

CHRISTIANIZATION AND THE WORSHIP OF ST. ADALBERT IN CONSTRUCTING THE STATE AND CHURCH IN POLAND

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The Polish state emerged all at once, and it did so as a strong, well-organized structure, and almost simultaneously with its sovereign's baptism. In 963 Mieszko (d. 992) enters history as the first historically confirmed ruler of Poland. The monk Widukind of Corvey writes about his strife with the Saxon count Wichmann that took place in that year. This is the earliest mention of the duke and his state. Little more is known about him. As tradition, described 150 years later by Gallus Anonymus in his *Deeds of the Princes of the Poles*, has it, Mieszko was a son of Siemomysł, grandson of Lestek and great-grandson of Siemowit. Apart from their names nothing is known about the lives of those semilegendary rulers. Archaeological research suggests that Mieszko's state emerged suddenly, right before his christening. Scholars have confirmed a great transformation of the settlement network in the present-day Greater Poland area, between the Warta River and the Noteć River, in the 940s and the emergence of mighty strongholds, including the notable examples of those in Poznań, Gniezno, Giecz and on the Ostrów Lednicki Island, as well as the beginnings of Mieszko's expansion onto the neighbouring lands. This is what Gallus Anonymus wrote about those expeditions in his chronicle:



1. Foundations of the *palatium* in Giecz, before 1035

“Having assumed the rule over his duchy, Mieszko began to show proof of intelligence and physical strength and to invade [neighbouring] peoples more and more often”.

This may be how the state emerged whose original name we do not even know. Maybe it was the State of Gniezno – *Civitas Schinesghe* – as suggested by a summary of Mieszko I’s document *Dagome iudex* from the late 11th c. It says that the judge Dagome, identified as Mieszko, his wife and two sons gave to St. Peter their country that included the land between Prussia, Rus’, extending as far as Kraków, mysterious Alemure (possibly Olomouc in Moravia), the seats of the tribe of Milceni (present-day Saxony), the Oder River and probably Szczecin. According to an eminent medievalist, professor Roman Michałowski, “the term Mieszko’s state was used, as well as Licikaviki, *Słowiańszczyzna* [the Slavic Lands], and finally the Slavs”.

The name *Polska*, or rather its Latin equivalent, *Polonia*, had not appeared in the sources until the year 1000.

Gallus Anonymus's work, the oldest Polish chronicle, was written in the years 1113–1116, that is, many years after the events it describes. Shortly after the anonymous monk had written his Polish chronicle, about 1122, began the so-called *The Old Holly Cross Annals*, shown in the exhibition. It surpasses Anonymus's work, as it includes the preceding historiographical work, the so-called *Annales Regni Polonorum deperditi*. Thanks to it the *Annals* contain the two important dates when everything started: 965 and 966.

In 965 princess Dubravka came from Bohemia and married Mieszko. The year 966 was the date of the duke's christening. A reputed German chronicler, Thietmar of Merseburg, provides an account of this event in his chronicle written in the years 1012–1018:

“In the land of Bohemia he [Mieszko] married the noble sister of Boleslav the Elder, who turned out to be right as her name suggested. In Slavonic she was called Dubravka, which translates into German as ‘the good one’. As a worshipper of Christ, when she saw her husband immersed in the countless errors of paganism, she was deliberating how to convince him to her faith. She was doing her best to convert him, not so as to satisfy the three desires of this corrupt world, but for the sake of the glorious reward in the afterlife that was so desired by the faithful. She purposefully acted in an improper manner for a short time in order to exert good influence on him for a longer one. Namely, when after their wedding came the Lent and Dubravka wanted to restrain from eating of meat and to mortify her flesh as a voluntary sacrifice to God, her spouse talked her sweetly into renouncing her resolution. She agreed to do it so that she could gain his favour in other matters more easily. Some claim she did eat meat during one Lent, others say it happened so during three such periods. You have learnt, my reader, of her trespass; now consider the fruit of her pious intent. Thus she struggled to convert her husband and the merciful Maker finally answered her request. His immeasurable grace caused that the man

who had persecuted Him so viciously, repented, rejected the venom of his innate paganism, owing to his spouse's effort, and washed the stain of the original sin with the holy baptism. And at once the beloved head of state was followed by his thitherto flawed people who, clad in festive robes, were counted among the sons of Christ”.

We do not know the exact day of Mieszko's baptism; no sources mention it. Many scholars believe it might have taken place at Easter or on Whitsunday. In the ancient times these were the usual days to christen adults. The problem is that in Europe of Mieszko's times those customs varied and the most prominent pagan personages were baptized on different days.

Certainly the new faith was adopted only by Mieszko and his entourage. The Christianization of the rest of society progressed slowly. This process had lasted until the 13th c. In Mieszko's land there was originally no church hierarchy and the first missionary diocese was created in Poznań as late as in 968.

The christening of Poland was part of a broader phenomenon of Northern, Central and Eastern European Christianization. More or less in the same period other rulers were baptized: of Bohemia (925), Denmark (965), Hungary (974), Kievan Rus' (988), Sweden (1008) and the magnates of Iceland (1000). In Norway the first Christian monarch was enthroned in 995. In most cases the church hierarchy was created some time after the baptism but some of these countries had to wait for the creation of a separate church province headed by a metropolitan for a long time. In Denmark it was created in the early 12th c., in Sweden and Norway in the mid-12th c., in Bohemia in the 14th c. In Poland and Hungary they were created as early as in the year 1000, and in Rus' – almost directly after the baptism, whereas in Iceland it never came into being.

The conversion was of prime importance. It introduced Mieszko and his land to the Christian civilization that dominated over Europe; it opened Poland to its influences and initiated the process of long-lasting and in-depth transformation of the state. Moreover