* 2007a).

Having introduced the Premonstratensian foundations in the later circaries of Saxonia and Slavia, to which must be added the female convents in Treptow/Marienbusch and Stolp (Hoogeweg 1925, 630–648), heavily dependent on the neighbouring monasteries, I would like to end this contribution by summarising the significance of these donors and abbeys for the regions of the Polabian and Baltic Slavs. After the first endowment of an abbey east of the Saale, Gottesgnaden, for which the intention is hard to assess today, Norbert of Xanten initially used the Magdeburg abbey of St Mary's, which he had reformed according to Premonstratensian principles, to drive the establishment of the provisional cathedral chapter in Leitzkau/Parduin/Brandenburg. Anselm and Evermod continued this path with Jerichow/Havelberg and Ratzeburg, while Grobe appears to have played a similar role for the Pomeranian bishopric. The aim of supporting the bishops who had returned to their original sees necessitated monastic activity at central places, as is also recognisable for Broda, Belbuck, Gramzow and Barsdin/Oderberg, at least in the way in which they were originally conceived (Flachenecker 2009, 331, 335). Where these central places also functioned as princely residences, as in Usedom-Grobe, the abbeys could also fulfil functions as house abbeys and memorial places (Petersohn 1999, 40–42). Most likely, Prince Ratibor I and his wife Pribislava, his nephew Bogislav I and his son Wartislav, alongside Bogislav II's daughter Woislava and further members of the Griffin dynasty found their final rest in Grobe (Flachenecker 2009, 334; Petersohn 1979, 372; 1999, 41–43; Behn 2012, 326, 331–333). Some of the charters connected to Grobe show that the local Premonstratensians were also responsible for introducing literacy to the Pomeranian princes, according to Jürgen Petersohn by using graphic means corresponding to the princely charters of the Hohenstaufen emperors (Petersohn 1999, 44–47). The relaying of the Magdeburg liturgy and veneration of saints to the Pomeranian bishopric in Kammin was also achieved via Grobe (Petersohn 1999, 52–54), just as the example of Magdeburg was also followed in Ratzeburg (Petersohn 1979, 186–188).

Yet the Premonstratensians' greatest achievements lie in building up a parish organisation in the surroundings of the abbeys they established in the territory of the Polabian and Baltic Slavs (Petersohn 1979, 362–365; Springer 2005, 22; Bünz, Hillebrand 2016, 653). As the example of Broda makes particularly clear, the patronage of village and town churches was soon to become the chapters' main source of income. This confirms a mid-19th century observation by Franz Winter:

“the ecclesiastical organisation of the entire territory between Lake Tollense and the northern part of Lake Müritz is the work of the Brode Premonstratensians”⁹. Yet this does not mean that they, through missionary activities, necessarily contributed to *gentilium colonum barbarie, quoquaversum horrebat Christianaque religione pessumdata jam pene nullus erat, reformare possemus*, as it was phrased in one of Anselm of Havelberg’s charters concerning the abbey at Jerichow (CDB 1843, 80, No. 3). Rather, from their bases in existing central places, they contributed to a territorial expansion which was not first and foremost driven by them, but rather by members of the lower nobility at the behest of secular rulers, or by the competing Cistercians, who had however not founded their abbeys in castle towns with good connections to important routeways, but rather at the margins of the existing cultural landscapes (Schich 2001). Franz Winter’s 1865 assessment that “the abandonment of the abbeys in the newly conquered Wendish areas” was ultimately responsible, “by missionising, cultivating and Germanising”, for “consolidating with the sword of the spirit what the iron sword had brought under German control”¹⁰ must therefore be seen as a scholarly error caused by the ideologies of its time. What is so remarkable about the Premonstratensians is their capacity to keep reinventing themselves; beginning with small groups whose lives followed the example of the original Christian communities, developing into cathedral chapters and from there into convents living off patronage and benefice and whose economic strategies certainly meant that the order’s discipline must soon have been in rather bad shape. In just the same way, their founder Norbert had repeatedly reinvented himself on his journey between Prémontré, Rome and Magdeburg.

⁹ Winter 1865, 209–210 (“die kirchliche Organisation des ganzen Landes zwischen dem Tollense- und dem nördlichen Müritz-See ist ein Werk der Prämonstratenser von Brode”); translation: author.

¹⁰ Winter 1865, 101 (“die Aufgabe der Klöster in den neueroberten Wendenländern“ sei es gewesen, “missionierend, cultivierend und germanisierend das mit dem Schwerte des Geistes zu festigen, was das eiserne Schwert unter deutsche Macht gebeugt“); translation: author.

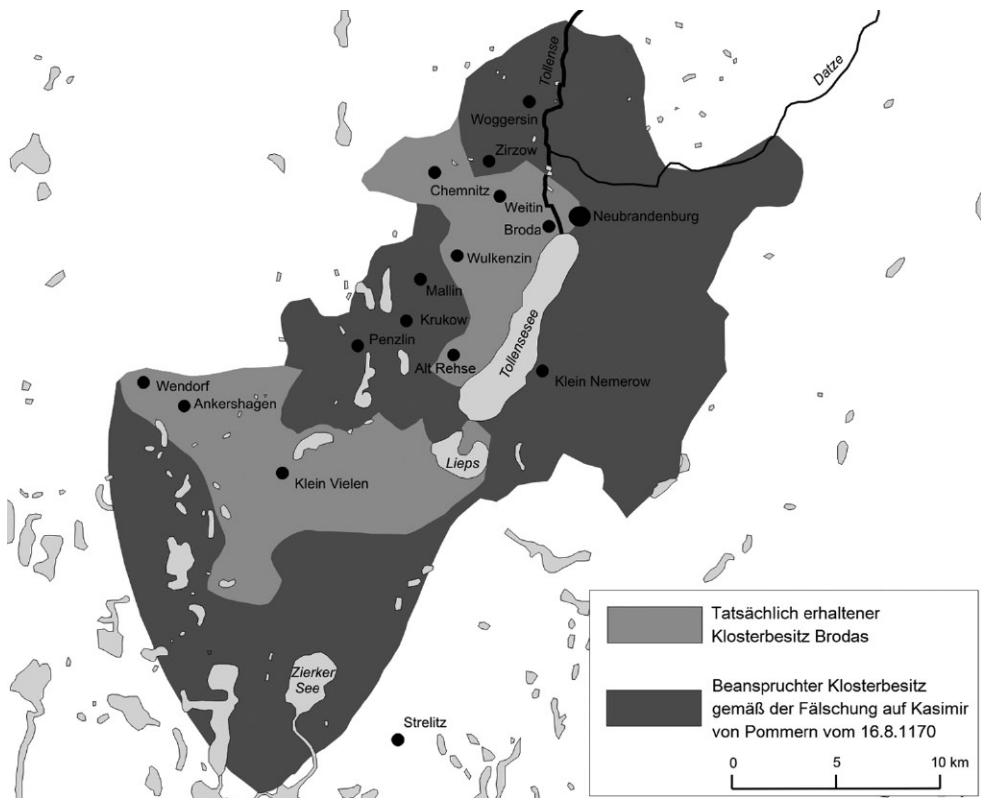


Fig. 1. Demands and reality in the property of the Broda monastery according to the faked charter of prince Casimir I and younger documents. After: Schulz 1999, 27. Redrawn by K. Opitz Ryc. 1. Roszczenia terytorialne i realne posiadłości klasztoru w Brodzie według sfałszowanego nadania księcia Kazimierza I i późniejszych dokumentów. Za: Schulz 1999, 27. Wyk. K. Opitz

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The significance of the Premonstratensians for the Polabian and Baltic Slavs

Summary

Via the Magdeburg abbey of St Mary, remodelled by their founder Norbert of Xanten, the Premonstratensians also reached the territory of the Polabian and Baltic Slavs. From the convents of Leitzkau and Jerichow the cathedral chapters of Brandenburg and Havelberg were established, while the cathedral clergy at Ratzeburg came from Gottesgnaden near Calbe an der Saale. Broda, Grobe and Belbuck were supported by the Pomeranian princes. In contrast to the Cistercians, who settled at the edges of the cultural landscape, the Premonstratensians sought the vicinity of central places, where their foundations initially fulfilled functions within pastoral care and as house abbeys. Soon, they saw their main task as helping to establish a parish organisation.

Znaczenie norbertan dla Słowian Połabskich i Bałtyckich

Streszczenie

Norbertanie dotarli na terytorium Słowian Połabskich i bałtyckich za pośrednictwem opactwa św. Marii w Magdeburgu, zreformowanego przez założyciela zakonu Norberta z Xanten. Kapituły katedralne w Brandenburgu i Havelbergu zostały założone z pomocą zgromadzeń w Leitzkau i Jerichow, zaś kler katedry w Ratzeburgu pochodził z Gottesgnaden koło Calbe nad Soławą. Klasztory w Brodzie, Grobi i Białobokach uzyskały wsparcie książąt pomorskich. W odróżnieniu od cystersów, zasiedlających obszary położone na uboczu krajobrazu kulturowego, norbertanie zakładali swoje siedziby blisko miejsc centralnych, gdzie ich fundacje początkowo pełniły funkcję duszpasterską oraz opactw domowych. Z czasem ich głównym zadaniem stała się pomoc w organizacji sieci parafialnych.

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