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## THE CONQUEST INVOLVING VIKING WAR-BANDS IN THE PROCESS OF THE PIAST STATE FORMATION. A CRITIQUE

**Abstract:** A concept repudiating endogenous origins of the Piast state has presently enjoyed considerable popularity in Polish historiography and archaeology. The scholars who support this hypothesis propound that the Piast state was formed in an act of conquest by a foreign military elite. Ideas akin to this supposition, based on the so called social conflict theory, were for the first time formulated in social and historical sciences in the second half of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century. This paper seeks to examine this thesis and collate it with the postulate that the social contract (finalised with a ritual pact) was the fundamental cause of the origin of the primary Piast domain.

**Key words:** Poland, Wielkopolska (Great Poland), the Piast state, social conflict theory, conquest involving Viking war-bands, social contract theory, Polish and German social and historical sciences.

The problem of Slavic-Scandinavian contacts in the Early Middle Ages, along with the issue of the presence of the Norsemen in the Piast state and their role in the genesis of that state, has been a matter of a long-running dispute amongst medievalists, including archaeologists (not only Polish), e.g. Wachowski 1914; Koczy 1934; Serejski 1953; Łowmiański 1957, herein non-Polish literature; Żak 1967; Kara 1992; Łosiński 1999; 2008; Wielowiejski 2000; Leciejewicz 2006; Biermann 2008; Morawiec 2010; 2013; Duczko 2011; 2013; Rohrer 2012; Sikora 2013; Stanisławski 2013)<sup>1</sup>. Polish scholars' interest in this issue goes back to the nineteenth century. Forasmuch as at first only historians participated in the discussion, the subjects of debate were accordingly determined by the area of research of historical medieval studies, having been reliant on their original research practice, which in the then preferred version (i.e., the classic one, gradually modified after World War II) was essen-

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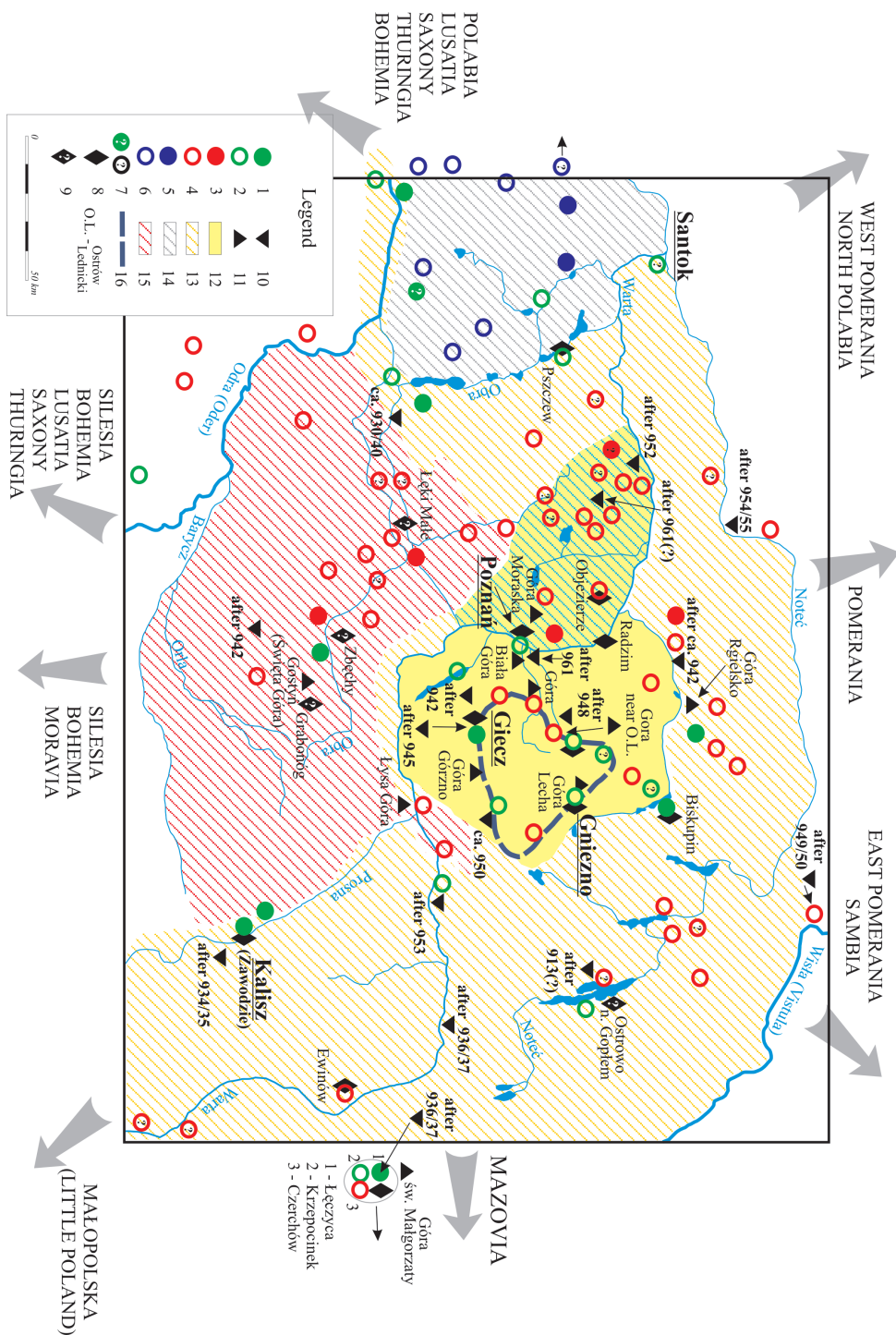
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<sup>1</sup> This is a slightly modified English version of an article that is going to be published in Polish in the Book of Jubilee dedicated to Professor Stanisław Kurnatowski (ed. A. Jaszewska).

Fig. 1. Strongholds and the alleged ritual-cult sites dated to phase C (end of the 9<sup>th</sup> – first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century) and phase D<sub>0</sub> (first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century) along with the earliest in the Warta River basin hoards of hacksilver against archaeologically determined extent of the earliest Piast domain (first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century), extent of areas politically related to the said domain (the so called collaboration zone) and extent of areas subjugated by the Piasts ca. mid-10<sup>th</sup> century at the latest

Author: M. Kara; drawn by M. Śniedziawska-Lerczak and J. Sawicka

Legend: **1** – stronghold functioning after 950, erected in the earlier phases of the Early Middle Ages; **2** – stronghold functioning after 950, erected in the late 9<sup>th</sup> or early 10<sup>th</sup> century; **3** – stronghold which ceased to function ca. mid-10<sup>th</sup> century at the latest, erected in the earlier phases of the Early Middle Ages; **4** – stronghold from the late 9<sup>th</sup>-first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century or from the first half (basically the second quarter) of the 10<sup>th</sup> – the beginning of the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century (the latter only within central Wielkopolska, most notably the Gniezno Upland); **5** – stronghold which ceased to function in the late 10<sup>th</sup>/early 11<sup>th</sup> century at the latest, erected in the earlier phases of the Early Middle Ages; **6** – stronghold which ceased to function in the late 10<sup>th</sup>/early 11<sup>th</sup> century at the latest, erected in the late 9<sup>th</sup> or in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century; **7** – chronology uncertain; **8** – alleged ritual-cult site; **9** – as above, albeit chronology uncertain; **10** – hoard of dirhams with a date of deposition; **11** – alleged sacred mountain with a historical or present proper name; **12** – extent of the oldest Piast patrimonial domain along with the so called Poznań segment incorporated into the domain in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century (hatched area); **13** – the zone of the so called collaboration with the Piast realm (areas incorporated by the Piasts ca. mid-10<sup>th</sup> century at the latest); **14** – as above, but incorporation not earlier than ca. 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century; **15** – the zone of the Piast conquests (areas incorporated ca. mid-10<sup>th</sup> century at the latest); **16** – the so called Gniezno con-figuration (chain) of strongholds dated to D<sub>0</sub> phase (in this group only Giecz was erected in the 9<sup>th</sup> century)



tially confined to the analysis and interpretation of the extant written sources from the period<sup>2</sup>.

Generally examined in the broader context of the genesis of the Polish state and nation, the West Slavonic–Scandinavian connections in the Early Middle Ages remained unexplored as an autonomous research issue by Polish or non-Polish historiography. Nineteenth-century historians sought to explicate the alleged Scandinavian origin of some of Polish noble families (e.g., the Awdaniec family – Semkowicz 1917) and to identify the causes of the division of the society into the privileged nobility (the Lechites) and the subjected peasantry.

Karol Szajnocha (1858) posited that the genesis of the said division was rooted in the migration of Scandinavian war-bands from the area of Denmark to the Polish lands, which purportedly happened in the sixth century. Szajnocha identified the invaders as *Lachy*, who, having conquered indigenous Slavic population of poorly developed social structure and primitive ‘forest-water’ economy, formed the Polish nobility – the foundation of the state. Wacław Aleksander Maciejowski (1846) was of the opinion that those invaders were *Lechowie*, who occupied the basin of the Elbe River and were, according to the author, the upper class of the Polabian Slavs, intermingled with *Sasi* (he was writing about the Saxons) from Scandinavia. Franciszek Piekosiński’s view (1881) is also worthy of note. He propounded that *Lechici* (the Lechites), who lived by the Elbe River, were a Polish tribe marked by an acquired Scandinavian culture. According to this concept, unlike ‘typical’ Slavs who practiced farming, the Lechites developed traits typical of conquerors, characteristic of the Scandinavians; hence the presence of knighthood with runes in their coats among the Lechites. F. Piekosiński argued that at the end of the eighth century the Lechites came to occupy areas located, *inter alia*, by the Warta River. Let us recall the view of another Polish historian of this period of time. For Edward Romuald Bogusławski, *Lechici* (the Lechites) were admittedly Slavs, initially ruled by Popiel the Scandinavian, and barely secondarily by the native Piast family (Bogusławski 1888; 1899). Piasts’s son Siemowit has dismissed Popiel as a result of bloody attempt, actively assisted by armed Norman troops, which remained and settled down at Polish lands, as sedentary population.

These concepts are part of the so called conflict theory, popular in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century in historical and

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<sup>2</sup> In this research model other historical sources, including archaeological record, are deemed to be secondary carriers of information about the past. A historian’s research effort accordingly consists in attempts to precisely and faithfully reconstruct a section of socio-political history s/he is interested in, to the considerable neglect of the reconstruction of the then culture. For this reason, archaeological record, which mostly furnishes information on the effects of socio-cultural transformations unfolding at a specific time and within a given space, is usually cited as an illustration of the findings of historiography. More often than not, it is overlooked by historians and sometimes even reinterpreted (!) with a violation of the autonomy of illation of prehistory (archaeology) as a separate scientific discipline. For potential research possibilities and methods of analysis of archaeological record see Kurnatowska, Kurnatowski 2012. For the modern model of cooperation between archaeologists and historians within medieval studies see Banaszkiewicz 2006; Rębkowski 2008.

social sciences in Europe (cf. Wierzbicki 2011), and until 1945 principally nurtured in the environment of the German and Austrian sociologists of the state, ethnologists, historians and archaeologists, as one of the fundamental underpinnings of their theoretical views<sup>3</sup>.

A philosophical theory developed within the positivist science, it was nevertheless inconsistent in character, comprising a set of theoretical views exposing various forms of social conflict. Concepts of social conflict were a subject of theoretical in-depth studies of, *inter alios*, Ludwik Gumplowicz (1838-1909), Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), Karl Marx (1818-1883), Georg Simmel (1858-1918) and Max Weber (1864-1920). Sharing the view that social conflict was a phenomenon caused by social interaction, they nevertheless variously perceived its essence (Turner 2012). A view, in which the social conflict 'theory' was validated by another theory of positivist philosophy of science, e.g. the so called social Darwinism, was neither commonly accepted. For some, such as L. Gumplowicz, a Polish sociologist at the University of Graz, a scientist of European renown, whose views profoundly influenced academics studying the theory of the state and its law, social conflicts were natural and universal, hence remained (analogously to the struggle of species in the natural world) phenomena irremovable from social life, unaccountable for valuation (Gumplowicz 1883; 1887; 1912/1918). On this basis, following the premises of anthropological sociology and anthropogeographical determinism, some Austrian and German scholars, whose views L. Gumplowicz did not share, pointed to certain ethnic communities (mainly Germans and Normans) as a breed particularly suited for conquest, i.e., struggle for living space, understood also as civilizational and cultural space<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> It is worthy of note that the Polish nineteenth/early twentieth-century supporters of this theory, including the prominent representatives of the then medieval studies (e.g., K. Szajnocha or F. Piekosiński), were historians first of all active in Galicia, which until 1918 remained under the sway of Austria. It cannot be ruled out that the mentioned researchers, in line with the then European historiography, sought to identify social and political phenomena, which in their opinion determined the nature of the Polish nation and special events in its history, in the earliest history of the nation. That being the case, they perhaps saw in the system of the oldest Polish society the underlying reasons of dramatic events of the so called Galician Slaughter of 1846, during which peasants, provoked by the Austrian annexationist, murdered the nobility and court officials.

<sup>4</sup> Important in this case were the views of a French aristocrat Alfred Gobineau. In his book entitled 'Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines', published in 1854, he presented a theory of the white race, superior in socio-cultural terms to other races and represented by the Aryans and then the Germans, who on civilizational grounds were fated to fight the barbarian races. This theory, based on the concept of the conquest of barbarian people by culturally privileged people belonging to the 'master race', enjoyed popularity in European science in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, notably in England, France, Sweden and German-speaking countries. The concept of a civilizational active or passive race was formulated in 1843 by a German historian Gustav Friedrich Klemm (cf. Gąsowski 1970, pp. 147-148). In the early twentieth-century Germany, the theory of race struggle was linked with the concept of living space (*Lebensraum*). The term was introduced by Friedrich Ratzel – a German geographer and ethnographer, one of the main founders of anthropogeography and the concept of geographical determinism (Ratzel 1901-1902). During World War I, representatives of German political science perceived areas of Central Europe and equatorial Africa, termed *Mittleuropa* and *Mittelafrika* respectively, in categories of living space (on this

Others believed (e.g., Engels and Marx, fathers of historical materialism, whose concepts have continually inspired social and historical sciences) that conflicts were phenomena of solely historical (not natural) dimension, and as such they instigated a sequence of evolutionary and at the same time dialectical economic and social transformations, also revolutionary, which, in a specific historical situation, could have led to the emergence of a society organised in a state – monarchy (Engels 1949 [1891]).

Notable is the fact that the concept of conflict, in the version shared, *inter alia*, by L. Gumplowicz, deemed that the act of conquest was an essential act in the history of state formation, whilst social struggle based on violence was considered a manifestation of a process already underway in the state. Forasmuch as violence breeds violence, state systems accordingly emerged exclusively in stratified and deeply conflicted societies, stricken with constant power struggle, exertions to seize and not to relinquish power, struggle for existence, tangible goods and last but not least for dominance and living space in the geopolitical sense. Depending on the level of social organisation, the struggle was directed towards the exploitation of ethnic groups (Gumplowicz) or class exploitation (Engels and Marx) under purportedly superior and universal principle: we fight – we have won – we exploit. It is worthy of note that the concept of struggle comprised all kinds of social conflicts between human groups, who are intent upon pursuing their goals, including such diverse phenomena as bloody feuds, massacres and parliamentary disputes resolved by peaceful means (cf. Gella 1965; 1966).

The foregoing theory is one of the philosophical and scientific ideas of positivism which now and again have evidently inspired historians and archaeologists, particularly from Central and Eastern European countries (cf. Wierzbicki 2011). A renaissance of a conflict theory in its rich variety has been recently no-

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Škrabec 2013). They were considered colonial territories with the conditions appropriate, in contrast to the over-populated and highly industrialised territory of the empire, for the Germans to practically implement the so-called German garden myth. Farmers were tipped as colonisers, perceived – in line with the theoretical assumptions of F. Ratzel – as people staying in harmonious relationship with nature. Let us add that due to the perceived hostile, highly barbaric nature of the natives, the militarisation of the immigrant population was considered essential for the survival of German settlers in the new culturally unfavourable environment. Almost at the same time in the German historical sciences appeared the concept of Central Europe as Germans' living space since time immemorial, successively colonised by warriors and peasants, as well as armed artisans and merchants, descendant from people (race) of German origin. This idea clearly alluded to the concepts formulated in anthropogeography. As regards the prehistoric times, invoked was the civilizational dimension of the military expansion of the Germanic peoples into the eastern lands of Central Europe from native areas of northern Europe, starting from the Neolithic, while in relation to the Middle Ages the state-organisational role of Norman Viking war-bands in different parts of Central and Eastern Europe was emphasised (e.g., Kossinna 1928; 1929; for the criticism of his ethno-cultural theses from Kossinna's times, see Twardcka 1977; cf. also Zak 1967, pp.13-20, especially p. 17, therein a still valid critical analysis of the Viking concept and the literature on the subject). Significantly, the members of Viking war-bands were called *Kulturträger* (carriers of culture)



table in the work of Polish archaeologists (e.g. Buko 2005; 2012; 2013<sup>5</sup>; Urbańczyk 2008; Moździoch 2011; 2013), who seek to explore the issue of state formation in medieval Europe. In ideas appertaining to the origins of the Piast state, embedded in this paradigm, an important role is ascribed to the members of bands of warriors, who were strangers in the Warta River basin. According to Andrzej Buko (interview – footnote 5), they were Norman Vikings. Zdzisław Skrok (2013) is of a similar opinion. Sławomir Moździoch does not overtly identify the origin of the foreign population (2011; 2013), believing it to have arrived somewhere from the East (the area of the present Mazovia, in general from behind the Vistula River) and from the North West (most likely from Wolin or the area of the mouth of the Oder River). Unless my reading of Prof. Moździoch's inexplicitly formulated ideas pertaining to the issue is erroneous, the researcher believes that the incomers from the East could have included warriors from the western dependencies of Kievan Rus', while among immigrants from the North West there were supposedly members of the so called Viking war-bands, who respected the customs typical of the peoples of the Baltic Sea Region, including the Scandinavian ones (S. Moździoch points to the practice of burying hoards of hacksilver, which he believes to have been sacrificial deposits). While I, admittedly, might have misinterpreted the views of the author, in S. Moździoch's view, the formation of the Piast state in the region of present-day Wielkopolska should assuredly be credited to the representatives of a foreign military elite. As elite troops subordinate to the leader, they were vital to the success of the Piast dynasty in the formation of their original patrimonial domain, which S. Moździoch is inclined to locate within the Kalisz Land and in the abutting areas of present-day Mazovia<sup>6</sup>. The

<sup>5</sup> See also Krzysztof Kowalski's interview with Andrzej Buko *Polska zaczęła się nagle* [Poland began like a shot] published in the newspaper 'Rzeczpospolita' No. 299 (7593) on 23-26 December 2006, at p. A19. According to A. Buko, the new, state social order was imposed by the Piast dynasty *with fire and sword*, by way of conquests launched in the first half of the tenth century, *even before Mieszko assumed power*.

<sup>6</sup> In the subject literature, A. Buko (2000, pp. 153-155; 2005, pp. 172-177) was the first to identify the area of the Kalisz Plateau with the range of the original patrimonial domain of the Piast family. S. Moździoch (2011; 2013) reformulated this hypothesis and expanded the limits of the domain delineated by A. Buko to include the region of today's Mazovia. Both researchers nevertheless believe that the Piast dynasty re-subdued the Gniezno Land by means of military violence, as the oldest territorial acquisition of the family. For the issues in question of fundamental importance are written sources, notably the 'Gesta Principum Polonorum' by Gallus Anonymus from the early twelfth century, the earliest extant source of information on the ancestors of the first historical Piast's descendant, Mieszko, the son of Siemomysł (I.1-4). It evidently relates the ruling origins of the dynasty to Gniezno (see Banaszkiewicz 2010, especially pp. 9-24; and also Kiersnowski 2000, pp. 393-394). None of the sources mention either the Kalisz Land with Kalisz or Mazovia as the original Piast domain. It is notable that Kalisz was for the first time mentioned in the chronicle only in the context of events related to the history of the second Piast monarchy, in the context of events that unfolded in the late 1106/early 1107 during the civil war between the half-brothers, sons of Władysław Herman, Prince Bolesław the Wrymouth and Prince Zbigniew (Gallus Anonymus, II.38). In contrast to the Gniezno stronghold, to which Gallus (I.1, 6, 19; II.38) consistently refers using a honourable name *civitas* or alternatively *metropolis*, the chronicler designated the stronghold of Kalisz as *castrum*, a term he applied to lower-level centres within the organisation of the Piast monarchy (cf. Lalik

war-bands are believed to have come to the area of today's central Wielkopolska by the Oder and Vistula routes, or alternatively with their tributaries, among others, the Bzura and Prosna Rivers, where the 'eastern' warriors were to have approached the middle section of the Vistula River taking the Bug–Narew route (Moździoch 2011, pp. 73-74, Fig. 1; 2013, pp. 305-306, Fig. 1). Whilst I shall elaborate on this issue below, let me simply note that a similar idea, i.e. a migration of Viking war-bands into the Warta River basin following the Vistula or the Oder route – were formulated within German medieval studies and archaeology in the first half of the twentieth century (see Łowmiański 1957, pp. 17-21; Labuda 1974; Boroń 2013, pp. 39-43 – and the references cited therein along with the critique of these ideas)<sup>7</sup>. At the time a singular view, the conquest of the tribe of *Lędyce*

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2006 [1967]; Kurnatowska 1991, p. 19, therein the information, with the relevant subject literature on the terminology used in the chronicles of Thietmar, Gallus Anonymous and Cosmas for the designation of strongholds, depending on their function and rank). Neither was Kalisz mentioned by Gallus (I.8) amongst the most important strongholds of Bolesław the Brave, which accorded him prestige in the region due to their unique strategic importance in the state (the presence of elite military contingents). As a reminder, this group comprised strongholds in Gniezno, Poznań, Giecz and Władysław (Włocławek), the first three located within the Gniezno Plateau and its direct periphery, believed by researchers to have been power-bearing centres of older tradition (e.g., Dalewski 1991; 1996). It is worth noting that pieces of information on the translation of central sites of territorial realm were recorded in written sources in the form of *quasi*-mythical stories or historical accounts. As an example, let us note the Latin *Alba Longa* – the legendary birthplace of the Roman state ('Mała encyklopedia' 1973, p. 29), or an attempt of Prince Sviatoslav to locate the central stronghold of the Rus in Perejaslavec on the Danube, neglecting their previous, the so called capital centres of Novgorod and Kiev ('Povest' vremennykh let', year 6477 [969], [English version, p. 87]; year 6478 [970], [English version, p. 87]). Let us also mention the case of a Slavic Prince Pribina (d. 860 or 861), who, having been expelled from Nitra, was granted by the Frankish king Louis part of the Lower Pannonia upon the Zala River as *beneficium*. In a written source ('Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum' – see Labuda 1999, pp. 96-97, no. 44b) it was scrupulously noted that having taken over the new 'realm', Pribina fell to erecting a stronghold (i.e., Mosapurc/Mosaburg near Lake Balaton, currently Zalavár in Hungary) which he turned into the centre of his power. The above examples evince that the origin of the dynasty, by virtue of its political powers, was a significant social issue, also in early medieval Europe, if only because the subjects in the first place identified themselves with the ruler and its power.

In the light of the foregoing remarks, the identification of Kalisz as the primary ancestral centre of the Piast dynasty seems a hardly promising research direction. Due to the scarcity of sources this issue will neither be resolved in the case of the stronghold in Giecz, for which a similar hypothesis has been formulated (Kara 2000, p. 74; Kurnatowska 2002, p. 64 – *a stronghold, in which the Piast dynasty had its roots*; Krapiiec, Krysztofiak 2003, p. 47). Unlike Kalisz, the relation of Giecz with the oldest (primary) *patrimonium* of the Piast is irrefutable (in terms of the model of culture reflected in archaeological sources – cf. Krysztofiak 2005; 2009; Kara 2009, pp. 203-319).

<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, in more recent work of Polish scholars, foreign warriors are believed to have been solely mercenaries in the service of the Piast and/or members of the Piast elite (e.g., Kara 1992; Wielowiejski 2000, pp. 84-85; Buko 2005, pp. 350-358; otherwise Skrok 2013, according to him the early medieval Poland is the Vikings' creation). Contrary to pre-war views of German researchers (e.g., Holtzmann 1918), the Slavic (native) roots of the Piast are fairly indubitable. In view of the foregoing, it is worth quoting the opinion of Błażej M. Stanisławski, an archaeologist of the early medieval Wolin, who in a recently published monograph on Jömsvikings clearly argues for the presence of the Scandinavians and the Rus' in the entourage of the first Piasts, yet repudiates the idea that the Vikings formed the state in the Warta River basin and argues that they only *played a significant role* (particularly in the economic development of that state – annotation by M.K.)



(the Lechites), occupying the region upon Lake Goplo and the Warta River by *Polanie* (the Polans) who, having been displaced from their original seats by the troops of Oleg, a Norman, had arrived from the area upon the Dnieper River *circa* 882 commanded by the Russo-Varangians, was developed in the 1920s by a Polish historian Kazimierz Krotoski (1925), a graduate of, among others, Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

It is worthy of note that the proponents of the conflict (violence) theory, including its contemporary version, exclude social consensus from the group of the so called state formation factors or, alternatively, assign it a role secondary to conquest<sup>8</sup>. The concept of social contract, finalised by the public and ritualised pact preceded by a phase of negotiations and social accommodation (Althoff 2009, pp. 47-48, 184-190), is understood as a phenomenon well known to historians, sociologists of state and political anthropologists, a sort of compromise concluded on behalf of the community by the leaders of its higher organisational levels, at least in relation to the perceived economic or political (including military) threat from its neighbours. In this situation, the party having an armed force at its disposal became the guarantor of the inviolability of the community in exchange for profits from services and contributions (cf. Vansina 1962; Tymowski 1985; 1999; 2013; Třeštík 1997; 2000; Althoff 2009; Vorbrich 2012, pp. 166-171, especially 168ff). In Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, the social contract – a phenomenon characteristic of pre-state regimes of the so called barbaric collectivism, evident in authoritarian regimes in the area of Central, Eastern and Northern Europe, albeit to a limited extent – was neither equal in character, nor

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at a certain stage of its organisation, at the end of the tenth and in the first half of the eleventh century (Stanisławski 2013, p. 278). Yet, in the conclusions of the quoted book, Stanisławski put forward a thesis, discussial in my view, that at the end of the tenth and in the first half of the eleventh century the comers from Scandinavia and Rus' formed a politically dominating power elite, centred around the local Piast dynasty (Stanisławski 2013, pp. 293-298). I find Z. Kurnatowska's (2000a, p. 426) views more convincing. According to Kurnatowska, it seems likely that the first historical Piasts deliberately brought the Scandinavian warriors to their state, considering their usefulness in organising elite troops of their retinue (*družina*). Kurnatowska points out that this is what the Hungarians did in the second half of the tenth century, during the formation period of their 'European monarchy' in Pannonia, wherein they used the experience of Bavarian warriors.

<sup>8</sup> This tendency is also evident in more recent work of anthropologists exploring issues in culture and politics, notably the Anglo-Saxon authors, according to whom various conflicts were 'from time immemorial' a factor generating social change, including state formation. Their views are based mainly on the analysis of contemporary social phenomena. Perceptible is a clear influence of this kind of views on the findings of archaeologists, who all too often mindlessly transfer concepts developed by anthropologists to prehistoric and medieval archaeology, also in the case of non-compliance of these concepts with the realities of the era. I deem valuable a more general opinion of Jacek Banaszkiewicz (2013, pp. 428-429), according to whom (...) *it is hardly reasonable to avail oneself of concepts or problems arising from the theoretical reflection situated above the epoch and its sources, so as to make them work, into the course of disquisition, located at the level of statements in relation to the theoretical meta-statements. The worst, however, happens when the researcher simply chooses to tell a model, theoretical concept, and merely on the principle of adding to it some 'historical' components, refers it not even as a report of research on a fragment of history, but offers it as an account of reality that once existed.*

was it a result of a plebiscite, and its occurrence did not have to be a result of the peace agreement reached during a *veche*, since in the course of deliberations during a *veche* or any other kind of assembly more often than not a stronger party employed various forms of persuasion, including violence (cf. Modzelewski 2004).

Having repudiated the idea of social consensus, scholars argue for military pressure resulting from social conflict, yet provide a myriad of interpretations of this phenomenon in the context of the genesis of a realm.

Supporters of the theory of conflict as a state formation mechanism perceive therefore military pressure, including the act of conquest, as the source of a realm (Urbańczyk 2008; Moździoch 2011; 2013)<sup>9</sup>. In a preferred model of systemic transformation of fundamental importance are not so much communities living in a barbarian collectivity regime, with a *veche* as the highest level political institution, and a subordinate group of leaders (chiefs) from the privileged, noble families, but militarised chiefdoms, marked by the already fairly impregnable position of *regulus*, frequently defined, in my opinion incorrectly, as an early form of monarchy (e.g., Earle 1987; Posern-Zieliński, Kairski 2004; Tymowski 2008; 2009; 2013; Vorbrich 2012). In this arrangement, the community is attributed with secondary functions, whilst chiefs and subordinated retinues are believed to be an active party. Aware of the objectives they pursue, similar to General Bonaparte in the final stage of the Directorate (1799), they play a ruthless game for real, almost absolute political power for themselves and their families.

On the other hand, other researchers point to various manifestations of violence (including military) in the organisation and consolidation of early states (e.g., Tabaczyński 2006), a view endorsed not only by advocates of conquest as a fundamental principle of early states formation, but also scholars who favoured an evolutionary mechanism of state formation among the Western Slavs. In this concept emphasised is the oppressive nature of the above mentioned formation,

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<sup>9</sup> In his recent book, devoted to the origins of the monarchy of Mieszko I, Przemysław Urbańczyk (2012) abandoned the idea of conquest, at least in relation to the territory of the oldest Piast domain. Thus, in Wielkopolska, the organisers of the state (realm) could – in his opinion – have availed themselves of *the standard negotiation mechanisms, i.e., the power of 'persuasion' (including military pressure), rich gifts and promises of military success (and thus the spoils of war)*; they could have also arranged politically advantageous marriages (Urbańczyk 2012, p. 155). According to P. Urbańczyk (2012, pp. 129-165), the realm formation in the said territory was bred of the deeds of the Piast dynasty whose ancestors are likely – according to him – to have come from Great Moravia, from the reigning Mojmir dynasty, notwithstanding a complete lack of any information on the subject in written sources. For the issue in question written sources are of decisive importance, and for this reason this hypothesis, whilst attractive, cannot be accepted. Despite the rejection of the paradigm of conquest as a state formation mechanism, the proposed view is nevertheless ideologically similar to ideas embedded in the theory of invasion given that according to P. Urbańczyk (2012, pp. 153-159), state formation in the region of Wielkopolska in the first half of the tenth century ensued from the implantation of a foreign (!), 'civilised' aristocratic family, which, as a result of its political sagaciousness and owing to the knowledge of contemporary ideology of power and political contacts in the region, gained real power over culturally backward local communities.

ensuing from the advanced social stratification of the community. The formation of a realm is therefore deemed a phenomenon synonymous with the exploitation of a numerically predominant group of producers, by a small, yet politically more powerful and better organised leadership strata, which has a realistic means of coercion at their disposal (Łowmiański 1953; 1973; Labuda 1992; 2002; 2012). For this reason, the said system is supposed to generate sundry negative social phenomena, notably violence, as the foundation of its existence, as well as armed conflict as a means of regulating political disputes between states (generally speaking, social conflicts transformations). In its theoretical underpinnings, the foregoing view refers to the Marxist theory of the origin of the state and its society, whereby a less numerous, yet politically more powerful leadership class (consumers) imposes real power over other social classes (politically weaker producers) by dint of violence and therefore already at the dawn of the system formed is the germ of future social conflicts that eventually lead to the destabilisation of the system (Engels 1949 [1891]).

Regardless of the definition of violence as a state formation factor, several modern concepts based on the so called conflict theory share another common trait, i.e. the fact of the establishment of the original domain of the ruling family is shown to have been linked to the migration of a foreign military population into the area (e.g., the Scandinavians and/or Rus'), or to the conquest of that territory, at least with a considerable degree of involvement of foreign warriors. The culture of these groups, particularly their chieftdom structure and experience, not only military, along with political and economic connections, are believed to have ensured their domination over farming local communities, which in turn should have enabled the efficient transformation of at least some members of the migrant war-bands into a leadership strata of the domain under formation. In this model, akin to the above-mentioned views of L. Gumplowicz, the origin of an embryo of a state as a socio-political and politico-spatial as well as cultural and economic formation is equal to a violent political event or a series of such events (conquest, fights for primacy put up by chiefs, a coup).

The possibility of a historical process involving a local, charismatic dynasty of military, judicial and perhaps also priestly prerogatives (for the role of charismatic leaders in the social processes see Weber 1975)<sup>10</sup> is thereby dismissed. This

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<sup>10</sup> The legitimization of the dynasty of Piast to rule was not necessarily bred solely of military prerogatives of his ancestors. The special position of the family may have grown out of the belief of the community in the exceptional connections of the aforementioned persons with the sphere of magic (prophetic gift, the ability to guarantee good harvest). Significant could also be a belief in the profound wisdom of the members of the dynasty, manifesting itself in righteous judgments they pronounced (see Banaszkiewicz 2000; Stephan 2010). In view of the foregoing remarks, ethnological parallels from Africa are worthy of note – see Vorbrich 2012, in particular p. 170: *Frequently, the assumption of power, the recognition of legitimacy of royal (chieftain's) power was ultimately clinched by obtaining royal things (...) procured by deceit or transmitted in the course of the ceremony of enthronement. Most often these were objects of heavy symbolic or even magic significance (as the seat of the community's spirit): thrones (stools), drums or umbrellas, but also items*

process could nonetheless have led to a sudden and rapid formation of a sustainable realm system within the stratified agrarian community inhabiting the central basin of the Warta River (see Kara 2009, pp. 288-289; Kurnatowska, Kara 2010). In this case, this was not an evolutionary, elongated economic and social process, deemed as a fundamental, causative state formation factor by positivist science (particularly 'Marxism' as one of its strands). The pace of state formation process was conditioned by an effective adaptation of the existent civilizational and cultural patterns, mainly in the field of the organisation of *regnum*, borrowed from the 'abutting' territories, basically from the Middle Danube Region and to a lesser extent from the Saxon province of the Kingdom of Germany. It stemmed also, or perhaps first of all, from the consolidation of local agrarian communities – local people provided with a certain surplus of food necessary to maintain the princely *družina* and a bureaucratic apparatus as well as for external exchange (Kurnatowski 1994 [1995], pp. 25-37; 2000, pp. 335-342; 2008, pp. 81-91) – around a charismatic family of dominative eligibilities, developing the idea of a common sacred territorial community, which would equate with their domain. In this case, an efficient appropriation by the Piast dynasty of the 'ancient' centres of worship and power (e.g., in Gniezno, Poznań and Giecz), which most likely happened with the local communities' consent, turned out to have been of central importance (Dalewski 1996; 2012; Banaszkiewicz 1998; Kurnatowska 2000b; Kara 2009; worship and power centres in Northern and Central Europe in antiquity and the Early Middle Ages were usually located in close proximity to places where communities held their assemblies, thereby enduing a *veche* with sacred inviolability [cf. Banaszkiewicz 1998]. Adscititiously sanctified owing to the ancestral tradition, the aforementioned places were perfectly suitable for concluding the social contract in the form of a sacred pact between a representative of the ducal family and the territorial-neighbourly communities represented by the elite). Evident traces of the conquest of territories of the middle and upper Odra River basin and the Łąd Land (a phenomenon applies to the southern periphery of central Wielkopolska)<sup>11</sup> (Fig. 1) bear witness to the fact that the Piasts did not avoid brutal political methods, including the conquest of certain communities using military force (it is more than likely that conquered were communities reluctant to mediation, which posed a threat to the power of the Piast dynasty). A practice widespread throughout the then Europe, as exemplified in 'Povest' vremennych let' (e.g., year 6422 [914], [English version, p. 71]; year 6454 [946], [English version,

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*that made the subjects' life easier: stones calling down rain, natron (natural soda – a preservative and disinfectant), etc.*

<sup>11</sup> i.e., excavated sites of burnt down strongholds, dated to the first half of the tenth – mid-tenth century, with numerous artefacts (also luxurious), the context and character of deposition of which suggest that the belongings were abandoned. Of key importance for the interpretation of these burnt strongholds are militaria deposited within the burnt sites, notably arrowheads excavated from the relics of burnt fortifications and/or dwellings, which can be regarded as the remains of missiles hurled at the stronghold (Kurnatowska, Kara 2010, p. 47, therein further literature).

p. 80]) – conquest was not practised by the Piast dynasty before the phase of territorial expansion of their primary domain (i.e. the Gniezno Land and its environs), which happened *circa* in mid-tenth century and in the second half of the tenth century (cf. K a r a 2009, p. 251ff, therein the analysis of archaeological sources). The power of the first historical Piasts was therefore, at least to a considerable extent, authoritarian. They nevertheless sought to resolve social conflicts and violence, generated by the solidifying monarchy, by involving the members of the elite and the armed forces, notably from *družina*, in the conquest of some neighbouring communities, thereby guaranteeing warriors (including private) prestige and a variety of material benefits. The Piasts, *ipso facto*, further expanded their real power over the people and land. Specific relations were cultivated between the Piast rulers and the people of their original domain (the area of the Gniezno Upland), wherein no trace of any acts of conquest has been recorded<sup>12</sup>.

Views negating the emergence of the Piast state as a consequence of military operations of Norman war-bands or the ‘Scandinavianised’ Lechites were put forward in the Polish and German historiography as early as in the nineteenth century. In the Polish scholarly community, such opinions were expounded in the context of the study on the genesis of the regime of the early Polish state particularly by the representatives of the then Kraków historical school, e.g., Michał Bobrzyński. Having extracted the information from the chronicle of Gallus Anonymus, first and foremost the so called Piasts’ dynastic legend (I.1-3), he stated that the said *Legend the least of all by later additions embroidered upon, offers this distinct advantage that it does not permit us to pursue the origin of Poland in adventurous hypotheses which new-fangled historians came up with* (namely, F. Piekosiński – annotation by M.K.) (B o b r z y ń s k i 1986 [1879], p. 102). Therefore Bobrzyński, Smolka, Małecki, a little later also Oswald Balzer, and earlier a German historian Richard Roepell, deemed a concatenation of internal (mainly socio-political) transformations to have been a fundamental factor in the formation of the Piast monarchy (cf. Ł o w m i a ń s k i 1957, pp. 15-17, and further literature

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<sup>12</sup> The course of the state formation process in the Gniezno Land was determined – in my submission – by the positive attitude of the people, notably its leaders, to the social-political and cultural order implemented on the Piasts’ initiative (in the then, pre-state political system, including chiefdom, the voice of the people could not be overlooked, the exception being a brutal coup, leading nevertheless to tyrannical rule, whilst the Piasts were the *domini naturales* [natural lords], as emphasised by Gallus Anonymous in his chronicle). Notable is the fact that as early as the Middle Ages, the oldest Polish history was perceived by the local elite as an element of a mythical-historical continuity, as evidenced by the content of the legend of the origins of the dynasty and its state recorded by Gallus Anonymous (I.1-3) (cf. K a r p 1981; B a n a s z k i e w i c z 2000; 2010). It is vital that the Piast domain is not treated as a ‘product’ of the community of the Polans, understood as a consistent tribal organisation with a relatively large and compact territory. State formation ferment touched the social substrate of a fairly fragmented vertical and horizontal (territorial) social structure, thus local communities typified by an agrarian-breeding model and varied in terms of size, who nevertheless identified themselves with a larger region (Gniezno and Poznań Lands, which are likely to have been initially separate) and with existing functional and cultural systems (cf. K u r n a t o w s k a 2008; K a r a 2009).

cited therein; see also Wierzbicki 2011; Boroń 2013). Both the foregoing scholars and historian-medievalists of the twentieth (notably the second half of the century) and the early twenty-first century, who sympathise with the concept of endogenous origins of the Piast monarchy (e.g., Trawkowski 1962; 1968; Łowmiański 1976; Samsonowicz 2000; Labuda 2002) nevertheless countenance the possibility of the occurrence of conquest in the mechanism of state formation employed by the Piast, albeit unassisted by any warriors of foreign origin (unlike Henryk Samsonowicz), yet unnecessarily in relation to the primary *patrimonium*. In the above-mentioned research model, the act of conquest was jettisoned as the primordial Piast domain emergence causation, in view of a deficiency of its confirmation in historical sources (cf. Serejski 1953; Łowmiański 1976). The ‘Norman’ question nevertheless fulfils an important function in these works, despite being reduced to the level of analysis of economic, political and dynastic connections of the state of Mieszko I and Bolesław the Brave with kingdoms of the Svear-Swedes and Danes, also in the context of the then game of political supremacy over the mouth of the Oder River, including Wolin – the legendary Viking Jomsborg (see Koczy 1934; Wojciechowski 1939; Labuda 1953 [1954]; Widajewicz 1953 [1954], herein polemics with Labuda’s views; Morawiec 2010; 2013; Stanisławski 2013; ‘Norman’ account according to the earlier subject literature – Potkański 1906; Wachowski 1914).

It is significant that until the beginning of the last century medieval studies did not employ historical archaeological data in the discussions on the possible involvement of the Normans in the genesis of West Slavic states, most likely in view of the lack of a sufficient quantity of appropriate findings. This situation changed in the years 1919-1939 along with the intensification of archaeological research, also in Poland. The discussed issues, together with a debate over the possibility of identifying the so called foreign population in the Piast state by archaeology, require a separate analysis and shall be presented elsewhere.

I shall leave to the Reader to judge the concepts appertaining to the origins of the Piast realm. I personally share the view of the scholars for whom the primary Piast *regnum* neither emerged in consequence of conquest, nor was it organised by a foreign military elite. I am of the opinion that such hypotheses are not supported either by interpretation of written or archaeological sources, remarkably consistent as regards the analysed issue (cf. Kara 2000; 2009; Kurnatowska 2002; 2008). They indicate the presence of an abrupt state formation watershed of civilizational and cultural character, which occurred in the first half of the tenth century in the area of present-day central Wielkopolska (the Gniezno Upland and its peripheries – see Fig. 1) in peaceful conditions (which does not exclude the absence of violence or the use of military pressure in certain situations) within a relatively short socio-historical process, with the significant involvement of the local, charismatic Piast dynasty, having its own *družina* at its disposal. The manner in which the members of that family acquired the ruler’s prerogative to the Polish



community and its territory to eventually become ‘natural lords’ (*domini naturales*) of this land (Gallus Anonymous, I.19-20), has parallels in Bohemia ruled by the Přemyslids and the Kingdom of the East Franks under the sway of the Liudolfings (cf. Althoff 2009; Sobiesiak 2013).

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