

Marcin Danielewski

The realm of Mieszko I : contribution to the study on fortified settlements

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MARCIN DANIELEWSKI (POZNAŃ)

THE REALM OF MIESZKO I. CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY ON FORTIFIED SETTLEMENTS*

Słowa kluczowe: grody, władztwo Mieszka I, Gniezno, Grzybowo, Poznań

Keywords: strongholds, the realm of Mieszko I, Gniezno, Grzybowo, Poznań

Abstract: The paper discusses the organisation of the realm of Mieszko I based on a network of strongholds. It seeks to examine the functions of fortified settlements and Mieszko's engagement in the construction of strongholds.

Introduction

2016 marks the 1050th anniversary of the baptism of Mieszko I. A fascinating research subject, there is not much we actually know of the first historical Polish ruler from the Piast dynasty, even though several books have sought to explore the issue¹. There has been an ongoing debate on the origins of Christianity, the establishment of the Church on Polish soil or the oldest

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¹ J. Strzelczyk, *Mieszko Pierwszy*, 2nd edition, Poznań 1999; G. Labuda, *Mieszko I*, Wrocław 2002; P. Urbańczyk, *Mieszko Pierwszy Tajemniczy*, Toruń 2012. It must be emphasised that the latter book is marked by several weaknesses, as D.A. Sikorski has convincingly demonstrated, *Mieszko Pierwszy Tajemniczy i jeszcze bardziej tajemnicza metoda historiograficzna*, *Roczniki Historyczne* 79 (2013), pp 183–203; idem, *Mieszko I mniej już tajemniczy (odpowiedź Przemysławowi Urbańczykowi)*, *Roczniki Historyczne* 80 (2014), pp 279–288.

monumental architecture². Particularly interesting is Mieszko's engagement in the construction of fortified settlements. A variety of issues pertaining to Early Medieval strongholds have been long discussed by scholars, e.g., Jan Dylík, Władysław Kowalenko, Jan Szymczak, Zofia Kurnatowska, Wojciech Dzieduszycki, Wojciech Chudziak, Jacek Poleski or Michał Kara³. For example, M. Kara looks at strongholds in the context of the origins of the Piasts' realm through the prism of archaeological sources. This paper, however, explores Mieszko I's activity in the sphere of constructing fortified settlements and their functions⁴.

First, how can we say whether a given structure was built or remodelled in the times of Mieszko I? Simply put, dendrochronology is the key to chronology. In fact, only tree ring dating allows fairly accurate statements as to when a given stronghold could have been erected or remodelled. Under favourable circumstances, we can date the time at which a tree was cut down to the exact calendar year. The date naturally does not have to be the same

² J. Dobosz, *Monarcha i możni wobec Kościoła w Polsce do początku XIII wieku*, Poznań 2002; *Początki architektury monumentalnej w Polsce*, T. Janiak, D. Stryniak (eds.), Gniezno 2004; D.A. Sikorski, *Kościół w Polsce za Mieszka I i Bolesława Chrobrego*, Poznań 2011; idem, *Wczesnopiastowska architektura sakralna*, Poznań 2012; K. Ożóg, *Chrzest Polski*, Kraków 2015.

³ J. Dylík, *Analiza geograficznego położenia grodzisk i uwagi o osadnictwie wczesnohistorycznym Wielkopolski*, Poznań 1936; W. Kowalenko, *Grody i osadnictwo grodowe Wielkopolski wczesnohistorycznej*, Poznań 1938; Z. Hilczerówna, *Dorzecze górnej i środkowej Obry od VI do początków XI wieku*, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków 1967; J. Szymczak, *Grody w Polsce środkowej i zachodniej w okresie rozbitcia dzielnicowego*, Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Historica 70 (1980); Z. Kurnatowska, *Próba odtworzenia organizacji zarządu terytorialnego państwa pierwszych Piastów w Wielkopolsce*, [in:] *Obronność polskiej granicy zachodniej w dobie pierwszych Piastów*, L. Leciejewicz (ed.), Warszawa 1984, pp 81–91; W. Chudziak, *Zasiedlenie strefy chełmińsko-dobrzyńskiej we wczesnym średniowieczu (VII–XI wiek)*, Toruń 1996; J. Poleski, *Wczesnośredniowieczne grody w dorzeczu Dunajca*, Kraków 2006; M. Kara, *Najstarsze państwo Piastów – rezultat przełomu czy kontynuacji? Studium archeologiczne*, Poznań 2009; W. Dzieduszycki, *Przemiany społeczno-organizacyjne wczesnośredniowiecznych Kujaw – możliwości interpretacyjne archeologii*, [in:] *Archaeologia versus historia – historia versus archaeologia czyli jak wspólnie poznawać średniowiecze*, M. Brzostowicz, M. Przybył, D.A. Sikorski (eds.), Poznań 2012, pp 165–174; J. Poleski, *Małopolska w VI–X wieku. Studium archeologiczne*, Kraków 2013. This is merely a selective list. For a more comprehensive discussion of the literature on fortified settlements the readers are referred to: M. Danielewski, *Sieć grodowa na Kujawach oraz jej funkcje od połowy X do końca XIII wieku*, Poznań 2016, pp 14–26.

⁴ This paper discusses some general aspects of the issue. A comprehensive analysis would perhaps take a book.

as the year in which a stronghold was constructed – wood would typically be seasoned for some time to make it suitable for construction purposes. However, if wood samples come from different parts of ramparts and a sufficient number of them are available, dendrochronological dating is very useful in the studies on Early Medieval strongholds⁵ and when combined with other methods of dating, yields significant results.

The results of accelerator mass spectrometry radiocarbon dating may be helpful in the studies on the chronology of strongholds too. This is less precise and mistakes or sample contamination occur more frequently, yet AMS dating can be a very useful complementary method.

The least accurate is dating based on artefacts such as pottery, spurs, jewellery or weapons. In this case, the accuracy hinges on the type of research that produces artefacts (archaeological excavations, test-excavations or surface prospection) or even the person to conduct the investigations, his or her conscientiousness, diligence and above all field experience⁶. Naturally, the chronology of strongholds that were hardly excavated would be far less precise than of those subject to complex and long-term excavations.

Aware of the problems with dating, we can now move on to other issues. During the reign of Mieszko I, fortified settlements must have been clearly marked in the landscape. Ibrâhîm ibn Ya`qûb al-Tartushi, a Jewish traveller, reported that:

*the Saqaliba build most of their forts, in swampy meadows with thick foliage. They trace out a circular or square space the size they want their fort to be, and then dig a trench along the perimeter and heap up the earth into a rampart, which they then reinforce with planks and logs, until the walls of the fort are the height they require. They make a gate wherever they want and build a wooden bridge leading to it.*⁷

⁵ Sometimes proper wood samples are simply impossible to collect. This happened for example in Mietlica (Kujawy), see M. Kara, M. Krąpiec, *Możliwości datowania metodą dendrochronologiczną oraz stan badań dendrochronologicznych wczesnośredniowiecznych grodzisk z terenu Wielkopolski, Dolnego Śląska i Małopolski*, [in:] *Ziemie polskie w X wieku i ich znaczenie w kształtowaniu się nowej mapy Europy*, H. Samsonowicz (ed.), Kraków 2000, p. 312.

⁶ See M. Danielewski, *Sieć grodowa*, pp. 114–122 for a comprehensive discussion of the problems with dating and a complete list of books and papers on the subject cited therein.

⁷ Polish translation: *Relacja Ibrahima ibn Jakuba z podróży do krajów słowiańskich w przekazie Al-Bekriego*, translated and published by T. Kowalski, MPH s.n., vol. I, Kraków 1946, pp. 48–49; English translation: *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North*, trans. by Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone, Penguin 2012.

Although this excerpt features the process of constructing ‘forts’, the very fact that the structures got the attention of the Jewish merchant suggests that they must have been an integral part of the then Slavonic lands, also in the Piasts’ realm. Ibrâhîm ibn Ya`qûb showed a keen interest in the state under Mieszko I and especially admired the wealth of the country ruled by the son of Siemomysł as well as his military power⁸. These military qualities must have been somehow related to the strongholds too.

The functions of strongholds

We come now to the question of the role of the then strongholds. The key function was undoubtedly military, a basic criterion for including any structure in the category of strongholds. Fortified structures, sometimes consisting of several parts and enclosed by a moat must have been military in nature. Also, behind the decisions to locate strongholds by lakes, in the bends of rivers or on islands were clearly military purposes. Besides, later sources, such as the chronicle of the so-called Gallus Anonymous mention that some members of a *družhina* (a retinue in the service of a duke) stationed in the most important strongholds: *De Poznan namque mille CCC loricati milites cum IIII milibus clipeatorum militum; de Gneznen mille quingenti loricati et quinque milia clipeatorum; de Wladislau castro octingenti loricati et duo milia clipeatorum; de Gdech CCC loricati et duo milia clipeatorum*⁹. Gallus Anonymus speaks of the period of the rule of Boleslaw I, yet it seems certain that during his father’s reign warriors did likewise.

Also other accounts, such as Thietmar’s chronicle, point to a defensive role of early Piasts’ strongholds. A description of Niemcza, besieged by the troops of the German king Henry II in 1017, provide a nice example:

⁸ *Ibid.*, p 50.

⁹ *Galli Anonymi Cronica et gesta ducum sive principum Polonorum*, edited and introduction K. Maleczyński, MPH s.n., vol. II, Kraków 1952, lib. I, cap. 8, pp 25–26. Polish translation: Anonim tzw. Gall, *Kronika polska*, trans. by R. Grodecki, with a preface by M. Plezia, edited by M. Plezia, Wrocław 1982, book I, chapter 8, p 24. English translation: *Gesta Principum Polonorum. The Deeds of the Princes of the Poles*, translated and annotated by Paul W. Knoll and Frank Schaer, with a preface by Thomas N. Bisson and with editorial corrections, Budapest, New York 2003, book I, chapter 8, p 47.

Inperator autem post tries ad eandem cum exercitu valido veniens, castris eandem undiquessecus circumdari iubet, sperans sic omnem hosti suo claudere accessum. Sapiens eiusdem consilium et in omnibus bona voluntas multum ibi prodesset, si in efficiendis rebus auxiliantium sibi affectus hunc adiuvaret. Nunc autem per omnes custodias presidium urbi in noctis silentio advenerat magnum. Tunc omnigenorum species instrumentorum a nostris parari iubentur, et mox ex parte contraria hiis admodum similia videntur. Numquam audivi aliquos, qui meliori pacientia ac prudentiori consilio se umquam defendere niterentur¹⁰.

Accounts relating a significant military role of strongholds are many and I have no intention of listing them all.

Another important function of strongholds was that of a refugium. Some of these structures were erected in inaccessible places and provided a shelter for people inhabiting open settlements in times of invasions¹¹. This was practiced as early as among the communities of the Lusatian culture. While in the Early Medieval Poland refugial strongholds are specific of the tribal period¹², also in the High Middle Ages some structures have modest fortifications and are located in inconspicuous locations. A fort at Kunowo, established in the second half of the thirteenth century, provides a relevant example¹³.

In addition, strongholds fulfilled economic functions. During the reign of Mieszko I, they were already settlement centres. The emerging ducal law must have governed the function of strongholds. Based largely on the twelfth-thirteenth-century diplomatic sources, strongholds are believed to have served as centres of tribute collection and economic management¹⁴. This view has been most comprehensively presented by Karol Modzelewski¹⁵.

¹⁰ *Die Chronik des Bischofs Thietmar von Merseburg und ihre Korveier Überarbeitung*, MGH SRG n.s. IX, ed. R. Holtzmann, Berlin 1935, lib. VII, cap. 60, pp 474, 475. Polish translation: *Kronika Thietmara*, trans. by M.Z. Jedlicki, Kraków 2012, book VII, chapter 60, pp 207–208. English translation: *Ottoman Germany: the Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, transl. and annotated by David A. Warner, Manchester. New York 2013, book VII, chapter 60, p 350.

¹¹ Cf. H. Jankuhn, *Wprowadzenie do archeologii osadnictwa*, trans. by A. Bender, Poznań 2004, pp 30–31.

¹² Cf. J. Poleski, *Małopolska*, pp 106, 210.

¹³ T. Makiewicz, *Średniowieczne grodzisko stożkowe na stanowisku 5 w Kunowie, powiat Mogilno*, *Slavia Antiqua* 19 (1972), pp 232–233, 234.

¹⁴ The issue and debates are discussed in detail in M. Danielewski, *Sieć grodowa*, pp 170–176.

¹⁵ K. Modzelewski, *Chłopi w monarchii wczesnopiastowskiej*, Wrocław 1987, pp 128–131, 133–137, 141–150; idem, *Organizacja gospodarcza państwa piastowskiego X–XIII wiek*, 2nd edition, Poznań 2000, pp 11ff.

The hypotheses put forward by the Warsaw historian are admittedly based on retrogressive and comparative methods in relation to written sources, yet this is only research approach to enable us to take a broader look on the economic role of strongholds in the tenth and eleventh centuries. We believe that the model proposed by K. Modzelewski is still in force.

Strongholds were also crucial administrative centres. The function of strongholds as centres of tribute collection was related to the supervision of the efficient collection of tribute, the provision of services by the population and the distribution of acquired goods. Strongholds were therefore home to the princely officials: the province *comes*, stronghold *comes*, *tribunus*, judges and others. Since the administrative apparatus must have had some form of pressure on the population, some warriors must have been stationed in strongholds or in their vicinity. Major strongholds obviously maintained significant military presence; in later times – mostly provincial centres. The account by the so-called Gallus Anonymus of the Pomeranians' invasion to Mazovia in 1109 provides a good example of the military possibilities of strongholds¹⁶. The information contained in the chronicle suggests that the Pomeranians invaded and fairly badly ravaged Mazovia until the province *comes* Magnus went against the invaders with his troops and managed to defeat them. It seems likely that warriors deployed in castellan strongholds were probably few and were not a counterbalance to the Pomeranians, considering that they plundered Mazovia with impunity¹⁷. The basic administrative apparatus maintained therefore certain coercive forces, which probably strengthened the efficiency of tribute collection and the enforcement of services. At the same time, strongholds were administrative centres providing temporal home to a ruler and his court, but above all a permanent location of the apparatus of the state responsible for economic, military and judiciary functions.

Strongholds were the seats of a ruler and his entourage. It is however noteworthy that the Piast realm did not have one capital town, which is in fact an inaccurate term for the Early Piast period. The system practiced at the time was that of *dux/rex ambulans* – a ruler controlled his domain

¹⁶ *Galli Anonymi*, lib. II, cap. 49, p 118. Polish translation: Anonim tzw. Gall, *Kronika polska*, book II, chapter 49, pp 112–113. English translation: *Gesta Principum Polonorum*, book I, chapter 8, pp 207–209.

¹⁷ K. Modzelewski, *Organizacja gospodarcza*, p 180.

by constantly travelling round the state, and thus exercised judiciary power, oversaw strongholds and officials of local administration. In this way, a duke or king prevented internal tensions, controlled opponents and land exposed to external invasions¹⁸. At the same time, some fortified settlements had clearly major importance for the ruler due to their military, economic or ideological role and as such were visited more frequently than others. The so-called Gallus Anonymus mentions *sedes regni principales* during the reign of Władysław I Herman. These included e.g., Wrocław, Kraków and Sandomierz¹⁹, perhaps also Gniezno, Płock, Poznań and Kruszwica.

A huge economic burden for a community, a ruler and his entourage could not stay for an extended period in one place. The problem with the service referred to as a station (*statio*), under which the population was obliged to secure accommodation and food to a ruler, his officials and servants²⁰, shows that *rex ambulans* was not purposeless. In the chronicle of the so-called Gallus Anonymus, we read about the travels undertaken by Bolesław I:

*Ubique enim suas stationes suumque servitium determinatum habebat, nec libenter in tentoriis sicut Numida, vel in campis, sed in civitatibus et castris frequentius habitabat. Et quotiens de civitate stationem in aliam transferebat, aliis in confinio dimissis, alios vastandiones et villicos commutabat. Nec quisquam eo transeunte viator vel operator boves vel oves abscondebat, sed ei pretereunti pauper et dives arridebat, eumque cernere tota partia properabat*²¹.

There is no doubt whatsoever as to the functioning of the *dux/rex ambulans* system in the Piast realm. We believe that such centres as Gniezno, Giecz, Ostrów Lednicki, Poznań, but also Kraków, Kruszwica, Płock, Sandomierz

¹⁸ The term has been defined, e.g., by: P. Urbańczyk, *Najdawniejsze stolice państwa piastowskiego*, [in:] *Polska na przełomie I i II tysiąclecia*, Poznań 2001, p. 237; J. Dobosz, *Kazimierz II Sprawiedliwy*, Poznań 2011, pp. 133–134. Cf. Z. Kurnatowska, *Poznań w procesie formowania się państwa Piastów*, [in:] *Tu się wszystko zaczęło. Rola Poznania w państwie Pierwszych Piastów*, A. Wójtowicz (ed.), Poznań 2010, p. 17.

¹⁹ *Galli Anonymi*, lib. II, cap. 8, p. 75. Polish translation: Anonim tzw. Gall, *Kronika polska*, book II, chapter 8, pp. 19–20. English translation: *Gesta Principum Polonorum*, book I, chapter 8, p. 135.

²⁰ More on the issue: K. Buczek, *Publiczne usługi transportowe i komunikacyjne w Polsce średniowiecznej*, *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej* 15 (1967), p. 255–299; A. Gąsiorowski, *Stacje królewskie w średniowiecznej Polsce*, *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej* 20 (1972), no. 2, pp. 243–264; K. Modzelewski, *Chłopi w monarchii*, pp. 86–92, 94.

²¹ *Galli Anonymi*, lib. I, cap. 12, pp. 31–32. Polish translation: Anonim tzw. Gall, *Kronika polska*, book I, charter 12, s. 30. English translation: *Gesta Principum Polonorum*, book I, chapter 8, p. 59.

and Wrocław must have been frequently visited by a duke, his court and officials in the second half of the tenth and the first half of the eleventh century. All these strongholds served the function of more or less permanent seats of rulers in the days of the first Piast monarchy.

Tadeusz Lalik rightly pointed out that fortified settlements were also ecclesiastical centres²². We would argue that *ecclesia – castrum* relations are particularly evident in the early period of the Piast governance. At the time of the first Piast monarchy, churches were erected in such centres of Wielkopolska as Gniezno, Giecz, Ostrów Lednicki and Poznań. Close spatial relations between churches and strongholds are indisputable and this also applies to early church administration on Polish soil. Nevertheless, in the eleventh, twelfth or thirteenth centuries, churches were built also beyond strongholds²³.

The construction of fortified settlements in the times of Mieszko I and his predecessor/predecessors

Although strongholds were among the most characteristic elements of landscape in the Piast state, the identification of their functions is a complex research problem. In the absence of written sources, historians are forced to use comparative and retrogressive methods. Which fortified settlements were built or which were redeveloped during the reign of Mieszko I then²⁴? The basic problem with that question is that we do not actually know when the son of the legendary Siemomysł took over the ducal power. Contrary to Mieszko I's date of birth, the date of his death is well known (992)²⁵.

Historians believe that Mieszko I was born sometime between 920 and 940. Oswald Balzer supposed that the ruler could have been born *circa* 922²⁶.

²² T. Lalik, *Organizacja grodowo-prowincjonalna w Polsce XI i początków XII wieku*, [in:] *Studia średniowieczne*, A. Gąsiorowski, I. Skierska (eds.), Warszawa 2006, pp 412–413.

²³ This issue has been well illustrated with regard to medieval Kujawy; see M. Danielewski, *Sieć grodowa*, pp 281–297.

²⁴ This paper does not discuss the development of stone architecture, but looks merely at investments related to strongholds.

²⁵ J. Strzelczyk, *Mieszko Pierwszy*, pp 67–68, 181; K. Jasiński, *Rodowód pierwszych Piastów*, Poznań 2004, pp 58–60

²⁶ O. Balzer, *Genealogia Piastów*, Kraków 1895, p 19.

Kazimierz Jasiński inclined to the opinion that it happened roughly in 935²⁷. On the other hand, Jerzy Strzelczyk argued that Mieszko's date of birth is closer to 940 rather than 920²⁸. The assessment of the role of Mieszko I in the development of strongholds in Wielkopolska and Kujawy will therefore depend on the view we find more convincing. It is important to emphasise that in our opinion K. Jasiński and J. Strzelczyk's argument seems more convincing than O. Balzer and his supporters'.

The year 963 is key to further considerations: under this year, the son of Siemomysł son is mentioned by Widukind of Corvey in the context of his fights with Wichmann, a Saxon nobleman²⁹. This is the first written record of Mieszko, allowing us to conclude that he ruled the Piast realm at the time. However, the events unfolding in the area in question prior to year are merely hypothetical. There are no written sources to tell whether Mieszko I began his reign in the 960s or earlier. Even if we suppose that Mieszko assumed the mantle of power before 963, there is not a shred of direct evidence to date the event. Therefore, in this paper we assume that Mieszko I reigned between 963 and 992. This, in the context of his supposed date of birth *circa* 935 or closer to 940, leads to some interesting conclusions. Namely, many of the fortified settlements in Wielkopolska and Kujawy were apparently constructed before 963. This is true both of Giecz (the beginning of the second half of the ninth century, *circa* 865 according to dendrochronological dating)³⁰; Gniezno (about 940)³¹; Ostrów Lednicki (around 930/940, according to dendrochronology after 921/928)³²; Poznań (the turn of the tenth

²⁷ K. Jasiński, *Rodowód*, p 60.

²⁸ J. Strzelczyk, *Mieszko Pierwszy*, p 68.

²⁹ *Widukindi monachi Corbeiensis rerum gestarum Saxoniarum libri tres*, ed. P. Hirsch, H. E. Lohmann, Hannover 1935, , cap. 66, p. 141.

³⁰ M. Krąpiec, T. Krysztofiak, *Potwierdzenie plemiennej genezy grodu w Gieczu*, Wielkopolskie Sprawozdania Archeologiczne 6 (2003), p. 42; eadem, *Rozwój wczesnośredniowiecznego ośrodka grodowego w Gieczu w świetle źródeł archeologicznych*, [in:] *Architektoniczno-przestrzenne i przyrodnicze podstawy rekonstrukcji wczesnośredniowiecznych założeń obronnych Gieczy*, A. Grygorowicz, K. Milecka, K. Tobolski (eds.), Poznań 2007, pp 24–26.

³¹ M. Kara, *Najstarsze państwo*, p 298.

³² *Ibid.*, pp 256, 307, 353. Wood samples for the centre at Ostrów Lednicki were dendrochronologically dated to 885, 921, see J. Górecki, *Archeologiczne badania Ostrowa Lednickiego i jego zaplecza w perspektywie 40-lecia Muzeum Pierwszych Piastów na Lednicy*, [in:] *Custodia Memoriae. Muzeum Pierwszych Piastów na Lednicy*, A.M. Wyrwa (ed.), Lednica 2009, p 97.

century)³³; but also Grzybowo (the 920s)³⁴; Kalisz (the second half of the ninth century)³⁵ or Mietlica in Kujawy (the second half of the ninth century)³⁶. The dates make it evident that Mieszko I was not the initiator of the construction of the largest strongholds in Wielkopolska and Kujawy.

During Mieszko's reign, new strongholds were constructed mostly beyond Wielkopolska. These include Kruszwica (the last quarter of the tenth century, the results of dendrochronological analyses suggest that wood was felled in 976)³⁷; Płock (the stronghold dates from the 970s)³⁸; Sandomierz (the second half of the tenth century)³⁹ or Głogów (built circa 989)⁴⁰.

³³ P. Sankiewicz, *Wczesnośredniowieczne konstrukcje obronne grodu poznańskiego*, [in:] *Poznań we wczesnym średniowieczu*, H. Kočka-Krenz (ed.), vol. VI, Poznań 2008, p 22; H. Kočka-Krenz, *Pozycja Poznania w X wieku w źródłach archeologicznych*, [in:] *Tu się wszystko zaczęło. Rola Poznania w państwie Pierwszych Piastów*, A. Wójtowicz (ed.), Poznań 2010, pp 35–36.

³⁴ Z. Kurnatowska, M. Tuszyński, *Grzybowo nad Wrześnią. Wczesnopiastowski gród na szlaku z Gieczy do Gniezna*, [in:] *Custodia Memoriae. Muzeum Pierwszych Piastów na Lednicy*, A.M. Wyrwa (ed.), Lednica 2009, p 145; J. Wrzesiński, *Przyroda grodu*, Lednica 2015, p 4.

³⁵ A. Buko, *Archeologia Polski wczesnośredniowiecznej. Odkrycia – hipotezy – interpretacje*, Warszawa 2011, p 243.

³⁶ M. Danielewski, *Nowe dane do badań nad kujawskimi grodziskami z Mietlicy i Borkowa*, *Studia Lednickie* 13 (2014), p 154.

³⁷ W. Dzieduszycki, *Przemiany społeczno-organizacyjne wczesnośredniowiecznych Kujaw – możliwości interpretacyjne archeologii*, [in:] *Archaeologia versus historiam – historia versus archaeologiam czyli jak wspólnie poznawać średniowiecze*, M. Brzostowicz, M. Przybył, D.A. Sikorski (eds.), Poznań 2012, p 168.

³⁸ M. Trzeciecki, *Początki Płocka*, [in:] *Płock wczesnośredniowieczny*, A. Gołembnik (ed.), Warszawa 2011, pp 96, 97.

³⁹ M. Florek, *sandomierski ośrodek grodowo-miejski w średniowieczu*, Warszawa 2005, p 25. This area of Małopolski with Sandomierz was incorporated into the Piast realm probably as early as in the 970s, see A. Buko, *Archeologia Polski*, p 262.

⁴⁰ K. Czapla, *Zaplecze osadnicze i gospodarcze grodu głogowskiego*, [in:] *Funkcje grodów w państwach wczesnośredniowiecznej Europy Środkowej. Społeczeństwo, gospodarka, ideologia*, K. Chrzan, K. Czapla, S. Moździoch (eds.), Wrocław – Głogów 2014, p 15. When exactly Silesia was incorporated into the Piast domain remains a central issue. In our opinion this happened roughly in the mid-980s; see M. Matla-Kozłowska, *Pierwsi Przemysłidzi i ich państwo (od X do połowy XI wieku). Ekspansja terytorialna i jej polityczne uwarunkowania*, Poznań 2008, p 329. Cf. A. Buko, *Archeologia Polski*, p 213. If Silesia was indeed incorporated into the Piast realm, we may assume that the construction of the stronghold was initiated by Mieszko I. However, some historians believe that Silesia had been infiltrated by the Piasts even earlier, see S. Moździoch, *Śląsk wczesnośredniowieczny w świetle badań archeologicznych i historycznych – crambe bis cocta?*, [in:] *Civitas Schinesghe cum pertinentiis*, W. Chudziak (ed.), Toruń 2003, pp 62–70. Cf. remarks by D.A. Sikorski, *Początki Kościoła w Polsce*, Poznań 2012, pp 90–97.

Strongholds built in Wielkopolska under Mieszko I include Śrem (the 970s)⁴¹, perhaps also Krzywiń or Piaski (between 955 and 970)⁴². These could nevertheless not be classified as central strongholds or strongholds of an outstanding military rank. Mieszko I appears to us as a continuer rather than a precursor of the construction of fortified settlements in Wielkopolska.

Let us return now to the most important strongholds of Wielkopolska: Gniezno, Poznań, Giecz, Grzybowo and Ostrów Lednicki. If we assume that Mieszko I was born *circa* 935 or 940, he could not have been behind the construction of any of these structures. Mieszko's predecessor/predecessors must have also initiated the expansion of the stronghold in Giecz (the tribal fortified settlement was enlarged at the beginning of the second quarter of the tenth century)⁴³; Grzybowo (the large stronghold was erected roughly in 940 at the latest)⁴⁴; and Poznań (the 940s or 950s saw a renovation of the northern fortified settlements and the construction of a horse-shoe rampart at Zagórze⁴⁵). Neither did Mieszko I initiate the foundation of a fortified settlement in Moraczewo. Located at a short distance from Ostrów Lednicki, the Moraczewo stronghold was built in the early tenth century. Within its ramparts, excavations uncovered powerful hall structures⁴⁶. To conclude, it is evident that the foundations of the stronghold structures, at least in Wielkopolska, were laid by Mieszko's predecessors. Due to the absence of relevant sources, the question whether these were Siemowit, Lestek and Siemomysł, mentioned by the so-called Gallus Anonymus⁴⁷, remains unanswered.

⁴¹ M. Brzostowicz, *Schyłek organizacji grodowej w Wielkopolsce*, [in:] *Funkcje grodów w państwach wczesnośredniowiecznej Europy Środkowej. Społeczeństwo, gospodarka, ideologia*, K. Chrzan, K. Czapla, S. Moździoch (eds.), Wrocław - Głogów 2014, p 386.

⁴² Z. Kurnatowska, *Proces formowania się „państwa gnieźnieńskiego”*, [in:] *Civitas Schinesghe cum pertinentiis*, W. Chudziak (ed.), Toruń 2003, p 41.

⁴³ T. Krysztofiak, *Rozwój wczesnośredniowiecznego ośrodka*, pp 24–26.

⁴⁴ Z. Kurnatowska, *Grzybowo pod Wrześnią - potężny gród wczesnopiastowski*, *Landform Analysis* 16 (2011), p 57.

⁴⁵ M. Kara, *Najstarsze państwo*, p 290.

⁴⁶ Cz. Strzyzewski, M. Łastowiecki, M. Kara, *Wczesnośredniowieczne grodzisko w Moraczewie pod Ostrowem Lednickim. Komunikat o wynikach badań archeologicznych w latach 1977-1981*, *Wielkopolskie Sprawozdania Archeologiczne* (2003), pp 83–88, 89–90.

⁴⁷ *Galli Anonymi*, lib. I, cap. 3, pp 12–13. Polish translation: Anonim tzw. Gall, *Kronika polska*, book I, charter 3, p. 14–15. English translation: *Gesta Principum Polonorum*, book I, chapter 8, p 23–25.

What actions, then, did Mieszko undertake with respect to the development of fortified settlements? We have already mentioned that the duke erected some new strongholds in Wielkopolska, albeit these were not centres of such importance as the central strongholds of Gniezno, Poznań and even Giecz. He also continued the work of his predecessor/predecessors. For example, under Mieszko I the stronghold of Gniezno was expanded to include two additional parts⁴⁸. At the same time, Ostrów Lednicki, which in the 960s became a bipartite structure, largely increased its significance. In the late 970s or in the 979s/980s, the fortified settlement on the island was developed into a one-part horseshoe-shaped stronghold⁴⁹. These investments were probably done under Mieszko I⁵⁰, just as those in Giecz. In the second half of the tenth century (probably in the 980s), the usable area of the stronghold was increased and its military qualities were improved⁵¹.

The stronghold of Poznań clearly stands out from other fortified structures. The magnitude of the investment is amazing. The first redevelopment during the times of Mieszko I occurred probably in the 960s, when both northern strongholds of Poznań were converted into a bipartite structure. In the 970s, the stronghold was enlarged by a third, northern part encircled by powerful wooden and earthen ramparts. In the 980s, the rampart was stabilised with a massive stone, wood and earthen 'offset'. The stronghold at Zagórze was surrounded by the same construction. Consisting now of four fortified parts⁵², Poznań grew into the most powerful centre in the Piast realm. It is evident that Mieszko I was keenly interested in the development of Poznań and the construction investments in the stronghold show the stronghold's major significance for the ruler. During the reign of Bolesław the Brave, Poznań slightly declined in importance as a central stronghold.

We shall now look briefly at Mieszko I as a continuator of previous fortified settlements on the outskirts of Wielkopolska and beyond its borders. Note that the Piast ruler invested in centres located on the borders of his domain. This is particularly evident in west Wielkopolska, near the border

⁴⁸ See T. Sawicki, *Wczesnośredniowieczny zespół grodowy w Gnieźnie*, [in:] *Gniezno w świetle ostatnich badań archeologicznych*, Z. Kurnatowska (ed.), Poznań 2001, pp 92–112 for a more comprehensive analysis of the issue.

⁴⁹ M. Kara, *Najstarsze państwo*, pp 353–354.

⁵⁰ A. Buko, *Archeologia Polski*, p 299.

⁵¹ T. Krysztofiak, *Rozwój wczesnośredniowiecznego ośrodka*, p 26.

⁵² M. Kara, *Najstarsze państwo*, pp 291–293.

with Ziemia Lubuska and Pomerania. Santok, a stronghold of tribal origins (built in the second half of the ninth century or at the end of the ninth century), provides the best example of this type of investment⁵³. The fortified settlement was redeveloped several times. Particularly important in the context of Mieszko I's actions seems the 970s investment, when an internal rampart separating the stronghold and the suburbium was remodelled⁵⁴. Already included in the Piast realm, the fortified settlement was perhaps renewed in order to strengthen the western borderlands.

The second half of the tenth century witnessed similar investments in Międzyrzecz. Dating from the tribal period, the first fortified settlement at Międzyrzecz is sometimes believed to have been incorporated into the Piast domain by Mieszko I. Having conquered the stronghold, Mieszko had it greatly expanded. An important role of the stronghold of Międzyrzecz on the route from Gniezno and Poznań to Lubusz dates from this time⁵⁵.

It is possible that Pszczew, another stronghold of the tribal origin in the vicinity (dendrochronological determinations show that wood used for the construction of the structure was felled in the 880s and 890s) fell under the sovereignty of the Piast roughly at the same time. Excavations at the fortified settlements unearthed a settlement layer from the times of the first historical Piasts, which yielded a wide assortment of artefacts⁵⁶. Międzyrzecz and Pszczew were possibly the elements of a local structure of a small tribe ruling over 11 fortified settlements. These two were the only ones to continue their existence after the community was incorporated into the Piast domain⁵⁷. The fortified settlement of Pszczew was situated on the same

⁵³ M. Brzostowicz, *Wielkopolska północna w czasach przedpiastowskich*, [in:] *Pradolina Noteci na tle pradziejowych i wczesnośredniowiecznych szlaków handlowych*, H. Machajewski (ed.), J. Rola, Poznań 2006, p. 272.

⁵⁴ M. Kara, *Z badań nad kulturą mieszkańców grodu santockiego w X wieku – głos archeologa*, [in:] *Santok „Strażnica i klucz królestwa”. 30 lat Muzeum Grodu w Santoku*, W. Popek (ed.), Gorzów Wielkopolski 2010, pp. 28, 32–33.

⁵⁵ T. Łaszkiwicz, *Międzyrzecz – od dziejów najdawniejszych po czasy wczesnonowoczesne*, [in:] *Międzyrzecz – dzieje miasta*, W. Strzyżewski, M. Tureczek (eds.), Międzyrzecz 2009, p. 100; S. Kurnatowski, *Ogólne omówienie wyników badań*, [in:] *Międzyrzecz. Gród i zamek w wiekach IX–XIV*, S. Kurnatowski (ed.), Warszawa 2015, pp. 467–470.

⁵⁶ M. Kara, M. Krąpiec, *Wyniki badań archeologiczno-dendrochronologicznych wybranych grodzisk wczesnośredniowiecznych z terenu historycznej Wielkopolski, przeprowadzonych w roku 2003*, *Fontes Archaeologici Posnanienses* 41 (2005), pp. 218, 220.

⁵⁷ S. Kurnatowski, *Ogólne omówienie*, pp. 468, 469–470.

route as Międzyrzecz (at a distance of roughly 14.5 km), closer to central Wielkopolska.

We have already mentioned how Mieszko I constructed new strongholds and redeveloped existing structures outside of Wielkopolska. The Wrocław centre is held up as a representative example of such practices. The first Wrocław fortified settlement was established in the first half of the tenth century, yet shortly after, in the 980s, a new structure was erected⁵⁸. Perhaps it was then that Mieszko I began to take over Silesia, constructed new strongholds or remodelled the existing ones⁵⁹. In Silesia, Mieszko characteristically abandoned his ill-famed radical practice of burning down the majority of seized fortified settlements⁶⁰.

It is interesting in this context to take a look at the Kraków land, incorporated into the Piast domain sometime between 987 and 989⁶¹. Archaeologists were thus far having difficulties with the strongholds from Małopolska and their chronology, largely due to the problems with obtaining an adequate quantity and quality of wood for dendrochronological analyses⁶². However, Jacek Poleski's research on the chronology of the fortified settlements of Małopolska has significantly filled in the gaps in our knowledge. Poleski convincingly demonstrated that Mieszko I based his rule over the newly acquired region on the already existing stronghold: Będzin, Kraków, Naszacowice or Stradów⁶³. It follows that the adaptation of older tribal centres for the needs of the new governance is best seen exactly in Małopolska.

In West Pomerania, hitherto functioning centres were mostly incorporated in the state structure and occasionally remodelled; this process is particularly evident in the 980s⁶⁴. The ramparts of the stronghold of Kołobrzeg

⁵⁸ S. Moździoch, *Spółczesność plemienna Śląska w IX-X wieku*, [in:] *Śląsk około roku 1000*, M. Młynarska-Kaletynowa, E. Małachowicz (eds.), Wrocław 2000, p. 41.

⁵⁹ Cf. footnote 40.

⁶⁰ A. Buko, *Archeologia Polski*, p. 213.

⁶¹ Gerard Labuda suggested that the Piasts seized Małopolska roughly between 987 and 989, see G. Labuda, *Studia nad początkami państwa polskiego*, vol. II, Poznań 1988, p. 292. This second view is shared by, e.g., A. Buko, *Archeologia Polski*, p. 218; J. Poleski, *Małopolska*, p. 211. On the other hand, Marzena Matla argues that it happened before 984, M. Matla-Kozłowska, *Pierwsi Przemyslidzi*, p. 329.

⁶² M. Kara, M. Krąpiec, *Możliwości datowania*, p. 308. Cf. Z. Kurnatowska, *Proces formowania*, p. 46.

⁶³ J. Poleski, *Małopolska*, p. 211.

⁶⁴ Z. Kurnatowska, *Proces formowania*, p. 45.

upon the Parsęta River were strengthened sometime after 986⁶⁵. The inclusion of Szczecin, a former tribal fortified settlement from the mid-ninth century⁶⁶, into the Piast realm dates similarly back to the 980s⁶⁷. We will not discuss Wolin, the character of development and political aspirations of which did not coincide with the vision of Mieszko I⁶⁸. Besides, the eleventh and twelfth centuries witnessed a steady increase in rank of a nearby Kamień⁶⁹. Wolin thrived from roughly the mid-tenth century until 1043⁷⁰.

The continuation of earlier settlements and the use of previously existing fortified settlements has also been evidenced in other areas of the Piast domain. We have already mentioned Mietlica, where a stronghold functioned as early as in the ninth century until the mid-eleventh century⁷¹, although it should be noted that within the Piast domain the stronghold was systematically undermined at the expense of the Piast Kruszwica⁷².

Conclusions

To conclude, Mieszko I continued the work of his predecessor or predecessors, at least with regard to strongholds. He continued to develop some centres in Wielkopolska that were established prior to his reign. Poznań apparently occupied a special place in the power structure of Mieszko I: the construction investments that took place at Ostrów Tumski surpassed those at all other central strongholds. At the same time, the son of legendary Siemomysł built a number of new strongholds in Wielkopolska and beyond.

⁶⁵ L. Leciejewicz, M. Rębkowski, *Uwagi końcowe. Początki Kołobrzegu w świetle rozpoznania archeologicznego*, [in:] *Kołobrzeg. Wczesne miasto nad Bałtykiem*, L. Leciejewicz, M. Rębkowski (eds.), Warszawa 2007, p 308.

⁶⁶ A.B. Kowalska, M. Dworaczyk (with the participation of R.K. Borówka and B. Wolny), *Szczecin wczesnośredniowieczny. Nadodrzańskie centrum*, Warszawa 2011, p 359.

⁶⁷ A. Buko, *Archeologia Polski*, p 214.

⁶⁸ More on Wolin: *Wolin wczesnośredniowieczny część 1*, Warszawa 2013; *Wolin wczesnośredniowieczny część 2*, Warszawa 2014.

⁶⁹ A. Buko, *Archeologia Polski*, p 216.

⁷⁰ B. Stanisławski, *Wstęp do archeologii wczesnośredniowiecznego Wolina*, [in:] *Wolin wczesnośredniowieczny część 1*, Warszawa 2013, p 37.

⁷¹ M. Danielewski, *Nowe dane*, p 154.

⁷² See W. Dzieduszycki, *Przemiany społeczno-organizacyjne*, pp 166–169, 173, for a more comprehensive analysis of the issue.

Several, like Kruszwica, Płock and Sandomierz, later grew into *sedes regni principals*, described by Gallus Anonymus. There were also attempts to use earlier tribal strongholds from the western border of Wielkopolska, West Pomerania or Silesia, which the prince sought to adapt to the needs of the Piast realm. The picture that emerges is that of a very complex internal politics of Mieszko I, who founded the strength of his realm upon strongholds. Centres of economic, territorial and likely judicial management over nearby lands, strongholds testified to the power of the ruler. We strongly believe that it is through the studies on the stronghold organisation, based on historical and natural sciences and including much-needed dendrochronological analyses, that we can enhance our knowledge of the first historic Polish rulers.

The realm of Mieszko I. Contribution to the study on fortified settlements

The issue of early Piast strongholds is among the most important scholarly problems relating to the realm of Mieszko I. The current possibilities of historical and natural sciences offer fresh opportunities to enhance our knowledge of fortified settlements. Very important in this context is dendrochronology, which allows a fairly accurate determination of the chronology of these structures. Analyses have demonstrated that Mieszko I continued to develop strongholds founded by his predecessors in Wielkopolska. One notable example is Poznań, one of the central strongholds of the then realm, which greatly expanded under the first Polish historical ruler. It is evident that Mieszko's actions concerning strongholds were carefully planned. The duke expanded and used some tribal centres for his own purposes, some examples including Międzyrzecz, Pszczew or Santok, located on the western fringe of the Piast domain and established new strongholds on newly occupied lands, for example Płock and Głogów. The paper examines military, economic or judicial functions of fortified settlements.

Translated by: Agnieszka Tokarczuk



Photo 1. Grzybowo stronghold. Photo by M. Danielewski



Photo 2. Mietlica stronghold. Photo by Ł. Oliwowski



Photo 3. Model of the Gniezno stronghold held in the exhibition at the Museum of the Beginnings of the Polish State. Photo by P. Namiota



Photo 4. Fragment of an excavation trench at the Grzybowo stronghold with visible wood remains during the 2005 research conducted by the Museum of the First Piasts at Lednica. Photo by D. Dominiczak-Głowacka*

* Photographic material housed in the collection of the Archaeological Reserve Grzybów Stronghold and made available by its director, Jacek Wrzesiński.

dr Marcin Danielewski,
Instytut Historii, Wydział Historyczny,
Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza,
ul. Umultowska 89d, 61-614 Poznań,
m_danielewski@tlen.pl