

## Summary

### Mieszko I the Mysterious

According to the standard knowledge, Mieszko I already in the seventh decade of the tenth century was the undisputed ruler of an independent authority within his ancestral territory, respected by the neighbours and attracting chroniclers' attention. We do not know, however: Why was it him? Why then? Why there? How did this happen?

The author's ambition is not to create a monument exhaustive on all issues, based on historical and archaeological testimony. The framework is not the chronology of political events, but selected research problems. The author focuses on a few topics that have either yet not attracted widespread interest, or allow for the enrichment of the existing interpretations, in the hope that it will revive a little what is today a rather schematic discussion.

Insufficiently researched is the state of knowledge of the people who described this part of Europe but lived far away. As good example may serve accounts which mention the Vistula river, which appeared in numerous early European sources. In a completely different intellectual environment were written Arabic descriptions of Slavs and their territory which include the important commentary by Yaqub ibn Ibrahim. A different concept about the "barbaric" areas and, of course, about the local rulers was developed by early Western European chroniclers (Chapter 2).

A recent subject of intense theoretical discussion has been the problem of early statehood (especially in German and Anglo-Saxon historiography). Many researchers question whether territorial organizations contemporary to Mieszko I, and even earlier can be considered as real states. If not, then what were they? It is a key to understanding what our first historical ruler created and how he ruled and how he managed to make the state survive on the turbulent geopolitical stage of Central-Eastern Europe (Chapter 1).

This cannot be done without a comparison of parallel developments in neighbouring countries or reference to the findings of archeology, or without responding to the Piast legend, which still arouses emotions and to prevailing beliefs about the alleged role of the Polanie tribe during the state formation period. The current vision of Mieszko I as a sole political genius

who suddenly appeared in the middle of the forests of the Central European Lowlands, is highly unlikely. A new interpretation of the process which brought Mieszko I to power and allowed him to achieve geopolitical success, is needed. The author tries to demonstrate that the state of Mieszko I was not a historical accident, or a sudden eruption of an organizational initiative of a man who came from an area previously devoid of any political traditions. In the author's opinion, it was the work of the people who came to Greater Poland from the outside. They knew how territorial power should be exercised, how to invest in the administration infrastructure and how to finance it all. From available sources of historical and archaeological chronology it is logical to assume that the Piast family originated from Great Moravia. „A prince” who emigrated from there after 906 AD could follow (through Olomouc) together with his family and advisors to the center of Greater Poland, then politically empty. There, after a few years, i.e. in the third decade of the tenth century, an effective construction of the territorial kingdom began. It is actually a pyramid of assumptions that allow us to draw the Piast state-building movement from a long tradition of Central European political experiences (Chapter 3).

We do not know when and where our first ruler was born. However, it is even more difficult to believe that we do not know what his real name was because the name commonly used today *Mieszko* is a later historiographic construction. The dispute began already in the twelfth century and has still not been settled. An analysis of the historical context allows us to reconstruct the intellectual atmosphere in which in the seventh decade of the tenth century the ruler was “given” the name Mškh/Miseco in the chronicles. This name was later transformed and re-interpreted several times and finally became accepted as Mieszko. It seems that the decisive influence on the form of the two oldest records (Arabic and Latin) had the Old Testament tradition, which to a large extent determined the contemporary worldview of Arab and European intellectuals (Chapter 4).

What was the geopolitical situation when Mieszko I decided to become a Christian? Were the communities which lived in the land religiously unified? Did they come into contact with some early-Christian elements? Was it possible for Christian enclaves to be created and then survive without there being a Christian state? What do we know about the neighbouring peoples, which also joined tenth century Christian Europe? There is an attempt to answer these questions in Chapter 5, in which the author also includes his doubts as to the reliability of information about the baptism of Mieszko I in 966. Available sources allow us to question the widespread belief in Mieszko's absolute paganism before that date.

To guarantee the survival of an early medieval state it was necessary to build an organizational infrastructure in which secular and ecclesiastical elites mutually supported each other in a system of institutionalized hierarchies of the kingdom and the Church. It was necessary to standardise the religious beliefs of the population according to Christian standards. Mieszko's marriage to a Christian princess in 965, his baptism in 966 and the arrival of Bishop Jordan in 968 initiated a difficult process of planned changes to the ideological basis of state power and of a radical change to the worldview of subordinates. What was the rate of these changes and how much Mieszko I was involved in the promotion of Christianity and the installation of church organisation within his territory? How far could he take advantage of support from the Church, whose foundations had to be created from scratch? Historians and archaeologists have different views on this matter, but there is no doubt that spreading the new religion brought many difficulties to the first ruler. There is doubt about his missionary commitment. He did not reach archaeologically observable successes in the evangelisation and Christianisation of his subjects. This undermines the hitherto cherished dogma of the rapid change of religion after 966 years (Chapter 6).

The emergence of monumental stone architecture in this part of Europe is one of the indicators of the countries having joining the Roman Christian civilization. Their rulers, fulfilling the liturgical requirements of the Church and enhancing its prestige, invested heavily in stone temples and monasteries, but also built their own impressive secular buildings. In this respect Mieszko I was not a typical monarch, so we assume that focusing primarily on expanding and strengthening his territory the *imitatio imperii* was not part to his political agenda. An image obtained by archaeologists shows the momentum of his investment in the infrastructure of government surveillance, but may disappoint with little involvement of the Christian ruler in building stone church and secular architecture (Chapter 7).

Mieszko's I state did not function in a geopolitical vacuum and the survival of this new territorial organisation depended not only on the military strength of the ruler, but also on his successful "foreign policy", or the ability to build relationships (friendly or hostile) with his neighbours. The key relationships were, of course, with the Ottonian Empire that required skilful use of existing rules of ritual and symbolic communication, with which Mieszko I did quite well. Gaining and maintaining a strong geopolitical position required from him a lot of determination and the ability to act within the system of relationships typical of the elites in Latin Europe in the second half of the tenth century. By skilfully balancing

between cooperation with the Empire and maintaining the status of an independent ruler, he strengthened the position of the Piast dynasty on the Central-European stage (Chapter 8).

There is no consensus among historians as to the size and shape of the territory that Mieszko I subdued during his long rule which probably started shortly after 963. Even the mysterious document *Dagome iudex* which is amazingly detailed as the earlier Middle Ages description of borders does not offer certainty in this regard, and even archeology did not manage to transfer the material evidence onto the territorial and political vision. We need critical analysis of current proposals, based on the confrontation of historical information with increasing archaeological evidence. Archeology is the only way to clarify the political geography of the *Dagome iudex*. If the interpretation of this document made by the current author is correct, then the state of Mieszko I had a different shape from the one so far shown on maps. The country was framed by two great rivers (the Oder and Vistula) and the Baltic (Chapter 9).

Just like the beginning of Mieszko's I rule, the end is also mysterious. We do not know the place or the circumstances of his death on 25th May 992. The cause and course of the conflict of succession, from which Boleslav the Brave emerged victorious as the undisputed ruler, are also unknown. Until recently, it seemed, however, that we knew exactly where Mieszko I was buried. However, this certainty can also be challenged by referring to the history, archeology and history of art. "Removing" the prince from the tomb in the center of the cathedral in Poznan, he should "be buried" in another place. It is difficult to make a clear decision, but available European analogies and an analysis of inconspicuous archaeological finds suggest that Mieszko I was initially buried along with his first wife Dobrawa in a little palatial church of St. Mary, while the first Polish Bishop Jordan was laid in the geometric center of the cathedral in Poznan (Chapter 10).

None of these proposals can be considered finally solved. The author tries to demonstrate that re-analyzing available information can significantly broaden the scope of discussion and at least challenge some of the well established dogmas.

The author's aim was not to write another biography of the first ruler of the Piast Dynasty, since the historical sources have not changed. The author focuses instead on a list of selected problems that require reconsideration of the long-established historiographic tradition by attempting to "understand" the most difficult matter: Who were Mieszko's I ancestors? Where did they get their knowledge about how to build the foundation of the state, and where did the means come from? What was the original name of Mieszko I?

Did he zealously spread Christianity? What was his geopolitical strategy? What was the territorial scope of its authority? What were the political circumstances of his death? Where was he buried?

The lack of a solid information base makes the proposed answers suggestions rather than conclusive historiographical statements. The present state of our knowledge does not allow us to provide undoubtful answers. However, the author knowingly took the risk of formulating rather controversial proposals which will probably provoke critical discussion. Its positive results should be a new book, in which it will be possible to complete a fascinating biography of Mieszko I.