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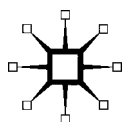
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A History of Poland

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Preface

If we view history as a discipline the role of which is to explain the present, we run the risk of being selective in what we consider relevant historic information. We might well miss or leave out what was important at the time, but which has no relevance to today's developments. We are likely to overlook trends, developments, movements and facts that were not part of the determinist progression through centuries. But most importantly we are likely to end up neither studying, nor explaining, history.

The twentieth century's preoccupation with nation states made it difficult to conceive that the right of nations to rule themselves was not the driving force in developments of the past. Even less are we willing to accept, without some hesitation, that this is not the ultimate right of each nation. Where a national group experienced persecution, mistreatment or oppression in recent history, the desire for independence and the right to self-determination was strengthened. A present-day historian and his audience might only too easily slip into an analysis of only those factors which led to that manifold destiny of national independence.

'The Polish Question' had dominated contemporary debates on the rights of national groups to independence in Europe. Until recently, when asked to make any comment on Poland and Poles, outsiders would refer to the nation's suffering and pain, betrayal and denial of rights. That is because they usually refer to the fate of the Polish kingdom during the partitions and the long fight for independence. But Polish history consists of more than just suffering. Nor is the history of Polish people that of victims, suffering because they had no say over their fate. It has been my attempt to move beyond issues which contributed directly to Poland's place in present-day Europe. I was not inclined to view Poles as passive in the face of events unfolding around them. The aim of the present volume of *The History of Poland* is to probe into the history of Poland, beyond the facts which determined the character of present-day Poland. Indeed, the history of Poland would be so much poorer, were its parameters to be defined by what we know to be present-day Poland. This volume attempts to look

at the history of people who inhabited the territory of what came to be known as the Kingdom of Poland, at its rulers and their objectives and finally at the factors which moulded and buffeted the region.

When I was asked by Palgrave to write this volume, I accepted the commission with excitement. I knew that in the process of writing the present volume, my understanding of past events would be extended. I also expected that many issues, which until now I took as said, would never again seem either obvious or simple. I admit to having found this commission intellectually challenging. Looking at the history of one's people was bound to be a test of historic skills. My failures and successes can ultimately be judged by the readers.

Many people had influenced me in my attempt to understand my past and that of Poland. Franciszka and Stefan Themerson had always encouraged me to be sceptical of received wisdoms. Tamara Deuscher encouraged me to probe further and not to be constrained by reactions to my findings. I remain indebted to them for pushing me to be bolder in my conclusions. But my biggest debt of gratitude is to Jan Toporowski, without whose help and companionship my life would have been incomplete. To Miriam and her English Babcia I dedicate this book.

MAPS



Map 1 Poland, late 10th–13th Centuries.



Map 2 Poland, 14th–15th Centuries.



Map 3 Poland, 1772–95.



Map 4 Poland, 1920–22.

The People of Central Europe

History has never been free from the politics of today. Only too frequently it has been a tool in the hands of those who use the past in order to justify present-day attitudes and actions. It has been suggested that Central Europeans are particularly adept at using remote historical events to justify the present. Thus in their claim to justify Germany's right of expansion eastwards some historians have suggested that the catalyst for the creation of the first Slav states had not emerged from within the local tribes, but was the result of German influence and organisation. By the same token Polish historians have defined as 'Polish' prehistoric archaeological evidence which in reality could at best only be evidence of tribal or regional developments, since the Polish state did not exist at the time. Any claim that evidence reflects some early 'Polish' national consciousness would be pure invention. The nineteenth century, preoccupied with the rise and fall of nation states, has created a particularly fertile ground for the proliferation of such spurious historic debates, aimed at suggesting that from their earlier days people wished to be ruled by 'their own people'. Since the creation of ethnically homogenous states is nearly entirely confined to the twentieth century, we should be careful in ascribing to any earlier development significance which was not present at the time.

During the inter-war period historians seeking to justify Poland's extended boundaries to the east suggested that the area which should be considered as the cradle of the Polish nation is that defined by the rivers Vistula, Dnieper, San and Dniester. After the Second World War when Poland's frontiers were shifted westwards a new historic interpretation was put forward. Since Poland lost over one-third of its inter-war territories to the Soviet Union, but gained undeniably German areas of East and West Prussia together with a western border on the

river Oder, the politically correct view changed accordingly. During the Communist period the cradle of Polish nationhood was redefined as being between the Vistula and the Oder rivers, which flow from the south to the Baltic Sea in the north. The political stability achieved at the end of the twentieth century and the acceptance by Poland's neighbours that the present borders are here to stay, have created preconditions for a less impassioned and more academic debate. The history of the present-day Polish state can be hopefully freed from the duty it had of supporting the reasons of state and concentrate on presenting the historic developments that resulted in the creation of the present-day Polish state. In Poland's case, the past is sufficiently turbulent and interesting not to need further embellishment.

Geography has played an important role in defining the boundaries within which human settlements developed in northern Europe. In the areas where the first Polish kingdom was to emerge at the beginning of the tenth century, the geographical features were sufficiently prominent to have made a marked impact on the evolution of human settlements. These determined movement across the region, contact between people, trade, but also the exchange and spread of ideas. In the north the Baltic Sea encouraged coastal trade, which in turn facilitated coastal settlement, but also enabled invasions. South of the coast, the terrain is flat, but the predominance of great primeval forests and marshes in the east was always a constraint on movement. Not until these forests and marshes were depleted did contact between scattered tribes take place. Thus the river valleys, which in the future Polish territories invariably start in high terrain in the south and then meander to the Baltic, have acted as communication routes. In the south the generally impassable Tatra and Carpathian mountain ranges formed a natural barrier between tribes north of the mountains and those south of them. One mountain pass between the Sudeten and Tatra Mountains, the Moravian Gate, allowed communication with areas south. It has also been possible to skirt the Carpathians by going south-east and along the valley of the river Dniester. These geographical features explain population movements and trading patterns.

North and north-eastern Europe had also been directly affected by the ice ages. The glaciers, which covered territories of future Poland, changed its geography and directly affected the pace of future human settlement. During the Palaeolithic period, approximately 40,000 years ago, mammoths were hunted in north-eastern Europe. There is some, though scant, evidence of human settlement, whose temporary nature

points to a nomadic lifestyle. The glacial period which followed destroyed most archaeological evidence. The ice cover tended to alter but most of northern Europe continued to be covered by glaciers. Between 12,000 and 8000 years BC the glaciers receded first to the Baltic and then further north freeing the seas. By then tribes which led a migratory lifestyle, based on limited agriculture and on following reindeer herds, lived in the region. It is estimated that by that time the climate had stabilised and became like the climate we know in what would later become Poland. As the glaciers receded, mixed forest grew and covered most of the area. Because of the density of growth it inhibited population movement. Pockets of human settlements established themselves in clearings and in areas where the forest cover was not too dense, but it is assumed that the pattern of forest cover limited contacts between groups and facilitated the emergence of strong tribal consciousness. Limited archaeological evidence suggests that it also encouraged economic self-sufficiency.

Opinions differ on what caused a change in this pattern of life. The key question is what led tribes to break out of the isolation imposed by geography and the topography of the region? Historians of this early period seem have put forward various interpretations. Some subscribe to the theory that what happened was no less than a revolutionary change, one which forced communities to change drastically the way in which they had hitherto obtained food and shelter. These are clearly theories influenced by the Marxist interpretation of historic evolution. This presupposes that the driving force behind all social changes is economic, usually accompanied by violent breakdown of the old order, which is in turn replaced by one more appropriate to new forms of production. Since there is little evidence of such a trauma before the Roman period, it might be wiser to assume that the population of north-eastern Europe was affected by a variety of influences, none necessarily violent nor sudden. In the south new agricultural methods absorbed from contacts with more advanced cultures might have encouraged further inter-tribal contacts. In the north, where trade in amber had always created preconditions for contact between the local population and traders from the outside, there is evidence of more exchange of commodities but also of use of hitherto unknown metals. In the interior, communities might have continued undisturbed, pursuing traditional methods of agriculture which in most cases amounted to the slash and burn method, followed by a few years of cultivation and then a temporary abandonment of the cleared field until nutrients

in the soil had been replenished. Whether one does or does not subscribe to the theory of a 'Neolithic revolution' resulting in a sudden and possibly rapid rate of change, there is agreement that by the end of this period, approximately between 5200 and 3700 BC, a more settled agriculture and animal husbandry became the norm. Communities ceased being nomadic and obtained most food from cultivation rather than hunting.

At this stage it is still not possible to speak of any specific ethnic groups inhabiting the territory of present-day Poland, though already during the Bronze Age communities emerged which appeared to share common cultural traits, such as similar styles of pottery, burial patterns and common agricultural methods. And although initially these groups would have consisted of no more than a few related families sharing common fields and herds, in due course some form of social stratification took place. Some burials are more elaborate and endowed with symbols of authority, such as arms, decorations and occasionally human and animal sacrifice, suggesting that a group of tribal elders and possibly also a priestly caste were emerging within the communities. The inclusion of horse bridles and decorations in some graves is evidence that a caste of warriors defined by their use of horses in fighting was also present in the Bronze Age. During the Roman period rich burials bear witness to substantial differentiation within local communities. By then a ruling or leadership group, possibly hereditary, had become defined. The reasons for these differences are not always easy to identify. Families breaking away from communities and successfully pursuing agriculture might offer one explanation. Other sources of wealth might have been booty and slaves obtained by the warriors during attacks on other communities.

During the early Bronze Age (1300–400 BC) a distinct local culture emerged around the river Bug. Historians have called it the *Łużyce* (Lusatian) culture. This was an economically stable community, associated with successful cultivation of a variety of grains and produce. During this period family groups combined into tribal groups, which united for the purpose of defence. Metallurgy and blacksmithing were known to the Lusatians. As the *Łużyce* culture declined, Scythian invasions left a mark on the region. The Celts were another distinct outside group which left a strong mark on the region. During the Roman period for the first time certain population groups were defined as Slav. During the fourth century they inhabited the areas of present-day Czech and Slovak lands and some parts of south-eastern Germany.

At the time of the great migration of peoples during the first half of the first millennium, territories around the Vistula and Oder rivers were temporarily inhabited by a number of tribes about which we have more information. During the years AD 45 and 53 Attila, the leader of the barbarian tribe of the Huns, ravaged areas of present-day Poland. By the fifth century AD, as the Germanic tribes moved on, the Slavs came to occupy most of the regions between the Carpathian Mountains and the Baltic Sea. In common with other parts of Europe, the region appears to have suffered from the cessation of the little trade that had taken place with the Roman Empire. Rapid movements of whole tribes, the reasons for which remain not entirely clear, ravaged the land. Grave discoveries suggest that standards of cultivation and levels of wealth fell and that tribes withdrew into isolation, making very little contact with the outside world and maintaining only limited economic exchanges across the region.

There is archaeological evidence that, during the ninth and tenth centuries AD, tribes combined to organise themselves, mainly for defence purposes. There is conclusive evidence of quite sophisticated building of fortified settlements, called *grodziska*. These were usually on raised terrain, sometimes where a river or lake provided some added security. Additionally, raised earth and stone structures surrounded the *grodziska*; sometimes a moat was dug around it. These settlements were not isolated. The fact that they usually appeared to be linked, either surrounding an area or providing defence against attack from one direction, suggests that inhabitants of the region had purposefully combined to form an alliance. Inhabitants would flock to the *grodziska* during time of danger, though at times of peace they most probably were the focal point of local economic and political life. Local tribal leaders with their warriors were most probably based in the fortified settlement. It would be expected that they would also have acted as religious centres. In most cases after the introduction of Christianity to Poland, the first bishoprics were established in pre-existing *grodziska*. The largest number of such settlements existed in the Wielkopolska region near the rivers of Warta and Wełna. At the same time there is evidence that, by means of tribal alliances or possible conquest, tribal leaders from within the Wielkopolska region extended their influence beyond their own areas, exacting some form of tribute. Trade between the centralised region and the periphery flourished, suggesting that Wielkopolska was becoming a centre of economic activity and trade for the whole area. Within Wielkopolska

human settlements were denser and exploitation of land more intense than outside the region. Evidence suggests that barter and sometimes cash trade using silver coins were also taking place between the centre and periphery areas.

The absence of an advanced literary culture means that it is not possible to be precise about how and when this process, whereby tribal leaders combined into defensive alliances, became a self-conscious desire to centralise and develop a more permanent political structure. Existing evidence gives only a fragmentary picture of the origins of the emergence of the state structure. We will probably never know who initiated the process of centralisation, which then was followed by state building. Nevertheless some intelligent speculation, based on the little that is known, is permissible. The existence of a number of powerful tribes dominating territories east of the Oder River had been recorded during the second half of the ninth century by a chronicler known as The Geographer of Bavaria. This source states that among a number of approximately 50 tribes, some became dominant. The Wiślanie and Lędzianie inhabited Małopolska, the Mazowszanie the Masovia area, the Polanie were in Wielkopolska, Goplanie in Kujawy, the Ślężanie in Silesia and finally the Pomorzanie in Pomerania. Initially these tribes existed independently. The reason why it became necessary to unite or bring together these tribes is not obvious. Military threat and the need to consolidate forces had in some circumstances acted as a catalyst towards state formation. But since the areas, which subsequently came to be known as the territory of the Polish kingdom, were not under threat of invasion, the incentive to centralise remains obscured by history.

By the eighth century the Polanie seem to have taken the lead in establishing control over neighbouring tribes. Their power might be explained by their strong economic position based mainly on the control of the salt trade. The centre of the Polanie's territory was the fortified stronghold of Gniezno, which in AD 850 was, by the standards of the time, a substantial town with fortifications, markets and settlement of craftsmen. The establishment of the first Polish dynasty came as a result of an internal coup during which the then ruler Popiel was removed and replaced by Ziemovit. Again the precise details are vague, but it would appear that through a process of conquests Ziemovit and his successors Leszek and then Ziemomysł incorporated the districts of Masovia, Małopolska and possible also Pomerania into the emerging state of Gniezno. The final stages of the consolidation of

the state took place during the rule of Mieszko I (960–92) who assumed leadership in approximately AD 960. Mieszko is the first ruler about whom we have some knowledge. This was mainly because the increasing power of the new state attracted the attention of the Christian German lords and the German Emperor who at that time bore the title of the Holy Roman Emperor. The Moravians and the Papacy, for different reasons, also paid attention to political developments around the Vistula River. The state of Gniezno, which increasingly was referred to as Poland, even at this early stage became a player in European politics.

The 180 years which started with Mieszko I and ended with the death of Bolesław Krzywousty (Boleslaus Wrymouth, 1102–38) was a time of the consolidation of Poland's new frontiers, the establishment of Christianity, the end of pagan faiths and, finally, the creation of permanent state structures. The transition from tribal rule to a hereditary monarchy was inevitably complex. This was a time of turbulence, strife and bloodletting. But at the end of Bolesław Krzywousty's reign Poland was considered to be a Christian state, with an established monarchy and a centralised administrative structure. It had won the recognition of the two European arbiters of power, the Holy Roman Empire and the Papacy.

In present-day thinking Poland's faith is inextricably linked to that of the Catholic Church, or as it was then referred to, the Church of Rome. History textbooks would like to present the Christianisation of Poland in mystical and possibly determinist terms. Thus the image of Poland as the frontier between the Western Christian world, on the one hand, and the Russian Orthodox Church, which derived from the Byzantine Church, on the other, rather conveniently symbolises a present Polish preference to be considered as belonging to the West European cultural traditions. The fact that first lasting contacts with Christianity came from Bohemia, rather than Germany, is also presented as a stroke of fate, even as an act of defiance. Since Germany has traditionally been Poland's key enemy, Poles fondly point out that conversion to Christianity came about not through the efforts of the German bishops but through contacts with Bohemia, making this in some way a voluntary act, rather than that of submission. History reveals a more complex and not so obvious a picture.

Although the eastern territories has been of some interest to the Papacy for some time, it was not until the tenth century that Christian missionaries made any impact on the region. Tribes east of Germany

had been exposed to some Christian influence even before Mieszko's reign. There are suggestions that cremation of bodies had ceased as a traditional way of disposing of the dead, possibly as a result of changing burial practices in Christian Western Europe. Christian symbols were known in the east. Missionaries had travelled eastwards, even though we know of no lasting consequences of their efforts before AD 966. The breakthrough was made when the ruler and his entourage converted and made the Christian faith the one official faith of the ruling family and their subjects. This act pitched the Christian faith in direct confrontation with pagan beliefs. In reality it would still be a long time before the Polish state would be truly rid of pagan religions, their symbols and centres of practice. For the newly emerging Polish state the critical moment occurred when Mieszko I married a Bohemian princess who was herself a convert to Christianity. With her entourage a Benedictine missionary of the name Jordan arrived in Poland. The fact that he was a missionary priest was important as it meant that he owed loyalty not to a bishop but directly to the Papacy. Mieszko appears to have made a political decision to convert and to be accepted into the Christian faith. On the eastern border of the German Holy Roman Empire the establishment of the so-called marches, dedicated to the conquest of the eastern territories, was a particular threat to the newly emerging state. By converting, Mieszko denied the Holy Roman Empire an excuse for conquest, since the right to military subjugation of pagans in order to convert them to Christianity would no longer be valid. By the same token Mieszko could now justify his military conquest against the still pagan Pomerania and territories to the east by claiming that this was an attempt to introduce Christianity. Mieszko's immediate successors, mindful of the ongoing conflict between the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire, frequently took the Papacy's side in order to weaken the Emperor's authority, and simply to destabilise their strong neighbour. On several occasions Polish kings accepted the tutelage of the Emperor, but at the same time appealed to the Pope to insure against inconvenient tutelage. The acceptance of the Christian faith was at the time a political decision, not a spiritual journey.

From the outset the Papacy saw advantages in encouraging Mieszko's independence. By receiving baptism from a Papal missionary, the newly emerging state had become a Papal protectorate. In its conflict with the Holy Roman Empire the Papacy was on the lookout for ways of controlling the spread of German influence eastwards. For the time being Poland was not drawn into the German sphere.

Conversion to Christianity brought with it numerous international benefits. These were possibly confined to the ruling groups. It brought Poland into the community of developed, well-organised and economically advanced West European states. The arrival of foreign priests and monks, skilled and willing to act as scribes and administrators, was a further advantage. Monks brought with them new skills, unknown implements and advanced cultivation methods. But to Mieszko the Church's direct links with the centres of power were just as important. The Church upheld the monarch's authority, now seen not merely as a tribal leader, but in accordance with the new faith, chosen by God himself to rule his people. We have to presume that Mieszko had still to contend with challenges to his own personal authority, but also that his and his predecessor's policy of centralisation had caused disquiet among the leaders of other tribes and the nobility. His acceptance of Christianity united the main tribes in a common faith, imposing a unifying set of beliefs and codes. The Church's commitment to the support of the ruler was particularly important to Mieszko. His international standing was enhanced, but the Church supported his temporal authority by defining the monarch's rule as a sign of divine will. In return the Church and its priests benefited from the ruler's patronage and support.

We can safely presume that initially the extent of Christian influence was minimal; possibly it was only confined to the court, the top nobility and to Mieszko's immediate entourage. The fact that the first church was not built in Gniezno, but in Poznań, suggests an anxiety about a pagan backlash. This did emerge in coming years when the Christian Church decided to exact a tithe from all the people. The efficient taxation system introduced and operated by the clergy, while giving Mieszko and his successors a guaranteed source of income, was deeply resented by the population. There must also still have been strong attachment to local religions and beliefs. The Christian Church's uncompromising hostility to them was bound to cause a reaction. Polygamy was still generally practised and the ownership of slaves was the norm among the wealthy. The Church's attempts to combat these practices and efforts to persuade the princes and nobility to respect Christian marriage vows brought them into conflict with long-standing practices. At times of political instability the Christian Church was attacked and its organisation was on more than one occasion virtually wiped out. This was the case during the period immediately after Mieszko's death, when the state structure, still so tenuous,

atomised. Several times the Church presence had to be re-established. During the reign of Bolesław Chrobry (Boleslaus the Valiant, 992–1025), the authority of the Church was only with the greatest difficulty reaffirmed after the civil war. The weakening of the Church inside Poland had its dangerous implications in foreign relations as successive rulers became anxious lest the German rulers succeed in their claim that the areas to the east were pagan. This would have legitimised their conquests. After a period of internal turbulence, Bolesław Chrobry anxiously sought to reaffirm Poland's commitment to the Church of Rome. An opportune murder of the missionary Vojtěch who had earlier been Bishop of Prague, by a pagan tribe in Prussia, allowed the Polish king to obtain the Papacy's full recognition of the independent status of the Polish Church. The King retrieved the martyr's body and, due to the fact that Vojtěch was well connected with the European ruling houses, his death attracted the Papacy's attention. His body was brought to Gniezno and when canonised the Poles appropriated him as St Wojciech. The Poles, on whose territories he had undertaken his missionary activities, were able to present themselves as defenders of the faith. As a result the Pope looked upon the Poles sympathetically and agreed to publicly reaffirm the Polish Christian Church's independence of the German hierarchy. Within the next few years in addition to the already existing Gniezno bishopric, three more were established, in Kraków, Wrocław and Kołobrzeg. All came under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Gniezno and thus the unity of the Church underpinned the unity of the state.

The process of state building did not proceed smoothly. After Mieszko's death, internal rebellions and military confrontations with neighbours on several occasions threatened to undermine what degree of centralisation had been achieved. It is possible to identify several stages whereby the process of state building progressed, faltered and was again continued under the leadership of a strong ruler. Mieszko's son Bolesław Chrobry marks a key stage in Poland's progression towards the creation of a Polish kingdom. His rule is characterised by nearly continuous struggles with the Holy Roman Empire to consolidate the international authority of the newly emerging state and the conquest of new territories. In 1000 Bolesław Chrobry appeared to have secured a major coup. By then the Papacy and the Emperor had agreed on a formal process whereby both would agree to the coronation of a new king. Otto III, the young Emperor swayed by deep mystical and religious emotions, visited the grave of St Wojciech in

Gniezno. Bolesław Chrobry appears to have impressed him enough during the course of the visit to obtain his consent to becoming King of Poland. He nevertheless still needed the Pope's agreement to being crowned. The Papal consent to the 'anointing' of a king, was in effect a process whereby the head of the Christian Church identified the chosen ruler and granted him God's authority. Chrobry's misfortune was that, while Otto was inclined to crown him, the then Pope Benedict VIII maintained the policy of opposition to the spread of German influence east. As the Polish ruler dispatched his emissaries to Rome to plead his case, Otto III died and was succeeded by Henry II who was determined to destroy the growing power of the Poles. The conflict between the two related to the extension of Polish influence over Łużyce and the region of Miśnia. In 1003 Bolesław Chrobry intervened in the Czech state, at that time torn by fratricidal conflicts between the ruler Boleslaus the Red and his brothers. In February 1003 Bolesław Chrobry assumed direct control over Bohemia and his troops occupied Prague. Henry II, hostile to the growth of Polish power, sided with Chrobry's opponents in the Bohemian and Moravian territories and forced the Poles to abandon Prague. Nevertheless conflicts continued with the Emperor until 1018. The outcome was advantageous to the Poles who defended their control of Łużyce and effectively stemmed German aspirations to eastern territories. Territories east of Poland also attracted Bolesław Chrobry's attention. The reason for this was that he still needed to consolidate the boundaries of the newly emerging state. Tactical considerations also played a role, as the Polish ruler needed to ensure that Henry II did not gain the allegiance of the rulers of Kiev. But in spite of marrying his daughter to the ruler of Kiev, Bolesław was not successful in his eastern policies. His son-in-law Svetopluk was first overthrown and, when reinstated, turned against Bolesław. The Principality of Kiev would henceforth mark the boundaries of Poland's eastern expansion.

In 1024 Bolesław was finally crowned King of Poland. This was achieved in the brief time between the death of Henry II and that of the Pope Benedict VIII. The latter's successor John XIX gave his consent to the Polish ruler being anointed. This made the earlier coronation by Otto III fully valid and the two requirements of the process were completed. Bolesław Chrobry had secured temporal and spiritual authority to become the King of Poland. Although purely symbolic, the implications of this act were immense. In the first place, Poland had achieved full recognition of its status of a European state by being

accepted into the Christian community. In the second place it was a confirmation of Bolesław's authority within his own community and the state which had by then emerged. The Church's full support for his authority strengthened his and his son's claim to rule.

But the process of centralisation, which was reflected in the strengthening of the authority of the King, met with opposition from the nobility. They took advantage of frequent crises which occurred when the issue of succession was either unclear or under attack, to try to destroy or weaken the power of the Crown. The nobility traditionally resented the strength of the Crown, which limited their power and reduced their role from that of being the ruler's companions to being his servants. The creation of the state bureaucracy also likewise met with resentment. It further diminished the ruler's dependence on the warrior nobility, thus robbing them of an opportunity to gain privileges. Henceforth the nobility would have to pledge its resources to the King and through supporting his policies and wars would obtain rewards either in the form of plunder or grants of estates.

But by the beginning of the new millennium the process of Christianisation, which had initially been confined to the court and the rulers' immediate entourage, became more aggressive and caused a reaction leading to revolts. Poland's neighbours who were on the lookout for an opportunity to interfere in Poland's internal affairs encouraged and facilitated these conflicts. Thus the German Emperor and the rulers of Bohemia, Moravia and Kiev all at one time or another supported pretenders to the Polish Crown and conspired to undermine internal stability. But there were limits to the likely cooperation between Poland's neighbours. The weakening of the Polish state was seen as desirable. Its destruction was not. Neighbouring rulers realised that a political vacuum would bring them into conflict with each other and would possibly result in disorder, which could eventually spill over into their own states. As none could destroy the Polish kingdom outright, a state of simmering internal instability was preferred. This consideration always acted as a moderating factor on the extent of interference in the internal affairs of the Polish kingdom.

Bolesław Chrobry's death in 1025 was followed by an extended period of conflict between his successors. Although the principle that the oldest son should succeed his father was generally accepted and was in particular upheld by the Church, the rulers' successive marriages, freely repudiating and discarding wives whose political usefulness had ended, made that principle unclear in its application.

The Christian Church had tried to oppose what it viewed as the rulers' lax attitudes towards marriage, but clergymen found it difficult to persuade the new Christians to abandon their traditional ways. In any case marriage remained a strong bond between allies. Its political usefulness could not be overlooked. When new alliances were consolidated, so new marriages were contracted. The result was that a successor to the throne had to contend with numerous and in many cases older half-brothers. These frequently lurked in the distant monasteries to which they had been banished by their father, or in the courts of neighbouring rulers, to which they had fled in fear of their life. These pretenders gave a veneer of legitimacy to any internal opposition or outside interference. Poland's descent into chaos between 1025, when Bolesław Chrobry died, and 1122 when Bolesław Krzywousty managed to re-establish the Crown's authority, was a time of internal conflict, foreign intervention and loss of territories conquered earlier.

Bolesław's son Mieszko II started his reign by undertaking an unfortunate, as it turned out, military incursion west. His allies were the pagan Łużyce and a number of Saxon noblemen who had fallen out with Emperor Conrad II. His initial military victories were cut short when Bezprym, his older half-brother from his father's earlier marriage, and his younger brother Otto fled east and sought the help of the Rus princes. Internal opposition emerged in the form of an anti-Christian backlash. Faced with military action in the east and west and rebellion in his own lands Mieszko was forced to negotiate with Conrad. Bezprym in the mean time gained the support of Mieszko's wife who was aggrieved by her husband's decision to deprive their son Kazimierz of the succession by placing him in a monastery. Mieszko was forced to accept Conrad's fairly harsh conditions. He renounced the title of king and agreed to carve out principalities for his brother Otto and an opportunistic uncle, who at this stage also appeared to challenge the King's authority. Nevertheless within two years Mieszko II managed to get rid of both and re-establish some authority over his territories. He then died violently, possibly assassinated. Mieszko's oldest son succeeded as ruler but soon died violently. This left only one legitimate male of the Piast dynasty. Kazimierz Odnowiciel (Casimir the Restorer, 1034–58), was Mieszko's son who had earlier been incarcerated by his father in a monastery. His reign was brief, as he too faced rebellion and was forced to flee to the court of Conrad II. In 1037 the Emperor, fearful of the consequences of the collapse of the Polish kingdom, restored him to power. Kazimierz had to overcome

years of lawlessness and internal strife. Without strong central authority whole areas had fallen under the control of tribal warlords. Historians have concluded that in effect two overlapping revolutions had taken place simultaneously; a political and a pagan revolution. The strongest reaction against the Church manifested itself close to the three bishoprics and the seat of the archbishopric. This would suggest that the proximity of the Church had been particularly oppressive to the local population. Kazimierz had to move the capital from Gniezno to Kraków and rebuild the Polish Church. Gniezno had been sacked by a Czech invasion and the relics of St Wojciech had been taken to Prague. The issue of the restoration of ecclesiastical authority had to be addressed urgently, in particular if the Polish state was to retain its independence and not allow itself to be dominated by its powerful German neighbour.

The restoration process had been temporarily successful and Kazimierz's son Bolesław Śmiały (Boleslaus the Bold, 1058–79) was able to build on his father's achievements. He also took advantage of the breach between the German Emperor Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII. By siding with Gregory's policies of freeing the Papacy from its dependence on the Emperor, the Polish prince was able to obtain Papal concessions in particular for the establishment of a Papal legate in Poland and the appointment of a fourth bishop. In the conflict between the two giants of the Christian world, Bolesław had backed the winning side. As a result, as Henry had to make his humiliating pilgrimage to Canossa to beg Papal forgiveness, Bolesław was crowned King of Poland.

Stability thus restored in Poland was only brief. For reasons that remain unclear, a new rebellion broke out. A number of noblemen sided with the King's younger brother and the Bishop of Kraków supported them. The King's decision to have the Bishop of Kraków executed for treason then led to a conflict between the state and Church. In the disorder that followed, the King had to flee the country. In 1079 Władysław Herman (Ladislaus Herman, 1079–1102), the deposed king's younger brother, took power in particularly difficult circumstances. Internal rebellion continued. Although he appears to have disposed of the exiled brother's eldest son, thus reducing the likelihood of rebellion coalescing around him, his own sons proved to be a source of difficulty. Władysław Herman had two sons, the first-born, Zbigniew, by his first wife who was a noblewoman. That marriage had not been sanctioned by the Church. But by the standards of the time, it

was still considered to have been a valid marriage and the son was treated as legitimate. His second son, Bolesław, was from his second marriage to the daughter of the Czech king. But Władysław Herman's third wife Judith, the sister of the German Emperor Henry IV, caused discord. Under his third wife's influence, the King despatched his first-born to a distant monastery and agreed with Judith that he should be declared illegitimate. Judith in the mean time formed an alliance with a powerful nobleman Sieciech and gave her support to the younger stepson.

The conflicts within the King's household allowed the opposition to crystallise around various factions. When the older son Zbigniew escaped from his monastery his cause was taken up by the Pomeranians on whose conquest the King had concentrated throughout his reign. The neighbouring Kujawy region also sided with the Pomeranians. Although both were finally defeated militarily, the King had to accept the son's claim to legitimacy. The Church threw in its lot with the oldest son and declared him to be legitimate and thus a rightful heir. In 1079 in an attempt to conciliate his sons Władysław Herman, by all accounts a weak and irresolute man, gave his two sons their own principalities. On receiving their own domains they proceeded to jointly wage war against their father and his supporters. When in 1102 the King died, his sons inherited a divided kingdom. It was inevitable that they would fall out and, in due course, the younger Bolesław Krzywousty forced his older brother into exile. When subsequently Zbigniew, enticed by false promises, returned to Poland, Bolesław had him first blinded and then killed. This was a common way of dealing with any likelihood of a challenge from male relatives. Bolesław Krzywousty's rule, until 1138, marked the last stage of stability before the next conflagration.

On his deathbed Bolesław Krzywousty decided that the kingdom should be divided between his sons. Some historians have seen in this decision the malign influence of a second wife, desperate to secure an inheritance for her sons. But the royal ordinance, defining precisely the rights and entitlements as well as duties of each son, was an attempt to deal with the inevitable conflicts which would follow his death. Thus far from being the King's weak response to a bullying wife, desperate to limit the authority of her stepson, the ordinance was a document aimed at consolidating the oldest son's authority, while recognising the rights of the younger siblings. It was the King's intention that his ordinance should be the guarantee of future stability, regulating inheritance

matters and securing both frontiers and power within the Polish state. To strengthen the impact of his ordinance Bolesław Krzywousty secured the approval of the Church, lay leaders and even of the Pope, thus committing them to upholding his decisions.

The ordinance stipulated that the oldest son was to be the absolute ruler of Poland. Each of the younger brothers received a clearly defined principality, the boundaries of which overlapped with tribal boundaries, thus making them more stable. Their right to each principality was to be hereditary. But only the oldest brother, the Senior, would have absolute control over Polish sovereignty. To him was assigned the main principality, which was the central area. This was meant to allow the Senior to exercise some control over his brothers' principalities. The Senior was to make all decisions concerning foreign relations and military affairs. The town of Kraków was designated as the capital of the kingdom. Unfortunately, soon after Bolesław's death his last wife Salomea, acting in defence of her sons' interests, conspired to undermine the authority of her stepsons and the Senior of the dynasty. What followed was the break-up of the state into self-governing principalities with each brother making extensive use of Poland's neighbours' willingness to assist them in the fratricidal conflicts which followed. For the next 200 years the territory of Poland was a battleground. Notwithstanding the state of anarchy into which Bolesław Krzywousty's successors plunged the Polish kingdom, it is worth noting that at the time of his death in 1138 the basic territorial unity of the state had been defined. It is also possible to speak of economic and social development, which paralleled those taking place in other European regions.

Bolesław Krzywousty's foreign policy was focused principally on the Pomeranian district. Its conquest served two purposes. Strategically it seemed a good idea to secure the region for Poland, thus stemming the growth of German influence in the region. The waging of a constant war against Pomerania also gave the Polish nobility a purpose and opportunity for enrichment through the acquisition of booty and slaves. This was likely to reduce their desire to challenge the power of the Crown and to decrease internal intrigues. The development of a community of knights, dedicated to the waging of war, made wars a necessary aspect of medieval life. Bolesław, in any case, did not seek the outright incorporation of the Pomeranian region into Poland, being satisfied with the incorporation of the Gdańsk district and the securing of areas up to the river Noteć. Western

Pomerania was subordinated to Poland without outright incorporation. Military conquest was accompanied by missionary activities and the Polish ruler paid a lot of attention to the Christianisation of conquered territories. Polish priests were sent to Pomerania and money was made available to build churches and to support the newly emerging ecclesiastical structure, which still had to contend with a very strong pagan presence. Bolesław's reasons were primarily political. He was determined that Pomerania should not become part of the German Church, but should be incorporated into the Polish Church, thus creating a barrier to the spread of German influence east. But the issue of the independence of the Polish and Pomeranian Christian churches briefly became an issue in the conflicts which were being played out in Rome. The Poles had backed Anaklet, the candidate of the Council of Florence, in his claim to the Papacy. When Pope Innocent II was able to defeat the so-called 'anti-Pope', the Poles found themselves on the wrong side of the complicated contest and the German bishops were able to persuade Innocent to subordinate the Polish Church to the authority of the German hierarchy. Only in 1135, after Emperor Lothar's death, did the Polish Church reverse this ruling, thus once more confirming the independence of the Polish Christian Church.

Bolesław's interference in the Hungarian battle of succession had resulted in disaster. It would seem that the Polish ruler had the knack of more than once backing the wrong man. Over the years the Poles realised that successive Czech Bohemian rulers and German emperors shared the same objective of weakening Poland. Thus while the Poles could only try and counteract Germany's power, in the Czech regions they were able to make their decisions effective. They were determined to make sure that the Bohemian Principality was weak. In that endeavour Hungary was Poland's natural ally. In 1131 during the battle of succession between two pretenders to the Hungarian throne, the Poles militarily backed Borys against Bela II. When Bela managed to gain the support of most of the Hungarian nobility Polish troops had to flee. But while they had been pursuing a war of intervention in Hungary, the Czechs occupied Silesia, a contested region between the two countries. The only way out for Bolesław Krzywousty was to accept the adjudication of the German Emperor Lothar II. Lothar forced him to accept Bela's claim to the Hungarian throne. In relation to Pomerania Lothar's decision was more complicated, as Bolesław was made to pay homage to the Emperor as the feudal lord of Pomerania. The Polish ruler's situation was undeniably

very humiliating, nevertheless the independence of the Polish lands had been retained. Even though the German emperors had successfully prevented any Polish ruler being crowned they were not able to subordinate Poland to the German Empire.

By the end of the twelfth century Poland had established the basic framework of state structure. However, as has been noted, the rulers' authority was never absolute. The nobility fought against the ruler gathering all authority in his hands. By the eleventh century tribal gatherings, which had still been called on special occasions, had become less relevant and infrequent. The nobility, the knights and the high clergy had through their contact with rulers and because of the rulers' dependence on them been able to have a say in matters relating to the waging of wars, conquests and distribution of lands. They were also in a position to extract from the ruler the rights to certain privileges, such as exemption from taxes and laws. The relationship between the rulers, who sought to strengthen their own position, and the nobility was inevitably antagonistic. During disturbances and rebellions which followed the death of Mieszko and Bolesław Chrobry, the nobility's rights and privileges were increased at the expense of the powers of the ruler. The twelfth century witnessed the establishment of a principle that only the nobility had the right to hold royal office, this being a guarantee of access to the ruler and a means of securing further privileges.

The peasantry, which in principle retained the right to petition rulers, in effect was removed from all forms of decision making deriving from tribal practice. The transformation of the structure of society and political turbulence, which affected the country, had its consequences upon the village communities. Peasants gradually lost the right to the land which they had cultivated. The beginning of the millennium was a time when the state encroached upon the peasants' personal liberties. The peasant communities became more differentiated. Thus in addition to free peasants there were those who together with landed estates had been handed over to the nobility or the Church by the Crown. They were tied to that land which they were not free to leave. After wars of conquest slaves were settled in villages, creating communities whose members had no personal rights.

As is only to be expected, life was short and difficult for those at the bottom of the social pyramid. Average life expectancy of women was not much more than 20 and for men 30. Political instability, wars and rebellions contributed to short life expectancy. But grave excavations

suggest that tuberculosis was rife and deaths in childbirth were common. At the same time there is little evidence of hunger and shortage. At the beginning of the eleventh century the previously noted practice of wives being either killed or committing suicide on their husbands' death, was abandoned. There had never been any evidence of husbands having a reciprocal obligation to die with their wives. Infanticide was practised in particular during time of hunger. Although some chroniclers have suggested that Slav communities traditionally killed older people, this is not confirmed by archaeological excavations. On the contrary, it would seem that Slav communities held their elders in very high esteem. Graves, which previously contained ashes, were increasingly replaced with graves containing bodies. This change of burial practice is evidence of the spread of Christianity, since the Church disapproved of all forms of cremation.

In spite of a relatively low level of agriculture, enough progress had been made in cultivation techniques to provide sufficient food for the community. Although ploughs had been introduced by foreign monks in their estates, most of the land was still cultivated by more primitive methods which meant that the soil was broken with digging implements or primitive ploughs but not turned over. The most commonly cultivated grain was millet, but wheat, barley and for the first time rye were also grown. Apple, pear and even peach trees became commonplace. A variety of beans and pulses were grown. Cucumbers, still not known in Germany, were cultivated in Polish lands as were garlic and poppy flowers. Flax and linen were the most common forms of cloth, since sheep rearing was not the norm in the lowlands occupied by the Slav people. Average peasant farmyards would have contained long-horn cows, pigs, sheep, goats and horses. Foreign travellers had noted that the eating of horsemeat was associated with Russian tribes and not with Slav people, who kept horses for work only. Hunting of wild animals became increasingly a royal monopoly, and excavations suggest that most meat consumed was from cultivated animals, which indicates that animal husbandry had become the norm.

There is extensive evidence of local and regional trade. In addition to regular local markets, where produce would have been sold and purchased, goods were carried over distances. Certain districts and villages developed specialist production of goods. In some cases this had happened because the ruler wanted to encourage production of goods such as weapons, iron implements and pottery. In other cases this would be a spontaneous development caused by the availability of

raw materials, or ready markets. Thus production for wider markets was already taking place.

During the tenth and eleventh centuries patterns of human habitation changed dramatically. Earlier, people lived either in small settlements or in villages. The beginning of the new millennium witnessed the emergence of towns. By the twelfth century several towns containing up to several thousands of permanent inhabitants were well established. Kraków, Gniezno, Kruszwica, Opole, Szczecin and Gdańsk all contained closely crammed buildings, usually still dugouts, which were entirely or partly sunk in the earth. Although the first stone buildings made their appearance around that time, they were usually church buildings constructed by foreign craftsmen. Bricks were not used until the thirteenth century. The origin of towns continues to be the source of historic controversies, but it is possible that several parallel economic and political processes had been taking place, which resulted in the emergence of larger population centres. In some cases the volume of local trade might have stimulated the formation of larger trading centres. In other instances, a convenient geographic situation might have been the catalyst for tradesmen and merchants to settle. Military centres and religious foundations were just as important in creating preconditions for larger volumes of trade, production and the dense settlements that these entailed. The process of centralisation of authority appears to have simulated further the growth of towns. On the Baltic coast towns sprang up purely in response to trade which took place in that region.

International trade, which virtually ceased during the turbulent times of the migration of the barbarian tribes, resumed during times of political stability. Though it was always limited by the fact that the Slav territories provided few commodities which were valued on international markets, the exception was amber, which was found on the coast of the Baltic Sea. This tended to be purchased by foreign traders who then transported it either along the northern route to Western Europe or along the southern route to the Danube and the Black Sea.

By the end of the twelfth century the country was divided into seven provinces which were administered by appointed administrators. These were Silesia, Kraków and its district, Sandomierz, Masovia, Kujawy with Łęczyca and Gdańsk Pomerania. Although Kraków came to be seen as the seat of the capital this was only nominally the town where the rulers resided. In reality they continued to tour the provinces, making themselves available to their subjects, but

no doubt also to enforce discipline and to maintain authority. The ruler's entourage usually consisted of members of the immediate family and those whose duty it was to see to all their personal needs. But by the twelfth century the court came also to include some form of administrative offices, usually staffed by clerics or monks, retained on account of their knowledge of writing and Latin. They had the task of maintaining records, including taxation and financial records. The Christian high clergy were valued intermediaries with the outside world. Through their contacts they were better informed than anyone else of what was happening in Rome, in other major centres and in the courts of other rulers. Thus we see the development of a mutually advantageous relationship between the rulers and the Church hierarchy, who were not only committed to upholding the authority of the ruler, but also were able to direct him in finer points of foreign affairs.

By the twelfth century Polish rulers had already established the basis of state financial systems. Taxation was levied on behalf of the ruler and the Church. This must have been oppressive, as we know of rebellions which had occurred because of the excessive burden of fiscal demands. The rulers also established monopolies over certain economic activities. The minting of coins was traditionally a royal monopoly, but extraction and trade in salt, a scarce and vital commodity, was likewise a royal prerogative. The existence of a taxation system suggests that money transactions had become the norm in Polish lands. Silver coins were preferred to gold on account of the low value of trade taking place. Silver coins were also broken up to make small change. At the same time other commodities continued to be used as a form of mutually acceptable payment. In Poland's case lengths of linen were traditionally used, the value of which both transacting sides agreed on.

Thus by 1138 Poland was economically, socially and politically at the same level of development as the other countries of the region. On account of the growing influence of the Christian Church culturally, Poland turned west towards the Latin culture, which divided it from the areas dominated by the Byzantine Church and culture. But through intermarriage with other ruling dynasties in the region, the Polish rulers and the nobility retained just as strong contacts with the Russian princes as with the Czech, Hungarian and German nobility.

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