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## The Origins of Christianity in Poland

*Początki chrześcijaństwa w Polsce*

### ABSTRACT

The baptism of Mieszko and the beginnings of the Christianization of his country have been a challenge for historians for many decades. This is due to the modest and late sources and the need to use materials from archaeological research. The most important moment was the baptism in 966, which was preceded by an alliance with the Czechs and a marriage with Princess Dobrawa. Then, the prince of Polans won over his own bishop (968) and the Christianization of his subjects began. Baptism and the process of Christianization, which was launched thanks to it, led not only to a change of religion, but also to a deep, though gradual, civilizational reconstruction of the Piast state.

**Key words:** 10th century, Christianisation, Mieszko I, the Piast state

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## STRESZCZENIE

Chrzest Mieszka i początki chrystianizacji jego państwa od wielu dziesięcioleci stanowią wyzwanie dla historyków. Wynika to ze skromnych i późnych źródeł oraz konieczności wykorzystania materiałów z badań archeologicznych. Najważniejszym momentem był chrzest w 966 r., który poprzedził sojusz z Czechami i małżeństwo z księżniczką Dobrawą. Następnie książę Polan pozyskał własnego biskupa (968 r.) i rozpoczęła się chrystianizacja jego poddanych. Chrzest i zapoczątkowany dzięki niemu proces chrystianizacji doprowadziły nie tylko do zmiany wyznania, ale także do głębokiej, choć stopniowej, przebudowy cywilizacyjnej państwa Piastów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** X wiek, chrystianizacja, Mieszko I, państwo Piastów

The spirituality and beliefs, held by communities in the late pre-literate and early literate time, have not been subjected to many historical reflections. The reason is quite simple, namely the written accounts are sparse and ambiguous and as such, they need to be supplemented with (not always complete) comparative studies and the results of archaeological excavations. The fact that the spiritual worlds: the old pagan and the new Christian one, intertwined at the beginning of Polish statehood does not make the task any easier. We are primarily interested in the new universe but then, in some way, it made use of older religious traditions. Polish paganism and its religious and mythological foundations have been largely discussed, also by two late eminent historians, Henryk Łowmiański and Aleksander Gieysztor. They adopted different perspectives to the religion and mythology of the ancient Slavs<sup>1</sup>. Without resolving the polemic between Gieysztor's approach modelled by G. Dumézil and Łowmiański's „traditional” approach, emphasis should be placed on the obscure (fractioned) and ambiguous sources and the relatively rapid progress of the new religion in most areas subordinated to the Piasts. The conversion to Christianity of the ruler and the elite resulted in the „displacement” of the old tradition. This was probably because, unlike Christianity, pagan customs and rituals were not perpetuated by writing which tends to serve the liturgy and at the tradition (memory). The relatively rapid replacement of native paganism (the ancient Slavic mythology) with Christianity was initiated by Mieszko I's conversion in 966. In Polish tradition and collective memory, it is recognised as the baptism

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<sup>1</sup> Vide: H. Łowmiański, *Religia Słowian i jej upadek (w. VI–XII)*, Warszawa 1986 (a summary of older inquiries by archaeologists, historians, and religious scholars on s. 56–77); A. Gieysztor, *Mitologia Słowian*, Warszawa 1982. Cf. J. Strzelczyk, *Mity, podania i wierzenia dawnych Słowian*, Poznań 1998 (as a dictionary), D.A. Sikorski, *Religie dawnych Słowian. Przewodnik dla zdezorientowanych*, Poznań 2018 and M. Łuczyński, *Mity Słowian. Śladami świętych opowieści przodków*, Szczecin 2022.

of Poland. Let me take a closer look at the first stages of the introduction and expansion of the new religion under the Piast rule.

The search for the origins of statehood to build on them a community and identity is deeply rooted in Polish culture. Since the dawn of the country's history, Poles have grappled with the myth of the genesis<sup>2</sup> – it has been present in Polish historiography since the Middle Ages, through the historiography of the subsequent epochs, the emerging academic historiography of the 19th century, up to today's attempts to explain the emergence of the Piast state by means of new methods and trends in contemporary humanities. A statement that attempts to explain, interpret, and describe what happened in the heart of Wielkopolska back in the 10th century based solely on the narrative of the oldest Polish historiography are doomed to failure, borders on a cliché. It has become imperative to include in the considerations not only the instruments available to modern source science, but also the achievements of literary studies. For several decades, archaeology has occupied a special place as a significant trigger of historical research into the origins and political centres of the Piast dominion which emerged from obscurity in the 10th century.

Today, we analyze the beginnings of Polish statehood by assuming two stages in the formation of the Piast rule. The first is the emergence of a new political structure from the barbarian tribal one, climaxing in the first half of the 10th century with the construction of a new network of large strongholds<sup>3</sup>. It was undoubtedly a pagan world. The second stage followed the removal of another barrier and including this structure into written history during the rule of Mieszko I and his successors. It was a world of political, social, and economic changes brought about by the intensifying processes of state-building, accompanied by entering a universe of a new (Christian) religion and its culture.

We know virtually nothing about the first period from written accounts. The later historiographical tradition has recorded scraps of legends and tales, which hardly reveal the reality of the first half of the 10th

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<sup>2</sup> Recently on the myth of genesis from the perspective of historical science: W. Werner, *Idea genezy, mit genezy*, „Historyka. Studia Metodologiczne” 2000, 30, s. 39–48; idem, *Kult początków. Historyczne zmagania z czasem, religią i genezą*, Poznań 2004 (cf. review by L. Pełka – *Mit genezy, obsesja czy myślenie historyczne?*, „Nomos” 2004, 45/46, s. 141–144).

<sup>3</sup> Vide: M. Kara, *Najstarsze państwo Piastów – rezultat przełomu czy kontynuacji? Studium archeologiczne*, Poznań 2009; Z. Kurnatowska, *Początki Polski*, Poznań 2002 [Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk, Mała Biblioteka PTPN, t. 9]; A. Buko, *Świt państwa polskiego*, Warszawa 2021; idem, *Archeologia Polski wczesnośredniowiecznej. Odkrycia, hipotezy, interpretacje*, Warszawa 2011. Cf. D.A. Sikorski, *Jak wyglądałaby nasza wiedza o początkach Polski bez źródeł archeologicznych*, w: *Materiały V Kongresu Mediewistów Polskich, t. 4, Badania interdyscyplinarne*, red. A. Buko, K. Kollinger, S. Jędrzejewska, Rzeszów 2018, s. 23–39.

century. Gallus Anonymus and his successors: Wincenty Kadłubek, and chroniclers from Wielkopolska and Silesia, showed a colourful world of dynastic legends and other stories about the beginnings of the state. However, they were guided by adopting the power ideology and propaganda rather than ascertaining facts.

Jan Długosz synthesized the accounts of his predecessors but failed to contribute anything new<sup>4</sup>. Essentially, we must rely on the findings and interpretations of archaeologists. When we slightly simplify these findings, it turns out that the state of Polans (Piasts) evolved; in the initial phase, it was grassroots evolution from tribal structures. The process accelerated in the late first and early second quarters of the 10th century, as large strongholds were built<sup>5</sup>. Contemporary disputes over the origin of the first Polish dynasty and the original centre of the dominion seem somewhat artificial and subject to speculation. The most classical theory of the origin of the Piasts points to the Gniezno Lake District as the site of the original structure later known as the state of Polans. Although the hypothesis that the Piasts may have originated in Scandinavia was once considered (today it seems to definitively rejected), attempts were made to trace them back to Giecz, and more recently to Kalisz and Moravia, but there are no convincing source arguments in favour of this theory<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> It is not my intention to join in the discussion on the origin of the chroniclers (especially Gallus Anonymus) – for G.A. vide: T. Jasiński, *O pochodzeniu Galla Anonima*, Kraków 2008 (here, s. 115, the author's earlier works on the subject) and G. Labuda, *Zamiana Galla-Anonima, autora pierwszej „Kroniki dziejów Polski”, na Anonima Wenecjanina*, „*Studia Źródłoznawcze*” 2006, 44, s. 117–125) and the time of the origin thereof (in general, between the early 12th and the second half of the 15th centuries); older research and opinions in: J. Dąbrowski, *Dawne dziejopisarstwo polskie (do roku 1480)*, Wrocław 1964. Vide for example P. Węcowski, *Początki Polski w pamięci historycznej późnego średniowiecza*, Kraków 2014. About the work of Jan Długosz vide: J. Dobosz, *Jan Długosz o początkach państwa i Kościoła polskiego, w: „Powtórka przed...” VI Spotkania z historią dla uczniów szkół ponadgimnazjalnych*, red. J. Dobosz, D. Konieczka-Śliwińska, Poznań 2012, s. 99–110 (cf. idem, *Początki państwa i Kościoła polskiego w przekazie Roczników Jana Długosza*, „*Zeszyty Długoszowskie*” 2010, 9, s. 85–94).

<sup>5</sup> Archaeological research is summed up by Andrzej Buko, *Archeologia* and idem, *Świt*. For an interesting popular science perspective vide: Z. Kurnatowska, *op. cit.*, also P. Urbańczyk, *Trudne początki Polski*, Wrocław 2008; idem, *Mieszko Pierwszy tajemniczy*, Toruń 2012 and M. Kara, D.A. Sikorski, quoted in footnote 3.

<sup>6</sup> Discussions on the subject have been going on for many decades – see summaries by H. Łowmiański, *Początki Polski. Z dziejów Słowian w I tysiącleciu n.e.*, t. 5, Warszawa 1973; G. Labuda, *Studia nad początkami państwa polskiego*, t. 1–2, Poznań 1987–1988; the author's popular science approach – *Pierwsze wieki monarchii piastowskiej*, Poznań 2012 (re-edition of two books from the „*Dzieje Państwa i Narodu Polskiego*” series – I, b. 2: *Pierwsze państwo polskie*, Kraków 1989 and I, b. 3: *Korona i infuła. O monarchii do poliarchii*, Kraków 1996), and by J. Strzelczyk – *Mieszko I*, Poznań 1992 and the subsequent editions as well as the above

We know a bit more about the reign of the first historical Polish ruler and his successors (son and grandson). We can confront the local records, the historiography from the neighbouring countries (the German Reich, Bohemia) with extensive archaeological research. In the heat of disputes and discussions, the latter continue to contribute new information. The narrative sources paint a picture of a strong and prosperous monarchy ruled by the Piasts. A careful reading of the annuals shows a fairly precise sequence of events recorded under specific dates. Since 963 onwards, the Piast monarchy was regularly covered in written sources with emphasis placed on the most important events – the baptism of Mieszko I in 966, the numerous wars, the martyrdom of Saint Adalbert in 997 and its consequences in the form of establishing an archbishopric in 999, and the Congress of Gniezno in 1000, important peace treaties (at Merseburg in 1013 and at Bautzen in 1018), and finally the first royal coronation in 1025. The most important thing, however, is that the duke of Polans was baptized which act commenced the Christianisation of his subjects.

Of importance to the processes at play was the nature of the early Polan statehood (at the political and socio-economic level alike), and the extent and the way in which the Piasts exercised power. The emerging patrimonial monarchy meant that full power (in today's sense legislative, executive and judicial) was concentrated in the hands of the Piast rulers.

The prevailing autarkic economy based on cultivation of the land, to a small extent coupled with the exchange of goods (mainly luxury goods) and perhaps, on a scale difficult to estimate, by the slave trade, required specific forms of fiscalism. The ruler and his entourage had to be constantly on the move in order to fulfil their judicial role properly (the ruler was the supreme judge) and to sustain themselves<sup>7</sup>. The system, referred to in historiography as *rex/dux ambulans* (touring monarchy), was obviously not an original Piast idea. It was widely and effectively used in early statehood as an emanation of the right use of the country's

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quoted archaeologists: Andrzej Buko and Przemysław Urbańczyk. Cf. works by genealogist Kazimierz Jasiński, specifically *Rodowód pierwszych Piastów*, Warszawa–Wrocław [1992].

<sup>7</sup> Legal and constitutional as well as economic and social issues, analyses, syntheses, and models, are presented by S. Kutrzeba, *Historia ustroju Polski. Korona*, wyd. 9, Poznań 2001; Z. Wojciechowski, *Państwo polskie w wiekach średnich. Dzieje ustroju*, wyd. 2 [reviewed and supplemented], Poznań 1948; J. Bardach, *Historia państwa i prawa Polski*, t. I, *do połowy XV wieku*, wyd. 2 [reviewed and supplemented], Warszawa 1964; K. Buczek, *Targi i miasta na prawie polskim*, Warszawa 1964; K. Modzelewski, *Organizacja gospodarcza państwa piastowskiego. X–XIII wiek*, Wrocław 1975; idem, *Chłopi w monarchii wczesnopiastowskiej*, Warszawa 1986; S. Gawlas, *O kształt zjednoczonego królestwa. Niemieckie władztwo terytorialne a geneza społeczno-ustrojowej odrębności Polski*, Warszawa 1996, s. 65–96; *Spółczesność polskie od X do XX wieku*, Warszawa 1979 or subsequent editions (about the Middle Ages – B. Zientara).

economic resources and the proper exercise of executive and judicial power<sup>8</sup>. It would seem that in this model, offering little opportunity for rapid progress, there was no room for a fixed point from which the dominion was managed, something like a state capital as we know it today. We can assume, however, that the touring monarchy did not need to eliminate from the social and political space a venue that can be defined as the ideological centre of the nascent and developing statehood.

This place was undoubtedly Gniezno, especially since the relics of Saint Adalbert were deposited there, and periodically Poznań (especially around 963–977)<sup>9</sup>.

Another important factor shaping, or perhaps transforming, the Piast monarchy as it made written history, was the adoption of a new religion. Records from 965 mention the arrival at the Polish court of princess Doubravka of Bohemia, daughter of Boleslaus I, Duke of Bohemia, to become Mieszko's wife<sup>10</sup>. In political terms, this must be interpreted as a Bohemian-Polish alliance accompanied by breaking off the earlier Bohemian-Veletian alliances. The Christian princess, wife of the Polan ruler, probably settled down with her husband (preoccupied with plans of conquering Pomerania) in Poznań, far from Gniezno. According to archaeological excavations, Poznań was most probably the centre of the pagan cult<sup>11</sup>. It is difficult to determine today if the marriage to Dou-

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<sup>8</sup> The best presentation of this issue in the domestic historiography by Izabela Skierska and Antoni Gąsiorowski – *Średniowieczna monarchia objazdowa: władca w centralnych ośrodkach państwa*, w: *Sedes regni principales. Materiały z konferencji Sandomierz 20–21 października 1997 r.*, red. B. Trelińska, Sandomierz 1999, s. 67–80. Vide: also an earlier work by A. Gąsiorowski, *Podróże panującego w średniowiecznej Polsce*, „Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne” 1973, 25, 2. Provided more extensive literature on the issue which are also partly discussed by the above-quoted K. Modzelewski, S. Gawlas (polemics: Buczek – Modzelewski – Gawlas) and historians of the law.

<sup>9</sup> Disputes about the first Polish capital city seem somewhat anachronistic today, not only because the system of touring power was in use, but also because certain norms were only just being shaped, and probably the breakthrough took place during the reign of Bolesław the Brave. Vide: J. Dobosz, *Gniezno jako centrum monarchii piastowskiej*, w: *Studia nad dawną Polską*, t. 4, red. T. Sawicki, Gniezno 2015, s. 63–75 (more literature contained).

<sup>10</sup> Vide: *Rocznik dawny*, w: *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, s.n., t. 5, wyd. Z. Kozłowska-Budkowa, Warszawa 1978, s. 4–5; *Rocznik kapituły krakowskiej*, w: *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, s.n., t. 5, s. 43; *Rocznik krótki*, w: *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, s.n. t. 5, s. 232; *Rocznik poznański I (starszy)*, w: *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, s.n., t. 6, wyd. B. Kürbis, Warszawa 1962, s. 129 and *Rocznik kapituły poznańskiej*, w: *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, s.n. t. 6, s. 23.

<sup>11</sup> G. Labuda, *Studia*, t. I, s. 55–79 and 443 and the subsequent pages (alliance with Czechs). About the Poznań palas and chapel vide: H. Kóčka-Krenz, *Pozycja Poznania w X wieku w źródłach archeologicznych*, w: *Tu się wszystko zaczęło. Rola Poznania w państwie pierwszych Piastów*, red. A. Wójtowicz, Poznań 2010, s. 33–60; eadem, *Poznań in the 10th*

bravka indicated Mieszko's intention to adopt Christianity. Anyway, he was baptized in 966<sup>12</sup> and, according to the chroniclers (Thietmar, Gallus Anonymus, Wincenty Kadłubek and others), his wife orchestrated it<sup>13</sup>. In 968, Mieszko's state had its own bishop – Jordan<sup>14</sup>. We can say with a high degree of probability that Mieszko embarked on a path of religious change at a time when he was active on the north-western frontiers of his dominion. This meant approaching the milieu of Western Christianity, interacting with it and most probably converting to Christianity, for political and prestige-related reasons. It is difficult to decide today whether the alliance with Bohemia and the political marriage with Doubravka were the main causal factor or merely a catalyst accelerating the decision. If we were to accept the first answer, the conclusion would be that there was an impulse behind everything, rather than fully thought-out plans, so it is more likely that the idea was born earlier, and the course of events was forced by the political developments.

We can assume that in 966, Prince Mieszko and his immediate entourage were baptized on home soil, voluntarily and after due consideration. It probably took place in spring (perhaps on Holy Saturday, 14 April, or on Pentecost, as late as 4 June), probably somewhere in Wielkopolska (in Poznań, although other important centres like Gniezno and Ostrów Lednicki cannot be ruled out)<sup>15</sup>. In adopting the new religion, Mieszko

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century, Poznań 2011. For the pagan cult in Gniezno vide: T. Sawicki, *Badania przy kościele św. Jerzego w Gnieźnie*, w: *Gniezno w świetle ostatnich badań archeologicznych. Nowe fakty. Nowe interpretacje*, red. Z. Kurnatowska, Poznań 2001, s. 175–179; idem, *Wczesnośredniowieczny zespół grodowy w Gnieźnie*, w: *Gniezno*, s. 90–92, cf. M. Kara, *Najstarsze*, s. 177–178; M. Danielewski, *Dzieje polityczne we wczesnym średniowieczu*, w: *Dzieje Gniezna pierwszej stolicy Polski*, red. J. Dobosz, Gniezno 2016, s. 25–27.

<sup>12</sup> Discussions about the date of Mieszko's baptism continue: A. Buko, *1050-lecie chrześcijaństwa na ziemiach polskich. Państwo Mieszka I i problem wczesnej chrystianizacji Polski w perspektywie badań archeologicznych*, „Nauka” 2016, 2, s. 7–38. Today, a different date is more clearly emphasized by Tomasz Jurek – *O czasie i okolicznościach chrztu Mieszka*, „Roczniki Historyczne” 2015, 81, s. 35–56.

<sup>13</sup> J. Dobosz, *Chrzest Mieszka I w średniowiecznej tradycji dziejopisarskiej*, „Przegląd Wielkopolski” 2016, 30, 3, s. 4–9 (more literature contained).

<sup>14</sup> Vide: *Polonia coepit habere episcopum. The origin of the Poznań bishopric in the light of the latest research*, red. J. Dobosz, T. Jurek, Poznań 2019, specifically articles by T. Jasiński, *The Circumstances of Appointing the First Bishop of Poland*, s. 73–84; D.A. Sikorski, *The oldest Poznań bishopric in the Times of bishops Jordan and Unger (968–1012)*, s. 85–98; J. Dobosz, *Between source facts and historiographic facts; knowledge about the first Bishop of Poland*, s. 99–110; also T. Jurek, *Biskupstwo poznańskie w wiekach średnich*, Poznań 2018, s. 67–88 [„Dzieje Archidiecezji Poznańskiej”, red. J. Dobosz, t. 1].

<sup>15</sup> The place where Mieszko I received baptism has been discussed in Polish historiography for many decades, and hypotheses and speculations have been multiplying – vide:

was followed by his subjects, especially since a dedicated bishop (Jordan) was appointed for Mieszko's dominion in 968. The establishment of the Archbishopric of St Adalbert with its seat in Gniezno was certainly a turning point, together with the appointment of the suffragan bishop during the reign of Bolesław the Brave (999–1000)<sup>16</sup>. So, Mieszko was baptized and took care of the mission of Christianisation brought from the West. Who mediated in the matters between Poland and Rome, from where the first clergy arrived and under what circumstances – these issues require a separate article. Christianisation was continued by Mieszko's successors, leading to the full acceptance of the new religion, and building its organisational structures in the following centuries. It introduced the Piast dominion to new civilisation and culture (writing, brick buildings), opening it up to the West. In this way, a state growing out of tribal structures and rooted in pagan beliefs, probably shaped by several generations of Mieszko's ancestors, entered history as a part of a new civilisation, a part of the *Respublica Christiana* embracing the geographical Europe of that time.

The origins of the Polish state, its first decades, the ruling dynasty and the policies pursued since the beginning of academic historiography in the 19th century have invariably been at the centre of historians' interest. Initially, the discourse revolved around the origin of the state and the dynasty. Over time, it shifted to social and economic issues, and since the 20th century onwards, archaeologists have become actively involved. Among the issues related to the origin of the Piast rule and its introduction to written history, the events of the 960s have played an important role, culminating in the baptism of Mieszko I, the first historical Piast ruler. As always, we inquire about the motives and circumstances of the prince's decision, as well as its consequences for the young state structure, both immediate and far-reaching. The answers are typically more or less

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J. Dobosz, *Miejsce chrztu Mieszka I*, „Kronika Miasta Poznania” 2016, 1, s. 11–20. The topic was previously addressed by Jerzy Dowiat and the biographers of the first historical Piast: Jerzy Strzelczyk, Gerard Labuda, Przemysław Urbańczyk. Vide: also the quoted works by Dariusz A. Sikorski and, lately, Tomasz Jurek.

<sup>16</sup> Vide: Thietmar, *Kronika*, wyd., tłum., oprac. M.Z. Jedlicki, Poznań 1953, ks. IV, rozdz. 44–46, s. 200–208. Most exhaustively about the events in: R. Michałowski, *Zjazd Gnieźnieński. Religijne przesłanki powstania arcybiskupstwa gnieźnieńskiego*, Wrocław 2005 and J. Strzelczyk, *Zjazd gnieźnieński*, Wrocław 2000; idem, *Otto III*, Wrocław 2000. Much attention to this phenomenon has been devoted by biographers of Bolesław the Brave: Jerzy Strzelczyk (*Bolesław Chrobry*, Poznań 1999) and Przemysław Urbańczyk (*Bolesław Chrobry – lew ryczący*, Toruń 2017). I have disregarded older works by Gerard Labuda and Henryk Łowmiański.



documented hypotheses, based on a rather modest and ambiguous source base, as I have already pointed out.

Mieszko's baptism went almost unnoticed by the literate witnesses of the time, and had it not been for Thietmar, Bishop of Merseburg, and his chronicle, we would have known this important event from the perspective of much later accounts. His work contains several paragraphs dedicated to the reign of Mieszko I<sup>17</sup>. One of them, incidentally placed as a retrospective supplement to the description of events in the early 11th century, refers to the years ca. 965–992 and briefly presents the prince's life<sup>18</sup>. The chronicler devoted a small *passus* to the local ruler's baptism arranged by his wife, all his subjects following suit, and to the first bishop. So, first Doubravka arrived at Mieszko's home to marry him, then the Piast ruler was baptized, and later their son Bolesław the Brave was born<sup>19</sup>. Virtually all Polish chroniclers followed this path when describing the events of 966–968 up to Jan Długosz, who gave his own, more complete vision of the history of the Piast state in the early period of its existence. Gallus Anonymus<sup>20</sup> repeated what Thietmar had written but his sequence of events was as follows: first Mieszko agreed to change his religion, then Doubravka arrived in his country, followed by baptism, marriage and, finally, the birth of Bolesław the Brave. The bishop of Merseburg was not surprised by the marriage of a Christian

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<sup>17</sup> Vide: Thietmar, *Chronicle*, ks. 2, s. 58–59 (about the subjugation of Mieszko by margrave Gero), s. 88–93 (on the battle of Cedynia in 972 and the congress in Quedlinburg in 973); ks. 4, s. 148–149 (about Mieszko's trip to Quedlinburg in 984), 155–163 (events from the gift of Otto III's camel in 985 to the occupation of Silesia by Mieszko in 990), 218–226 (the events of the baptism and family relations of the first historical Piast).

<sup>18</sup> Describing the events of the early 11th century, the chronicler emphasized that: „I cannot place in its correct order everything that ought to be treated within the context of this book. In what follows; therefore, I will not be embarrassed to add a few recollections. [...] Hence, I will relate the remaining deeds of Miesco, the celebrated duke of the Poles, who has already been treated in some detail in the previous books” – Thietmar, *Chronicle*, ks. 4, rozdz. 55, s. 191.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, rozdz. 55–56, s. 218–223.

<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting the debate revived in recent years over the origins of Poland's first chronicler and his work. Nowadays, the clues lead to Italy as the place of origin of Gallus Anonymus, and sometimes Bamberg is also pointed out, in contrast to the older search for his homeland in the Romance world or in Hungary – the older literature collated by J. Dąbrowski, *Dawne dziejopisarstwo polskie (do roku 1480)*, Wrocław 1964, s. 26–42, contemporary discussions involve Tomasz Jasiński, Jarosław Wenta, Edward Skibiński. Edition and translation: Anonim tzw. Gall, *Kronika czyli dzieje książąt i władców polskich*, wyd. K. Malczyński, *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, s.n., t. 2, Kraków 1952; Anonim tzw. Gall, *Kronika polska*, tłum. R. Grodecki, oprac. M. Plezia, Wrocław 1989 (or other issues).

woman and a pagan, while a century later, Gallus found it hard to accept and described it according to the spirit of his time. The first Polish chronicler added information unknown to his predecessor, namely that Mieszko was blind until the age of seven and on the day of his first haircut (rite of passage), he miraculously regained his sight. This was supposed to be a sign of the future conversion of the Polish ruler and his people<sup>21</sup>. However, Gallus did not mention Jordan, the first bishop.

The subsequent chroniclers did not really upset the order of events established by Gallus Anonymous, either with new details or their interpretation. Wincenty Kadłubek<sup>22</sup> repeated Gallus' vision of Mieszko's baptism without reservations, adding a generous number of metaphors. His erudite chronicle, connecting with the scholarly trends of the 12th century, contains a story of little Mieszko's blindness (an account somewhat shorter than Gallus') and miraculous recovery. Next, the chronicler mentions the ruler's „blindness” stemming from the fact that he had seven wives, or rather concubines, whom he dismissed by marrying Doubravka. This matrimony led to the „grace of baptism” and the subsequent acceptance of Christianity by his subjects<sup>23</sup>. Writing from the perspective of the last years of the fragmentation of Poland, a chronicler from Wielkopolska tried to follow Master Wincenty's reasoning but attached dates to his account of Mieszko's baptism. According to him: „In the seventh year of his life, Mieszko received, by divine disposition, the light of his eyes. And finally, in the year of our Lord 931, he married Dobrochna, St. Wenceslas' sister. In the following year, at the instigation of his wife and by the grace of the Lord, he was baptized with all the Lechitic i.e. Polish, people. In the year 937, this wife gave him a son whom he baptized as Bolesław, and in the year of our Lord 938, he appointed Jordan Bishop of Poland”<sup>24</sup>. The yearly

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<sup>21</sup> Anonim tzw. Gall, *Kronika czyli*, ks. 1, rozdz. 5–6, s. 18–19 (here about the arrival of Doubravka, Mieszko's baptism, marriage and the son, Bolesław) and ks. 1, rozdz. 4, s. 16–18 (about young Mieszko's blindness, his miraculous recovery of sight and the prophecy of the Christianisation of the country).

<sup>22</sup> About the chronicler and his work vide: J. Dąbrowski, *Dawne*, s. 70–83; he provides older literature; lately B. Kürbis, *Wstęp*, w: Mistrz Wincenty (tzw. Kadłubek), *Kronika Polska*, tłum. and red. by B. Kürbis, Wrocław 1992.

<sup>23</sup> Mistrza Wincentego zwanego Kadłubkiem, *Kronika Polska*, wyd. i oprac. Marian Plezia, *Monumenta Poloniae Historica* n.s, t. 11, Kraków 1994, ks. 2, rozdz. 8–9, s. 36–38; Mistrz Wincenty (tzw. Kadłubek), *Kronika Polska*, ks. 2, rozdz. 8–9, s. 49–50.

<sup>24</sup> *Kronika Wielkopolska*, wyd. B. Kürbis, *Monumenta Poloniae Historica* n.s, t. 8, Warszawa 1970, rozdz. 10, s. 16 (translation: *Kronika Wielkopolska*, tłum. K. Abgarowicz, wyd. B. Kürbis, Kraków 2010, rozdz. 10, s. 55–56). About the work which, in my and the publisher's opinion, comes from the late 13th c., vide: lately E. Skibiński, *Problem pochodzenia Kroniki Wielkopolskiej*, w: *Wielkopolska – Polska – Czechy. Studia z dziejów średniowiecza ofiarowane*

dates are the chronicler's inventions or the copyist's errors that are hard to determine.

The events related to Mieszko's baptism, and its circumstances are also briefly described in two chronicles of Silesian provenance: the *Polish Chronicle* (Polish-Silesian) and the *Chronicle of Polish Dukes*. The former describes Mieszko's dismissal of his seven wives (*septem pelices* – seven concubines) and his marriage to Doubravka, followed by his baptism in 966. In the *Polish Chronicle*, the story of Mieszko's miraculous recovery of sight is also mentioned<sup>25</sup>. The other chronicle begins with the little duke's blindness and its symbolism, before moving on to the spurned seven wives and concluding with Mieszko's marriage to Doubravka and his baptism (both events are dated 966)<sup>26</sup>. Both accounts coincide with the earlier works, especially with the chronicle of Gallus Anonymus, and Wincent Kadłubek. In principle, they add little to the knowledge of the events of 966. Unlike the older accounts, they provide the year of the baptism. On the other hand, Dzierżwa, a 14th century chronicler, gave a brief account of Mieszko's dismissal of his seven wives (concubines), his marriage to Doubravka, daughter of a Bohemian prince, and his conversion. The chronicler mentioned that he drew on some unspecified Polish annuals<sup>27</sup>.

Jan Długosz, who provided his narratively elaborate, albeit strongly anachronistic vision of the events of 965–966, basically synthesised all the previous accounts, adding more than a pinch of his own conjecture. First, he stated that Mieszko took over the reign in 964 after the death of his father Siemomysł. Under 965, he described the circumstances of the marriage of the Polish duke with Doubravka and his baptism, and in 966, he accounted on the establishment of the Polish Church by virtue of a single act.

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*Profesorowi Bronisławowi Nowackiemu*, red. Z. Górczak, J. Jaskulski, Poznań 2009, s. 189–198 and A. Krawiec, *Kilka uwag na temat na temat genezy Kroniki Wielkopolskiej*, w: *Wielkopolska – Polska*, s. 199–215.

<sup>25</sup> *Kronika polska*, wyd. L. Ćwikliński, w: *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, t. 3, Lwów 1878, s. 616. About this work of medieval literature vide: Z. Wielgosz, *Kronika polska w twórczości dziejopisarskiej klasztoru lubiąskiego*, w: *Scriptura custos memoriae. Prace historyczne*, red. D. Zydorek, Poznań 2001, s. 233–252.

<sup>26</sup> *Kronika książąt polskich*, wyd. Z. Węclewski, w: *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, t. 3, Lwów 1878, s. 437–438. More on the source in J. Dąbrowski, *Dawne*, s. 165–168.

<sup>27</sup> Vide: *Kronika Mierzwicy*, wyd. A. Bielowski, w: *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, t. 2, Lwów 1872, s. 188. On this 14th c. work vide: J. Dąbrowski, *Dawne*, s. 120–122 and, more extensively, J. Banaszkiewicz, *Kronika Dzierżwy. XIV-wieczne kompendium historii ojczystej*, Wrocław 1979, as well as E. Skibiński, *Dzierżwa i kronikarz wielkopolski. Powrót problemu*, w: *Scriptura*, s. 225–232.

In the light of this account, the following course of events was taken: Mieszko dismissed seven concubines; then he sent a message to Bohemian prince Boleslaus I, Duke of Bohemia, concerning the marriage with his daughter Doubravka; the Přemyslid ruler replied that Mieszko had to accept the Christian faith in order to marry Doubravka, and she replied in a similar tone; the Duke of Polans convened a council on accepting Christianity, and under the influence of Divine Providence the decision was made to accept the new religion; following these events, another mission was sent to Bohemia, as a result of which permission for the marriage was obtained; this resulted in the ceremonial arrival of Doubravka in Gniezno, and the Duke's baptism was followed by his marriage to Doubravka.

Here is the information that the Piast duke „received holy baptism in Gniezno”<sup>28</sup>, which resulted in the establishment of the entire Polish Church in 966, according to Długosz. Its structure was to consist of two metropolises (Gniezno and Krakow) and seven dioceses (Poznań, Włocławek, Płock, Wrocław, Kamień Pomorski, Lubusz and Chełmno). In the light of the chronicler's account, the pace of change was breakneck but then we know that Długosz's account borders on presentism<sup>29</sup>.

Chronicle accounts with spare dates are supplemented by annual records. However, the authors of the Polish annuals (debated incessantly for two centuries), just like the chronicles, were not direct witnesses to the events of the 960s. In the forms as we know them today, they date from the 12th to 15th centuries, although some may refer to older sources<sup>30</sup>. Overall, they contain quite a few references to events from 965–968, but these are brief, accounting for the arrival of Doubravka, the baptism of Mieszko and the birth of their son Bolesław (later Bolesław the Brave). The annuals of Wielkopolska provenance also contain records of the arrival of Bishop Jordan (968), while later annuals from Małopolska highlight the ordination of Prohor to the Bishopric of Krakow (968, 969 or 970)<sup>31</sup>. Some, like

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<sup>28</sup> These events are described by Jan Długosz under the year 965 – *Roczniki czyli kroniki sławnego Królestwa Polskiego*, ks. 2, Kraków 2009, s. 241–243 – vide: also in J. Dobosz, *Początki*, s. 85–94; idem, *Jan*, s. 99–109.

<sup>29</sup> J. Długosz, *Roczniki*, ks. 2, s. 244–247, cf. J. Dobosz, as in footnote 8.

<sup>30</sup> I do not cite here a fuller account of the state of research on Polish annuals, as this would require a large review article, meanwhile vide: J. Dąbrowski, *Dawne*, s. 44–69, who has collected older inquiries, newer literature vide: J. Dobosz, *Monarcha i możni wobec Kościoła w Polsce do początku XIII wieku*, Poznań 2002, s. 25–26, footnote 44 and W. Drelicharz, *Annalistyka małopolska XIII–XV wieku. Kierunki rozwoju wielkich roczników kompilowanych*, Kraków 2003.

<sup>31</sup> More about the annuals covering the events of 965–968 vide: J. Dobosz, *Monarcha*, s. 25–32.

the Annual of Sędziwój of Czechel (the author was more or less a contemporary of Jan Długosz), provided more elaborate information about the baptism. Sędziwój covered the events of interest to us in the following way: *Anno domini nongentisimo 65 Dobrochna Wrathislai ducis Bohemie filia et soror sancti Wenczeslai desponsatur Meskoni filio ducis Zemomysl, qui Mesca cecus natus fuit et Prage baptisatus divino miraculo lumen recepit*<sup>32</sup>. The note is short, but interesting in that it mentions Prague as the place of Mieszko's baptism. The author summarized the events as follows: in 965, Doubravka married Mieszko, who was baptized in Prague. He described Mieszko as the son of Siemomysł (correctly according to Gallus Anonymous' account) who was born blind. However, the chronicler changed his wife's name to Dobrochna and clearly mistook her father's name (not Vratislaus but Boleslaus I) and presented Wenceslaus as his brother instead of his uncle. The sequence of events is the same as in Thietmar's work – first the marriage then the baptism of duke Mieszko. It is difficult to say where the yearbook writer came across the information about the baptism taking place in Prague; perhaps he modelled his account by the events of 1386 and the arrival of the pagan Jagiełło to be baptized at the court of his future wife? Based on a combination of chronicle and annual accounts<sup>33</sup>, historians have modelled the course of events accompanying Mieszko's baptism, adopting the year 966 as pivotal.

Mieszko's baptism has been a challenge for historians for many decades and for at least several reasons. Firstly, it is due to the scarce sources – the fact that the local ruler was baptized passed virtually unnoticed in the accounts of his times.

Secondly, the records contained in these (usually late) chronicles and annuals sometimes differ significantly from one another; the chronicles place different emphasis and sequence of events while the annuals, most of them late (the 13th–15th centuries), sometimes surprised historians with discrepancies in the dates. Thirdly, intense archaeological research, especially after WWII, continues to provide new and interesting material for the early history of the Piast dynasty and its state (including the oldest Polish Church)<sup>34</sup>. They force historians to ask some questions anew and sometimes even to reinterpret seemingly well-established knowledge.

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<sup>32</sup> *Rocznik Sędziwoja*, wyd. A. Bielowski, w: *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, t. 2, Lwów 1872, s. 872.

<sup>33</sup> This research was once summarized by B. Kürbis, *Refleksje kronikarzy nad chrystianizacją Polski*, „*Nasza Przeszłość*” 1988, 69, s. 97–114, cf. J. Dobosz, *Monarcha*, s. 24–40.

<sup>34</sup> Vide: Z. Kurnatowska, *op. cit.*; A. Buko, *Archeologia*; P. Urbańczyk, *Trudne*; M. Kara, *Najstarsze*; idem, *Wczesnośredniowieczne grodziska Wielkopolski w nowszych studiach archeologii (wybrane zagadnienia)*, w: *Wielkopolska w dziejach. Archeologia o regionie*, red. H. Machajewski,

In summary, we can well recognise the historical context of the adoption of Christianity, which coincided with the emergence and reinforcement of the so-called first Piast monarchy, overlapping with the expansion of *Christianitas* in the 10th century. Regular contacts with Christian political constructs introduced the Piast ruler to the milieu of the then *Respublica Christiana*, and it was only a matter of time before the religion changed. So, the shift was west of the Reich (to the Polabian areas), accompanied by the solidification of some of the pagan Polabian Slavs and the development of the state of the Polans towards the north-west. Perhaps these geopolitical relations in Central Europe led to an alliance between the Piasts and the Přemyslids, sealed by the marriage of Mieszko and princess Doubravka, daughter of the local Christian ruler Boleslav I. This political situation seems to have accelerated (stimulated) Mieszko's decision to adopt the new religion. The sequence of events was as follows: alliance with Bohemia, arrival of Doubravka (965), marriage to Mieszko, his baptism (966). The arrival of Jordan, the first bishop, in 968 and his early missionary activities dynamized the process of Christianisation in the Polans country. So, the baptism of the ruler and the country's elites led to the beginning of a process of evangelisation and Christianisation of the entire Piast dominion, stretched over a long period of time<sup>35</sup>.

How should we interpret Mieszko I's conversion and his country's entering *Christianitas* of the time? The ruler's baptism was an act (baptism of an individual), a pebble that set in motion an avalanche

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Poznań 2008, s. 137–152; idem, *Stan badań dendrochronologicznych wczesnośredniowiecznych grodzisk z terenu Wielkopolski*, w: *Osadnictwo i architektura ziem polskich w dobie Zjazdu Gnieźnieńskiego*, red. A. Buko, Z. Świechowski, Warszawa 2000, s. 55–68; idem, *Archeologia o początkach państwa Piastów (wybrane zagadnienia)*, w: *Kolory i struktury średniowiecza*, red. W. Fałkowski, Warszawa 2004, s. 253–317; *Civitates Principales. Wybrane ośrodki władzy w Polsce wczesnośredniowiecznej. Katalog wystawy*, red. T. Janiak, D. Stryniak, Gniezno 1998; *Gniezno w świetle ostatnich badań archeologicznych. Nowe fakty, nowe interpretacje*, red. Z. Kurnatowska, Poznań 2001; A.M. Wyrwa, *Gdecz – Giecz. Scire est reminisci. Krótka historia wydobywania z zapomnienia rezydencji piastowskiej*, Dziekanowice–Lednica 2014; *Tu Polska się zaczęła...*, red. H. Kóćka-Krenz, Poznań 2007, specifically s. 7–44 (older literature); H. Kóćka-Krenz, *Poznań*.

<sup>35</sup> The circumstances of Mieszko's baptism, the accompanying events and the external situation, and research into the birth and first decades of the Piast state have been compiled and summarized in: *Początki państwa polskiego. Księga Tysiąclecia*, red. K. Tymieniecki, t. 1, *Organizacja polityczna*, t. 2, *Spółeczeństwo i kultura*, Poznań 1962. H. Łowmiański, *Początki Polski*, specifically t. 5, s. 310–621 and G. Labuda, *Studia*, t. 1–2; vide: also T. Jasiński, *Początki Polski w nowym świetle*, „Nauka” 2007, 4, s. 7–18 and Mieszko I's biography – J. Strzelczyk, *Mieszko Pierwszy*, Poznań 1992 (and the subsequent editions); G. Labuda, *Mieszko I*, Wrocław 2002; P. Urbańczyk, *Mieszko*; idem, *Trudne*.

(Christianisation). However, it is most often assumed that the act of the ruler's baptism entailed (at least formally) the Christianisation of his people<sup>36</sup>. It was therefore a founding act of the new religion and, at the same time, a symbol of the Christianisation of Poland. Baptism and the Christianisation it triggered off was not only a change in religion but also a profound, albeit gradual civilisational transformation. To put it shortly if not a bit loftily, owing to the events of the early second half of the 10th century, Poles are who they are and where they are. As descendants of barbarians, by entering *Christianitas* Poles became a part of the Western civilisation, over time drawing on the achievements of antiquity – these three components are at the basis of Polish identity today.

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<sup>36</sup> On issues of evangelisation, conversion, and Christianisation vide: B. Dumézil, *Chrześcijańskie korzenie Europy. Konwersja i wolność w królestwach barbarzyńskich od V do VIII wieku*, tłum. P. Rak, Kęty 2008, specifically s. 6–15. Vide: also „Kwartalnik Historyczny” 2015, 122, 4, s. 731–854 where 15 texts are dedicated to Christianisation in connection with the 1050th anniversary of Mieszko's baptism.

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