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**CHRISTIANISATION OF THE PIAST MONARCHY  
IN THE 10th AND 11th CENTURIES**

I

Which facts testify to the beginning of the Christianisation process of a given country and which ones indicate its conclusion? This is a question which was posed by Barbara Yorke in her work on early medieval England.<sup>1</sup> In her opinion, the process of Christianisation starts with the conversion of the first monarch and ends at the time when there are no more pagan rulers on the throne. In accordance with these principles, the author assumes that the Christianisation of England began with the baptism of the king of Kent, Æthelbert, that is most probably in 597. During the course of almost one hundred years however, there was a kaleidoscopic pattern of the occupation of the thrones of individual Anglo-Saxon kingdoms by pagan and Christian rulers and also pagan rulers who later accepted Christianity and Christian ones who committed apostasy. This continued until the 680s, when a pagan assumed power for the last time, which marked the end of the period of the Christianisation process.

Yorke also focused her attention on some other facts allowing a determination of whether and to what extent a ruling house of the period was attached to Christianity. The most important among those

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Yorke, 'The Reception of Christianity at the Anglo-Saxon Royal Court', in Richard Gameson (ed.), *Saint Augustine and the Conversion of England* (Stroud, 1999), 152-73, esp.: 161-5.

facts is the phenomenon of the destruction of pagan sanctuaries. This, to be precise, did not always happen in the first generation after the conversion. In Kent, for example, those mentioned sanctuaries had not been liquidated until forty years after the baptism of the first king, during the reign of his grandson, despite the fact that there was no vacancy on the bishop's throne during that whole period. This testifies to the detachment which Christian rulers maintained from their new religion. On the other hand, there are recognised cases which prove their far reaching identification with the faith of Christ. For example, from the beginning of the 630s onwards, some monarchs happened to step down from the throne to join a religious order. There was also an increasing tendency for rulers to send their daughters to nunneries. Towards the close of the seventh century every Anglo-Saxon kingdom had its own monastery where female members of the royal family served God. A final factor are the canonisations which were taking place already in the 7th century: kings, especially martyrs who had died on the battlefield, and females from the royal family, were venerated as saints.

The concept of Christianisation which is used by Barbara Yorke could be considered as minimalist. She does not ask whether also common people accepted the new faith and whether this was a profound change. She considers opinions and religious practices of the monarch and his family as the crucial indicators.

This is the approach to the subject which will be adopted in this article. This does not mean that the author does not recognise the importance of research into the problem of evangelisation, conversion, and Christianisation of the whole Polish people.<sup>2</sup> However, for such an early period such a study encounters hindrances which

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<sup>2</sup> The studies concerning the Christianisation of Poland are numerous. Among the most important are works by Aleksander Gieysztor, e.g. 'Les paliers de la pénétration du christianisme en Pologne au X<sup>e</sup>-XI<sup>e</sup> siècle', in *Studi in onore di Amintore Fanfani*, i (Milan, 1962), 329-67; 'Le fonctionnement des institutions ecclésiastiques rurales en Bohême, en Pologne et en Hongrie aux X<sup>e</sup> et XI<sup>e</sup> siècles', in *Cristianizzazione ed organizzazione ecclesiastica delle campagne nell'alto medioevo* (Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 28, Spoleto, 1982), 925-54. I myself also took part in the discussion on this subject several times, e.g. *La christianisation de la Pologne aux X<sup>e</sup>-XII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, in Michel Rouche (ed.), *Clovis. Histoire et mémoire*, ii: *Le baptême de Clovis, son écho à travers l'histoire* (Paris, 1997), 419-34.

are difficult to overcome. Written sources are too scarce, and the archaeological material which is used for this purpose is hardly ever possible to interpret unambiguously. On the other hand, the analysis of the process of Christianisation focused on an individual ruler makes a good point of departure because in the conditions created by early medieval Europe the new religion spread across previously pagan countries thanks to the conversion of the monarch.

Let us apply to the Polish material the conceptual template, worked out for the needs of the study of the situation in Anglo-Saxon England. There is a highly characteristic fact which immediately attracts one's attention. Here, from the conversion of the first ruler onwards, the throne of Poland was occupied incessantly by Christians, and none of them committed apostasy. Only the conduct of Bezprym can be open to question. Some argue that, reaching for the rank of duke in 1031, he abandoned Christianity.<sup>3</sup> This point, however, does not seem to be particularly convincing.<sup>4</sup> Also, another doubt arises. Was it not the case, as traditional history maintains, that in the early days of the rule of Casimir the Restorer, or after he had left the country, rule over the territory passed to local dukes who disavowed Christianity in a wave of pagan reaction?<sup>5</sup> This was indeed the course of events in peripheral Pomerania,<sup>6</sup> but in turn Miećław, who took over the rule in Masovia at this time, was certainly not an apostate.<sup>7</sup> We do not know either whether any ducal power crystallised in the heart of the Piast state, Greater Poland. It is rather doubtful.<sup>8</sup> Even if this was so, the ruler

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<sup>3</sup> Gerard Labuda, *Mieszko II król polski (1025–1034). Czasy przełomu w dziejach państwa polskiego* (Rozprawy Akademii Umiejętności, Wydział historyczno-filozoficzny 73, Cracow, 1992), 85–6.

<sup>4</sup> See Zbyszko Górczak, 'Bunt Bezpryma jako początek tzw. reakcji pogańskiej w Polsce', in Jerzy Strzelczyk and Józef Dobosz (eds.), *Nihil superfluum esse. Studia z dziejów średniowiecza ofiarowane Profesor Jadwidze Krzyżaniakowej* (Poznań, 2000), 111–21.

<sup>5</sup> A general overview of the problem of apostasy in Poland of the 1030s is presented by Jerzy Strzelczyk, 'Der Volksaustand in Polen in den 30er Jahren des 11. Jahrhunderts und seine Rolle während der Krise des frühpiastischen Staates', *Zeitschrift für Archäologie*, xviii (1984), 134–5 (the whole article on 129–40).

<sup>6</sup> Aleksander Gięsztor, 'Trzy stulecia najdawniejszego Mazowsza (połowa X – połowa XIII w.)', in Aleksander Gięsztor and Henryk Samsonowicz (eds.), *Dzieje Mazowsza do 1526 roku* (Warsaw, 1994), 100.

<sup>7</sup> Janusz Bieniak, *Państwo Miećława* (Warsaw, 1963), 24–5, *passim*.

<sup>8</sup> Henryk Łowmiański, *Początki Polski*, vi, part 1 (Warsaw, 1985), 72–3.

here may not have favoured paganism. One piece of evidence of this is that Gniezno Cathedral with its furnishings, dripping with gold and jewellery, remained intact until the invasion of Břetislav (in 1038 or 1039). As can be observed, the Polans were not familiar with the apostasy of a ruler.

This produces the following conclusion: if we considered the most important criterion used by Barbara Yorke as the basis of our considerations, we would have to assert that in the state of the Polans, Christianisation took place instantly. So we are facing a situation which is completely different from the Anglo-Saxon countries. It is worth trying to explain this difference.

In England it was the political instability which was the cause of the pattern of religious change.<sup>9</sup> In the discussed period, continuous fights between individual kingdoms took place. Whereas some of them made attempts to gain hegemony, some others defended themselves from being marginalised and losing independence. The preponderance of one ruler over others was often relative and impermanent. Sooner or later it turned out to be disastrous. Political and military defeats and the uncertain future made the rulers confront the dilemma of which religion to choose: Christianity or traditional cults. It was not only the case of the prudence of social engineering, to provide oneself with the biggest possible number of allies. The major problem lay elsewhere. Which religion – it was asked – would bring favours from Heaven more efficiently? The answer was far from simple. There was a common consent that political and military success was a criterion for assessing the effectiveness of a religion. If this was the case, a military defeat induced one to abandon previous beliefs and look for good fortune elsewhere. It turned out soon, however, that also this new faith did not guarantee only success. This gave rise to temptation, why not return to the old religion?

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<sup>9</sup> The most significant work on this subject: Nicholas J. Higham, *The Convert Kings: Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester and New York, 1997), *passim*; among other works – there are many studies that could be mentioned – several are of especial value: Arnold Angenendt, 'The Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons Considered against the Background of the Early Medieval England', in *Angli e Sassoni al di qua e al di là del Mare* (Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 32, Spoleto, 1986), ii, 2, pp. 747–81; Henry Mayr-Harting, *Two Conversions to Christianity: The Bulgarians and the Anglo-Saxons* (The Stenton Lecture, 1993, Reading, 1994).

The situation in Poland was completely different. Throughout the whole 10th century the state of the Polans grew in power and expanded its territory. Using archaeological methods, the origins of this thriving political creation can be dated back to the first decades of the above-mentioned century.<sup>10</sup> The state we discuss was concentrated at that time around such strongholds as Gniezno, Grzybowo, Giecz, Poznań, and Ostrów Lednicki. At first it covered a small territory. However, the area of the territorial power of the Polans grew rapidly. Even though the reconstruction of respective stages in the expansion with the consideration of the chronology of events encounters certain problems, the majority of scholars agree that until the end of the 10th century the Piast state incorporated Pomerania (at least large areas of it with Gdańsk and Kołobrzeg), Culm Land, Kuyavia, Masovia, Sandomierz Land, Cracow Land, Silesia, and Lubusz Land. In the first quarter of the 11th century the territorial expansion of the empire encountered some bigger difficulties, yet it still progressed, despite the fact that simultaneously some lands were lost by the Polans irretrievably (part of Pomerania with Kołobrzeg). Boleslav the Brave conquered Moravia, Milsko, and Lusatia, and Red Rus'. The occupation of Prague ended with a failure, but the capture of Kiev, even though the Poles had to withdraw from the town, was commonly considered to be a success.

The circumstances in which the ruler's actions were to a substantial degree successful did not induce him to look for another religion for his current faith turned out to be effective enough. Thus it becomes clear why neither Mieszko I nor Boleslav the Brave felt the temptation to commit apostasy. But the successes of the Piasts had begun already in pagan times. The question arises how Mieszko's conversion was at all possible in those circumstances. First of all,

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<sup>10</sup> Of fundamental importance for the discussion on the problem of the origins and territorial development of the Piast state is the research conducted by Zofia Kurnatowska, published in a number of works; the concise characteristic of the problem, *eadem*, 'The Organisation of the Polish State – Possible Interpretations of Archaeological Sources', *Quaestiones Mediaevi Novae*, 1 (1996), 5–24; among later works, *eadem*, 'Proces formowania się państwa gnieźnieńskiego', in Wojciech Chudziak (ed.), *Civitas Schinesghe cum pertinentiis* (Toruń, 2003), 33–49; 'Kraków i Ziemia Krakowska w procesie formowania się państwowości na ziemiach polskich', in *Lapides viventes. Zaginiony Kraków wieków średnich. Księga dedykowana Profesor Klementynie Żurowskiej* (Cracow, 2005), 21–7.

one has to realise that it happened during a political crisis. In 963 or slightly later (in any case before 966) the duke of the Polans was badly defeated in the war against the Veleti (Volinians?), who were commanded by the Saxon troublemaker Wichmann. Probably at the same time a conflict with the Germans took place, which ended with the Polish duke's military and diplomatic defeat. The ruler was made to recognise the superiority of the emperor, which probably involved the obligation to pay tribute to him.<sup>11</sup> The alliance with the Czech duke, augmented by the marriage to his daughter, was an effective attempt to end this crisis.

In the following year the duke of the Polans accepted Christianity. No details are known regarding this event, and we can only assume what reasons the monarch had in mind to take these steps.<sup>12</sup> It is difficult to doubt, however, that the conversion was, at least in its part, the result of a marriage to a Christian princess. One also has to accept the point that the new faith was to assist the convert in moving within this newly built political structure, where such an important place was held by the Christian powers: the Empire and Bohemia. There is a question, however, why Mieszko so light-heartedly distanced himself from the traditional cults which had been witnessing victories of the dukes of the Polans for decades. The answer is that recent defeats cast doubt on the value of the religion inherited from the ancestors. It turned out to be worthless in the confrontation with the Veleti, Wichmann, and Gero I. Mieszko concluded his war of 967 against Wichmann and the Veleti to his advantage. He had already been Christian, so this victory must have augmented his belief that he

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<sup>11</sup> Such a view definitely prevails in numerous studies devoted to this subject. A different point of view is represented first of all by Gerard Labuda, *Studia nad początkami państwa polskiego* (Poznań, 1946), 5–54 (and many later works). The author refuses to accept the opinion about the conflict between Mieszko and the Germans in 963 but confirmed for 972. In this scholar's view the tribute was not the result of the defeat.

<sup>12</sup> There is a large number of studies of the circumstances and causes of Mieszko I's baptism. Among the most important works are: Henryk Łowmiański, 'Imię chrzestne Mieszka I' (1st edn, 1948), in *idem*, *Studia nad dziejami Słowiańszczyzny, Polski i Rusi w wiekach średnich* (Poznań, 1986), 286–356; Gerard Labuda, 'Jakimi drogami przyszło do Polski chrześcijaństwo?', *Nasza Przyszłość*, 66 (1988), 39–82; Stanisław Trawkowski, 'Początki Kościoła w Polsce za panowania Mieszka I', in Jan M. Piskorski (ed.), *Polska Mieszka I. W tysiąclecie śmierci twórcy państwa i Kościoła polskiego* (Poznań, 1993), 51–72.

had chosen the right religion, as it provided him with the blessing of supernatural powers. And after the triumph of 967 further victories were won, such as in the battle at Cedynia (972), where Mieszko settled his accounts with the Germans.

I am inclined to express the view that the military and political successes of the Christian rulers – Mieszko I and Boleslav the Brave – were the cause of their huge attachment to the religion of Christ. However, this was not the only reason. Of great significance was undoubtedly Mieszko's and Boleslav the Brave's cooperation with the emperor and the German aristocracy.<sup>13</sup> This cooperation was fostered by the geopolitical situation.

Between Poland and Saxony stretched the Slavic Polabian territory. With its attachment to paganism and independence, for whole decades it resisted the military expansion of the German kingdom, which was assisted by strenuous evangelisation. It was the Piasts who were natural allies of the German elites, equally interested in the expansion into the Polabian territories. This alliance became especially important after the Slavic uprising, which started in 983 and wiped out the German rule over the Veleti and Obodrite tribes. Both Mieszko I and Boleslav the Brave provided their support for the military expeditions of the emperor's troops against the Slavic 'rebels'. More or less independently from this strategic alliance, the house of the Piasts established, through marriages and friendship, links with the emperor's family, as well as with the Saxon, Bavarian, and Lotharingian aristocracies. The marriages and political cooperation gave the Polish dukes the opportunity to maintain religious contacts with great religious institutions in Germany, such as Magdeburg Cathedral, the monasteries in Fulda and Lüneburg, or St Michael's Abbey in Bamberg. All this contributed to the fact that the Piast rulers and their families quickly assimilated ideas and values that were propelled by the Christian religion, with which they eagerly identified themselves.

These facts were complemented by one more significant factor: Boleslav the Brave was engaged by Otto III to help realise a great

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<sup>13</sup> Herbert Ludat, *An Elbe und Oder um das Jahr 1000. Skizzen zur Politik des Ottonenreiches und der slavischen Mächte in Mitteleuropa* (Cologne and Vienna, 1971); Andrzej Pleszczyński, *Niemcy wobec pierwszej monarchii piastowskiej (963–1034). Narodziny stereotypu. Postrzeżenie i cywilizacyjna klasyfikacja władców Polski i ich kraju* (Lublin, 2008).

political and religious enterprise, which was the restoration of the Imperium Romanum.<sup>14</sup> At the Gniezno congress of 1000 the Polish duke assumed the office, specially created for him, of the collaborator of the empire.<sup>15</sup> Boleslav did not abandon the empire or break his links with it, quite the contrary – he assumed certain responsibilities within its structure. *Cooperator Imperii* – this was a dignity of very high rank. Suffice it to say that the collaborator of the Empire received as a gift a copy of the sacred spear, the most important German royal insignia. It is noteworthy that Otto III put the imperial diadem on the head of somebody whom he was making his collaborator. Even though we cannot precisely determine the meaning of this gesture, it is difficult to doubt that an intention to exceptionally honour the Pole lay behind it.

Boleslav the Brave accepted Otto III's offer and eagerly took pride in the new office which he held on the emperor's behalf. This is proven by the content of the *Liber de passione s. Adalberti*, the life of saint Adalbert, which has not been preserved – the work which was used by Gallus Anonymous. The accumulation of facts depicting the greatness and position of the Polish ruler allows one to assume that the hagiographer attempted to show the point of view of the Polish court.<sup>16</sup> Yet this accumulation also proves how much this new dignity of Boleslav was appreciated in Gniezno.

There has been a conviction prevailing in historical studies for many years that the Polish duke remained loyal to the ideology of the cooperation with the Empire also after Otto III's death.<sup>17</sup> There was, however, a war between Boleslav and Henry II which lasted almost uninterruptedly for a dozen or so years. This circumstance *per se* does not speak against such a supposition. It is known that Henry II

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<sup>14</sup> On the concept of 'renovatio Imperii Romanorum' and its place in Otto III's ideology see my remarks: Roman Michałowski, *Zjazd gnieźnieński. Religijne przesłanki powstania arcybiskupstwa gnieźnieńskiego* (Wrocław, 2005), 261–311 (there the bibliography of the most important works on the subject).

<sup>15</sup> Tomasz Jasiński, 'Tytułatura Bolesława Chrobrego na Zjeździe Gnieźnieńskim', in Marek Derwich, Wojciech Mrozowicz and Rościsław Żerelik (eds.), *Memoriae amici et magistri. Studia historyczne poświęcone pamięci Prof. Waclawa Korty (1919–1999)* (Wrocław, 2001), 23–31; my view: *Zjazd gnieźnieński*, 219–41.

<sup>16</sup> On this source concisely Gerard Labuda, *Święty Wojciech biskup-męczennik, patron Polski, Czech i Węgier* (Wrocław, 2004), 24–7.

<sup>17</sup> This is first of all the opinion of Ludat, *An Elbe*, 67–92, esp. 86.



did not offer Boleslav the Brave a position as prestigious as the one given by Otto III. Therefore, one has the right to suspect that it was a specific policy of the German king which was the fundamental cause of Boleslav's stance, not the hostility of the Polish ruler towards the Empire as such. In this context scholars indicate a highly significant factor: here the grandson of Boleslav, Casimir, born in 1016, was given Charles as his middle name.<sup>18</sup> This induces an assumption that the Polish duke designated his grandson to play a significant role in the restoration of the Empire – the grandson who was, after all, the successor of the emperors on his maternal side.

It is obviously possible that Boleslav the Brave's attitude fluctuated. Thus in 1007 the monarch invaded the property of the archbishop of Magdeburg, breaking off the brotherhood, which had linked him with the local canons. By doing so, he ceased to be the servant of the patron saint of the arch-cathedral – St Maurice. Does this not mean the questioning of the Gniezno ideology, as the saint's spear, which was in the possession of the ruler as the collaborator of the Empire, was the spear of the Commander of the Theban Legion?<sup>19</sup> This is an issue which is worth further consideration. On the other hand, however, one has to remember that the wedding ceremony between Mieszko II and Richeza of Lotharingia, the granddaughter of Emperor Otto II, took place after the Magdeburg conflict (1013). Boleslav, impressed by this marriage, could have come to terms with the Gniezno ideology again, provided he had ever distanced himself from it before.

Tasks of a religious character were on top of the list of duties performed by the collaborator of the Empire. Otto III established this office having been inspired by the letter to the Philippians by St Paul (2, 25).<sup>20</sup> There is a mention in it of an Epaphroditus who St Paul sends to the Philippians as his brother and collaborator. Otto III assumed the title of servant of Jesus Christ (*servus Iesu Christi*) for the time of his pilgrimage to Gniezno, in other words he entitled himself as St Paul had before, e.g. in the quoted letter. The

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<sup>18</sup> Stanisław Kętrzyński, 'Karol Wielki i Bolesław Chrobry', *Przegląd Historyczny*, xxxvi (1946), 19–25.

<sup>19</sup> Roman Michałowski, 'Bolesław Chrobry bratem kanoników magdeburskich. Próba nowego spojrzenia', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, cxii, 3 (2005), 55–68.

<sup>20</sup> Jasiński, 'Tytulatura Bolesława', *passim*.

emperor considered himself to be an apostle.<sup>21</sup> He went to Poland to strengthen the local infant Christianity, and to provide it with the means needed to carry out the mission among the neighbouring pagan tribes. Hence the establishing of the church province of Gniezno and hence the providing of Boleslav the Brave with suitable prerogatives and other instruments of the rule (e.g. the spear of St Maurice). The Polish ruler was to be Otto III's collaborator the way Epaphroditus was the collaborator of St Paul.

Therefore, if we investigate the factors that induced Boleslav to identify himself with Christianity it is not enough to say that he collaborated with the emperor to realise his political ideas. At the same time it has to be added that this was a thoroughly religious idea and that the tasks for Boleslav the Brave were thoroughly religious. Highly appreciating the role he played in the efforts of the restoration of the Roman Empire, he also must have appreciated what constituted the essence of this undertaking, namely a concern for the strengthening of Christianity in his own country, for the mission among pagans, and for the extension of the Church organisation.

## II

The first Piasts' support for Christianity manifested itself in their legislative activity. This information comes from the chronicle by Thietmar of Merseburg. In 1018 he wrote the following:

In huius [i.e. Oda's] sponsi regno sunt multae consuetudines variae; et quamvis dirae, tamen sunt interdum laudabiles. Populus enim suus more bovis est pascendus et tardi ritu asini castigandus et sine poena gravi non potest cum salute principis tractari. Si quis in hoc alienis abuti uxoribus vel sic fornicari presumit, hanc vindictae subsequentis poenam protinus sentit. In pontem mercati is ductus per follem testiculi clavo affigitur et novacula prope posita hic moriendi sive de hiis absolvendi dura electio sibi datur. Et quicumque post LXX. carnem manducasse invenitur, abscisis dentibus graviter punitur. Lex namque divina in hiis regionibus noviter exorta potestate tali melius quam ieiunio ab episcopis instituto corroboratur. Sunt etiam illi mores alii hiis multo inferiores, qui nec Deo placent

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<sup>21</sup> Percy Ernst Schramm, *Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio: Studien und Texte zur Geschichte des römischen Erneuerungsgedankens vom Ende des Karolingischen Reiches bis zum Investiturstreit*, i (3rd edn, Bad Homburg vor der Höhe, 1962), 141–6.

nec indigenis nil nisi ad terrorem prosunt; quos in superioribus ex quadam parte comprehendendi. ... In tempore patris sui, cum is iam gentilis esset, unaquaeque mulier post viri exequias sui igne cremati decollata subsequitur. Et si qua meretrix inveniebatur, in genitali suo, turpi et poena miserabili, circumcidebatur idque, si sic dici licet, preputium in foribus suspenditur, ut intrantis oculus in hoc offendens in futuris rebus eo magis sollicitus esset et prudens.<sup>22</sup>

Septuagesima Sunday was the name taken from the Christian calendar, and the ban on eating meat during Lent applied to Christians. It is therefore obvious that the penalties for the consumption of meat could have been introduced in 966 at the earliest, together with Mieszko I's acceptance of the new religion. The strict disciplines which were imposed on the Church community during Lent were regulated by canon law. It provided for a specific penance for their violation, which usually came down to a certain number of days on bread and water.<sup>23</sup> This penance was monitored by a bishop, which is, as a matter of fact, mentioned by Thietmar in the above quoted passage. One should assume that also in Poland bishops coerced those who had violated Lent into performing penance. This was, however, found unsatisfactory, and a penalty of mutilation was adopted. On the one hand, it had a symbolic meaning – it affected the part of the body directly linked to the sin – on the other hand it hindered committing the same sin in future. The kind and brutality of the penalty prove that it was the state apparatus which was responsible for its incorporation into the legal system, so ultimately – the duke. Bishops might have offered him their encouragement, but the appropriate rules had to be introduced by him.

Thietmar writes separately about the customs in Poland of Boleslav the Brave and about the customs in Poland of Mieszko I, when the latter had still been a pagan. Does this mean that not only the punishment for violating Lent but also the punishment inflicted on men for sexual misdemeanours – which is mentioned in the chapter on the

<sup>22</sup> *Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi Chronicon*, ed. Robert Holtzmann, in MGH, SS rer. Germ., n.s., ix (Berlin, 1935) (hereafter: Thietmar), VIII, 2–3, p. 494; the text is quoted from codex I, an important text variant from codex II will be presented below (*ibid.*, 495).

<sup>23</sup> See e.g. *Burchardi Wormacienis Ecclesiae episcopi decretorum libri viginti*, ed. in *Patrologia Latina*, 140 (Paris, 1853) (hereafter: Burchard), XIX, 5, col. 962.

rule of Boleslav – was an innovation of the Christian times? Most probably so.<sup>24</sup>

In pagan societies living in barbarian Europe in antiquity and the early Middle Ages, transgressions against the norms of sexual behaviour often received corporal punishment, but the repressions affected women, not men. From this point of view the letter by saint Boniface to Æthelbald, king of Mercia is instructive. The archbishop accuses the ruler of a number of offences, with maintaining extramarital contacts at the top of the list. In order to embarrass him, the author emphasises that even pagans punish male lechers and adulterers. For example in old (i.e. continental) Saxony licentious maidens and married women are coerced into hanging themselves. Or, groups of women, who are joined by more and more avengers, chase away the female sinners from one village to another and from one community to another, horsethumping them mercilessly and injuring them with knives.<sup>25</sup> The reader cannot resist the surprise. Boniface promises to give an example of punishing male lechers and adulterers – which is logical, as he, after all, admonishes a man – yet he writes about punishing wanton women and adulterers. This can be clarified in one way: he heard about specific cases of public persecution of immoral women among pagans, whereas he is unable to give an example of the punishment which would be inflicted on men for the same offence. *Nota bene*, the description presented in the letter by saint Boniface shows that this persecution engaged communities larger than just the distant or the immediate family of the persecuted person.

<sup>24</sup> Among the studies on this subject there were different opinions, cf. e.g. Marian Plezia, 'Z zagadnień pierwotnego prawa małżeńskiego w Polsce' (1st edn 1949), in *idem*, *Od Arystotelesa do Złotej Legendy* (Warsaw, 1958), 310–11 (the whole work on 306–13); Henryk Łowmiański, *Początki Polski*, iv (Warsaw, 1970), 198, footnote 610; Adam Krawiec, *Seksualność w średniowiecznej Polsce* (Poznań, 2000), 135–9; Paweł Żmudzki, 'Mieszko I i Amazonki. Wspólnoty wojownicze i normy życia rodzinnego w relacji Ibrahima ibn Jakuba', in Barbara Trelińska (ed.), *Tekst źródła – krytyka – interpretacja* (Warsaw, 2005), 125, footnote 124 (the whole article on 99–126). On the policy of the first Piasts regarding family and sexual life, see Aleksander Gieysztor, 'Le tradizioni locali e le influenze ecclesiastiche nel matrimonio nella Polonia nei secoli X-XIII', in *Il matrimonio nella società altomedievale* (Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 24, Spoleto, 1977), 321–42, esp. 334–6; Żmudzki, 'Mieszko I i Amazonki', 124–6.

<sup>25</sup> S. Bonifacii et Lulli epistolae, in MGH, *Epistolae*, iii (Berlin, 1892), no. 73, pp. 339–45, esp. 342.

There is certainly no doubt that in pagan societies the man who had had sexual intercourse with someone else's wife had to take into account the possible revenge of the betrayed husband and his family. However, there was no threat to the personal inviolability of the adulterer on the part of the political community (unlike in the case of the female adulterer). Meanwhile in Poland under Boleslav the Brave, the punishment was inflicted on adulterers by a larger social or state organisation. This is indicated by the place of torture: it was a fair bridge. This brings us to the conclusion that the above mentioned penalty was introduced in Christian times. Most likely, the oppressive organisation was driven by the conviction, typical of Christianity, that the sin against the sixth commandment rests equally with both the man and the woman.

Also, another circumstance is significant. During the rule of Boleslav the immoral deeds which were penalised were not only limited to adultery.<sup>26</sup> Thietmar writes about sexual intercourse with someone else's wives and – irrespective of this – about fornication. The wording of codex I: 'alienis abuti uxoribus vel sic fornicari presumit' may not seem to be clear enough but codex II gives us a completely unambiguous reading: 'Hic si aliquis alienus uxoribus abutitur vel alio modo fornicatur, hanc penam vindicte promerite mox sentit'.<sup>27</sup> Codex I is an autograph, at least with respect to the fact that the author supervised in person the making of the manuscript and himself made additions and corrections.<sup>28</sup> Codex II gives a different version of the chronicle. Until recently there was a prevailing conviction that we faced an alteration made in the 12th century in Corvey Abbey on the river Weser. As a matter of fact, however, with the exception of a few later interpolations, this is the version by Thietmar himself.<sup>29</sup> The chronicler read the text known to us from manuscript I, and introduced grammatical, stylistic, and factual corrections. Therefore, one has the right to accept that the clarification of the passage in

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<sup>26</sup> See Henryk Łowmiański, *Religia Słowian i jej upadek (w. VI–XII)* (Warsaw, 1979), 367.

<sup>27</sup> Thietmar, 495.

<sup>28</sup> On the above mentioned manuscripts Holtzmann, in Thietmar, XXXIII–XXXIX.

<sup>29</sup> This was proven by Hartmut Hoffmann, 'Mönchskönig und *rex idiota*. Studien zur Kirchenpolitik Heinrichs II. und Konrads II.', in MGH, *Studien und Texte*, viii (Hanover, 1993), 151–76.

question comes from the author. If this is the case, severe punishment in Poland was inflicted on men who indulged in a broad range of activities which were considered debauchery, which entailed all sorts of extramarital contacts. This also can be seen as the influence of Christian morality.

Now it is worthwhile referring to the legislation of the king of Kent, Æthelbert (d. 616 or 617). Some articles of his code regard sexual offences committed by men. In fact, the above mentioned laws do not provide for corporal or mutilating punishment for the offences under discussion, they only impose the obligation of some compensation for the victim. Secondly, this responsibility lies only in the case of the sexual intercourse with somebody else's wife<sup>30</sup> or somebody else's female servant.<sup>31</sup> The scope of punishable sexual offences is therefore narrower than in Boleslav the Brave's Poland; it does not entail, for example, sexual intercourse with a maiden who is not anybody's servant. It is also worth mentioning the article which discusses sexual intercourse between a free man and another free man's wife: the culprit has to pay *wergeld* to the aggrieved husband and bring him a new wife.<sup>32</sup> The state apparatus was interested, as it is seen, in the cases of marital infidelity but it was far from inflicting corporal or mutilating punishment on the wife's lover. The tendency was quite the contrary: by making the culprit responsible to pay *wergeld*, an attempt was made to prevent a bloody revenge.

The code under discussion, barely brushed with the influence of Christianity, reflects legal practices of a pagan society which has just crossed the threshold of statehood.<sup>33</sup> It may even seem that the king had little influence on the content of the legislation.<sup>34</sup> The legislation of Æthelbert shows us that the attitude towards the

<sup>30</sup> 'The Kentish Laws: Æthelberth', in *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, ed. and transl. Frederick Levi Attenborough (Cambridge, 1922), art. 31, pp. 8–9, art. 85, pp. 14–15.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, art. 10–11, pp. 4–5, art. 14, 16, pp. 6–7, art. 85, pp. 14–15.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, art. 31, pp. 8–9.

<sup>33</sup> On the ambivalent attitude of convert Æthelberth towards Christianity see: Higham, *The Convert Kings*, 53–132.

<sup>34</sup> Patrick Wormald, "Inter cetera bona ... genti suae": Law Making and Peace Keeping in the Earliest English Kingdoms' (1st edn 1995), in *idem*, *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West: Laws as Text, Image and Experience* (London, 1999), 179–99; on the Anglo-Saxon legislation in general see *idem*, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century* (Oxford, 1999).

cases of debauchery was different in a pagan society than in the state of Boleslav the Brave.

Let us then return to Poland. I put forward the question when the law that ordered to punish men for sexual offences was introduced: in the pre-Christian times or after the baptism of the Piasts. I favour this latter option as the following circumstances argue for this: first of all, the fact itself of mutilating punishment of men who committed debauchery, secondly, its very wide definition. In both cases the influence of Christian morality and canon law seems to be noticeable.

Adultery and fornication were penalised by the Church with penance that included fasting on bread and water for a smaller or larger number of days and years, depending on the gravity of the offence.<sup>35</sup> Like in the case of consuming meat during the prohibited period, also here the secular penalty duplicated the Canon one. On account of the fact that at such an early stage of Christianisation new moral rules were only known and accepted by a narrow circle of people, one has to assume that they were imposed by the state apparatus on the recommendation of Mieszko I or Boleslav the Brave.

In a number of states in early medieval Europe there was a tendency to encourage Christian duties by state coercion.<sup>36</sup> These obligations referred both to the cult and customs. This tendency adopted two features. On the one hand, the king encouraged bishops to enforce the norms of canon law, especially with regard to the infliction of penance on sinners. In some cases he went further using the coercive force, tried to make sure that the imposed penance was actually performed. On the other hand, the secular legislature adjusted itself to the requirements of the Christian religion.<sup>37</sup> In consequence it duplicated, naturally to a small degree, the canon law. The penalties

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<sup>35</sup> Burchard, col. 957–8.

<sup>36</sup> For the earliest Middle Ages see Bruno Dumézil, *Les racines chrétiennes de l'Europe. Conversion et liberté dans les royaumes barbares, V–VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* ([Paris], 2006), *passim* (with the bibliography on this subject).

<sup>37</sup> A very good survey of the problem is presented by Jean Imbert, 'L'influence du christianisme sur la législation des peuples francs et germains', in *La conversione al cristianesimo nell'Europa di Alto Medioevo* (Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 14, Spoleto, 1967), 365–96; for Poland see, e.g. Adam Vetulani, 'Średniowieczny Kościół polski w zasięgu łacińskiej kultury prawniczej', *Zeszyty Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego*, ix, 1–2 (1966), 29–51; Witold Sawicki, *Studia nad wpływem praw obcych w dawnej Polsce* (Warsaw, 1971); Wojciech M. Bartel, 'Problemi di storia delle fonti di diritto canonico in Polonia nei secoli

imposed by the *leges* were certainly of the nature different from the ones known to the Church legislature.

Of highly instructive nature is, from my point of view, the shorter version of the *Zakon sudnyj ljudem* [Court law for the people], the oldest relic of Slavic law.<sup>38</sup> It was written in the second part of the 9th century in Moravia or – and this is more likely – in Bulgaria. In some articles there is a characteristic parallelism, which lies in the fact that one crime is doubly sanctioned. For example, sexual intercourse with a nun is punishable by the cutting off the nose and fifteen years of penance, with the remark of the redactor of the *Zakon* that the first punishment is inflicted according to secular law, and the other – according to canon law.<sup>39</sup>

The legislative activity of the first Piasts was therefore part of a wide, pan-European trend. We cannot, of course, ascertain whether they issued their laws in writing,<sup>40</sup> such as the rulers of the neighbouring countries: saint Stephen in Hungary and some time later Břetislav I in Bohemia.<sup>41</sup> It is highly possible but cannot be proven.

However, one cannot resist the impression that the legislative activity of the Polish rulers, with all its typical character, had its own shades. Obviously I realise that the comparative analysis of the legislative acts under discussion must be based on widely extended research into secular and canon laws. In the context of chapters 2 and 3 of the chronicle by Thietmar such research has not been conducted, and the present work will not fill this gap. Yet a cursory reading of

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X–XIII', in *Chiesa, diritto e ordinamento della 'societas christiana' nei secoli XI e XII* (Miscellanea del Centro di studi medioevali, 11, Milan, 1986), 311–28.

<sup>38</sup> See Wincenty Swoboda, in *Słownik starożytności słowiańskich*, s.v., vii (Wrocław, 1982), 55–7. I have used the issue: *Magnae Moraviae fontes historici*, iv, ed. Lubomír Havlík (Opera Universitatis Purkynianae Brunensis. Facultas Philosophica, 156, Brno, 1971), 147–98.

<sup>39</sup> *Magnae Moraviae fontes*, art. 6, p. 182. See Sergej Vilfan, 'Le tradizioni locali e le influenze ecclesiastiche nel matrimonio in Slovenia e nelle regioni vicine', in *Il matrimonio*, 371–2.

<sup>40</sup> See Gieysztor, 'Le fonctionnement', 935.

<sup>41</sup> See e.g. János M. Bak, 'Signs of Conversion in Central European Laws', in Guyda Armstrong and Ian W. Wood (eds.), *Christianizing Peoples and Converting Individuals* (International Medieval Research, 7, Turnhout, 2000), 115–24; on the legislation of early medieval Hungarian kings recently: Vincent Mucska, *Uhorsko a cirkevné reformy 10. a 11. storočia* (Universitas Comeniana Bratislavensis Philosophica. Acta Historica Posoniensia, 4, Monographiae, 1, Bratislava, 2004).



the relics of the early medieval law seems to induce the conviction that the Christian legislation of the first Piast monarchy in the points discussed here was distinguished by a high degree of repression, often greater than in other countries. As far as the newly Christianised countries are concerned, the mutilating penalties inflicted on men for some sexual crimes were present almost only in the code *Zakon sudnyj ljudem* (the cutting off the nose).<sup>42</sup> These were taken over from the Byzantine legislation.<sup>43</sup> The example of the Visigoths, which I will discuss below, seems to be an isolated case. As far as breaking the fast is concerned, corporal punishment happened only exceptionally. It was horsewhipping, but inflicted, mainly if not only, with regard to slaves and with the possibility of a buyout. It also seems that the scope of punishable offences was wider than in many other secular legal systems. The imposition of the criminal liability for debauchery serves as an example of this.<sup>44</sup> Another example can be found. It refers to Lent, which will be further discussed below.

<sup>42</sup> Corporal punishment for men for having sexual intercourse was provided for by the decrees of St Stephen, 'Sancti Stephani Decretorum liber I', ed. György Györffy, in *idem, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft der Ungarn um die Jahrtausendwende* (Vienna, Cologne and Graz, 1983), 263–74. They concerned, however, individual cases when a free man had a sexual intercourse with another man's female servant or a servant of a free man did the same with a servant of another free man (art. 28, p. 271–2). The cause of it was not the disapproval of immoral deeds but other reasons, e.g. the willingness to prevent the loss of freedom by the free man who would have to lose it in consequence of his relation with a female servant (see art. 29, p. 272). The law maker explicitly cites such a circumstance.

<sup>43</sup> On mutilating punishment in Byzantium see Evelyn Patlagean, 'Byzance et le blason pénal du corps', in *Du châtement dans la cité. Supplices corporels et peine de mort dans le monde antique: Table ronde organisée par L'Ecole française de Rome avec le concours du Centre national de la recherche scientifique (Rome 9–11 novembre 1982)* (Collection de L'Ecole française de Rome, 79, Rome, 1984), 405–26.

<sup>44</sup> See, however, footnote 42. It is worthwhile, for the discussion here, looking at the decrees of Břetislav I, *Cosmae Pragensis Chronica Boemorum*, ed. Bertold Bretzel, in MGH, SS rer. Germ., n.s., ii (Berlin, 1923), II, 4, pp. 86–8. The above mentioned legislature provides for the penalty – it is exile – for immorality, but the repressions are to affect women only. Men, indeed, are to be also punished, yet not for the adultery but for the divorce. Thietmar does not write about divorces in the passage under discussion. The decrees of Břetislav do not mention the breaking of the fast, while there was a fine for holding fairs on Sunday and burying the dead in forests. Let us have a look at the decrees of St Stephen, 'Sancti Stephani Decretorum liber I', 263–74. As far as intimate life is concerned, only special cases were discussed, such as kidnapping a girl (a penalty in the form of

In early medieval societies the question whether and to what extent the king possessed legislative rights was an important political issue during the period of the establishing of a state.<sup>45</sup> It was a tribe and its tradition which was the carrier of the law,<sup>46</sup> and when it came to writing national *leges* an important role was played by tribal sages. In this situation the king eagerly acted as the legislator.<sup>47</sup> Implementing the law or at least actively participating in its implementation, the monarch extended his competences through *fait accompli*. The introduction of Christianity facilitated this in many ways. After all, any important questions were to be regulated according to the new principles.<sup>48</sup> The tribal *leges* show us that the amendments caused by the requirements of Christianity concerned mainly two ranges of issues: on the one hand, marital problems and sexual life, on the other – the religious practice (especially fasting and holiday rest, rarely the duty to attend Masses). These were the points stressed by the first Piasts. One has to realise that the amendments mentioned by Thietmar deeply affected the whole society, all its layers, as much, of course, as the still undeveloped state apparatus, working in the circumstances of scattered settlements, could control the behaviour of its subjects. In consequence, the following hypothesis takes shape: the radicalism of actions taken by Boleslav the Brave, and perhaps already by his father, was motivated by their willingness to extend the authority and instil obedience to the duke in the people.<sup>49</sup>

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material compensation) and the matters mentioned in footnote 42. St Stephen provided for the repressions for breaking the fast, but this was not a mutilating penalty (a few days of staying in custody on bread and water). Nevertheless, he ordered to punish with flogging for the absence from a Sunday Mass.

<sup>45</sup> Wormald, “Inter cetera bona”, *passim*.

<sup>46</sup> See e.g. Karol Modzelewski, “Legem ipsam vetare non possumus”. Królewski kodyfikator wobec potęgi zwyczajów”, in Franciszek Ryszka *et al.*, *Historia, idee, polityka. Księga dedykowana Janowi Baszkiewiczowi* (Warsaw, 1995), 26–32.

<sup>47</sup> See Patrick Wormald, “‘Lex scripta and verbum Regis’: Legislation and Germanic Kingship’ (1st edn, 1977), in *idem*, *Legal Culture*, 1–43.

<sup>48</sup> See Richard E. Sullivan, ‘Khan Boris and the Conversion of Bulgaria: A Case Study of the Impact of Christianity on a Barbarian Society’, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, iii (1966), 55–139.

<sup>49</sup> Gieysztor, ‘Le tradizioni locali’, 339–40; see also Żmudzki, ‘Mieszko I i Amazonki’, 125 and *passim*. It should be observed that some historians researching civilisations which do not have anything in common with the Greek and Roman and Christian civilisations notice the repressive character of the early states under

Was such a policy initiated by the Piasts only after the introduction of Christianity? In this respect it is worthwhile analysing the information put in chapter 3 of the chronicle by Thietmar, which regards the pagan period of Mieszko I's rule. It describes the cruel and repressive customs referring to family and sexual life. One could assume that these laws were imposed by the duke of the Polans, perhaps Mieszko or his predecessor, trying to discipline his subjects. This cannot, however, be proven. Corporal punishment inflicted on indecent women happened in pre-state barbarian societies,<sup>50</sup> and the killing of widows is well documented for the Slavs of the tribal period, already from the 6th century.<sup>51</sup> It would be, therefore, careless to think that the customs, described by Thietmar, were introduced by Mieszko. More likely seems to be the view that they were the legacy of traditional culture and did not necessarily reflect the imperious aspirations of the monarchy.

The hypothesis suggested above which interprets the legislative activity of the first Piasts indicates only one possible conclusion and by no means closes the discussion.

Let us return to the matter of Lent. The ban on the consumption of meat in the Latin Church was effective from Ash Wednesday, whereas the text by Thietmar suggests that the period of abstinence in the state of the Piasts began over two weeks earlier – from Septuagesima Sunday (more precisely from the Monday after Septuagesima

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formation with regard to immoral offences, see Donald V. Kurtz, 'Legitimation of the Aztec State', in Henry J.M. Claessen and Peter Skalnik (eds.), *The Early State* (New Babylon: Studies in the Social Sciences, 32, The Hague, Paris and New York, 1978), 169–89. This scholar contemplates causes of the severity of the penalties which could be inflicted among the Aztecs for forbidden sexual behaviour (the death penalty) and answers: 'One possible explanation is that if a state can control fundamental areas of a citizen's affective behaviour, it has made a giant stride toward control of other, less affective areas of his life' (p. 184). This quoted book was indicated to me by Prof. Michał Tymowski. Another interpretative model, which explains the issue under discussion, was developed by an anthropologist and is also worth mentioning: Yehudi A. Cohen, 'Ends and Means in Political Control: State Organization and the Punishment of Adultery, Incest, and Violation of Celibacy', *American Anthropologist*, 71 (1969), 658–87.

<sup>50</sup> Plezia, 'Z zagadnień', 310–11.

<sup>51</sup> Gieysztor, 'Le tradizioni locali', 324–5; Vilfan, 'Le tradizioni locali', 358–9; Helena Zoll-Adamikowa, *Wczesnośredniowieczne cmentarzyska ciałopalne Słowian na terenie Polski*, 2 vols. (Wrocław, 1979), i, 282–6; ii, 186–94, 245–7.

Sunday).<sup>52</sup> This information could be considered as a misunderstanding were it not for later sources, dating back to the 12th and 13th centuries. They provide us with irrefutable evidence that the beginning of Lent on the Oder and Vistula was on Septuagesima Sunday. In these circumstances one has no choice but to admit that before 1018 the Polish Church made by its independent decision an amendment to the canon law. The tendency was to tighten the law, so in consequence the ban on the consumption of meat was imposed also in the pre-Lent period.

This could only happen after the Polish Province had been established, at the provincial synod, so not before 1000. It is known that in the Christian states of the time, for example in Germany, synods were presided over by kings. This was surely also the case in Poland in the times of Christianisation, where the authority of the monarch over bishops must have been stronger than in the countries of old Christianity. We also know, on the other hand, that Boleslav the Brave was vested with all the powers to which the emperor was entitled in Church matters. What surprises is not only the brutality of the secular law, enforced by Boleslav, but also the monarch's interference in the canon law.

In an attempt to show the motives of the ruler, one would first have to notice that his decision was a practical consequence of the conclusions drawn in the aftermath of the discussion which had taken place in the western Church for two hundred years. Some Carolingian theologians, especially liturgists, thought that Lent should begin from Septuagesima Sunday. This proposal was not at first reflected in the canon law. Certain changes took place as late as Ottonian times, but the Church in the West stopped half-way. At the synod in Aachen (992) a ban was put on making marriages, performing *placita saecularia* and trials by ordeal during the pre-Lent period. Nevertheless, neither then nor at any other time were constraints imposed on lay people as regards the kind of food. Boleslav the Brave and the Polish Church showed more determination, and even though all the strict disciplines of Lent were not extended to the pre-Lent period, its most

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<sup>52</sup> Roman Michałowski, 'The Nine-Week Lent in Boleslaus the Brave's Poland: A Study of the First Piasts' Religious Policy', *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 89 (2004), 5–50. The argument presented below and concerning the prolonged fasting is based on the results of this work.

characteristic feature was introduced: the abstinence from consuming food containing meat.

This determination is – it is difficult to doubt it – the evidence for the Boleslav's great religious zeal. He was surrounded by bishops and monks belonging to the spiritual elite of Europe of that time, people who were rigorous and at the same time well acquainted with Church matters, such as saints Adalbert, and Gaudentius, the first archbishop of Gniezno,<sup>53</sup> Benedict of Benevento, and John (of Claves?), the hermits of Międzyrzecz, or saint Bruno of Querfurt. These or other people of this sort must have encouraged Boleslav the Brave to enforce the ideals which the Church in the West dreamt of but it did not have enough courage to realise itself.

It is impossible to see here an attempt to discipline the subjects, because the extension of Lent would not have been noticed by the inhabitants of the country which was just being Christianised. If we face here a declaration, this was addressed somewhere else. It is worth asking whether Boleslav the Brave did not seek to show that he held an exceptional position in the empire. At the Gniezno congress – which I have already mentioned – the duke was raised to the dignity of the collaborator of the empire, which was combined with taking up special religious duties. The tightening of the canon law would have been the manifestation that the Polish duke was really in charge of his office and served with full devotion. If one accepted that Lent was extended during the reign of Henry II, which is highly likely, such a manifestation would have been polemical in character.

In an attempt to solve the problem in the context of internal policy, the following possibility is worth considering. The state of Boleslav the Brave consisted of a number of tribes. There is no doubt that the monarch made attempts to integrate them. It is not accidental that the name of 'Poland', which meant not only the territory of the Polans but also the whole territory they had invaded, became

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<sup>53</sup> It should be noticed that Leo, abbot of Sts Boniface and Alexis on the Aventine, was the papal legate at the synod of Aachen in 992. Therefore, the pertinent resolutions passed there must have been known to Sts Adalbert and Gaudentius. At that time they both stayed in that monastery. After all, they may have possessed a more direct source of information. That is, it is possible that St Adalbert, probably with Gaudentius, accompanied abbot Leo at the mentioned synod (such a view, with full conviction, by Labuda, *Święty Wojciech*, 137).

popular during his rule. Here, the introduction of the same date to mark the beginning of Lent for many Polish tribes, the term which was uniform for them and at the same time different than in other countries, would have been the action aiming at the integration of all the subjects inhabiting the Piast monarchy.

It is noteworthy, however, that the interpretative clue, which is suggested by Thietmar, goes in a completely different direction. Although the chronicler considers the customs prevailing in Poland of Boleslav the Brave as cruel, he understands that different methods are impossible in the barely Christianised country. The fast itself, imposed by bishops, will not induce people to abide by the Divine Law. And in this context the statement is made that such a people 'sine poena gravi non potest cum salute principis tractari'. In all probability the word *salus* means in this case 'salvation' understood eschatologically. In other words, Thietmar wants to say that the monarch in Poland cannot avoid using brutal methods to coerce people into abiding by the Divine Law, as long as he wants to reach eternal life.

In order to better understand the quoted passage of the chronicle by Thietmar, one has to reach for some comparative material. Especially instructive is the story of the Spanish Visigoths.<sup>54</sup> *The Story of Wamba*, the work that was written in ca. 680 by Julian of Toledo, contains the following excerpt: Wamba (672–80), just elected and anointed king, was heading with his troops towards some rebels. When he found out that some of his soldiers were not only plundering but also setting fire to houses and committing adultery, he punished them more strictly than as if they had rebelled against him. The author added more precisely that the adulterers were circumcised. The monarch explained his severity with the following words: here he himself and his troops are about to face the trial by war (*iudicium belli, examen pugnae*). The king is convinced that if he did not avenge the sins of his warriors, he would be defeated. For he would not

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<sup>54</sup> An apt characteristic of ideological approaches in the kingdom of the Visigoths can be found in Alexander P. Bronisch, 'Die westgotische Reichsideologie und ihre Weiterentwicklung im Reich von Asturien', in Franz-Reiner Erkens (ed.), *Das frühmittelalterliche Königtum. Ideelle und religiöse Grundlagen* (Reallexikon der Germanische Altertumskunde, Ergänzungsband, 49, Berlin and New York, 2005), 161–89. On the religious policy of the above mentioned kingdom recently also: Dumézil, *Les racines chrétiennes*, 275–302.

avoid the trial of God if he, seeing the vile practice of his subjects, abandoned punishment.<sup>55</sup>

What draws one's attention in the quoted paragraph is the concept of the 'trial by war'. Heaven gives victory to the just party – here is the bottom line of this concept. The thing that matters, however, is not only who is right in the ongoing combat. Wamba was the legitimate king, appointed by God, and the enemies were rebels who had raised their hands against the Lord's anointed. But the ruler was frightened by the deeds of his soldiers. There was a conviction, as it can be observed, that in the 'trial by war' Heaven took into consideration all the sins of the given party participating in the conflict. Wamba himself was free from any guilt. Julian of Toledo gives the ruler glowing references, calling him *religious princeps*. But the outcome of the war could be determined by the evil deeds committed by his people. A righteous king is therefore not enough, it is the righteousness of his subjects which is also needed. However, the tragic consequences of the people's sinful conduct can be prevented. It would suffice for the monarch to severely punish the wrongdoing of his subjects.

One wonders how Wamba punished the adulterers. The source says that he had their foreskins cut off. The easiest and probably the most accurate solution would be to assume that the monarch followed the same principle as Boleslav the Brave: he wanted to punish the parts of the body directly associated with the sin. There is, however, another possible interpretation.<sup>56</sup> The striking circumstance is that the texts says about cutting off the foreskins, not the men's penises, and if so, perhaps circumcision was meant. Indeed, the hypothesis has been put forward recently that the king had the warriors circumcised

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<sup>55</sup> '... quia insolens quorundam e nostris motio non solum praedae inhiabat, sed etiam cum incensione domorum adulterii facinus perpetrabat, tanto disciplinae vigore iam dictus princeps in his et talibus patratum vindicabat scelus, ut graviora in his supplicia illum putares impendere, quam si hostiliter contra illum egissent. Testantur hoc praecisa quorundam adulterorum praepudia, quibus pro fornicatione hanc ultionis inrogabant iacturam. Dicebat enim: "Ecce! Iam iudicium imminet belli, et libet animam fornicari? Et credo, ad examen pugnae acceditis; videte, ne in vestris sordibus pereatis. Nam ego, si ista non vindico, iam ligatus hinc vado. Ad hoc ergo vadam, ut iusto iudicio capiar, si iniquitatem populi videns ipse non puniam"; *Historia Wambae regis auctore Iuliano episcopo Toletano*, ed. Wilhelm Levison, in MGH, SS rer. Merov., v (Hanover and Leipzig, 1910), cap. 10, p. 510.

<sup>56</sup> Bronisch, 'Die westgotische Reichsideologie', 179.

to demonstrate that in their sinful conduct they were as unfaithful to God as the Jews.

This interpretation casts serious doubts but one must admit that fits well in the atmosphere of that time. In 7th century Spain the question of the infidelity of the believers of Judaism gained extraordinary ideological, political, and religious significance. The Visigoths strove to Christianise the Jews and exerted every effort to achieve their goal. The Visigoths encountered numerous bitter disappointments on their way. Especially painful were the cases of apostasy of the forcefully Christened Jews. There was a prevailing conviction that the infidelity of this nation manifested itself especially dramatically in apostasy.

The policy aiming to convert the believers of Judaism, commenced by the first Catholic king, Reccared, gathered its individual momentum during the reign of Sisebut (612–21). This ruler multiplied diverse constraints in his efforts to make the Jews accept Christianity, he even reached for the means previously hardly ever used: direct force. A perfect insight into this policy is provided by the acts of the synod which took place in Seville in 615–21.<sup>57</sup> The local bishop and a great scholar, Isidore, who had a critical attitude towards the monarch's drastic methods, certainly participated in it. We know this fact, however, from other sources, as the synod manifested a full solidarity with the king's policy.

The bishops expressed the conviction that it was Sisebut's duty to get the Jews to convert.<sup>58</sup> He had received power over them from Christ, that is why he should lead them to the faith in Christ. He would be appraised by God for his deed. The fathers who had gathered at the synod realised that the conversion of the believers of Judaism would take place under compulsion. They did not see, however, anything

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<sup>57</sup> On this synod Dumézil, *Les racines chrétiennes*, 286–9, 663–5. I used the issue included there, 665–7.

<sup>58</sup> 'Namque fidelissimus Deo Sisebutus ac uictoriosissimus princeps inter cunctas reipublicae suae curas memor Patrum dictis, quam multa bona praestantur inuitis sciens, super haec Deo se debere rationem de his quos Christus suo deputauit regimini, maluit istos etiam nolentes ad ueritatem perducere quam in uetustatae inolitae perfidiae perdurare. Reprehensibile quippe erat ut princeps praeclarus, fide et gratia Sancti Spiritus plenus, qui longe existentes gentes doctrina sua perdoceret, subiectas animas in errorem perfidiae relaxaret, et qui erant in regimine sui, a fide Christi existerent alieni'; *ibidem*, 666.



wrong in it. They remarked that also those forcefully converted can benefit from numerous spiritual goods.

Sisebut had greater aspirations than only to evangelise the Jews. The letter of the monarch, addressed to the king of the Longobards, Adoloald, and to his mother, queen Theodelinda, has been preserved. Sisebut expressed his regret that some Longobards kept believing in Aryanism, and vehemently encouraged Adoloald to take immediate measures in order to combat this heresy. Among the arguments he presents there is also the following: once the Visigoths also believed in Aryanism. At that time they suffered different calamities, famine, plague, and wars. The state of the Visigoths had been flourishing since they had accepted the right faith. The same bliss can be achieved by the Longobards, provided they give up their heresy.<sup>59</sup> The addressee of the letter was a Catholic, Sisebut knew this well, so the quoted argument should be understood this way: the orthodoxy of the king is insufficient to bring prosperity to the nation and the country. The orthodoxy of the whole people is needed to achieve this.

It is possible to find with no difficulty some other Visigoth authors who expressed similar views but the above quoted texts are sufficient to draw interesting conclusions. Here, there was a conviction that the king was responsible to God for the conduct of his subjects. Their sin can bring punishment from Heavens on the king's head. This will reach him in the worldly life – for example in the form of a military defeat – or in the eternal life. This is why the monarch has to impose the way of belief and conduct on them, and when they are not obedient, there is no way out – he has to punish them severely. There was nobody to doubt that it was the best for the people to be righteous and to live voluntarily in decency. However, when they do not want this, they should be coerced. This would be a great spiritual benefit not only for the king but also for the people.

The problems under discussion are given in the Visigoth sources an exceptionally thorough consideration. Yet the same way of thinking is also confirmed for other Christian countries of early medieval Europe. The king of the Franks, Childebert I (511–58) prohibited in an edict the worshipping of pagan idols and committing sacrilege,

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<sup>59</sup> *Epistolae Wisigothicae*, ed. Wilhelm Gundlach, in MGH, *Epistolae*, iii (Berlin, 1892), no. 9, p. 672.

for which he provided strict criminal sanctions.<sup>60</sup> He explained his step in two ways: firstly, his own heavenly reward and the salvation of his people depend whether they would worship God in honest faith; secondly, the admonishing of the bishops only turns out to be insufficient. King Guntram spoke in a similar fashion in his edict of 10 November 585.<sup>61</sup> There he expresses his concern about the stability of the kingdom and the best interests of his subjects. His concern is because the crimes committed by the people are the cause of different penalties imposed by God, worldly and eternal: people and animals die of the sword or diseases, and many will have to face torture in hell. That is why he calls for the bishops to admonish the faithful. Otherwise they will become responsible for their sins. Also he himself – Guntram, to whom the Highest King conveyed authority, must care for his subjects. If he fails to do so, God's wrath will reach him. Therefore he orders secular judges to punish the people who ignore the teaching of the priests. He mentions only one transgression, which should be fought against, by name: work on Sunday and holy days.

Ine, the king of Wessex, preceded his code of the laws, which he issued at the close of the 7th century, with a prologue. He explained in it that the aim of the law maker was the salvation of souls and the security of the kingdom. Some paragraphs concern strictly religious matters. Among others, baptism of children within thirty days after their birth is demanded and a ban on work on Sunday imposed.<sup>62</sup> Charlemagne announced on 23 March 789 the *Admonitio generalis*, a great capitulary entirely devoted to religious matters.<sup>63</sup> Its respective chapters, full of demands and bans, are devoted to numerous problems concerning discipline among the clergy, liturgy, pastoral work, and morality. The whole work is preceded by the large preamble. From our point of view of especial interest is the following statement included

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<sup>60</sup> *Capitularia Merovingica*, in MGH, *Capitularia regum Francorum*, ed. Alfred Boretius, i (Hanover, 1883), no. 2, pp. 2–3. On the religious problems in the Merovingian and Carolingian capitularies see Thomas M. Buck, *Admonitio und Praedicatio: Zur religiös-pastoralen Dimension von Kapitularien und kapitularienmahen Texten (507–814)* (Freiburger Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Geschichte, 9, Frankfurt am Main, 1996); on the religious policy of the Merovingian kings see recently: Dumézil, *Les racines chrétiennes*, 217–43 (with the selected bibliography on the subject).

<sup>61</sup> *Capitularia Merovingica*, no. 5, pp. 11–12.

<sup>62</sup> *The Laws of Ine and Alfred*, in *The Laws of the Earliest*, the prologue (p. 37).

<sup>63</sup> *Caroli Magni Capitula*, in MGH, *Capitularia regum Francorum*, no. 22, pp. 53–62.

in the opening part of the document: Christ must be worshipped with good deeds so that the king and his kingdom (or reigning) be spared by God to eternity.<sup>64</sup> Another example is provided by Ottonian Germany. Henry II, presiding over synods, demanded a strict exaction of canon law and simultaneously sought to tighten it.<sup>65</sup> The king's concern was primarily the marital law and, in particular, the frequent cases of breaking the canon hindrance.<sup>66</sup> He justified his zeal by expressing fear that any leniency in this respect might bring the wrath of God to his homeland.<sup>67</sup>

The above mentioned sources allow us better to understand the stance of the Piast dukes. Here it shows that their concern about the morality and piety of their subjects was not just due to bigotry but it resulted from a deep understanding of the ruler's duties and the adoption of – let us put it this way – the technique of ruling. The monarch could not allow the people in his country to indulge in debauchery and break their fast, because it would have brought the wrath of God on himself, the country, and the whole people. The punishment could be worldly – military defeats, disease, famine – and eternal. By being lenient towards his subjects in this regard, the duke risked losing his own salvation (*salus* in Thietmar) and exposed those people who indulged themselves in sinful life to damnation. God put Mieszko, and later Boleslav the Brave at the head of *His* people, therefore Mieszko and Boleslav were responsible to God for the way their nation served the Lord. But can anybody serve the Lord being forced to do this by the reign of terror? The clergymen present at the Gniezno court would have probably answered with the words of the synod at Seville: God gives His grace even to those who do not want His grace. Therefore, it is worth taking drastic measures, and even with reference to a wide range of sins. And if the sinners,

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, 53.

<sup>65</sup> On the religious policy of Henry II first of all see Hoffmann, 'Mönchskönig', *passim*.

<sup>66</sup> Patrick Corbet, *Autour de Burchard de Worms. L'Eglise allemande et les interdits de parenté (IX<sup>e</sup>–XII<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Ius Commune. Sonderhefte. Studien zur europäischen Rechtsgeschichte, 142, Frankfurt am Main, 2001), 116–71; Jerzy Strzelczyk, 'Między *sacrum* a *profanum*. Sprawa Irmingardy i Ottona z Hammersteinu', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, cxii, 3 (2005), 21–31.

<sup>67</sup> *Vita Adalberonis II. Mettensis episcopi auctore Constantino abbate*, ed. Georg H. Pertz, in MGH, *Scriptores*, iv (Hanover, 1855), cap. 16, pp. 663–4.

in consequence of extraordinary hardness of heart, did not come closer to God by any means, the ruler would be free from any responsibility for the crimes of his subjects, because he has severely punished them.

The same interpretative scheme could be probably applied to the motives which inclined Boleslav the Brave to prolong the period of abstinence. The monarch knew from his trustworthy bishops and monks that Lent should actually begin from Septuagesima Sunday and he began to fear the wrath of God. Also, perhaps, the train of thought was different. Realising his own and his subjects' sinful nature, which should be paid for in this and the next world, he decided to expiate the wrongdoings through increased penance. It was best to start Lent from the time of Septuagesima.<sup>68</sup>

I have suggested a few possible explanations of the policy of the Piasts: 1. instilling the conviction of the ruler's authority into the society, especially with reference to legislative competences; 2. political declarations to be used abroad; 3. efforts aiming to integrate the people living in vast areas and belonging to different tribes; 4. last but not least, providing for oneself God's blessing with all its political and existential consequences, both worldly and eternal. These variants do not exclude one another. The religious policy of Polish dukes could have had several targets at the same time.

In any case, there is one thing that is certain. The legislation of the Piast rulers and the amount of energy they used to exact their laws provide evidence that they adopted profoundly the principles which a Christian monarch should follow.

### III

At the beginning of my essay I made a reference to the study by Barbara Yorke. This scholar established the criteria which let us determine the point in time when Christianisation process ended in a given country. The most important criterion – the moment from which there were no more pagans or apostates on the throne – was applied by me on the first pages of my article for the estimate of the situation in Poland. Another indicator was the time of destroying pagan sanctuaries. Did they exist after 966 under the reign of the first

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<sup>68</sup> Zbigniew Dalewski, *Ritual and Politics: Writing the History of a Dynastic Conflict in Medieval Poland* (Leiden and Boston, 2008), 117–19.

Piasts? If Thietmar's estimate were considered authoritative, the answer would have to be that they did not. The chronicler is highly critical of Boleslav but he does not criticise him for tolerating the cult of pagan idols. On the other hand, he only speaks of Mieszko I in a very positive way. When he mentions the pagan cult site of Ślęza, he uses the past tense to describe rituals performed on this hill. He therefore considers the problem as non-existent.<sup>69</sup>

I realise that Thietmar's account should not be taken absolutely. I used the argument *ex silentio*, fallible by nature, on the other hand we do not know how deeply the chronicler knew the realities of the Polish interior. There are no other written sources which could help solve this problem. The results of archaeological excavations also fail to help, at least at present, to draw unambiguous conclusions. It is generally difficult to identify pagan sanctuaries, and even more difficult to determine the exact time of their activity. The most interesting results were produced by archaeological excavations in Kałdus. There is a big degree of probability that a site of pagan cult existed there in the second part of the 10th century.<sup>70</sup> However, in order to be able to use those findings for our purpose one would need to know exactly how much time after Mieszko I's baptism pagan rituals were performed there. If it turned out that this happened for many more years, another question would have to be asked: did this practice result from the duke's leniency, or did it stem from the fact that the real power of the monarch did not reach the territories beyond the Vistula? We have to allow for the possibility that in those lands the Polans had to settle for merely receiving tribute for some time.

Thus there is no alternative but to rely on the evidence by Thietmar and accept that pagan sanctuaries were destroyed by the Piast state soon after the conversion of the monarch, at least in those territories which were directly controlled by him. Can one assume, after all, that those who broke teeth for eating meat during Lent would tolerate worshipping pagan idols? Obviously we mean here a public cult.

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<sup>69</sup> Thietmar, VII, 59, p. 472. See in this matter the opinion of an archaeologist Grzegorz Domański, *Ślęza w pradziejach i w średniowieczu* (Wrocław, 2002), 103, 106–7.

<sup>70</sup> Wojciech Chudziak, *Wczesnośredniowieczna przestrzeń sakralna in Culmine na Pomorzu Wiślańskim* (Mons sancti Laurentii, 1, Toruń, 2003), 57–67, 132.

Pagan cults in private life were practised for many more centuries, non-Christian forms of burial rituals were not immediately abandoned, and this happened even in Greater Poland itself (this concerned, first of all, cremation).<sup>71</sup>

Anglo-Saxon analogies would encourage us to put forward some other questions: Did the first Piasts establish nunneries? Did they send there their daughters? Were local dukes considered to be saints in early Piast Poland? Putting aside a more detailed discussion on these problems, I will only outline the issue. Indeed, Polish nuns lived in the Poland of Boleslav the Brave, so there must have been at least one nunnery here.<sup>72</sup> Taking into consideration the structure of property of that time, one has the right to assume that this nunnery was erected as the royal foundation. We also know that one of Boleslav's daughters chose to be a nun and reached the dignity of abbess.<sup>73</sup> Did she, however, serve God in the monastery set up by her father or grandfather, or in a nunnery in a foreign land, this, as a matter of fact, cannot be established at present.

At the same time one has to be cautious while approaching the recently advanced thesis regarding canonisation or the attempts to canonise Boleslav the Brave during the times of the first monarchy. In contradiction to such an argument stands the inscription on the monarch's grave. Here the words and phrases used by the poet do not generally read hagiographically, except for one: *athleta Christi*. If considered the whole text, one would have to accept the view that Boleslav is shown there as a great king and hero rather than a saint.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> A survey of this problem is presented by Sławomir Moździoch, "Gens perfida et nondum bene Christiana" – konfrontacja chrześcijaństwa i wierzeń tradycyjnych w państwie pierwszych Piastów w świetle najnowszych odkryć archeologii', in Aneta Pieniądz-Skrzypczak and Jerzy Pysiak (eds.), *Sacrum. Obraz i funkcja w społeczeństwie średniowiecznym* (Warsaw, 2005), 67–82.

<sup>72</sup> Marek Derwich, 'Studia nad początkami monastycyzmu na ziemiach polskich. Pierwsze opactwa i ich funkcje', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, cvii, 2 (2000), 95–7 (the whole article on 77–105); *idem*, 'Czy Dobrawa była fundatorką pierwszego opactwa polskiego? Ze studiów nad początkami Kościoła na ziemiach polskich', *Acta Universitatis Carolinae. Philosophica et historica*, 1–2, Z pomocnych věd historických, 16 (2002), 637–43.

<sup>73</sup> Kazimierz Jasiński, *Rodowód pierwszych Piastów* (Warsaw and Wrocław, [1993]), 108–9.

<sup>74</sup> On the ideological message of this poem see Brygida Kürbis, 'Epitafium Bolesława Chrobrego. Analiza literacka i historyczna' (1st edn, 1989–90), in *eadem*,

What remains is the archaeological context of Boleslav the Brave's alleged grave in Poznań Cathedral. This context has recently become the basis for a thesis on the canonisation or the attempt to canonise the monarch.<sup>75</sup> In this case a historian should suspend his verdict and wait for the outcome of the discussion that will progress among archaeologists and historians of art.

Inasmuch as royal nunneries and oblations of royal daughters were indeed typical of Christian monarchies in the early Middle Ages, the kings-saints who were not martyrs and who, in addition, did not spend their last days in monasteries, were until the mid 11th century exceptionally rare. The lack of canonisation of Mieszko I and Boleslav the Brave would not have diminished the Christian character of the monarchy of the first Piasts at all.

*transl. Robert Bubczyk*

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*Na progach historii*, ii: *O świadectwach do dziejów kultury Polski średniowiecznej* (Poznań, 2001), 243–82.

<sup>75</sup> Tomasz Janiak, 'Czy Bolesław Chrobry był czczony jako święty? Z badań nad przestrzenią liturgiczną przedromańskiej katedry w Poznaniu (do połowy XI w.)', *Slavia Antiqua*, xlv (2003), 67–95; with a hint of approval Hanna Kóčka-Krenz, 'Königsgräber im Dom zu Posen', in Erkens (ed.), *Das frühmittelalterliche Königtum*, 371 (the whole article on 359–75); the author admits the possibility that Mieszko I's canonisation was prepared.