

THE PLACE OF THE POZNAŃ STRONGHOLD AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR WIELKOPOLSKA AND THE PIAST REALM EMERGING IN THE 10TH AND THE FIRST HALF OF THE 11TH CENTURIES

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Abstract. The aim of the study is to present the role of the stronghold on Ostrów Tumski island in Poznań from the 10th to the mid-11th century. A key aspect of the considerations shown in the article remains the location of the feature in the changing structure of the Piast rule. Therefore, an attempt has been made to juxtapose Poznań with other central strongholds in Wielkopolska, namely Giecz, Grzybowo, Gniezno, Moraczewo, and Ostrów Lednicki. The paper discusses the origins of the stronghold on Ostrów Tumski but also focuses on the subsequent phases of its development. It is evident that the reign of Mieszko I remained crucial for Poznań, when the location underwent a major expansion to a four-part form, but above all was associated with the religious conversion. At that time, a palace with a chapel was built on Ostrów Tumski, accompanied by the construction of a cathedral for the first bishopric in the Polish lands, headed by Bishop Jordan. The Poznań stronghold did not diminish in importance during the reign of Bolesław I the Brave, and even though the ruler made Gniezno the capital of the archbishopric and a place of pilgrimage, Ostrów Tumski, located between the Warta and Cybina rivers, continued to be a key stronghold in the Piast realm. Poznań was a location for the peace negotiations in 1005, but also most likely the burial place of the rulers of the Piast dynasty.

Keywords: Poznań, Wielkopolska, early Middle Ages, strongholds, Piast realm.

Introduction

The stronghold on Ostrów Tumski in Poznań was probably founded in the late 9th and the early 10th century (Sankiewicz 2008, p. 22; Kóčka-Krenz 2010, pp. 35-36), and certainly no later than the second quarter of the 10th century (Kara 2024, p. 34). It is among the most important settlement centres of early medieval

Wielkopolska. It was built on an island among the floodplains of the Warta and Cybina rivers, enjoying a very convenient defensive position. In addition, this location, which consisted in a spatial arrangement of important topographical elements (fords on the Warta and at least two hills in the local landscape) were very favourable due to the course of transport routes (Kara 2009, pp. 180-181). The waterway and the mentioned crossings made Poznań some sort of a transport hub. It was here that important transport routes crossed, connecting the rich coastal settlements with the central part of the emerging Piast realm, but also linking the interior of Wielkopolska with the western areas of interest of the Piasts (cf. Kóčka-Krenz 2000, p. 62), i.e. first and foremost Lubusz Land, and later even (Upper) Lusatia, which became a particularly strong element in the rivalry between Bolesław I the Brave and Henry II, king of Germany in the early 11th century (this conflict has been widely discussed in literature: Korta 1990, pp. 36-41; Strzelczyk 1999, pp. 114-159; Danielewski 2022a, pp. 259-275). Thus, Poznań had already been an important site in the early 10th century. This is in line with the results of the settlement studies, where population growth on either bank of the Warta was marked since the 8th century; these processes intensified in the following two centuries. This picture is best illustrated by analyses of the settlement of Wielkopolska, where a large increase in population was noted in the following centuries in the area enclosed by the Warta River bend to the south and west, the Węlna River to the north, and the Noteć–Gopło tunnel valley to the east. Around 1000, the centre of the Piast realm, referred to in written sources as *Civitas Schinesghe*, was inhabited by almost 9.4 people per km² (Kurnatowski 1994, p. 34, Fig. 21; 2008, p. 86). Interestingly, the estimated population density back then amounted to over 7 persons per km² in Kuyavia, and over 6 persons per km² in south-eastern Wielkopolska (Kurnatowski and Kurnatowska 1997, p. 68). Therefore, from a demographic point of view, Poznań, situated within the ideological centre of the Piast dynasty, was therefore a leading settlement. In this situation, it is not surprising that it was a key stronghold of the dynasty at that time, although its role varied over the 10th and 11th centuries.

The role of Poznań in the first half of the 10th century

The stronghold, built in the late 9th and the early 10th centuries on Ostrów Tumski island in Poznań, was not a large structure; it was built as a single-partite feature. Its remains were discovered during excavations at St. Mary's church. It was a structure with an interior diameter of about 40 m with timber, stone and earth ramparts reaching a width of 10 m. In this form, the castle functioned in the first half of the 10th century (Kóčka-Krenz 2000, pp. 122-123). The site did not differ in size from other early settlements in Wielkopolska of that period. In this case, Grzybowo – another key early medieval centre in the Piast realm, compares



Fig. 1. Foundations of the palace in Giecz. Photo by Marcin Danielewski

well. The first stage of the stronghold's development can be dated to 919-923; at that time, it was very similar in size to the Poznań site, as its internal diameter reached ca. 49 m along the longer line, and 23 m along the shorter line. Only the ramparts of the Grzybowo feature were wider, reaching about 25 m in its eastern part (Danielewski 2022b, pp. 179, 181). Poznań and Grzybowo were therefore comparable sites in terms of size. The former had an older chronology but was a somewhat smaller site than the Grzybowo settlement which also, in 929-934 and early in the next decade of the 10th century, began to transform more rapidly into a large site occupying 4.4 ha in its final form (Danielewski 2021, pp. 12, 24).

At this point the key issue comes in, namely that related to the role of Poznań in the first half of the 10th century. At that time, it certainly was not yet a stronghold with a dominant role in Wielkopolska, although it was a part of a group of so-called central strongholds, viewed in the context of the entire 10th century and at least the first half of the 11th century. These key sites, considered strongholds, included Giecz, Grzybowo, Gniezno, Ostrów Lednicki and Poznań (Kurnatowska 2008, pp. 319, 326, 356-357). The uniqueness of these (four) sites was to be attributed to the written sources, the relics of stone ecclesiastical and residential architecture recorded on the sites, the size and multi-particularity of the locations

and, finally, the numerous remains of the elite culture discovered at the sites. It is worth noting, however, that this is the overall picture that archaeologists and historians draw of these strongholds. However, in the first half of the 10th century the indicated locations (at least some of them) differed strongly from each other. The oldest stronghold was in Giecz, established certainly in the 860s (Krysztofiak 2016, pp. 125-126). The chronology of the origins of the first stronghold on Ostrów Lednicki remains less clear, as in literature on the subjects, attempts have been made to relate the first stage of this establishment to the third quarter of the 9th century (Górecki and Łastowiecki 2016, pp. 61-63). The oldest dendrodates, namely 886 and 921, remain key in this case (Banaszak, Kowalczyk and Tabaka 2020, p. 58). However, the relative dating was based only on 14 fragments of pottery (Danielewski 2021, p. 56 note 14). In view of the above, the timing of the emergence of the oldest settlement on Ostrów Lednicki may be debatable, especially as the foundation of the rampart is dated to the second quarter of the 10th century (Banaszak, Kowalczyk and Tabaka 2020, p. 58). In this situation, it seems that the Poznań stronghold was younger than the stronghold at Giecz, and most probably older than Ostrów Lednicki, Grzybowo and, above all, Gniezno. The stronghold at the latter site was not established until c. 940 (Kara 2009, p. 298), so it was considerably younger than the other central strongholds indicated. Attempts to emphasise the exceptional importance of Gniezno have been made based on the interpretation of the Lech Mount as a site of rituals and cult, but this issue is highly debatable (Sikorski 2010, pp. 411-414; Danielewski 2016, pp. 25-27). Therefore, it is indisputable that Poznań stood out from the other indicated strongholds in terms of early chronology, although the primacy of Giecz in terms of seniority remains unquestionable. In fact, according to one theory, this stronghold should be attributed to the beginnings of the Piast dynasty, even if Kalisz and Great Moravia have also been indicated (Kurnatowska 2000; Kara 2009, pp. 318-319; Buko 2012, pp. 133-154; Urbańczyk 2012, pp. 129-165). The latter concept seems of special importance to considerations on Poznań, as it assumes that the Piast dynasty was founded by refugees from the declining Great Moravia, who arrived in Polish lands. There have been attempts to attribute the Moymirid dynasty to the ancestors of the Piasts (Urbańczyk 2012, pp. 154-159). This concept is directly related to Poznań, as the name 'Poznań' was supposed to express the eponymous founder of the settlement who came from Moravia. In turn, this was to be evidenced not only by the name of the feature, but also the artefacts that could testify to the presence of visitors from the Nitra region (Kurnatowska and Kara 2005, pp. 9-17; Kurnatowska 2010, pp. 13-15). This issue is highly debatable and has provoked serious discussion in the Polish academic milieu (cf. polemics: Sikorski 2013, pp. 188-190; 2014, pp. 279, 281; Urbańczyk 2014, p. 270). Leaving aside the validity of the concept proposed by Zofia Kurnatowska and Michał Kara, and popularised by Przemysław Urbańczyk, it seems that it is still impossible to trace the origin of the Piast family. From the point of view of Poznań in the first half of the 10th

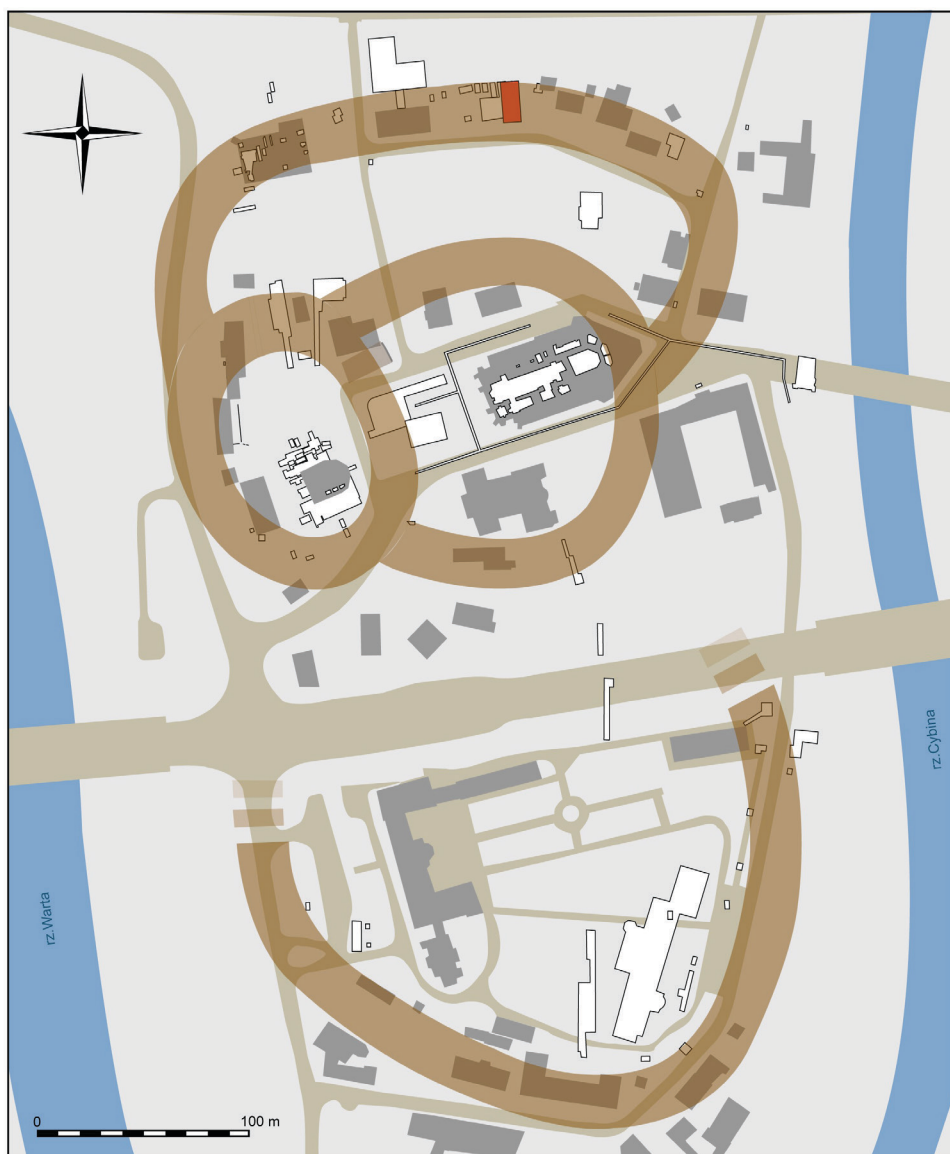


Fig. 2. Map of the stronghold on Ostrów Tumski island in Poznań. Developed by Olga Antowska-Gorączniak

century, the alleged “Poznań” and Moravian hypothesis is of great importance. Unfortunately, the somewhat speculative nature of the hypothesis makes it impossible to decide if the founders of the stronghold and the dynasty came from the Nitra area.

In the first half of the 10th century, the stronghold on Ostrów Tumski in Poznań was not the largest of the early Wielkopolska strongholds previously indicated. Here again, comparisons illustrating the size of these five sites, are of interest. In these considerations, the settlement from the Lech Mount in Gniezno is not considered, as it was not established until around 940. Comparisons of the other sites show that the size of their ramparts and the area of all these strongholds were similar. In the case of Poznań, the internal diameter of the first stronghold amounted to approx. 40 m. Similar calculations have been made for Giecz where the central square occupied an area with a diameter of about 45 m (Krysztofiak 2016, p. 126), but also for Grzybowo (about 49 m along the longer diameter of the square and 23 along the shorter diameter). It is more difficult to establish anything about the first stronghold at Ostrów Lednicki. The site probably had a horse-shoe-shaped form, although even there the square had a diameter of about 50 m (Górecki and Łastowiecki 2016, p. 63). It is noteworthy that many of the strongholds of the time had similar sized or slightly smaller main squares; this applies to Góra, Moraczewo, Spławie and Trzek (see Sikora 2024, p. 44). In this respect, therefore, Poznań did not stand out among the other strongholds in Wielkopolska at that time and, in some respects, was even inferior to Giecz and Grzybowo. Key in this aspect are comparisons in terms of the width of the ramparts: the 12 m wide rampart at Giecz and the approximately 25 m wide rampart of the small stronghold at Grzybowo (Krysztofiak 2016, p. 126; Danielewski 2022b, p. 179). Although, in the latter case, the measurement concerns the total width of the embankment, which was certainly overbuilt in the course of its operation for about 100 years. However, in relation to these comparisons, of greater importance are the conclusions concerning the investments made at the individual sites, i.e. Giecz, Gniezno, Grzybowo, Ostrów Lednicki and Poznań. In the first half of the 10th century, Poznań and especially Gniezno were not the primary centres as far as their expansion is concerned. Poznań was transformed into a bipartite structure probably in the 940s (Sikora 2024, p. 45), at which time the Gniezno stronghold on the Lech Mount was freshly built. While these developments are strongly evident in the other settlements, Giecz was still transformed to a bipartite form early in the second quarter of the 10th century at the earliest (Krysztofiak 2016, p. 132). After the first stage of development dating to 919-923, Grzybowo was extended in 929-935 and the early 940s; no younger timber was found in the excavations (Krapiec 2022, p. 190). The site then took on its monumental form occupying 4.4 ha (Danielewski 2021, p. 24), becoming the largest stronghold of early medieval Wielkopolska in the 930s and 940s. In comparison, Giecz, regularly extended in successive periods, reached a maximum area of 3.5 ha (Krysztofiak 2016, p. 117). Thus, archaeological data show that firstly there was an expansion of the settlements located in the mesoregion of the Września Plain (southern part of the Gniezno Hügelland), and only then did a similar process take place in Poznań, located in the area of the Poznań Hügelland. This pattern includes Ostrów Lednicki, which,



Fig. 3. Ostrów Lednicki stronghold. Photo by Mariusz Lamentowicz

in the period after 921 and before the mid-10th century, was transformed to a form with total diameter reaching about 150 m (Górecki and Łastowiecki 2016, p. 65). Notably, this settlement should be closely considered with Moraczewo, located on the western side of Lake Lednica. Operating from the late 9th century or, more probably, the early 10th century (and expanded in the second quarter of that century), it survived until the 960s when it was burnt down (Strzyżewski, Łastowiecki and Kara 2003, pp. 89-90; Kara 2009, pp. 307-308). The stronghold occupied an area of 1.82 ha (Strzyżewski, Łastowiecki and Kara 2003, p. 80) with the central square hosting a large hall building (the older stage – a building measuring 15×12 m; the younger stage – a structure measuring 14×10 m). They were interpreted as places where feasts were held and the ruler or the ruling family met the team and the noblemen (Strzyżewski, Łastowiecki and Kara 2003, pp. 86-87, 88, 90; Kara 2009, p. 307). It can be assumed that the growth of the feature on Ostrów Lednicki resulted from the decline of Moraczewo and the relocation of the population previously living in the area (Kara 2009, p. 307). Therefore, the key period of development of Ostrów Lednicki was yet to come. While in the first half of the 10th century Giecz and Grzybowo remained the most intensively developed of the five or six defensive sites under analysis, to some extent the above-men-

tioned Moraczewo also connects with this pattern. The most considerable building investments were carried out at Grzybowo. Giecz, the oldest stronghold in the area, was also set for intensive expansion. The Lednica settlement grew in size but still operated in the shadow of Moraczewo. While its characteristics remain highly complex, there are indications of the ruler and his team's periodic residence in this location (Kara 2009, p. 307). However, another scenario is also worth considering, namely that this feature was associated with the temporary residence of a member of the Piast dynasty, who had a squad, a separate stronghold, and who co-ruled and lost his authority in the 960s.

Only then could the Lednica stronghold take fully over the position of Moraczewo, since the 960s created as a feature with strong connections with the new religion – Christianity (Danielewski 2021, p. 67). On a list of key strongholds in central Wielkopolska, Poznań should be named only after these sites as it was located somewhat on the periphery of the events related to the previously discussed locations. Situated in the central part of the Poznań Hügelland, established at a quite early stage, Ostrów Tumski was overshadowed by Grzybowo, Giecz, Moraczewo and Ostrów Lednicki until the 940s. The key time for this site was yet to come. Gniezno, whose significance was to change radically in the second half of the 10th century, played the least important role in this stronghold structure.

Poznań in the reign of Mieszko I

The second half of the 10th century was a time of profound changes in the stronghold network in early medieval Wielkopolska, and the reign of Mieszko I became crucial for the Poznań stronghold. However, a little earlier, in the 940s, the feature assumed its bipartite form, encompassing two hills: the western one, where a *palas* was later located, and the eastern one, where a cathedral was built following adoption of Christianity by Mieszko I (Sankiewicz 2008, p.22; Sikora 2024, p.45). These changes were very significant, including extension of the previous small stronghold so that, after the transformations, it occupied an area of 80×100 m, representing the princely part. The other section was built on the eastern side and took a horseshoe form. This part of the stronghold occupied an area of 130×100 m (Kóčka-Krenz 2000, p. 65; 2015b, p. 123). The transformation of the first Poznań stronghold from the late 9th/early 10th century to a dyadic form was also accompanied by the reconstruction of the ramparts to a width of 10 m, preceded by a timber and earthen berm. The fortification was erected using the girder and hook technique (Sankiewicz 2008, p. 22; Sikora 2024, p. 45). This part of the investment seems to have been crucial, as it preceded the subsequent activities, probably related to the reign of Mieszko I. It is worth considering who was responsible for the mentioned significant transformation of Ostrów Tumski, as it was a prelude to the events of the 960s. To clarify this issue, some attention should

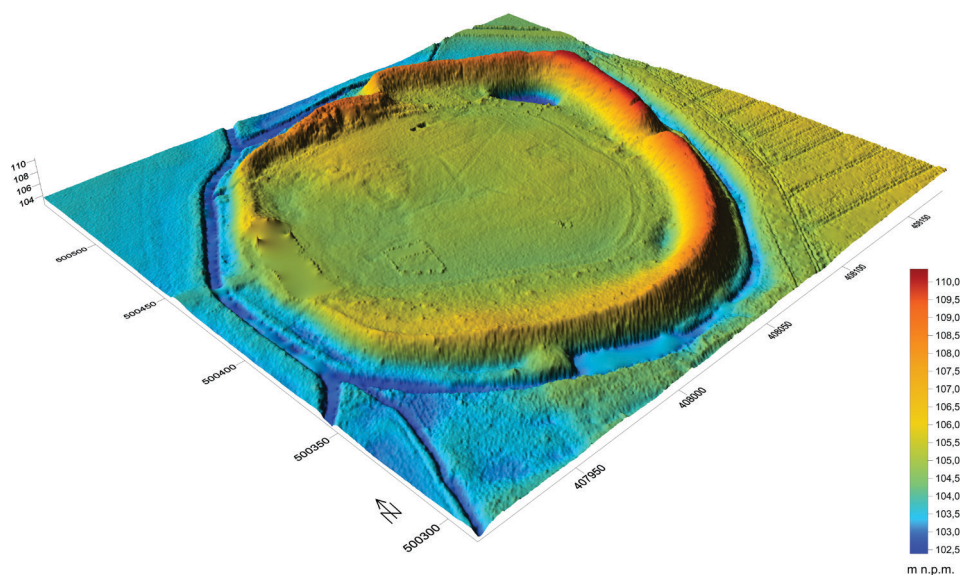


Fig. 4. An ALS LiDAR picture of the Grzybowo stronghold. Developed by Wiesław Małkowski

be devoted to Mieszko I's birth. Typically, literature on the subject has suggested the date between 920 and 940. Therefore, Mieszko I might have been born around 922 (Balzer 1895, p. 19), but also around 935 (Jasiński 2004, p. 60). Finally, attempts have been made to prove that the son of the legendary Siemomysł was born closer to 940 than 920 (Strzelczyk 1992, p. 70). These considerations are only seemingly of secondary importance, for they truly explain the role that Mieszko I played in the development of strongholds in Wielkopolska. The year of 963 seems to be key for these considerations when Widukind of Corvey mentioned the future husband of princess Doubravka of Bohemia in the context of his battles against Wichmann, a Saxon nobleman (Widukind 1935, lib. III, cap. 66, p. 141). This is the first written information about Mieszko I that leads to a conclusion that he had been ruling the Piast realm at that time. However, whatever happened in the area in question before 963 remains a hypothesis. It is difficult to determine whether Mieszko I took over the reign as late as in the 960s or perhaps earlier? Even if we consider the latter conjecture more plausible, there are no direct indications for establishing the moment when this representative of the Piast dynasty assumed power. Therefore, for the purpose of this article, let me assume that Mieszko I ruled in the years 963-992. This fact, together with the alleged birth of Siemomysł's son around 935 or closer to 940, leads to an interesting observation, namely that the prince built his rule on the successes of his predecessors and re-

focused the rank of individual locations. We do not know of any historical rulers from the Piast dynasty preceding Mieszko I, although chronicler Gallus Anonymus mentioned his legendary predecessors: Siemowit, Lestek and Siemomysł (Gallus Anonymus, 1952, lib. I, cap. 3, pp. 12-13). It is therefore impossible to say whether these individuals alone were responsible for the shape of the stronghold network in place in the first half of the 10th century. Someone had built this structure before Doubravka's husband, as archaeological and written sources from the 960s suggest.

During the reign of Mieszko I, following the death of the prince's unnamed brother (who died in 963 in a conflict with Wichmann, a Saxon magnate at the head of the Wolinians) (Widukind 1935, lib. III, cap. 66, p.141), the ruler decided to marry Doubravka, a Bohemian princess. In consequence, Mieszko I adopted Christianity in 966 (more on this event: Dowiat 1969; Sikorski 2011, pp. 91-129; Ożóg 2015). Based on the available sources, it is impossible to indicate where Siemomysł's son was baptised, the likely locations including Poznań, Ostrów Lednicki, Gniezno and even Magdeburg (cf. Sikorski 2011, pp. 107-129; Ożóg 2015, pp. 102-110; Jurek 2018, p. 63). In the context of these considerations, the effects of the religious conversion seem more crucial than the place of baptism. In this case, we are on safer ground provided by two elements that show the then leading position of the stronghold on Ostrów Tumski. The first relates to the location of the first bishopric in the Polish lands, as ordered by the duke, in Poznań, headed by Bishop Jordan (presented in detail by Jurek 2018, pp. 67-88). A question arises why, of all locations, Poznań was chosen, but again it probably stems from the fact that it was Mieszko I's most important seat and his proper residence, while the ruler's relatives, including his brother Czcibor, resided in other central strongholds (cf. Jurek 2015, p. 87; Danielewski 2021, pp. 57-69). Hence, those locations were probably never considered for the diocese. Another important element showing the stronghold's importance but affecting the choice of Poznań for the bishop's seat, was the stone architecture discovered on Ostrów Tumski. This included the palace and residence complex, erected shortly after the mid-10th century. An important part of this building was a chapel with liturgical as well as sepulchral functions (Kóčka-Krenz 2015b, pp. 123-125; 2016, pp. 120-122). It was the first religious building used as the basis for the beginnings of Christianisation. Therefore, Poznań stood out because it hosted the key, and the earliest temples associated with the new cult. Mieszko I perceived the stronghold as a site from which the new faith was to spread to other areas of his realm. Notably, towards the end of his life the ruler initiated the construction of the oldest cathedral in the Polish lands (Kóčka-Krenz 2016, p. 127; Danielewski 2019, p. 173). However, the issue of the alleged baptistry, operating prior to the construction of St Peter's Cathedral, remains doubtful (cf. Bukowska 2013, pp. 135-136; Urbańczyk 2013, pp. 258-259, 302-303). I leave the latter problem aside, especially as there is ample evidence for the prominent role of Poznań in the reign of Mieszko I.



Fig. 5. Mock-up of the Gniezno stronghold. Collection of the Museum of the Origins of the Polish State. Photo by Piotr Namiota

Two other key elements demonstrating the importance of the Ostrów Tumski stronghold are the expansion of the site, first to a three-part form (which took place after the mid-10th century), and then in the 970s and 980s to a four-part form (Sikora 2024, p. 46). These investments, including the development of Zagórze as the fourth segment of the castle, made the site the most powerful defensive feature of early medieval Wielkopolska, with the estimated length of the ramparts of over 2.5 km (Antowska-Gorączniak 2013, p. 58). This brings us to the key issue, namely the major changes in the structure of the previously discussed central strongholds. In the reign of Mieszko I, a major breakthrough came not only in terms of the duke's religion (although it is closely linked to the position of Poznań) but also in the stronghold network. At that time, Poznań assumed its role of the ruler's main seat at the expense of Grzybowo, previously the most powerful stronghold in Wielkopolska. During this period, the Grzybowo stronghold continued operation, but no further expansion was facilitated, nor was it decided, for some reason, to locate a church there. More tragic was the fate of Moraczewo, burnt down in the 960s. There were also Giecz, Gniezno and Ostrów Lednicki, all expanded and further developed during the reign of Mieszko I. In the case of Giecz, in the second half of the 980s its usable area was increased by moving the face of the inner rampart. At the same time, around 990, a 150 m long wooden bridge connected

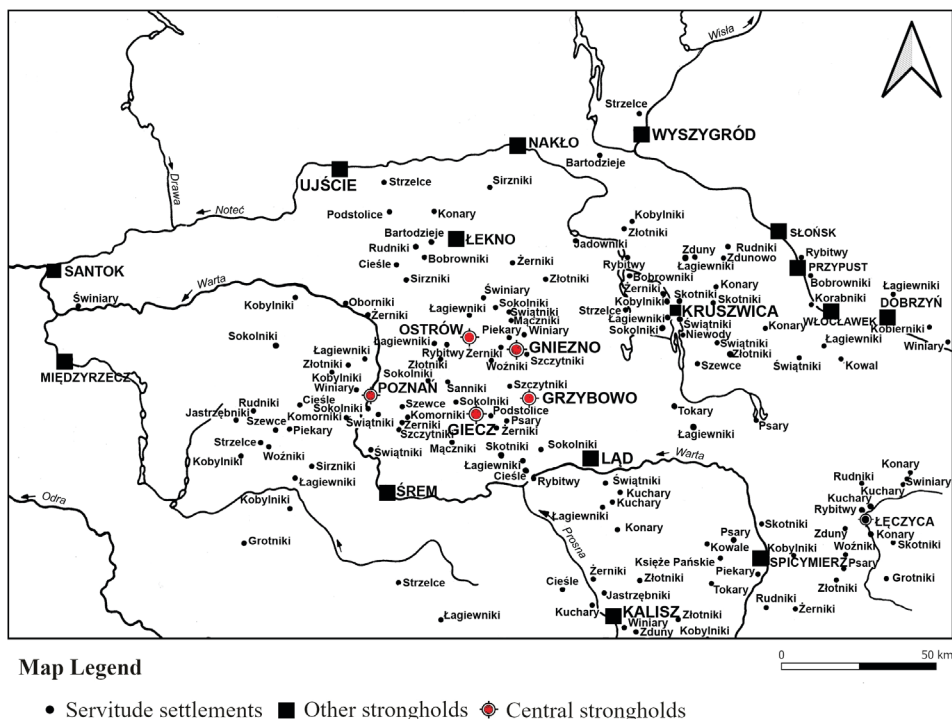


Fig. 6. Map showing the location central strongholds: Giecz, Gniezno, Grzybowo, Ostrów Lednicki and Poznań. Developed by Marcin Danielewski, Anna Głód and Monika Stelmasiak-Majorek

the lake's eastern shore and the north-eastern foot of the rampart (Krysztofiak 2016, pp. 133, 134-135). Notably, there was another, older bridge (the southern bridge) which may have been built much earlier, i.e. in the second quarter of the 10th century (Krysztofiak 2016, p. 135). The picture of this stronghold is complemented by sacred and residential stone architecture, which can be traced back to the initiatives launched during the reign of both Mieszko I and his successors, i.e. Bolesław I the Brave, and perhaps even Mieszko II (more on the buildings in Krysztofiak 2016, pp. 135-141; Rodzińska-Chorąży 2016, pp. 179-206). Similar observations can be made about Ostrów Lednicki which thrived during the reign of Mieszko I, at the expense of the mentioned Moraczewo. The fortifications of the third stage of the stronghold on Ostrów Lednicki date to the second half of the 10th century, with the youngest dendrochronology indicating 977 (Górecki and Łastowiecki 2016, pp. 66-69). At that time, the stone ducal residence in the Lednica stronghold was built, together with the palace church and the so-called church No. II (more on the dating of the buildings in Wrzesiński, co. Kara 2016, p. 193; Goslar, Paw-

lak and Wyrwa 2020, p. 336). The feature was completed by bridges connecting the 'Poznań' and 'Gniezno' roads and the island, built between 961 and 964 (Kola, Radka, Wilke 2016, pp. 113, 120, 126). These investments can certainly be related to Mieszko I's reign, when the Lednica stronghold enjoyed a period of prosperity. Finally, there was Gniezno with significant transformations taking place during the reign of Doubravka's husband. First, between c. 940 and c. 983, Gniezno had a dyadic stronghold complex, which may even have taken on a three-part form at the end of this period (Sawicki 2018, p. 123; cf. 1999, pp. 21-22; Danielewski 2016, pp. 33-34). Most likely, there was a church in the form of a rotunda (Janiak 2004, pp. 87-88; Wetesko 2016, pp. 74, 76). The existence of a stone *palas* in Gniezno, traces of which have so far not been recorded, remains debatable (Danielewski 2016, p. 36). In view of the above, a consideration of the possible chronology of the alleged palace, which may not have existed at all, would also be speculative. All this indicates that Gniezno was emerging as one of the key centres of Mieszko I's realm, even though the range of investments and their scale was smaller than in Poznań or even Ostrów Lednicki. The time of Gniezno's prosperity was yet to come, and in Mieszko I's dominion, Poznań was the prevailing stronghold.

The importance of Poznań in the reign of Bolesław I the Brave and Mieszko II

Other events that should be attributed to changes in the stronghold structure in Wielkopolska included Bolesław I the Brave's rise to power while his younger brothers, Mieszko and Lambert, and his stepmother, Oda, fell from power, and noblemen Odylen and Przybywoj were blinded (as recounted by Thietmar 1953, lib. IV, cap 58, p. 225). Back then, as a key settlement in the Piast domain, Poznań, continued to play a very important role. This was reflected in the investment of resources and time in the repair of the existing ramparts (Sikora 2024, p. 49), as well as the continued work on Poznań Cathedral, the construction of which probably lasted from the 980s to the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries (Bukowska 2013, pp. 159, 164). Finally, the conflict of 1005 should be viewed as very symptomatic, when Henry II, king of Germany, together with Jaromír, Duke of Bohemia, the Bavarian prince Henry V and the pagan Veleti, embarked on a war expedition into Bolesław's realm, culminating in the arrival of the troops at Poznań (details of this conflict in Olejnik 2002, pp. 43-46; Zakrzewski 2006, pp. 210-212; Danielewski 2022, pp. 259-275). Interestingly, the army of the German king stopped two miles from the Poznań stronghold. Negotiations soon began, and they involved the noblemen of the king's entourage and Archbishop Tagino, who travelled to the Poznań stronghold (Thietmar 1953, lib. VI, cap. 27, pp. 353, 354). The feature on Ostrów Tumski was thus a key point of defence during Henry II's

invasion. Notably, after forcing his way across the Oder in the vicinity of Krosno Odrzańskie, Bolesław the Brave packed up his camp, leaving many war artefacts behind (Thietmar 1953, lib. VI, cap. 26, pp. 351, 353). It seems that Mieszko I's son went immediately to Poznań, as the subsequent events: the arrival of the German king's army at Międzyrzecz and, later, at the heart of Wielkopolska, unfolded rather quickly. This indicates the high pace of the march and Henry II's forces not coming across major obstacles (cf. remarks by Zakrzewski 2006, p. 211; Danielewski 2022, pp. 273-274). Decisive for the end of the expedition were the losses sustained by the royal army at Poznań before the siege of the stronghold had even been started, the strength of the local ramparts, early autumn, and the prospect of returning to the homeland before the rains started. All these elements made Henry II comply with Bolesław's requests for peace (Danielewski 2022, p. 274). As the largest defensive structure in Wielkopolska at the time, the stronghold on Ostrów Tumski played a key role in stopping the advance of the royal army. If Poznań had been conquered, the conditions for peace would have been completely different. Consequently, Henry II regained Lusatia and Upper Lusatia, while Bolesław also had to accept the loss of Bohemia (Strzelczyk 1999, p. 127; Zakrzewski 2006, p. 203). A separate negative effect for Bolesław may have been the loss of Western Pomerania, where the bishopric of Kołobrzeg fell, an event probably related to the participation of the Veleti in Henry II's war expedition of 1005 (Strzelczyk 1999, pp. 203-204; Urbańczyk 2017, p. 207). Still, the Piast prince maintained his power, which would probably not have been possible had the German king conquered Poznań. The investments made in this location, especially during the reign of Mieszko I, made the stronghold on Ostrów Tumski seem like an impregnable fortress and probably successfully discouraged Henry II from laying siege.

A very important aspect of the importance of Poznań during the reigns of Bolesław I the Brave, Mieszko II, but also Mieszko I, is the burial place of the rulers. It has been indicated in literature that they were deposited in Poznań Cathedral (Kurnatowska 1990, pp. 71-84; Dalewski 1991, pp. 37-38; Jasiński 2004, pp. 61, 83; Kóčka-Krenz 2018b, pp. 39-56). Notably, these arguments were raised based on younger written sources, where the burials of Mieszko I and Mieszko II are to be confirmed, among others, by the 15th-century records of Jan Długosz (1964, lib. II, pp. 222, 295, 310), and the burial of Bolesław I the Brave in "Kronika wielkopolska" (1970, cap. 11, pp. 16-17, cap. 65, p. 84) as well as the ruler's epitaph (Kürbis 1990, pp. 95-132; details on all the sources indicated above in Dalewski 1991, pp. 37-38; Gąsiorowski 1991, pp. 231-239; Zydorek 2001, pp. 511-522). Interestingly, the written sources are in line with the results of archaeological research, where two rectangular tombs were recorded in the central part of Poznań Cathedral. The first and older of these would be associated with Mieszko I and the second with his son Bolesław (Kóčka-Krenz 2018a, p. 58). Of course, we are not in a position to decide whether they were actually buried

in these tombs, but the burial site tradition of the Piast rulers, preserved in younger written sources and recorded architectural relics, may be an indication. If this was the case, Poznań and its cathedral should be seen as a special place for the Piasts, since it was their burial site. It can also be assumed that in the changed religious situation in Poland after 966 and the creation of Poznań as a location strongly associated with the new cult, it was perfectly suited for the burial of Christian rulers. This is even more justifiable given that Ostrów Tumski was not only a princely residence with a chapel from the time of the introduction of the new faith, but also a monumental cathedral, the construction of which had already been underway during the reign of Mieszko I. This provided an excellent opportunity to create this church as a burial place for the Piasts.

However, during the reign of Bolesław I the Brave, there were changes in the position of the most important strongholds in Wielkopolska. In the first half of the 10th century, Grzybowo – the most developed settlement of this part of the Piast realm, was slowly declining. Most likely, it ceased to operate in the mid-11th century¹ (Danielewski 2021, p. 12, cf. an analysis of ceramic material Dębski 2022, pp. 291-292). Giecz and Ostrów Lednicki were still important locations in the Piast domain, and their development was still tangible. In the case of the former location, the rampart structure underwent several repairs, carried out until the 1030s (Krysztofiak 2016, p. 135). However, Giecz was then most affected in the sphere of investments related to the construction of monumental stone architecture. This is evidenced by the fact that, in the late 10th century or at the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries, the construction of a princely *palas* began but was never completed, and eventually a wooden feature was erected in the place of the palace chapel in the first half of that century (Krysztofiak 2016, pp. 135-137). It was followed by the church of St John the Baptist, built in the first decades of the 11th century, although attempts have been made to attribute the building to Mieszko II and Casimir I the Restorer (Rodzińska-Chorąży 2016, pp. 202, 203). The greatest transformation of Ostrów Lednicki took place in the palace complex, rebuilt around 1000 to assume a two-storey form. The sacred part of the feature (the chapel) was also transformed (Rodzińska-Chorąży 2016, pp. 157-159).

Gniezno enjoyed its heyday in the reign of Bolesław I the Brave. At that time, Gniezno became the burial place of Saint Adalbert of Prague and the Five Martyr Brothers, the ecclesiastical capital, possibly the site of the royal coronation, as well as a military mainstay of the reign. Saint Adalbert of Prague died during a missionary expedition to Prussia on 23 April 997, and after the martyr's death, Bolesław I the Brave redeemed his body and deposited it in Gniezno (Labuda

¹ We are not able to determine whether the demise of the stronghold occurred as early as in the 1030s, when the Piast rule was in crisis. The ceramic material found at Grzybowo is not chronologically sensitive enough to indicate a specific decade when the site was abandoned. On the other hand, based on it we can conclude that it does not generally extend beyond the mid-11th century.

1988, pp. 480-481; 2004, pp. 253, 260). This had a direct bearing on the events of 1000, when the Congress of Gniezno took place, a meeting between Bolesław I the Brave and Otto III, Holy Roman Emperor. It was then decided to establish an archbishopric in Gniezno and bishoprics in Kołobrzeg, Krakow and Wroclaw. In this way, Gniezno was elevated to the rank of other ecclesiastical capitals (Strzelczyk 1999, pp. 71-75; Urbańczyk 2017, pp. 123-125). Gniezno's status as a place of pilgrimage and veneration of saints was soon raised by the fact that the bodies of the Five Martyr Brothers: Benedykt, Jan, Izaak, Mateusz and Krystyn, murdered on the night of 10 November 1003, were deposited there (more on the burial in Wetesko 2013, pp. 207-209; 2016, p. 83). Notably, despite these developments, investments in the expansion of the local sacred architecture were limited. At the time, the space of the rotunda, already in operation, was widened following the burial of Saint Adalbert (Wetesko 2016, pp. 78-80). Bolesław I the Brave may also have started the construction of a cathedral basilica, which was not consecrated until 1064 during the reign of Bolesław II the Bold (Wetesko 2016, pp. 112-114; Danielewski 2019, p. 180). As the above considerations suggest, Gniezno was the most important ecclesiastical seat in Poland during the reign of the son of Mieszko I and Doubravka, although in terms of religious buildings, in this case the monumental cathedral basilica, Poznań boasted a larger and completed architectural feature.

Gniezno is sometimes seen as a royal centre during the period in question. Namely, the coronations of Bolesław I the Brave and Mieszko II took place in 1025. In historiography, the assumed coronation venue has been Gniezno (description of the events: E. Skibiński 2011, pp. 225-230). However, we should bear in mind that the place of coronation of the first three kings (Bolesław I, Mieszko II and Bolesław II) was not provided in Polish yearbook records. I have pointed out this problem by emphasising that it was not until the 13th century that it became a tradition to crown Polish kings in Gniezno, i.e. the capital of the archbishopric. This tradition was supposed to have originated during the rivalry between the Krakow and Gniezno ecclesiastical centres and the emerging idea of a united Polish Kingdom (Cetwiński 2011, pp. 235-242). This fact shows how debatable the place of coronation of Bolesław I the Brave and his son Mieszko II remains. Thus, we are dealing with a historiographic construct, where it is assumed that representatives of the Piast dynasty crowned themselves kings in Gniezno, even though the written sources do not corroborate this supposition. Even Gallus Anonymous reported only on the Congress of Gniezno in 1000, while he disregarded the possible coronation of Bolesław I the Brave and Mieszko II in 1025 in his text (Gallus Anonymous 1952, lib. I, cap. 6-18, pp. 16-41).

The last aspect concerning Gniezno and the period in question is related to the castle on the Lech Mount. It was during the reign of Bolesław I the Brave that major investments took place, which meant that in the first quarter of the 11th century the Gniezno castle, together with three baileys, covered an area of 4.6 hectares

(Sawicki 1999, p. 9; 2001, p. 116). The extensive construction work included reinforcing the rampart of the oldest stronghold complex or surrounding the northern part of the mount with a new massive rampart in a sandwich structure, using hooks (Sawicki 2018, a. 134-135). Above all, in the first quarter of the 11th century, the largest member of the Gniezno castle complex, i.e. bailey III with an area of 1,600 m², was surrounded by a timber and earth embankment, replacing the earlier stakewall (Sawicki 2018, p. 138). The Gniezno stronghold thus became a powerful settlement, surpassing Giecz and Ostrów Lednicki in terms of the momentum of the investments and its importance.

The above indicates that during the reigns of Bolesław I the Brave and Mieszko II, the stronghold on Ostrów Tumski in Poznań continued to play a key role for the Piast dynasty. However, the emphasis was shifted and, for reasons that are not entirely known, in 1000 Gniezno became the ecclesiastical capital for the Polish lands. Possibly, of immediate significance was the deposition of St Adalbert's body in Gniezno. Thus, the local stronghold also became a place of pilgrimage and veneration of saints, even though Poznań had clear advantage gained through the existence of the first bishopric and a cathedral, erected from the 980s. It is also possible that Gniezno was promoted as a centre of great religious importance, while Poznań was assigned a key political role (peace negotiations in 1005; alleged burial place of the first historical rulers). It is also very likely that individual rulers chose other factors in the establishment of their respective strongholds, i.e. a desire to exercise power in a territory while residing in their favourite seat. Just as Mieszko I placed special emphasis on the development of Poznań, closely linked to the new official religion, so Bolesław I the Brave strove to make Gniezno the capital of the ecclesiastical metropolis and a place of pilgrimage. Finally, the Piast realm was home of *dux/rex ambulans*, a system where power was exercised by travelling continuously thus overseeing the country. As a result, the prince or king exercised judicial authority, looked after local administration and strongholds, and controlled his political opponents or lands prone to invasion. Therefore, in general, the term 'the capital of the state' used with reference to the first Piasts is a nomenclature misuse. The realm of Mieszko I and Bolesław I the Brave was itinerant in nature and therefore the ruler had at least several places of residence from which he exercised his rule (see Urbańczyk 2001, p. 237; Danielewski 2016, pp. 48-49).

Poznań in the 1030s

Like the other strongholds discussed in this text (Giecz, Gniezno and Ostrów Lednicki), Poznań experienced great turbulence in the 1030s. It was a time of momentous political changes which affected the Piast rulers. It is sufficient to note that as many as five Piast representatives ruled during this period: Mieszko II,

Bezprym, Otto, Dytryk and Casimir the Restorer, while Mieclaw seized power in Mazovia (Bieniak 2010, pp. 81-83, 193; Danielewski 2014, p. 131). These figures show the complexity of the political situation. The domain was split internally, followed by subsequent attempts at its unification by Mieszko II and Casimir the Restorer. These two kings ruled twice in the 1030s (Labuda 2008, pp. 97, 101, 104, 160). Bezprym's reign was short-lived (1031-1032) when the eldest son of Bolesław I the Brave took the reign after the intervention of Yaroslav the Wise, Grand Prince of Kiev. After Bezprym's death in 1032, following decisions made at the Treaty of Merserburg, the Piast realm was divided between Mieszko II, Otto and Dytryk (Jasiński 2004, pp. 107, 126; Labuda 2008, pp. 68, 71-72, 73, 97, 160; Drózdź 2009, pp. 30-31; Śliwiński 2014, pp. 239-240). As a result, separation of powers was introduced to the realm from 1032 to 1033, so that successively Mieszko II ruled independently. His second reign in 1033-1034 ended with the alleged regency of Richeza, which lasted from her husband's death until around 1035 or late 1034/early 1035. This period was closed by the first reign of Casimir the Restorer from 1034 or the years 1035-1038 (Danielewski 2014, pp. 134-135). The time was full of events that weakened the stronghold structure. It was also a time of invasions: by Conrad II, Holy Roman Emperor in 1031 and Yaroslav the Wise, Grand Prince of Kiev in 1030 and 1031, with Prince Mstislav also participating in the latter expedition. The picture was completed by the so-called pagan and social reaction, dated in literature to the years 1031-1034, with the climax of the unrest coming during the reign of Bezprym. In turn, the following events, the rebellion of the noblemen and the invasion of Bretislav I, Duke of Bohemia, were closely related to the reign of Casimir the Restorer. The first incident of 1037/1038 resulted in the exile of Casimir the Restorer (Labuda 2008, pp. 108, 160; Drózdź 2009, p. 54; Danielewski 2014, pp. 133-135; Samp 2021, pp. 94-95), and subsequently the decentralisation of the Piast rule, although, short-lived and varying from one region to another. Again, there is no information on the destruction that the strongholds would have suffered. Only the description of the invasion of Bretislav I in 1038 or 1039 (the dating of the event aroused great controversy: Krzemińska 1959, pp. 24-37; Wojciechowski 1998, pp. 263-267; Labuda 2008, pp. 147-153, 160; Bieniak 2010, pp. 109-110) indicates that the main strongholds of Wielkopolska (and others) were the target of this expedition.

As the ideological centre of the Piast realm until the 1030s, Wielkopolska was its key part. The situation only changed after the expulsion of Casimir the Restorer from Poland and the invasion of Bretislav I. These developments are worth focusing on, as they were also of fundamental importance for Poznań. The issue of Bretislav's expedition was recounted in some detail by Kosmas, the Czech chronicler. Only, the information contained in the twelfth-century source differs significantly from the records by Gallus Anonymous (I will refer to it later). Kosmas's text contains information about Giecz in Wielkopolska, which Bretislav I was to occupy without a fight and abduct the local population to Bohemia, where

they received a part of Černin forest (Kosmas 1923, lib. II, cap. II, pp. 83-84). The Prague canon also covered in detail the seizure of Gniezno without a fight and the looting of numerous riches and the remains of Saint Adalbert, the Five Martyr Brothers and Radim Gaudentius (Kosmas 1923, lib. II, cap. III, V, pp. 84, 90). Kosmas also mentioned that Bretislav I destroyed Krakow and left taking lavish booty (Kosmas 1923, lib. II, cap. II, p. 83), although this last thread of the chronicler's story has been considered unreliable in literature on the subject (Krziemieńska 1959, pp. 33-34; Matla-Kozłowska 2008, pp. 465-471; Labuda 2010, p. 287). However, in the Prague chronicler's description, Poznań was not among the locations plundered by Bretislav I, while the author mentioned that the prince had burnt and destroyed other towns (Kosmas 1923, lib. II, cap. II, p. 83). It is impossible to decide if Poznań was also among the destroyed strongholds based on the Prague canon's account. This question is clarified, albeit very laconically, by the twelfth-century account of Gallus Anonymus. He stated that the Czechs destroyed Gniezno and Poznań and took away the body of St Adalbert (Gallus Anonymus 1952, lib. I, cap. 19, p. 43). This description does not indicate the exact fate of Poznań during Bretislav's invasion. However, I do not assume that Poznań was besieged because the Czech expedition was unlikely to have lasted long, and the fortifications of the stronghold on Ostrów Tumski were so powerful that there would not have been enough time for a siege during the short expedition. Besides, the examples of Giecz and Gniezno show that the strongholds were incapable of defence, so it is reasonable to assume that Poznań was no different. In this case, the outflow of population from the Polish lands in the 1030s and the consequent declining population were crucial factors. Thus, it can be assumed that if Bretislav's army reached Poznań, it was probably the last (after Giecz and Gniezno) stronghold of key importance to the expedition to Wielkopolska mentioned in written sources (see Pilarczyk, Danielewski and Kościelniak 2017, pp. 168-169). There is no indication that the defensive feature on Ostrów Tumski was besieged at that time. It is intriguing, however, what was happening to it at the time, since Gallus Anonymus reported that the stronghold had been abandoned and that wild animals had established lairs in the church of St Peter (Gallus Anonymus 1952, lib. I, cap. 19, p. 43). Consequently, literature on the subject offers concepts that the cathedral part of the stronghold had been severely destroyed (Kóčka-Krenz 2015a, p. 17; cf. Kaczmarczyk 1988, p. 89; Sankiewicz 2008, p. 23). However, there is no consensus on this point, as based on archaeological findings we are rarely able to associate specific burnt layers to data from annual events. So much was happening in the 1030s in a political context: the invasion of Conrad II in 1031, the expeditions of Yaroslav the Wise, Grand Prince of Kiev in 1030 and 1031, the pagan and social reaction from 1031-1034 (with the unrest peaking during the reign of Bezprym), the rebellion of the noblemen in 1037/1038, and the expedition of Bretislav I, Duke of Bohemia in 1038 or 1039, that it is impossible to connect the specific events with the destructive layers in the Poznań stronghold.

More pivotal to these considerations remains the fact that Poznań, Giecz, Gniezno, Ostrów Lednicki and the whole of Wielkopolska suffered a decline in central authority, internal disturbances and invasions. Following these events and the return of Casimir the Restorer from the Reich in 1039, together with 500 knights (Gallus Anonymous 1952, lib. I, cap. 19, p. 44), the indicated strongholds continued operation, but they diminished in importance.

It has been assumed in literature on the subject that Krakow became the ruler's main stronghold (Labuda 2008, pp. 114, 161; Drózd 2009, pp. 117-119, 150-151) and thus the centre of gravity of the Piast rule shifted southwards towards Małopolska (Labuda 2012, p. 179; Samp 2021, pp. 109-110). Thus, the second reign of Casimir the Restorer marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of the early medieval Piast realm.

Summary

The rule of the Piasts in the 10th and the first half of the 11th century (until the late 1030s) relied on the strongholds from Wielkopolska, some of which (Giecz, Gniezno, Grzybowo, Moraczewo, Ostrów Lednicki and Poznań) became key, at least temporarily, features of the domain. Wielkopolska was therefore the ideological centre, so it is not surprising that successive rulers of the Piast dynasty ruled from there. However, it is impossible to identify a single stronghold which played a dominant role throughout this period. On the contrary: the changing role of the individual centres is apparent, probably stemming from the fact that the sites were allocated to members of the dynasty, but also that successive princes transformed some of them as their main seats. However, this had nothing to do with capitalisation. This structure included the Poznań stronghold, probably built in the late 9th and the early 10th century, certainly no later than the second quarter of the 10th century. Its key moment of development related to the reign of Mieszko I, who turned Ostrów Tumski into a dominant stronghold with a princely seat, where the first bishopric on Polish soil was located, and very early sacral architecture, which played its part in the religious conversion of 966. It is also of significance that the cathedral in Poznań was probably intended as a burial place for the reigning rulers: Mieszko I, Bolesław I the Brave and Mieszko II. Consequently, Poznań became the main city of the Piast rulers and basically maintained its political position until the 1030s. Admittedly, Bolesław the Brave tried to turn Gniezno into the ecclesiastical and pilgrimage capital of his realm. Still, Poznań played the main political and military role at the time, as perfectly illustrated by the invasion by Henry II, king of Germany in 1005. The collapse of the first monarchy, which resulted from a confluence of many events in the 1030s, was associated with Wielkopolska being stripped of its rank and of all the local strongholds losing their superior position.

Krakow and Małopolska emerged as the new centre of power, from which Casimir the Restorer exercised his rule. This is best illustrated by the fact that in the following centuries, of all the locations in Wielkopolska discussed here, only Poznań became the main seat of the Piast princes again, although this did not happen until the time of the fragmentation of Poland.

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