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BULL OF ANTIPOPE JOHN XXIII FOUND IN MIERZYN, CENTRAL POLAND

Abstract: In 2022, during excavations of the knight's manor house at Mierzyn, which belonged to the Nagodzice family, a lead bull of the antipope John XXIII (1410-1415) was found. The seal was discovered in the area of the economic hinterland, a few hundred metres south of the stronghold. This is the second archaeological find of a bull of this antipope from the territory of Poland. The article discusses the object in relation to other finds of this kind and in the context of the history of the medieval knight's seat in Mierzyn.

Keywords: bull, antipope John XXIII, Mierzyn, the Nagodzice family, knight's seat, 14-15th century, motte-and-bailey castle

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Introduction


Mierzyn is currently a small village located in the centre of Poland, about 6 km south of Rozprza, in Piotrków County. In the Middle Ages, Rozprza was the centre of a castellany with a large stronghold, the existence of which is attested to by sources from 1065 and 1136. In the late Middle Ages, the former castellan's stronghold was transformed into a knight's manor house.¹ Also in Mierzyn there was another medieval knight's manor house on a motte – the remains of which manor are well-preserved and clearly visible among the surrounding meadows (Fig. 1).


The village of Mierzyn may first appear in written sources as a settlement related to the functioning of ducal estates in a document issued in a place called

'Mirano' – possibly referring to Mierzyn – in 1248 by Duke Kazimierz Konradowic of Kujawy and Łęczyca. Analysis of the document indicates that the village was located in the Sieradz or Łęczyca regions, as the witnesses of the document in question originated mainly from this area.² On the basis of this meagre information, however, it is impossible to confirm whether a manor house was already located in the village at that time.

The next mention of Mierzyn comes from 1306, when the owners of Mierzyn were the Mierscy, or Mirski, family of the Jelita coat of arms with the battle cry 'Jelita, Nagody.' This is evidenced by a document issued by Władysław Łokietek, in which one of the witnesses was a Clementis 'de Mirsin.' Another important note from 1342 confirms that Dziwisz of Mierzyn took over the village of Piotrów in the Łęczyca region from the Cistercian monastery in Sulejów, in exchange for which he donated two fields located in Milejów to the monastery.³ The next owner of Mierzyn was Jarosław of the Nagody

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¹ Szyszka 2007a, 61-62; Sikora et al. 2017, 160.

² Szyszka 2007b, 39. Older literature suggests that this is the village of Murzyno in Kujawy, cf. Zajązkowski and Zajązkowski 1966, 199.

³ See Szyszka 2007, 39-41.





Fig. 1. Aerial view of the Mierzyn stronghold and its surroundings, 2021. Photo: J. Sikora.



Fig. 2. Tombstone of Mikołaj of Cieszanowice from the first half of the 16th century. Photo: P. Strzyż.

coat of arms (also known as Jarosław of Wardzyń), known in sources from 1388, who sometimes between 1390 and 1394 became a pantler (*dapifer*) of Sieradz, and in the years 1394-1400 was a cup-bearer (*pincerna*) of Sieradz. His successor in this position, Piotr of Widawa, is mentioned from 4 April 1402.⁴ Later information on property divisions in the village comes from 1447 and 1452, in documents that attest to the functioning of a ‘fortalicium’ in Mierzyn at that time.⁵ Therefore, the only personal clue in the case of the bull of John XXIII found in Mierzyn, for chronological reasons, concerns the son of the owner of this estate, i.e., Tomasz, the Sieradz master of the hunt (*venator*) in 1411-1452, who may have taken over this position from Zbigniew Bąk of Bąkowa Góra, of the Zadora coat of arms, as early as 1410.⁶

In the mid-14th century, due to the establishment of a new trade route – the Toruń-Kraków road – Mierzyn found itself on one of the main routes of the Polish Kingdom. The Toruń-Kraków road ran from Toruń through Brześć Kujawski, Łeczyca, Zgierz, Rzgów, Tuszyń, Sroć, Rękoraj to Piotrków, and further through Rozprza, Mierzyn and nearby Trzepnica to Przedbórz, and further through Małogoszcz, Jędrzejów, and Miechów to Kraków.⁷

⁴ Zajączkowski and Zajączkowski 1966, 199; *Urzędnicy*, p. 102, B 61, 62; p. 126, B 265; p. 175; Szymczakowa 1998, 26, 246-247.

⁵ Gieysztor 1963, 222, footnote 63; Nowak and Szymczak 1993, 86; Kajzer 2004, 225-226.

⁶ *Urzędnicy*, p. 110, B 124; 177, p. 116, 159, 175.

⁷ Samsonowicz 1973, 702-703, Map 3; Augustyniak 2014, 344.



Fig. 3. View of the mound in Mierzyn from the north, 2021. Photo: J. Sikora.



Fig. 4. View of the mound in Mierzyn from the north-west, 2022. Photo: K. Skóra.

A prominent landmark in the topography of Mierzyn village is the brick church of St. Nicholas and the Blessed Virgin Mary, first mentioned in sources in 1435. Only the chancel of the church was built in the Middle Ages, of which the original cross-ribbed vaults with keystones bearing the coat of arms of Jelita have survived to this day. This church was the centre of a parish which was established before 1399. The parson Mathias of Mierzyn is mentioned

in the sources at this date as well.⁸ The nave of the church was added to the existing medieval presbytery centuries later, around 1600. The tower was added in the second quarter of the 19th century and made taller during the renovation works in the early 20th century.⁹

⁸ Zajączkowski and Zajączkowski 1966, 199; Baranowska 2018, 8, 12.

⁹ *Liber Beneficiorum* 192; *Katalog*, 10-11; Szukała 1997, 19.

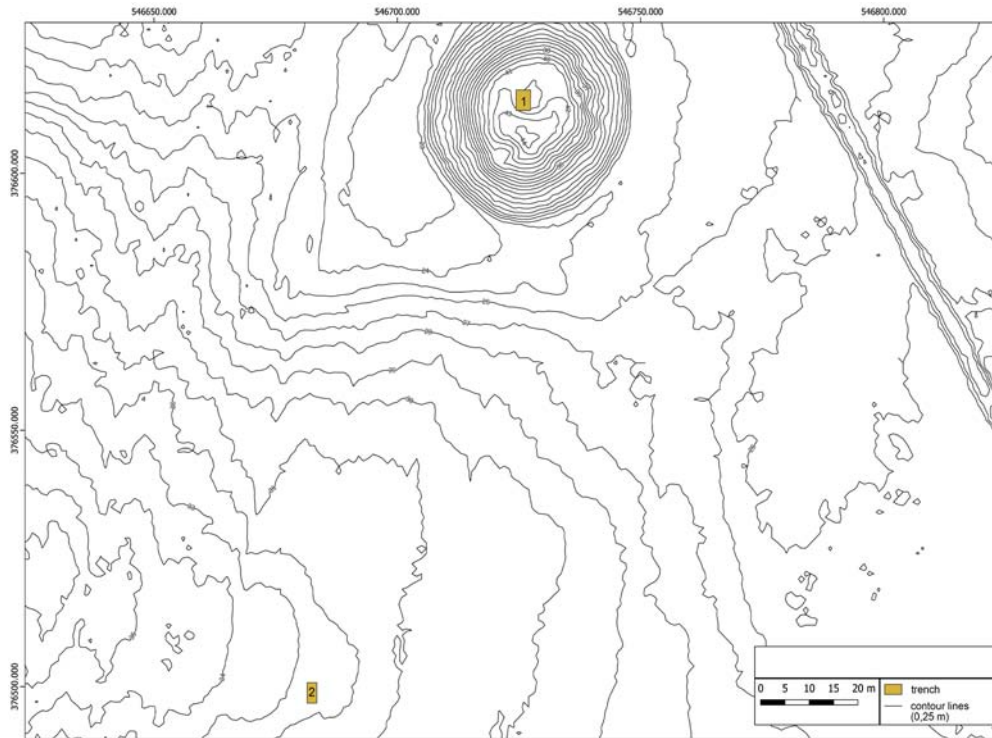


Fig. 5. Map of the area around the stronghold at Mierzyn, depicting archaeological excavations. Drawn: J. Sikora and P. Strzyż.



Fig. 6. View of the stronghold at Mierzyn and its economic hinterland marking where the bull was found – red point, 2022. Photo: J. Sikora.

The tombstone of Mikołaj from Cieszanowice from the first half of the 16th century¹⁰ (Fig. 2) is still preserved in the church, and its heavily worn surface proves that it was originally embedded in the church floor. Thus, it is very likely that the knight's seat at Mierzyn co-existed with the church in the 15th century.

The local chronicle of Stanisław Kotnowski, written in 1935, mentions that in the church of Mierzyn there were 'carefully and specially bound documents and certificates (birth certificates, marriage certificates, etc.) still kept in Latin from 1612 to 1808.' However, there is no information about the older documents.¹¹

¹⁰ *Katalog*, 11; *Corpus*, 150.

¹¹ *Kotnowski*, 5.

Description of research and context of discovery

The bull was discovered during archaeological work undertaken in Mierzyn by the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Łódź and the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Łódź Branch, at the previously unexplored stronghold located among the meadows to the west of the village (Fig. 1). The site is now a fairly high mound (over 5 m) with a diameter at the base of about 40 m, and a plateau diameter of about 20 m (Fig. 3 and 4). The knightly seat of the Nagodzice family at Mierzyn was inventoried as a stronghold (*grodzisko*) for the first time by Roman Jakimowicz in 1926.¹² Initial verification of the site in the field was made in 1946 by Marian Gozdowski on behalf of the State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw, who defined its chronology as 12th-13th century. It was then included in the catalogue of settlement sites in Central Poland published by Janina Kamińska in the 1950s. Kamińska noted that the site had been partly damaged and levelled by local farmers, who wanted to fill in the moats and increase the area available for cultivation.¹³

The first archaeological survey took place in 2021. At that time, two trenches were excavated (Fig. 5), the first of which (Trench 1) was placed on top of the mound, slightly closer to its northern side. It mainly exposed the remains of the foundation of a residential and defensive tower, made of erratic boulders and bonded with clay. Ceramic material and metal objects made it possible to verify the time of use of the residence to the second half of the 14th century to the 15th century.

In 2022, archaeological works concentrated on the area around the mound. Surface investigation using metal detectors was intensified. The use of this tool was necessary for two reasons: first, to verify theories concerning the location of the suburbium, the preliminary identification of which was based on laser scanning and aerial photography; second, to find objects that might have been dispersed on the surrounding land as a result of two attempts by farmers to destroy the mound (in 1939 and again in the 1960s). In total, an area of about 1 hectare was searched, revealing a significant amount of historic material dating from the Middle Ages to the modern era. A clear concentration of medieval artefacts was marked on a small elevated area of land to the south of the hill. Among the most significant discoveries are two silver coins – a groschen of John of Luxembourg from the years 1310-1345 and a half-groschen of Alexander Jagiellon

from the years 1501-1506, as well as parts of a costume (a belt buckle with Gothic floral ornamentation, a round silver belt buckle). Most significant was the discovery of a lead bull which was found about 100 m south of the stronghold in the humus layer, on the edge of a site which we tentatively identify as an economic hinterland (Fig. 6).

Description of the object

The lead papal seal (bull) from Mierzyn is preserved whole and in good condition (Fig. 7). The images on the reverse and obverse are legible. The object has the shape of a slightly oval disc, measuring 36×38 mm in diameter, 4.5-5.5 mm thick, and 43 g in weight. The design of the bull is conventional. On the reverse of the lead seal is an inscription: IOHAN|NES: P̄P̄: | XXIII:, that is IOHANNES P(A)P(A) XXIII. Above the PP are the two letters omega, Ω, signifying eternity. On the obverse, however (in accordance with the rules of the papal chancery since the pontificate of Paschalis II, 1099-1138), below the inscription of the pope's name with his ordinal number are the images of the heads of the Apostles St. Paul (S[ANCTUS] PA[ULUS]) and St. Peter (S[ANCTUS] PE[TRUS]), in that order.

Between their heads is the image of a cross, towards which the eyes of the two Apostles are directed. This form of papal bulls has survived to the present day.¹⁴

About the bull

The bull is a lead seal, stamped with a stamp press, which was attached to documents leaving the papal office. The origin of such bulls is linked to the Byzantine territories and their sphere of influence. The papal chancery began to use them from around the middle of the 6th century, with the oldest surviving specimen being the seal of Pope John III (561-574). Until around the mid-11th century, the content of the depictions on the bulls was not standardised. It was only from the pontificate of Paschalis II (1099-1118) that a canon of symbols (the same as those present on the bull of Mierzyn) was established.¹⁵ Around 1430, the typeface changed from majuscule to monumental capital,¹⁶ and a small modification of the image dates from 1480.¹⁷ From then on, a lead seal was attached to every formal letter or decree as a sign of authenticity. It

¹² Jakimowicz 1926, 273.

¹³ Kamińska 1953, 95.

¹⁴ Wójcik 1976, 1192-1193; Szymański 2001, 474; Giergiel et al. 2015, 26.

¹⁵ See Misiuk 2013, 157-158; Giergiel et al. 2015, 26; Bartels 2017, 317.

¹⁶ See Misiuk 2013, 158.

¹⁷ Bartels 2017, 317.



Fig. 7. Bull of Antipope John XXIII: A – Reverse, B – Obverse. Photo J. Słomska-Bolonek.



Fig. 8. The accident of John XXIII while on his way to the Council of Constance.
Source: Ulrich Richental, *Chronik des Konstanzer Konzils 1414–1418*, c. 1464, fol. 9.

contains the pope's name on one side and on the other the images of Saints Peter and Paul, from whom he receives his authority. Bulls from archaeological contexts no longer usually have the silk thread or string to indicate the meaning of the letter, which is an official document of the chancery.

The vast majority of seals were made of lead. Silver or gold bulls are known from archives, but have not yet been confirmed archaeologically, likely because of the value of their raw material – even if they were no longer needed to serve their original purpose, silver or gold could certainly be used as valuable metal.

Antipope John XXIII and his contacts with the Kingdom of Poland

Antipope John XXIII (c. 1370–1419) played a principal role in the Great Western Schism in the Catholic Church, which began at the death of the last Pope of Avignon, Gregory XI. John XXIII laid claim to the papal throne from 17 May 1410 to 29 May 1415.

Born into a family of Neapolitan aristocrats, Baldasare Cossa (who later became antipope John XXIII) had a short military career before joining the clergy. Moving up through the ranks, he became archdeacon of Bologna in 1396, cardinal deacon of St. Eustatius in 1402, and eventually legate of Bologna and Romagna. In defiance



Fig. 9. Miniature depicting John XXIII fleeing from the Council of Constance, accompanied by Frederick IV of Habsburg. Diebold Schilling, *Amtliche Berner Chronik*, c. 1478-1483. Bern, Burgerbibliothek, fol. CLXVIIv.

of Pope Gregory XII he went to Pisa, where, calling for a council to end the schism, he was instrumental in the election of a third rival claimant to the papacy, antipope Alexander V (1409-1410). After Alexander's death, Cossa was elected in Bologna as his successor, taking the name John XXIII. John XXIII was regarded by some as Peter's legitimate successor until Angelo Roncalli (1958-1963) decided to call himself John XXIII upon election to the papacy, relegating Baldassare Cossa to the ranks of antipopes once and for all. The legitimacy of the first John XXIII, although disputed, was not officially determined for five centuries.¹⁸

Of John XXIII's many actions, his excommunication of the Czech reformer Jan Hus (c. 1369-1415) in 1412 and the convening of the Council of Constance in 1414 (which restored unity to the Church) are particularly noteworthy (Fig. 8). At the Council the decision was taken to remove him from power. The trial was accompanied by numerous

explicit accusations of highly immoral behaviour. In this context, his alleged greed seemed to be with little more than an ordinary sin compared with much serious charges of sexual misconduct and poisoning.¹⁹ Regardless of whether the allegations of extreme immoral behaviour were true or fabricated, however, John XXIII was indisputably motivated by worldly ambition, like other popes of the time. Facing the abovementioned charges, he decided to escape from his trial held in Constance in 1415 using the patronage of Frederick IV of Habsburg (Fig. 9).²⁰ However, he was captured and imprisoned in Radolfzell on Lake Constance. A few years later, in 1419, he died as cardinal-bishop of Tusculum, reconciled with Pope Martin V.²¹

During the period of his claim to the papacy, only some European countries recognised John XXIII as the

¹⁸ Prignano 2019, 9.

¹⁹ Prignano 2019, 313.

²⁰ Albert 1898, 402-403; Brandmüller 1991, 226-235, 292-293; Prignano 2019, 462.

²¹ Prignano 2019.

legitimate head of the Church, including Bohemia, the Teutonic Order, England, France, and some countries of the German Reich,²² with Poland officially recognising him in 1411. John XXIII issued many documents for the Kingdom of Poland and the countries of the German Reich – more than 230 registers can be found in the *Bullarium Poloniae* and *Repertorium Germanicum*.²³ Information on papal documents also comes from other sources, i.e., state and church archives (see below).²⁴

Role of the Bull from Mierzyn in a regional and supra-regional context

Fortunately, the bull from Mierzyn was found in a context that allows for a wider analysis – it was located about 100 m to the south of the stronghold and about 400 m to the south of the parish church (Fig. 6). In this paper we discuss the circumstances under which it was found, and the related question of who the addressee of the letter was – most likely either the owners of Mierzyn or the clergy of the parish.

The seal may originally have been among the documents stored in the parish chancellery, from which it might have been removed with other unnecessary items to the surrounding fields during renovation work. Another possibility is that the bull, originally kept in the church, may have ended up at the nearby Nagodzice residence after some time. From there, it could have ended up in the fields during attempts to destroy the earthen mound, or been lost accidentally during transport to another location. This thesis could be substantiated by the fact that the parish priest of Mierzyn was the owner of the estates in the village (one Jan Mierski, mentioned in Jan Łaski's *Liber Beneficiorum* in 1521). He also held the office of Sieradz deputy wine steward (*subpinerna*) at that time (mentioned in 1519).²⁵ Thus, he could theoretically have been the person who transferred the documents from the church to the manor house on the mound or its immediate area. Of course, it cannot be ruled out that such a translocation had already taken place in the 15th century during the tenure of an earlier parish priest. Unfortunately, the identification of the 'decision-maker' is hampered by the lack of relevant sources.

Another explanation (which seems least likely to us) is that the bull was lost during the transport of the document in unexplained circumstances. This would be related to Mierzyn's location on the road leading from Toruń to Kraków, which in this area ran from Rozprza towards Cieszanowice, passing just south

of the village. Whether it could have been lost by the papal collector on the road leading from the south to Mierzyn is difficult to judge.

Bulls found in non-urban centres in Europe are discovered among the fields where they are assumed to have ended up together with layers of refuse and waste that were disposed of outside the city. This interpretation makes sense for suburban locations such as Mierzyn.²⁶

The second life of bulls is also evidenced. We have examples of recycling – adapting a lead seal to function as a spindle whorl by cutting a hole in the middle of it (cf. Table 1),²⁷ using it as an amulet by punching a hole for hanging, or repurposing it into weights by cutting it into smaller pieces.²⁸ Of their use as spindle whorls, Eleonore Standley writes: 'Their consecrated nature and decoration suggests, however, that their selection was more symbolic and pious, rather than simply practical.'²⁹

In the case of finds from the fields, an agrarian-apotropaic function is also considered, with the bull being part of a late medieval votive tradition in the countryside. It is assumed that the objects were deliberately placed in the ground with the intention of ensuring a good harvest.³⁰ M. H. Bartels considers the possibility that bulls were even sold or gifted by local clergy to farmers.³¹ The burying of silver coins and devotional items was also supposed to be a manifestation of folk efforts to influence the harvest.³²

Other archaeological finds of bulls of John XXIII from Polish and European lands

The bull of John XXIII from Mierzyn is not the only object of its kind from the Polish lands – it is the second example whose discovery was accompanied by an archaeological context. The first was a half of a bull from Brzezcie near Opatów, found in 2014.³³

The number of archaeological bull finds in Poland is gradually increasing. The reason for this is the widespread use of metal detectors. In the UK, where regulations concerning the use of metal detectors are very different compared to the much stricter Polish

²² Giergiel et al. 2015, 29.

²³ *Bullarium Poloniae*, nos. 1243-1479; *Repertorium Germanicum*.

²⁴ Cf. Giergiel et al. 2015, 30-31.

²⁵ *Liber Beneficiorum*, 192; Baranowska 2018, 16.

²⁶ Bartels 2017, 323-325.

²⁷ Cf. Standley 2016, 284-285. The bulls of Innocent VI (1352-1362); John XXIII, found at Brompton on Swale (North Yorkshire); and Innocent IV (1243-54), found at Dunkeld, had been converted into spindle whorls.

²⁸ Bull of Pope Paschalis I (817-824) detected in the Frome Valley in Herefordshire in 2007, Ravell 2004, 1-2.

²⁹ Standley 2016, 285.

³⁰ Verspay 2013, 42-44, 64.

³¹ Bartels 2017, 329.

³² Verspay 2013, 42-44, 64.

³³ Giergiel et al. 2015.

Table 1. Bulls of antipope John XXIII. A selection of finds from archaeological contexts.

Site	State of preservation	Diameter [mm]	Thickness [mm]	Weight	Context	References
Poland						
Mierzyn	Whole	36-38	4,5-5,5	43	Motte-and-bailey castle – suburbium. Metal detector	-
Brzezie	Half	37	5	-	Farm and manor house. Metal detector	Giergiel et al. 2015.
France						
Saint-Omer, Saint-Bertin Abbey	-	-	-	-	Abbey. Inside the church. Probably from a grave.	Dąbrowska-Zawadzka and Comte 1995, 209; De Laplane 1846, 280.
Évron, Benedictine Abbey, Notre-Dame	-	-	-	-	Abbey, burial in crypt under choir, bull between the bones of the right hand placed at chest level: Simon de Boiscornu, abbot of Évron (1416 ?)	Aubin 1988, 160-162; Dąbrowska-Zawadzka and Comte 1995, annexe; Sanke 2009.
England						
Shimpling (Suffolk country) Unique ID: SF-24E3BA	Whole	34,45×35,94	5,71	49,58	Metal detector, 2019	http://finds.org.uk
Epsom and Ewell (Surrey County) Unique ID: SUR-91AB24	Whole	39,28	-	50,3	Metal detector, 2016	Christie et al. 2017, 411, Fig. 4d. https://finds.org.uk
Teffont Parish (Wiltshire County) Unique ID: WILT-5D31FF	Whole	38,55	-	47,29	Metal detector, 2015	https://finds.org.uk
Brailles Parish (Warwickshire County) Unique ID: WAW-058B25	Whole, with a damaged surface.	38,63	5,74	51,1	Metal detector, 2012	http://finds.org.uk
Bardney Parish (Lincolnshire County) Unique ID: NCL-47CBF6	Half	36,22×19,02	6,29	24,8	Metal detector, 2010	http://finds.org.uk
Brompton-on-Swale (North Yorkshire County) Unique ID: SWYOR-F52016	Whole, with a hole in the middle – adapted as a spindle whorl	36,16	6,9	43,97	Metal detector, 2009	Downes 2009. https://finds.org.uk
Suffolk Stowmarket (Suffolk County) Unique ID: SF6390	Whole, with a damaged surface.	36,5	5	45,29	Metal detector, 2001	http://finds.org.uk
Germany						
Konstanz	Whole	c. 40	-	-	Metal detector, 2018	www.suedkurier.de

law, there are more finds of this kind (Fig. 10). There are 518 papal bulls in the Portable Antiquities Scheme database. Forty such artefacts are known from the Netherlands.³⁴ There is also a significant list of bulls discovered in the burials of bishops, abbots, and members of the lay elite, primarily from England, France, and Denmark.³⁵

In contrast, in the case of Poland, as late as 2013 (Zbigniew Misiuk) and in 2015 (Tomasz Giergiel), researchers publishing discoveries from Kunowice, Słubice District, and from Brzezie, Opatów District, mentioned only eight bulls.³⁶ These included three seals discovered in Kraków³⁷ and two more in Poznań on


³⁴ Bartels 2017.

³⁵ Dąbrowska-Zawadzka and Comte 1995; Sanke 2009.

³⁶ Misiuk 2013, 161; Giergiel et al. 2015, 38.

³⁷ Two bulls of Pope Boniface IX were found in Queen Jadwiga's tomb in Wawel Cathedral in 1949, Bochnak 1968. The third



Fig. 10. Finds of bulls of antipope John XXIII from England: 1 – Babergh District (SF-24E3BA); 2 – Epsom and Ewell District (SUR – 91AB24); 3 – Wiltshire District (WILT-5D31FF); 4 – West Lindsey District (NCL-47CBF6); 5 – Richmondshire District (SWYOR-F52016); 6 – Mid Suffolk District (SF6390). Source: The Portable Antiquities Scheme 

Ostrów Tumski in the vicinity of the cathedral.³⁸ Single relics were uncovered by archaeological research in the Old Town in Gdańsk,³⁹ on the grounds of the Cistercian monastery in Kołbacz,⁴⁰ in the Teutonic Knights' castle in Człuchów,⁴¹ and on the grounds of the castle in Grodno in Lower Silesia.⁴² However, only three years later, Borys Paszkiewicz, discussing a bull discovered at the 'Plac Nowy Targ' site in Wrocław, listed a total of more than twenty such objects. In doing so, he indicated that these seals may not have been properly recognised previously.⁴³ The increase in the number of finds is also linked to the use of metal detectors

during excavations and the development of cooperation between archaeologists and search groups. Thus, to the list of B. Paszkiewicz, further specimens can be added, such as the bull of Pope Alexander IV (1254-1261) found in the surroundings of the Collegiate Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Uniejów, Poddębice District,⁴⁴ and two specimens coming from the Lubuskie Region.⁴⁵

In Poland, the larger collection of antipope John XXIII's bulls comes from archives – approximately 20 seals have been preserved with documents to which they were attached.⁴⁶ Many such bulls are in the collection of the XX Czartoryscy Foundation at the National Museum in Kraków. Out of a total of six documents, four have preserved lead bulls – for example, the seal

bull, of Pope Alexander IV (1254-1261), was found during archaeological research in 1962 at Wawel Hill, Wiktor-Kisza 2003.

³⁸ These are the seals of Popes Calixtus III (1455-1458) and Martin V (1417-1431), Giergiel et al. 2015, 38.

³⁹ The seal of Gregory IX (1227-1241), Cynowa and Trawicka 2006.

⁴⁰ Kuczyński 1990, 65.

⁴¹ The seal of Gregory XI (1370-1378), Paszkiewicz 2018, 714.

⁴² The bulla of Benedict XIII (1394-1417), Orlicki 2021.

⁴³ Paszkiewicz 2018, 713-715.

⁴⁴ Charuba 2020, 5; Szymczak 2021, 46-47.

⁴⁵ <https://zielonagora.naszemiasto.pl/sensacja-w-lubuskiem-znaleziono-trzy-papieskie/ar/c7-7261839>, access 29.07.2022. Unfortunately, no further information is available about these finds.

⁴⁶ Giergiel et al. 2015, 30. In this collection, about half no longer have their bulls preserved today, or only their tag has survived.

attached to the act proclaiming King Władysław Jagiełło as the general vicar for Greater Novgorod and Pskov in 1415 is in excellent condition (Fig. 11).⁴⁷ It is interesting to note some variation in the material on which these imprints were hung. Usually, it is silk thread in red and gold/yellow colours (cat. no parchment nos. 307 and 309), and less frequently hemp cord (cat. no parchment no. 308).⁴⁸ Seals on a red/yellow/golden silk tag can also be found, among others, in the archives of St. Wenceslas Cathedral in Kraków,⁴⁹ Kraków University,⁵⁰ AGAD in Warszawa (inv. no. 2481),⁵¹ and in the Monastery in Mogiła near Kraków.⁵² In turn, apart from the Czartoryscy collection, hemp ropes are also recorded in documents from the archives of the Poznań chapter cathedral and the chapter of the Gniezno archdiocese (no. 333),⁵³ AGAD (inv. Nos. 2472, 4395, 4396),⁵⁴ and the Corpus Christi monastery in Kraków (no. A. 35).⁵⁵ The type of textile tag used was related to the rank of the document issued – from the 13th century onwards, a silk cord (dyed) denoted a document with graces or privileges (*Bull of Grace*), while a hemp cord denoted a document with excommunication or other judicial orders (*Bull of Justice*).⁵⁶

Several papal bulls addressed to Polish recipients are known from the period of John XXIII's pontificate. A supplication sent in the late summer of 1410 to John XXIII for permission to keep in Polish churches the church valuables taken from Prussia in 1410 was answered positively by the Pope.⁵⁷ Most were received by Władysław Jagiełło, the first of which, such as those of 21 and 28 July 1410 and 28 September 1411, confirming all previous privileges and statutes of the University of Kraków, were addressed directly to the king.⁵⁸ But in a letter of 22 September 1411, the pope wrote to the

king not to demand immediate payment from the Teutonic Order of its debts of 100,000 score groschen.⁵⁹ There were also more personal requests, such as that contained in a letter of 4 May 1412 from Rome, for the king to support him in his battle against the condottiero Sforza and to convince Sigismund of Luxembourg to do so.⁶⁰ Three bulls are known from 1412: from 16 May, in which, at the king's request, he instructed the abbot of Paradyż to take up the matter of endowing the abbey in Wieleń;⁶¹ from 26 August, addressed to the bishop-elect of Halych, Jan Rzeszowski, with permission for him to retain his existing benefices;⁶² and from 28 August, on raising the episcopate of Lviv (*Lwów*) to the dignity of metropolis, at the king's request.⁶³ From 1414 we also know of three bulls, all with January dates: one from Mantua, dated 5 January, that, at the king's request, ordered that in future only nobles and persons with university degrees should be admitted to the higher dignities of the Gniezno church,⁶⁴ which he also communicated to the Kraków Cathedral Chapter in a bull dated 15 January.⁶⁵ Finally, in a bull dated 15 January in Mantua, he instructed the Bishop of Kraków, Wojciech Jastrzębiec, to merge the Norbertine convents of Busko, Imbramowice, Krzyżanowice, and Zwierzyniec into two monasteries, in order to observe the monastic rule more strictly.⁶⁶

From the last five months of John XXIII's pontificate comes his still quite numerous and important correspondence, held from Constance until March 1415. At the request of Polish King Władysław II Jagiełło and the Grand Duke of Lithuania Witold, by a bull of 17 January, John XXIII abolished all the privileges of the Teutonic Order that applied to their subordinate lands. On the other hand, on 26 February, John XXIII appointed King Władysław II Jagiełło vicar-general *in spiritualibus* in Novgorod and Pskov and their adjoining lands.

Finally, on 15 March – responding to royal supplications – he authorised the collection of half of the annual church revenues for the purpose of fighting the infidel Tatars.⁶⁷

It is known, however, that all the papal bulls of John XXIII presented above have a preserved seal,⁶⁸ and therefore none of them can be linked to the discussed bull of Mierzyn. Thus, how and why the

⁴⁷ Fałkowski et al. 2006, 93-94, cat. no. 14; Giergiel et al. 2015, 27-28, fig. 2.

⁴⁸ *Codex epistolaris*, nos. 40, 50, 55, 57-59, pp. 47-48, 56-57, 63-64, 67-71.

⁴⁹ *Kodeks dyplomatyczny katedry*, no. 557, pp. 396-398, bull of 17 January 1415 issued at Constance.

⁵⁰ *Codex diplomaticus*, no. 47, pp. 87-91, bull of 28 June 1410 issued at Bologna.

⁵¹ *Zbiory*, no. 197, bull of 28 September 1411 at Rome, cf. also http://agad.gov.pl/inwentarze/preg_work.xml, access 05.08.2022.

⁵² *Diplomata*, no. 119, pp. 100-101.

⁵³ *KDW*, no. 230 and 240, bulls of 20 April and 28 June 1414 issued at Bologna.

⁵⁴ *Zbiory*, nos. 184 and 205: bulls issued successively: 22 June 1410 at Bologna, 22 September 1411 at Rome, and 15 January 1414 at Mantua, cf. also http://agad.gov.pl/inwentarze/preg_work.xml, access 05.08.2022.

⁵⁵ *Zbiory*, no. 191, bull issued on 12 May 1411 in Rome.

⁵⁶ Fałkowski et al. 2006, 198.

⁵⁷ Józwiak et al. 2010, 562-563.

⁵⁸ *Codex diplomaticus*, nos. 46-48, pp. 84-93; see also Drabina 2003, 133, 142.

⁵⁹ *Codex diplomaticus Lithuaniae*, no. 9, pp. 146-148; see also Drabina 2003, 132.

⁶⁰ *Codex epistolaris*, no. 50; see also Drabina 2003, 132.

⁶¹ *Bullarium Poloniae*, no. 1370; see also Drabina 2003, 142.

⁶² *Bullarium Poloniae*, no. 1396; see also Drabina 2003, 142.

⁶³ *Vetera*, no. 8; cf. Drabina 2003, 142.

⁶⁴ *Codex epistolaris*, no. 55; see also Drabina 2003, 142.

⁶⁵ *Statuta*, 169-170; see also Drabina 2003, 142.

⁶⁶ *Zbiór*, no. 205; see also Drabina 2003, 142.

⁶⁷ *Codex epistolaris*, nos. 57-59; Drabina 2003, 132.

⁶⁸ *Codex epistolaris*, nos. 50, 55, 57-59.



Fig. 11. Bull attached to the document proclaiming King Władysław Jagiełło as Vicar General for Greater Novgorod and Pskov in 1415. Source: Falkowski et al. 2006, cat. no. 14.

seal found its way to Mierzyn? Of the Polish men in John XXIII's papal curia (Adam of Będków, Piotr Bołeścic, Paweł Włodkowic, Piotr of Kobylin, and Paweł of Czechow⁶⁹) none came from the immediate vicinity of Mierzyn. The persons of John XXIII's 17 envoys to Poland, including 11 nuncios, are also known.⁷⁰

One possible answer is that the pope's lively activity on the Polish-Lithuanian-Teutonic conflict and in many other areas – especially ecclesiastical – may significantly expand the list of John XXIII's bulls⁷¹ and contribute to solving the mystery of the Mierzyn bull in the future.

Concluding remarks

The circumstances that caused a bull of John XXIII to be found in the vicinity of the knight's seat in Mierzyn

are not fully explained; the main obstacle is the state of preservation of written sources from the 14th and 15th centuries concerning the Nagodzice family. Regardless of who the addressee of the papal letter was, however, it is clear that it is a unique object testifying to Mierzyn's place in the supra-regional network of contacts linking Polish lands with centres of European ecclesiastical power. Archaeologically, only a small fraction of the medieval knight's seat has been recognised so far. The results of the research to date are promising, and further work may fill the information gap created by the destruction of the archives in 1944. We hope that further archaeological research will yield new data which will allow this puzzle to be solved.

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