

Anna Kowalska-Pietrzak
Institute of History University of Lodz

History of Poland During the Middle Ages

Poles are Slavs. Slavs belong to the Indo-European people also called Wends and Ands. Slavs' ancestors came from Asia not later than the 1st millennium before Christ. They split into three groups: Eastern, Southern and Western Slavs. Poles, like Czechs, belong to Western Slavs. Slavs were described by ancient chroniclers, who wrote that they had very rigid customs. Husbands and wives had to be faithful, but each man could have several wives. Widows could die with their husbands (e.g. a widow could commit suicide by burning herself at the stake with her husband's body). Slavs were friendly to prisoners of war, although they engaged in cruel wars. Generally, hospitality was characteristic of the Slavs. They liked eating, drinking and dancing. They believed in many gods. There were different gods for weather, families, fields and so on. Slavs worshiped them in holy forests or on hills. They worshiped nature too (e.g. trees or streams). Their world was full of ghosts and mystic powers.

In the early period of the Middle Ages, many tribes had lived on the lands which became the territory of the Polish state. They were living in Major Poland (in Polish called: *Wielkopolska*),¹ in Silesia (*Śląsk*),² in Minor

¹ The main river is the Warta. The most important towns: Gniezno, Poznań and Kalisz (it is mentioned by Ptolemy in the 2nd century).

² Its territory spreads to the south of Major Poland. The main river is the Upper Oder (Odra). The Sudety Mountains are to the south of this land. Silesia was divided into 2 parts: Lower Silesia (the main cities were Wrocław, Legnica, Głogów) and Upper Silesia (the main towns were Opole and Racibórz). Upper Silesia is situated between Lower Silesia and Minor Poland.

Poland (*Małopolska*),³ in Masovia (*Mazowsze*),⁴ in Cuiavia (*Kujawy*)⁵ and in Pomerania (*Pomorze*).⁶ Another territory which was important in the history of medieval Poland was Prussia (*Prusy*).⁷

The Vistulians and the Polians were the most important Polish tribes. The Vistulians lived along the banks of the upper Vistula (in the territory of Minor Poland). It was a great tribe, which was subordinated to Bohemia in the 9th and 10th centuries.⁸ At that time the Polians built their own state.⁹ They were living in Major Poland and they extended their authority and power over the other lands.

³ The main rivers are the upper Vistula (Wisła) and the San. The Beskid Mountains (which are a part of the Carpathians) spread in the south of this land. The main cities are Cracow, Sandomierz, Lublin.

⁴ This land lies to the north of Minor Poland. The main river is the Middle Vistula. The main towns were Płock and Czersk. Warsaw, the contemporary capital of Poland, became an important hub since the 15th century.

⁵ It spreads between Masovia and Major Poland. The main cities were Włocławek and Kruszwica.

⁶ This is the territory which spreads along the shores of the Baltic Sea (from the upper Vistula to the upper Oder). It is situated to the north of Major Poland and Cuiavia. Pomerania was divided into 2 parts: Eastern Pomerania (the main city is Gdańsk) and Western Pomerania (the main cities: Szczecin and Włogoszcz). Another important town was Kołobrzeg.

⁷ It bordered with Eastern Pomerania (in the west), Masovia (in the south) and Lithuania (in the north-east).

⁸ Many legends are connected with the Vistulians, e.g. The one about a dragon which lived in Cracow, near the Wawel Hill (the home of the Vistulians' rulers). The dragon was defeated by a shoemaker who played a trick on him. The shoemaker filled the skin of a ram with sulphur, which was then eaten by the dragon. Remains of this story can be seen to the present days (as a sculpture of the dragon belching fire). Another story tells us about King Krak and his daughter called Wendy. She preferred death to marriage to a German Prince, so she jumped into the Vistula river. Inhabitants of Cracow remember Krak and Wendy because both have their symbolic graves (mounds).

⁹ There are many legends from Major Poland; for instance: the story about three brothers – Lech, Czech and Rus. They were travelling together and each of them was looking for a good place to live. One day Lech found the nest of a white eagle (that is a legendary genesis of the Polish ensign) and he established a new town there. It was Gniezno, the first capital of Poland. Lech's brothers were connected with the origins of the Ruthenian people and Czechs.

1. Poland under the dynasty of the Piasts (to 1370)

The roots of the first Polish dynasty – the Piasts (from the 9th century to 1370) – came from Major Poland. It is possible that the founder of the dynasty (Piaśt) was a very important official at the princely court and he seized power (similarly to the Carolinians and Stuarts).¹⁰

Mieszko I was the first historical ruler of Poland. Many historians discuss when Mieszko and his country were mentioned by chroniclers for the first time.

The symbolic date is 963. Mieszko's troops probably fought against Gero's troops in that year.¹¹ During that period Mieszko ruled over Major Poland, Cuiavia and Masovia. He was also trying to conquer the Pomeranians. He had to fight against the Polabian tribes as well. They were, like Mieszko and his people, Slavs and pagans.¹² Mieszko was looking for an ally against the Polabians. Boleslaus, the Prince of Bohemia became his ally. Mieszko got married to Dobrava, Boleslaus' daughter. After the wedding, Mieszko and his people were baptized Roman Catholics in 966. Dobrava gave birth to a son, who became (over half of the century later) the first King of Poland and to the present day he is referred to as one of the most famous Polish rulers.¹³

Several years later (972) Mieszko had to fight with Hodo, who took power over part of East Germany after Gero's death. The troops met at

¹⁰ There is also a legend written by an Anonymous Gall, the eldest Polish chronicler (at the beginning of the 12th century). The founder of the Piasts dynasty was a peasant (it is similar to a story told by Czechs about their first prince). It was said that Piaśt was celebrating the coming-of-age of his son Simovit, when two strangers came into his home and told him: "You will become a ruler because the people will want you to rule over them". This prophecy could be connected to their earlier visit. The two strangers had visited King Popiel, but he threw them out. He was such a bad ruler that his people instigated a mutiny and, according to a legend, Popiel was eaten by mice in the Kruszwica dungeon.

¹¹ Gero was a great feudal landlord who reigned over a special territory in East Germany given to him by Emperor Otto I.

¹² The Polabians lived between rivers: the Oder and the Elbe.

¹³ In tradition Dobrava was connected with the christianization of Poland. Some chroniclers wrote that she asked her husband to be baptized. It is said that she did not share a bed with Mieszko until his baptism. But it is probably another legend.

the battle of Cedynia, near the river Oder. This battle was important in the history of Poland, because it was the first big battle that has been recorded. Hodo was conquered by the Polish Prince, and Emperor Otto I ordered Mieszko to go to Germany and to explain what happened. Mieszko had to give up his son (Boleslaus) as a hostage. Boleslaus soon returned to his father. After Dobrava's death (977) Mieszko got married again. His wife was Oda, a daughter of one of the German margraves. She gave birth to three sons.¹⁴ The next great achievement of Mieszko was the conquest of Minor Poland and Silesia, which were under Czech rule. Mieszko joined these territories in 990. Several years earlier he had married off his daughter Świętosława-Storrada to Eric, King of Sweden, and later she married Sven, King of Denmark, by whom she gave birth to Canute the Great, King of England. Mieszko died in 992. His eldest son became the next ruler.

Boleslaus the Brave ruled over Poland to 1025. At the beginning of his reign he decided that his line of policy would be connected with the Emperor. After defeating his step-mother, he fought against the Polabians by the Emperor's side. Next Boleslaus looked after Adalbert (*Wojciech*), a Bishop of Prague, who was exiled by the Prince in 997. Adalbert wanted to be a missionary and the Pope agreed to it. Boleslaus sent soldiers to Adalbert, but the missionary made up his mind to go to the pagan Prussians without the soldiers, so he was murdered there. This event was used by Boleslaus to strengthen the position of Poland. The Polish Prince redeemed Adalbert's body for "a sack of gold" and ordered to bury it in the church in Gniezno. Adalbert was canonized as a martyr and became the patron of Poland. Afterwards Boleslaus was able to benefit from this further. The Emperor Otto III made a pilgrimage to Adalbert's grave in Gniezno in 1000. Officially, it was the moment when a metropolitan See was created at Gniezno. Adalbert's brother was nominated the first Archbishop. Bishopricks were established at Cracow, *Wroclaw* and *Kołobrzeg*. The visit of the Emperor was very important for the young Polish state. Boleslaus became Otton's partner in the Roman dream 'Renovatio Imperii'. Boleslaus also had some friends in the East of Germany.¹⁵

¹⁴ So Boleslaus had to fight against them to rule over the whole state of his father.

¹⁵ For instance: one of his daughters got married to Hermann the landlord. The sculpture of her and her husband can be seen in Germany (as A laughing Pole) to the present day.

Good relations between Poland and Germany deteriorated after the death of Otton III in 1002. Bohemia was seized by Boleslaus in 1003. Next, he fought (1004–1018) against the Emperor Henry II, Otton's successor. Boleslaus was struggling for Lusatia (*Łużyce*) and Milzi (*Milsko*). In his campaigns, he reached as far as the Saal. Finally, in the treaty of Bautzen (*Budziszyn*) in 1018, Henry II granted the disputed territory to Boleslaus. During the struggles with the Emperor, Boleslaus led two victorious campaigns to Ruthenia (1013, 1018).¹⁶

Several weeks before his death (1025) Boleslaus was crowned the first King of Poland. The Polish territory increased during his reign. Boleslaus' successes were the main causes of his son's problems.

Mieszko II was Boleslaus' heir. Each of the political neighbours of Poland was waiting for an appropriate time to take revenge. In addition, Mieszko II had two brothers, for whom his father left nothing. The elder of them, Bezprym went to Ruthenia to look for help against Mieszko. The second of them, Otto went to Saxonia for the same purpose. The rulers of the above mentioned countries supported them. The position of Mieszko's wife (Richeza) was also of some political importance. She was a relative of Otto III and she felt humiliated by her husband because of his marital infidelity. She probably took the crowns and the children and went to Germany. Mieszko found himself in a difficult situation and he escaped from the country. His elder brother, Bezprym, had started his short reign and Mieszko had to submit to the Emperor Conrad II at the Congress of Magdeburg in 1032. Poland was divided into three parts. Mieszko took one of them, but as a prince, not a king. Before his death he united the country.

After Mieszko's death (1034) the pagans, who were in hiding during the reign of the previous rulers, rose in rebellion against christian priests and landlords. Interregnum lasted for several years. **Casimir the Restorer**, Mieszko's son, came back from Germany in 1038 and was rebuilding the state after the pagan rebellion and damages made by Czech rulers, who had invaded Poland. Casimir had to rebuild the territory, the organization

¹⁶ The story about the coronation sword of the Polish kings is connected with the second campaign. It is said that Boleslaus used his sword to strike the Kiev Golden Gate so strongly that it was jagged and was called the Jagged Sword. It is not true. Indeed, the sword was much younger.

of the state and of the church. First of all, he made a decision to become an ally of the Emperor and Jaroslaus the Wise, the Prince of Ruthenia. In 1040s Casimir successfully tried to regain the lost parts of Poland. He joined Masovia to Major Poland and Minor Poland. Fighting against the Prince of Bohemia he regained Silesia as well. Casimir died in 1058.

The Polish society began to transform during his reign. Before that time the main military power had been the team (*drużyna*), which had stood by the prince's side and had been led by him to campaigns. The military had been settled in fortresses (*grody*) to defend them. The warriors had received arms from the Prince and they had been maintained by him. After the pagan rebellion, the warriors started to be endowed with lands by Casimir. A man who received the lands was obliged to fight against the enemies and to have his own arms. It was the so-called "knight laws" (*ius militare*).

Boleslaus the Bold continued his father's political ideas. The foreign affairs were very important to the young ruler. As an ambitious and strong prince, he wanted to decide who would rule in the neighbouring countries, so he engaged in the internal politics of the neighbouring states. He fought against the Princes of Bohemia, Hungary and Ruthenia. He gave the thrones to their brothers and to other relatives who were useful to him. He formed a great coalition against the Emperor Henry IV. Boleslaus also co-operated with Pope Gregory VII, when he was controverting with the Emperor. Boleslaus the Bold became an important ruler in Central Europe. As a result of his policy he was crowned King of Poland in 1076. Three years later Boleslaus was in conflict with the Cracovian bishop Stanislaus, who was accused of betrayal.¹⁷

The bishop supported a baronial rebellion against Boleslaus and he was judged, killed and dismembered.¹⁸ Stanislaus' death became the cause of Boleslaus' exile to Hungary.¹⁹

¹⁷ This issue was being discussed in the Polish historiography for over 200 years and it is still perceived as one of the most controversial events in the medieval history of Poland.

¹⁸ It was a story similar to the conflict between Henry II King of England and the Archbishop Thomas Becket in the 12th century.

¹⁹ Over hundred years later, during the period of fragmentation of Poland, the Cracovian bishop was canonized and Poles regarded him as the second (apart from st. Adalbert) patron of the Polish country. It was believed that the regions of Poland were joined like

After the exile of the King, **Ladislaus Hermann**, his younger brother, became the ruler. He was a very weak Prince. His brother's realm was destroyed by him. He was submissive to the Emperor, he was not engaged in foreign politics, he gave real power to his official. Ladislaus was the father of two sons. The younger of them was **Boleslaus the Wrymouthed**.²⁰

After Ladislaus' death his sons: Boleslaus and Zbigniew (the illegitimate Ladislaus' son) were fighting against one another. The problem with Zbigniew was one of several causes of the war between Boleslaus the Wrymouthed and the Emperor Henry V. In 1109 the Emperor, who wanted to submit Boleslaus, supported Zbigniew's rights to a part of Poland and he invaded it. The Emperor was conquered by Boleslaus.²¹

Boleslaus Wrymouthed, similarly to his uncle Boleslaus the Bold, was engaged in struggles for the thrones of bordering countries. This ruler was also famous for conquering and bringing Christianity to Pomerania, which was separated from Poland during the reigns of Boleslaus' ancestors.

Boleslaus' last will determined Poland's fate for about two hundred years. He had many children: 5 sons and several daughters. He divided Poland into 5 parts. Boleslaus gave one part of the country to each son and their descendants. The last part (Minor Poland with Cracow) should have belonged to the eldest one in the whole Piast house.²² This means that

Stanislaus' body. According to one of the legends, his body fused in a miraculous way and it was watched by the eagles.

²⁰ His birth was connected to a story about a miracle. Ladislaus and his wife could not have a child for a long time. One day a pious Bishop said to them: "Send envoys to Provance, to Saint Gill's abbey. If monks pray there, you will have a child". After some time Boleslaus was born.

²¹ One of the famous sieges in the medieval history of Poland took place during that war. Henry V led the siege of Glogov. The Emperor demanded hostages from Polish warriors for the defending of Glogov, before they sent messengers to Boleslaus to ask him what they should do: fight or give up. When Boleslaus had ordered the defenders not to give up, the Emperor commanded to fasten the Polish hostages to siege towers. He hoped the Polish warriors would not shoot at their children and relatives, and the siege towers would be able to stay near the walls of Glogov, but the hostages were killed by defenders and they did not give up.

²² There are many theories of how Poland was divided by Boleslaus because his last will was probably an oral one. It was a common custom in Poland at that time. The matters in dispute are e.g.: periods in which each son took his power over land, which lands belonged to the senior and which lands were intended for the youngest sons.

– according to Boleslaus – the elder of the family should have ruled over the younger members.

Ladislaus the Exile – the eldest of the brothers – took Silesia with *Wrocław*, Boleslaus the Curly: Masovia and Cuiavia with *Płock*, Mieszko the Old: Major Poland with *Gniezno* and *Poznań* and Henry (probably several years after his father's death) took the *Sandomierz* region. When Henry had been killed by Prussian pagans in a battle, Casimir the Just (the youngest of the brothers) took his lands.²³

The eldest of Boleslaus Wrymounthed's sons – Ladislaus the Exile – was ruling over Silesia and Minor Poland (as the senior). He was not loved by his younger brothers because he wanted the juniors to be submissive to him. After several years of the civil war, Boleslaus the Curly and Mieszko the Old exiled Ladislaus. Ladislaus went to the Emperor, who was a relative of his wife – Agnes.²⁴ The Emperor promised to help Ladislaus, but Ladislaus never came back to Poland. During his exile Ladislaus took part in the second crusade. He arrived in the Holy Land with his son – Boleslaus the Tall.²⁵ After Ladislaus' death Boleslaus and his brothers came back to Poland. Their uncles (Boleslaus the Curly and Mieszko the Old) had agreed and let them rule over Silesia. In this way Ladislaus' descendants began their very long reign over the region.²⁶

Wrocław was the capital of Boleslaus' the Tall Duchy. His brother Mieszko was the Prince of *Opole* and *Racibórz*, so he ruled over the territory between Upper Silesia and Minor Poland.²⁷

²³ Three of five brothers (Ladislaus, Mieszko and Casimir) were progenitors of three main lineages of the Piasts. Boleslaus the Curly's lineage died out after his son. Henry died as a bachelor. See also the genealogical table.

²⁴ The Emperor Conrad III decided to Marry Richeza (Ladislaus' daughter) off to Alfons VII, the Emperor of Spain. After death of her first husband, Richeza got married to Raymond II, the Count of Provence.

²⁵ After the crusade Boleslaus became famous for fighting of Milano. He accompanied the Emperor in his Italian campaign, and he defeated one of the greater knights living in that period.

²⁶ The last male member of the Silesian Piast house (and the whole Piast house simultaneously) died in 1675.

²⁷ The lineage which began from Boleslaus the Tall (died in 1201) became more important than the one from Mieszko (died in 1216). Boleslaus' descendants were Henry the Bearded (a son) and Henry the Pious (a grandson). See the genealogical table.

After the extinction of Boleslaus the Curly's lineage, his Duchy (Masovia and Cuiavia) was taken by Casimir the Just (the youngest of brothers), who also had ruled over Minor Poland.²⁸ Casimir reigned over the eastern territory of Poland from that time and the barons of Minor Poland were consolidating their position as the elite of power. Major Poland was under the reign of Mieszko the Old.

To summarize: there were three important duchies in Poland at the end of the 12th and at the beginning of the 13th century. The first one was the Silesia Duchy under Boleslaus the Tall's rule and next under his son Henry the Bearded. The second one was the Major Poland Duchy under Mieszko the Old and next under his son Ladislaus the Spindleshanks' authority.²⁹ The third one was Minor Poland connected with Masovia and Cuiavia, where Casimir the Just reigned. After Casimir's death in 1194 and after several years of struggles, Casimir's great territory was divided into two parts. Minor Poland was taken by his elder son Leszek, and his younger son Conrad took Masovia and Cuiavia.

Pomerania was being separated from Poland in the 2nd half of the 12th century. There were two local dynasties. Western Pomerania had to defend itself from the Danes, the Emperor and margraves of Brandenburg. Princes of Major Poland helped the Pomerania Princes several times, but the help was insufficient. Western Pomerania was getting independence from its western neighbours in the 12th and the 13th centuries.

Princes of strong personality ruled over Poland in the first half of the 13th century. The most important ones were: Henry the Bearded, Leszek the White, and Conrad of Masovia.

Leszek the White³⁰ continued his father's policy. He was engaged in the domestic problems of Ruthenia and was a rival of the King of Hungary.

²⁸ Mieszko was older than Casimir, so he was the senior. But Mieszko was a strong ruler, thus barons rose a rebellion against him and exiled him from Minor Poland. They entrusted power over Minor Poland to Casimir. Mieszko was exiled from Major Poland several years later. He regained power over Major Poland and ruled over Minor Poland three times, till his death in 1202.

²⁹ Ladislaus was waging wars against his nephew and namesake for about 25 years, so Major Poland was divided into two duchies periodically.

³⁰ A funny story is connected with Leszek the White. Leszek ordered to write a letter to the Pope. It was his answer to the appeal to take part in the fifth crusade. Leszek refused.

Finally, Poles submitted the Włodzimierz Duchy and Hungarians submitted the Halicz Duchy. It was a very important event, the consequences of which had influence on future Polish-Hungarian relationships. Leszek was assassinated (1227) due to fighting between regional princes.

Leszek's brother, Conrad of Mazovia, who was ruling over Mazovia, Cuiavia and Central Poland, had two great political projects. He began to realise the first one when Leszek was still alive. It was a programme of protecting his Duchy from invasions from the pagan Prussians, who lived to the north of Masovia borders. Conrad was trying to build coalitions against them and he organized some military expeditions consisting of troops from Mazovia, Silesia, Minor Poland and Pomerania. He also tried to bring the local military order into existence. Finally, Conrad invited the Teutonic Knights to the country in 1226.³¹ They were called *Krzyżacy* in Poland, the name which refers to the black cross on their white mantles. Conrad settled them in the District of Chełmno. Conrad hoped that the Prussian lands would become his territory, but the Teutonic Knights began to obtain some privileges from the Pope and the Emperor and they started to build their own state. They had conquered Prussian lands before 1288. New towns and villages were founded and settled with colonists in the conquered lands.

The takeover of the Cracovian throne after Leszek's death was the second great political project of Conrad of Masovia. He was a rival of Ladislaus the Spindleshanks of Major Poland and Henry the Bearded of Lower Silesia.³² Leszek's son – Boleslaus the Chaste – was only one year old. After defeating Conrad, Henry joined a lot of Polish lands. Lower and Upper

because: he was too fat; he was used to drinking beer, which was not allowed in Palestine and he disliked drinking wine, so he could not go there. And the last but the most serious reason was: the Prussian pagans lived much closer to his country's border, to the north of Masovia. There were the same tribes to whom Saint Adalbert arrived over two hundred years earlier and he was killed by them.

³¹ The Order was established in the Holy Land in 1190-ties. The main purposes of their existence should have been care of pilgrims and the sick and struggling against unbelievers. After loss of the Holy Land by Christians, they had been in Hungary for a short time. The Hungarian King removed them, when they tried to build their own state.

³² This rivalry entailed further consolidation of the barons of Minor Poland. Ladislaus granted a privilege even to them.

Silesia, Minor Poland with Cracow, and Major Poland belonged to him. Henry wanted his son (Henry the Pious) to be crowned. Henry the Bearded died in 1238 and three years later the Golden Horde invaded Central Europe. One of the Mongolian (Tatars) armies attacked Poland. Its main strike went through South Poland. Henry the Pious, who was the commander of the joined troops from Silesia and Major Poland, was killed and his forces were defeated at the battle of Legnica. Next Mongolian invasions occurred in 1259 and 1287.³³

After the first Mongolian invasion the great state which was built by Henry the Bearded and Henry the Pious fell. Silesia was divided between Henry the Pious' sons³⁴ and it was getting more and more fragmented. There were many duchies and many princes. Cracow and Minor Poland was under Conrad of Masovia's rule for two years. Boleslaus the Chaste (Leszek White's son) became the next ruler there, and Leszek the Black (Conrad of Masovia's grandson) gained power after him. The Duchy of Conrad of Masovia was also divided into two parts (the Masovian and the Cuiavian parts). Mieszko the Old's descendants ruled over Major Poland.

The period of fragmentation was the time of transformation. The clergymen and the laymen were endeavoring after immunities.³⁵ The colonization continued and the economy flourished. New villages and new towns were established by modifying the old ones or by starting completely new settlements. Development of agriculture, internal and external trade, mining etc.

³³ Two Cracovian customs have taken their beginning from the time of the Mongolian invasions. The first one is Lajkonik (a rider in Mongolian dress tours the streets on a hobby-horse on the 8th day after Corpus Christi); the second one is Hejnał (the trumpet-call) sounded every hour in the Cracovian Market. A curiosity connected with Mongols is the fact that Benedict the Pole, a monk, was travelling as a translator of the papal legate and reached the Mongolian Empire, so he was a precursor of Marco Polo.

³⁴ One of the brothers, Boleslaus the Bald, lost the Lubusz land, which was called "the key to Poland" because its owner was able to lead campaigns to 3 others territories (Pomerania, Major Poland and Silesia). It was taken by march of Brandenburg and the New March was formed on this territory.

³⁵ Development of the so-called "great land property", the first efforts by laymen and clergymen owners to receive immunities, had begun much earlier, but the period of fragmentation was the time of the main struggles for them because of weakness of the ducal authority and augmentation of the baronial power.

Took place. During that time estates began to be created in Poland. There were: clergy, noblemen (gentry), townspeople, and peasants. Culture was developing as well (e.g. the new architectural style; the first sentences were written in the Polish language³⁶). At that time several Polish scholars were acting, e.g: Martin the Pole, who was a historian, a lawyer, a preacher and a papal confessor. He wrote *Chronicle of the Popes and the Emperors*. His works were very popular in the Middle Ages and translated from Latin into German and French. Vitellon wrote *Perspectiva*. It is said he was a precursor of modern psychology. Francon of Poland wrote the first work about *torquetum*³⁷ and the work about improvement of the Toledan astronomical tables.

About 40 years after the first Mongolian invasion the Polish Princes began to think about unification of the whole of Poland. Henry the Righteous, Prince of *Wroclaw* (the grandson of Henry the Pious) was the first one among them.

He joined Southern Poland (Silesia and Minor Poland) and wanted to realize his great dream: to be a Polish King.³⁸ Unfortunately, Henry died as the Prince in 1290. Przemysl II (of Major Poland) continued the unification. He joined Major Poland and Minor Poland, but the Prince of Bohemia (Wenceslaus II) invaded Minor Poland in 1291. Przemysl had to withdraw from Minor Poland, but he soon joined Major Poland and Eastern Pomerania³⁹ and he was crowned King of Poland in 1295. A year after his coronation Przemysl II was killed as a result of the inspiration of the margraves of Brandenburg.

Wenceslaus was gaining authority over Poland. Some of Princes of Silesia paid homages to him for their duchies. He also fought against Ladislaus the Elbowhigh,⁴⁰ who also wanted to unify the Polish land. Wenceslaus II conquered Minor Poland, Central Poland, Cuiavia, Major Poland

³⁶ For instance, a man wanted his wife to rest and he told her: "I am going to work, and you will rest".

³⁷ It was a device for astronomical measurement, used from the 13th to 18th century.

³⁸ Henry sent an envoy to the Pope to ask the Holy Father for permission for coronation. This messenger spent all the money on his own needs. Protecting him, his brother, who was Henry's doctor, poisoned the Prince.

³⁹ Przemysl took over Eastern Pomerania after the last local Prince's death. The Princes had reached such an agreement earlier.

⁴⁰ He was Conrad of Masovia's grandson and Leszek the Black's step-brother. His nickname came from the fact he was a short man.

and Eastern Pomerania. In 1300 Wenceslaus II got engaged to Przemysl II's daughter and he was crowned King of Poland.⁴¹ He died five years later. His son, Wenceslaus III, was murdered a year later.

Meanwhile, **Ladislaus the Elbowhigh**, who had been exiled by Wenceslaus II, came back to Poland and started regaining and uniting Polish territory. He had serious problems in Major Poland⁴² and in Pomerania. Pomerania was invaded by the margrave Valdemar of Brandenburg in 1308. The Polish Prince invoked the help of the Teutonic Knights. The Knights threw Valdemar out of this land and slaughtered inhabitants of Danzig (*Gdańsk*). The whole province was captured by 1309. The Grand Master of the Teutonic Order built a castle in Marienburg, which became his residence.⁴³ Pomerania belonged to the Teutonic Knights for the next 150 years. It was the beginning of serious problems connected with the Order for many years. Ladislaus was trying to regain Pomerania, but without success.⁴⁴ Ladislaus, who was ruling over Minor Poland, Cuiavia, Central Poland, and Major Poland, was crowned King of Poland in 1320.⁴⁵ It was the symbolic end of the division period in Poland.

After the coronation Ladislaus the Elbowhigh allied with Charles Robert the King of Hungary. Ladislaus' daughter Elizabeth married Charles Robert (1320). This marriage was very important in Polish history. Next Ladislaus allied with Giedymin the Prince of Lithuania. Ladislaus' son Casimir married Princess of Lithuania (1325). He was interested in Ruthenian problems also and he wanted to win Masovian and Western Pomerania Princes over to his side.

⁴¹ Wenceslaus was struggling for the Hungarian crown for his son. Charles Robert of Anjou was another candidate to the Hungarian throne. Charles Robert was a descendant of Charles of Anjou (the brother of St. Louis, king of France), who conquered Sicilian kingdom. Charles Robert became the King of Hungary and Ladislaus the Elbowhigh's son-in-law.

⁴² Princes of one of Silesian lineages (Głogów) were ruling in Major Poland. Ladislaus was not able to join it till 1314.

⁴³ It was in Venice earlier.

⁴⁴ For instance: the Teutonic Order was sued before the canonical court (1320–1321). The judges were nominated by the Pope. The verdict was: the Order should give Pomerania back and pay a lot of money to Poland. The sentence was not performed.

⁴⁵ It was the first coronation in Cracow, the former ones took place in Gniezno.

Ladislaus the Elbowhigh had to fight against the Brandenburg troops and against the Teutonic Knights, who were allied with John of Luxembourg, the new King of Bohemia. King John, as Wenceslaus II and III's successor, wanted to be a Polish King as well.⁴⁶ During the war (1329–1332)⁴⁷ Ladislaus the Elbowhigh defeated this coalition at the battle of *Płowce* in 1331. Though, the disputed questions (to whom Pomerania should belong and who was the King of Poland) were not solved there. These were tasks for Ladislaus' successor.

Ladislaus the Elbowhigh died in 1333. His heir was his son: **Casimir the Great**. He is considered to be one of the greatest rulers of Poland. He was crowned King of Poland eight weeks after his father's death. Casimir could lead effective negotiations. During the first decade of his reign he extended the truce with the Teutonic Order and he wanted to come to an understanding with Brandenburg and King John of Luxembourg. John gave up his royal claims to the Polish throne (1335). At that time the alliance with Hungary became the fundamental cornerstone of Casimir's policy. Casimir declared that if he died without a male heir, the Polish throne would be taken over by his nephew Louis (the son of Elizabeth and Charles Robert of Anjou).

Casimir remembered the Eastern Pomeranian issues and he tried to rejoin them to Poland. The Teutonic Knights were sued before the court again (1339).

The verdict was beneficial for Poland, but it was not executed. Finally, Casimir decided to make peace with the Order at the Treaty. Poland rejoined some territories which were lost during the last war with the Order, but Pomerania (and *Gdańsk*) remained in the hands of the Teutonic Knights. Several months earlier Casimir had drawn up an agreement against the Order with Princes of Western Pomerania. Prince Boguslaus V married Elizabeth, Casimir's daughter. Undoubtedly, this marriage strengthened the treaty.

⁴⁶ John, who was called by himself a King of Poland, confirmed appurtenance of Pomerania to the Order. He continued making the Silesian duchies dependent on Bohemia as well. He was successful when one of the Masovian Princes paid homage to him for the Plock Duchy.

⁴⁷ The Teutonic Order took control over a part of Poland (i.e. over Cuiavia).

At that time Casimir was also being engaged in Ruthenian issues. He began the conquest of Ruthenia in 1340. In that year Prince Boleslaus George Trojdenovitch (the last of the Princes ruling there and Casimir's relative coming from the Masovian Piast lineage) died. According to the decisions which had been made earlier, Casimir could take that territory. The final conquest of the province, which was completed in 1366, was really important to Polish foreign policy. The Polish rulers and the Polish barons were engaged in the so-called 'eastern policy' much more than in the 'western policy'. It was a constant course of Polish foreign policy from that time. Casimir argued with Lithuania about those lands, so he decided to make an alliance after the Lithuanian invasions on Poland and after wars between both states. Hungary was interested in the Ruthenian problems at the same time. They wanted to govern there in the future, so the Hungarian ruler took part in wars and negotiations concerning that region.

Casimir was also trying to rejoin Silesia and Masovia, which still did not belong to Poland. He had to negotiate with Charles IV of Luxembourg, the new King of Bohemia, who owned some parts of the mentioned territories. Charles resigned from Masovia (which was taken by Casimir in fief), but Casimir had to resign from his Polish rights to Silesia. Silesia was beginning its separation from Poland and it was not part of Poland until the 20th century.

Two spectacular events could be seen in Cracow in the last decade of Casimir's reign because Casimir got involved in international policy. Elizabeth of Pomerania⁴⁸ married Charles IV of Luxembourg, King of the Romans and King of Bohemia, in 1363. The married couple were crowned Emperor and Empress of Rome several months later.

The international Cracovian Congress was held a year after that wedding many kings and princes arrived in Cracow in 1364. Charles of Luxembourg, King Louis of Hungary, King Valdemar of Denmark, Princes of Bavaria, Pomerania, Mazovia, and Silesia were amongst them. Peter King

⁴⁸ Casimir's granddaughter by Elizabeth and Boguslaus V. It is believed that Elizabeth was such a strong woman she was able to break horseshoes in her hands.

of Cyprus, who was trying to organize a new crusade and wanted the European kings to participate in it, also reached Cracow.⁴⁹

Casimir's reign was connected with many transformations of the country. Great economic development should be perceived first of all. The growth of settlements (cities and villages), growth of trade as well as lead and salt mining. Casimir reformed the monetary system and wanted to form a state treasury. He introduced rules for military duties and strengthened the system of Polish defence. He ordered building many castles and fortifications. Many buildings, which can be seen to the present day, were built in Cracow during Casimir's reign.⁵⁰

At that time the law was codified and published. It was the basis for the Polish Law for many years to come. The King founded the University of Cracow (the second one in Central Europe⁵¹) in 1364. Casimir wanted to create one Chair in liberal arts, two Chairs in Medicine, three chairs in Canon Law and five chairs in Roman Law. The Italian model for universities was accepted.

Casimir's private life was complex. He had legal wives by whom he had several daughters, but no legal son,⁵² so the main issue was the problem of succession at the end of his life. The Polish throne had been promised to Louis of Hungary (Casimir's nephew by Queen Elizabeth) for many years. But shortly before his death, Casimir wanted Kazko of Pomerania (his grandson and Empress Elizabeth's brother) to be his heir. He announced it in his last will, giving some lands to Kazko. When Casimir died (1370) the problem of succession was not yet solved.

Casimir was the last Piast who ruled over the whole of Poland. After five hundred years of Piast reign, Poles found a ruler from another dynasty. It was the end of a very long period in Polish history.

⁴⁹ This meeting of the kings was commemorated by Guillaume de Machaut, a famous poet of that period. Poles often mention a fabulous feast at the house of a townsman Nicholas Wierzynek on this occasion.

⁵⁰ There is a proverb about Casimir who took over ruling over the country, where buildings were made from wood and he bequeathed it to his successor with buildings of stone and brick.

⁵¹ The first one was set up in Prague by Charles IV of Luxembourg.

⁵² He had also several mistresses and several children by them (illegitimate sons as well).

2. The Polish-Hungarian Union. The Anjou dynasty

After Casimir the Great's death, the House of Anjou reigned Over Poland. Hungary was the country which stretched its power over Bosnia, northern Serbia, a part of Bulgaria, Moldavia and Wallachia at that Time. Louis was engaged in Italian issues and made wars against Venice capturing the Dalmatian Coast.

Louis the Hungarian was crowned King of Poland about two weeks after Casimir's death. He was strongly supported by Minor Poland barons. Kazko of Pomerania, who was supported by Major Poland opposition, had no political ambitions.⁵³

Ruling through regents was characteristic for that period because Louis seldom visited Poland. Queen Elizabeth (the King's mother) was the first nominated regent and the last one to be nominated was Sigismund of Luxembourg.⁵⁴ Louis neglected Polish foreign policy. He was mainly engaged in Ruthenian issues. Lithuania was also interested in conquering the Ruthenian land. Struggles lasted in the first half of the 1370s, when Kiejstut (Prince of Lithuania) led his forces to Poland. Louis did the same in the following year. After that the King thought about joining the Ruthenian territory to Hungary and nominated Hungarian governors there. In that period the Roman archbishopric in Halicz and bishoprics were founded (1375).

Just as Casimir the Great, Louis had daughters and he had no son, so he wanted to ensure the Polish throne to one of his daughters. He had to pay Polish noblemen for their agreement on the Angevin succession in the female line. In 1374 Louis granted the famous privilege of Kosice (Koszyce), which is regarded as the final stage of isolation of the noble stratum and as the beginning of development of noble privileges. Louis confirmed

⁵³ Another candidate to the crown was Ladislaus the White (who started the Cuiavian Piast lineage and was a monk in Dijon). A part of Polish noblemen who did not want Louis to rule over Poland, tried to induce him to fight for the Polish throne against Louis. Ladislaus, who left the monastery, made little unrest in Poland.

⁵⁴ He was a son of Charles IV of Luxembourg and Elizabeth of Pomerania. He was 14 years of age and was a fiance of Mary, King Louis's daughter. He turned up in the next period of Polish history many times.

previous rights and immunities to the nobility and gave them new rights. For instance, offices should not be held by foreigners, and noblemen were obliged to pay very low land-tax (2 groshes from the peasant field). They were also obliged to join the military service in order to defend the country, but the King was obliged to pay them for military expeditions abroad. If anyone was taken captive, the King would have to compensate him. Consequently, the Polish noblemen agreed to the reign of one of Louis' daughters.

Louis chose his elder daughter Mary as the Polish Queen. After Louis' death (1382) the interregnum began. It lasted two years. The situation in Poland was complicated. Sigismund the Luxembourger, Mary's fiance, was not popular in Poland. In addition, Hungarians elected Mary as the Hungarian Queen. It meant that she and her future husband, who preferred the Hungarian crown, would not reside in Poland. Finally, Polish noblemen decided to elect **Hedwig** (*Jadwiga*), Mary's younger sister, as a Queen. They wanted to break the Polish-Hungarian union. She was about 10 years old and engaged to William of Habsburg (Prince of Austria). Another party elected the Masovian Piast, Prince Siemovit IV, who intended to kidnap Hedwig and marry her. The struggles between the parties in Poland continued during that period.

The young Princess Hedwig was crowned Queen of Poland in 1384.

3. The Polish-Lithuanian Union The Jagiellonian period

After Hedwig's coronation Polish barons were looking for a husband for her. They did not accept her fiancé and they supposed that this marriage would not be of advantage to Poland. Jagiello, Prince of Lithuania, was a much more interesting proposition for the Polish barons because they hoped that his connection with Lithuania could finish the Lithuanian invasions. It could end the rivalry between the countries concerning Ruthenia and it could give Poles an opportunity to develop economic expansion there. And finally, this connection could create an alliance to fight against the Teutonic Order.

Lithuanians were the last pagan people in Europe.⁵⁵ They lived between the rivers *Niemen* (Lower and Middle) and *Dvina*. Their territory was divided into two parts: *Žmudź* (in the west) and *Auksztota* (in the east). The tribes who lived there, took part in military rapacious expeditions against their neighbours (and against Poland too). At the beginning of the 13th century, the German Order of the Brothers of the Sword, which was settled in Latvia, started attacking Latvians, Estonians and Lithuanians in order to conquer their lands. The Teutonic Order, which was flourishing in Prussia, joined the Order of Brothers and it started making efforts to join territories belonging to both branches of the Order. In that period the Lithuanian state began to be created. Prince Mendog became the only ruler in *Auksztota*. He was baptized Roman Catholic (1251) because he thought it helped to avoid invasions by the Order. When the people who lived in *Žmudź* had defeated the Teutonic Order they asked Mendog to be their Prince, on the condition that he would return to paganism. He made an apostasy. Mendog was killed by his subjects in 1263, but his aims – to defend the country against the Order and to conquer Ruthenia – were taken over by his successors. Unrest seized Lithuania after Mendog's death.

Giedymin ruled over Lithuania in the 1st half of the 14th century. He was a very active Prince, who entered into relations with the Pope, the West-European rulers and the Polish King.⁵⁶ He is considered to be the creator of the Lithuanian state. The most outstanding Giedymin's sons were Olgierd and Kiejstut. The brothers shared the power. Olgierd was engaged in the conquest of Ruthenia, he fought against Mongols,⁵⁷ Poland, Hungary and the Moscow Duchy. Kiejstut was defending Lithuania against the Order in the west. The Order had military domination over Lithuanians and it was aided by Western knights, who reached the Order State and treated the expeditions as crusades.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ They belonged to the Baltic language group. The first mention about them comes from the 11th century. They lived in the poor country with many swamps, woods and lakes.

⁵⁶ His daughter Aldona Anna got married to Casimir the Great (1325).

⁵⁷ They submitted the Ruthenia in the 1st half of the 13th century, before the first invasion to Poland.

⁵⁸ One of the Western knights who took part in the expeditions (1390) to Lithuania was Henry Lancaster, the future King of England (Henry IV). It is believed that he heard a true story about a Masovian Prince, who accused his pregnant wife of marital infidelity. When

Olgierd's son (Jagiello) and Kiejstut's son (Witold) fought against one another. Witold wanted to recover his patrimony and made alliances with the Teutonic Order when it was to his advantage. Jagiello realized that his country (the last pagan state in Europe) was located between two Christian powers: the Teutonic Order and the Moscow Duchy. The Grand Duke of Moscow defeated Mongols (1380) and he prepared to fight for the Ruthenian territory, which belonged to Lithuania. Jagiello had to choose between the Roman Catholic baptism and the Orthodox one.

When Hedwig was crowned Queen of Poland, the Lithuanian legacies were in Cracow. Negotiations concerning a connection between Poland and Lithuania and the wedding of Hedwig to Jagiello, soon began. In this way Jagiello decided to be baptized Roman Catholic from Poles because he could be a King in Poland. If he had connections with Moscow, he would have been only a vassal. By making an alliance with Poles Lithuanians acquired an ally to fight against the Order. The Roman Catholic christening would – theoretically – mean that the Order would have no pretext to invade Lithuania. The Orthodox baptism did not give such a guarantee.⁵⁹

An agreement was signed in Krevo in August 1385. Jagiello undertook that he, his brothers and his Lithuanian subjects would be baptized Roman Catholics. He was obliged to marry Hedwig, but for breaking her previous engagement,⁶⁰ he had to pay compensation to William of Habsburg; this was to release Polish prisoners and to recover the lands which had been lost by Poland in earlier periods. He was also obliged to join Poland, Lithuania and Ruthenia.⁶¹ These were conditions to be elected by the Polish barons and nobility as the Polish King.

a child was born, the Prince ordered to kill his wife. A boy (Henry) was brought up out of the Masovian court. When he grew up he was so similar to the Prince that he believed the boy was his son. It is said that this story was used by Shakespeare to write "The Winter's Tale".

⁵⁹ The members of the Orthodox Church were considered schismatics.

⁶⁰ Hedwig and William got married as children (*sponsalia de futuro*). She was 4, he was 8 years of age. It meant that the marriage was not consummated. There is a romantic story about William reaching Cracow in August 1385 and wanting to fulfill the marriage. The Polish barons watched Hedwig, so the young couple did not meet.

⁶¹ The scale of the association of the countries was being discussed for many years.

At the beginning of 1386, Jagiello was christened as Ladislaus, married to Hedwig (he was about 35, she – about 12) and crowned King of Poland. It was a turning point in the history of Central-Eastern Europe, which changed a political arrangement. The unifying countries had an area of 800000 km². Their influences stretched between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea and from the river Oder to the rivers Dniepr and Dvina.

After the wedding Hedwig recovered Red Ruthenia for Poland and she led negotiations with the Order about regaining some lands from it. Ladislaus Jagiello expressed his thanks to noblemen by confirming the privileges given by his predecessors, he christianized Lithuania and took homages of Moldavia and Western Pomerania. He made an alliance with Wallahia. Ladislaus Jagiello also made an agreement with his first cousin Witold⁶² to whom he gave authority over Lithuania. They cooperated from that time, with some breaks.

Hedwig was a pious Queen, who did many charitable deeds,⁶³ but the royal couple had a serious problem. They had no child. Over 13 years after the wedding (1399), Hedwig gave birth to a daughter. The Queen and her daughter died several days later. In her last will Hedwig had donated her jewellery, clothes and money to the reformation of the Cracovian Academy. The King was the executor of her will. That's why the Academy is known as the Jagiellonian University.

The Union of Krevo was weakened by Hedwig's death, but it survived. It was restored several times during the next centuries, and it lasted for several centuries. The first restoration of the union took place in 1401. Poles and Lithuanians decided that the next Polish King should be elected with the agreement of the Lithuanian and Polish lords.

Contradictions between Poland, Lithuania and the Teutonic Order led to a war. It was seen especially in the first decade of the 15th century. Both sides were preparing for military actions, i.e. Looking for allies⁶⁴ and making open and secret diplomacy. The most famous event of the struggles

⁶² A mediator was Henry, whose fate inspired Shakespeare. Henry had a bishop nomination at that time, but he was in love with Witold's sister and did not want to be a clergyman any longer. He married her.

⁶³ She was canonized in 1997.

⁶⁴ For instance: the Order leagued with Sigismund of Luxembourg, King of Hungary, who declared war against Poland.

against the Order was the battle of Grunwald/Tannenburg in Prussia on 15 July 1410, which took place in the so-called Great War (1409–1411). Ladislaus Jagiello was joined by Witold with Lithuanians and Ruthenians, by Czech troops and by a contingent of Polish knights under Zawisza the Black (who was one of the famous knights in Europe at that time). The Order had foreign knights from Western Europe. The Polish forces won a crushing victory over the Teutonic Knights. The Grand Master was killed, thousands of prisoners were taken for ransom, the Teutonic camp was captured. Ladislaus Jagiello sent many banners as a trophy to Cracow. After the siege of Marienbourg, which was not captured by the Polish troops, the new Grand Master and the Polish King made peace in 1411 (in Torun), but Pomerania stayed by the Teutonic Order. After this treaty Ladislaus Jagiello and the Teutonic Knights made wars several times. They also instigated diplomatic wars.

Controversy between Poland and the Order was disputed (but unsolved) during the Council of Constance (1414–1418),⁶⁵ where Paul Vlodykovic presented his ideas. Paul based his views on the ideas of Stanislaus of *Skalbmierz* about just and unjust wars. He claimed that all nations should coexist, all people have the right to live, all people have rights to their states and to their property, all people are equal (the pagans too). Paul also contested the powers of the Emperor and the Pope over the pagan lands and he propagated an idea that Christianity should not be led by force (by sword and fire). It was a new point of view.

Ladislaus Jagiello and Witold were engaged in the Czech problems which were connected with the development of the Hussitism movement. They were rivalling with sigismund Luxembourg,⁶⁶ whose brother was the former King of Bohemia.

⁶⁵ The Council of Constance was one of the important events in Europe in the 15th century. It was convoked to end Great Western Schism, to take a position on Hussitism and a union with Orthodox Church. The council had to settle several international disputes. The conciliarists had a Majority there. The conciliarism (an idea, that the Council in the church should have more power than the Pope and the Council is more important than the Pope) was initiated by treaties which were written (i.a.) by mathew of Cracow.

⁶⁶ It was still the same ruler who was known in Poland after the death of Louis the Hungarian and who held the thrones of Hungary and Germany at that time. He was crowned the Emperor and the Czech King in 1430-ties.

The succession to the Polish throne was an important question in Ladislaus Jagiello's life. He had four wives, but his first son (Ladislaus) was born when he had been ruling over Poland for circa 40 years. The old King confirmed the previous privileges and granted several new ones to the Polish barons. He did this so that they would allow his sons to reign. According to those privileges a nobleman could not be arrested without a court sentence and his lands could not be confiscated without a court sentence. But a nobleman could buy a farm from a headman, even though the headman did not want to sell it. It was a very important economic privilege because the nobility was able to enlarge their granges which were characteristic of Central Europe. The rule of election gained an advantage over the principle of succession (the rule of election in a framework of the dynasty at that time). It was seen that the importance of noblemen was increasing.

Apart from the issue of succession, Jagiello had several problems in Lithuania at the end of his life. First of all, Sigismund Luxembourg wanted to break the Polish-Lithuanian Union. According to Sigismund, a creation of the Kingdom of Lithuania and a crown offer to Grand Duke Witold was the best way to achieve it. The Polish lords did not want Lithuania to become the kingdom, but Witold was dreaming about a crown, so the controversy was huge. It was a very dangerous situation for the two parts of the Jagiellonian realm. Witold died soon (1430), as the Grand Duke, fortunately for the union. A civil war in Lithuania broke out after his death, but the union still lasted. The civil war continued but Poland was becoming the greatest power in Central-Eastern Europe when Jagiello died (1434). He left two sons: Ladislaus and Casimir.

Ladislaus of Varna was 10 years old when he was crowned King of Poland. The Polish barons ruled instead of him. The peace treaty was concluded with the Teutonic Order, the Polish diplomacy took place at the Council of Bazel,⁶⁷ Moldavia was submitted and the civil war in Lithuania

⁶⁷ Nicolas Lasocki, who participated in the Council of Bazel, went, as a representative of the Council, to the Peace Congress in Arras and contributed to making peace between France and Burgundy. He wrote a work for King John II of Castile, in which he described Poland and Lithuania. He also explained why Poland had come into conflict with the Teutonic Order.

was ended over several years (by 1440). In that period, after the Emperor Sigismund Luxembourg's death, Poland wanted to take control over Bohemia (1438–1439). Casimir, Ladislaus' younger brother, was a candidate for the throne. However, Albrecht II Habsburg (the King of Hungary) became Sigismund's successor also in Bohemia. When he died, Zbigniew Olesnicki (a Cracovian Bishop and the first politician in Poland) wanted Ladislaus Jagiellon to be the new King of Hungary.⁶⁸ Ladislaus was elected and crowned the Hungarian King in 1440. The lords reigned in Poland in the King's absence. The period of the next Polish-Hungarian Union began in this way. Ladislaus had to fight for the Hungarian throne against Elizabeth, the former Hungarian King's widow. This lasted over two years. King Ladislaus needed a lot of money to wage that war, so he had to pawn royal property in Poland. It caused a reduction of income and had negative consequences for many years.

After the civil war, the Pope persuaded Ladislaus to lead a crusade against Turks. The King was killed by them at the battle of Varna on the Black Sea coast (1444).⁶⁹

Casimir Jagiellon – the second son of Jagiello – was enthroned unexpectedly in Lithuania by local lords when Ladislaus was elected as the Hungarian King. The personal union between Poland and Lithuania was then broken.⁷⁰ After his brother's death, Casimir was elected the King of Poland. Before he was crowned (1447), he led political games (for three years) with the lords under the pretext of the uncertainty of his brother's death. In this way he wanted to overcome the baronial opposition, which demanded him to confirm the privileges, like his predecessors.

The year 1454 was very important for Casimir Jagiellon. He got married to Elizabeth of Habsburg and began a long (13-years) war against the Teutonic Knights. The marriage enabled the Jagiellons to seek for

⁶⁸ Olesnicki knew that Hungary was in danger because of Turkish attacks, but he dreamt about organizing a crusade.

⁶⁹ There were many stories that the King was not killed at the battle and he was seen by somebody somewhere. It was said he lived as a hermit (e.g. in Portugal).

⁷⁰ The Lituianian mutiny, which enthroned Casimir as Grand Duke, against his brother's will (Casimir was to be only his brother's governor) caused that Casimir never charged anybody (even his sons) with ruling over Lithuania.

the inheritance when the Habsburg dynasty in Bohemia and Hungary extinguished.⁷¹ Whereas the war made it possible to recapture some lands belonging to the Order. The war against the Teutonic Knights had several reasons, apart from territorial, for instance: economic (trade without obstacles made by the Order) and social (the Prussian nobility wanted privileges like the Polish one).

The Prussian nobility, the landlords and the townsmen set up an opposition organization called the Prussian Association (*Zwiazek Pruski*). They started an uprising and asked the Polish King to incorporate the Prussian lands to Poland at the beginning of 1454. During the war, the noblemen forced privileges from the King, concerning levy in mass and taxes. The war finished in 1466 (the treaty in Torun).⁷² Eastern Pomerania (called Royal Prussia) came back to Poland and the eastern part of Prussia (called Ducal Prussia) stayed in the Teutonic State. After many years Brandenburg joined Ducal Prussia and became the Kingdom of Prussia.

During the war, seven of the thirteen children were born to Casimir and Elizabeth. Elizabeth was called “mother of the European kings” because each ruler was related to her. And this is so to the present day. The eldest son, Ladislaus, was elected as King of Bohemia (1471) and King of Hungary (1490).⁷³ The second son – Casimir – was made an offer by Hungarian rebels (against King *Maciej*) to assume the throne in Hungary (1471).⁷⁴ He did not become a King, but died as a saint.⁷⁵ Three other sons – John Albert, Alexander and Sigismund – succeeded the Polish throne consecutively. The youngest brother – Frederick – became the Archbishop of Gniezno and a Cardinal. Casimir and Elizabeth’s daughters married rulers. Hedwig got married to the Prince of Bavaria and her wedding was so marvelous that it has been remembered to the present day as “the Landshut wedding”; Sophia

⁷¹ Elizabeth was a granddaughter of Sigismund of Luxembourg and a sister of the last Habsburg King in Bohemia and Hungary.

⁷² At the end of the war, Casimir incorporated some parts of Masovia into Poland.

⁷³ The Jagiellons ruled over Bohemia and Hungary till 1526, when King Louis, Ladislaus’s son, was killed by Turks at the battle of Mochacz.

⁷⁴ Both of the brothers rivalled Maciej Korwin, King of Hungary and a son of a Hungarian national hero. Ladislaus took over the Hungarian throne after Maciej’s death.

⁷⁵ He is a patron of Lithuania.

was married to the Elector of Brandenburg and was the mother of Albrecht von Hohenzollern, the last Grand Master of the Teutonic Order. Anna was the wife of Boguslaus X, the Prince of Western Pomerania. Barbara got married to George, the Prince of Saxony and Elizabeth to Frederick II, the Prince of Legnica.

The Jagiellons had to struggle with several problems from the second half of the 1460s. First of all they fought against *Maciej Korwin*, the King of Hungary, about the Czech crown. Peace was made between them in 1479, but the Kings did not live in friendship. The second question was that Ivan III, the Grand Duke of Moscow, began unifying the Ruthenian lands (those which were under the Jagiellons as well). The expansion of the Turkish Empire in the area of the Black Sea was the third issue of concern. Turks were attacking Moldavia, captured Caffa⁷⁶ and submitted Crimean Tatars. Turks often inspired Tatars to invade neighbouring countries. They had ravaged them and had taken thousands of captives, who were later sold as slaves. These events changed the arrangement of powers in this region.

Casimir Jagiellon died in 1492, several months before Columbus discovered America.⁷⁷ Casimir's heir was his son **John Albert**, who became a Polish King. John's brother Alexander became the Grand Duke of Lithuania. John Albert incorporated some Silesian and Masovian lands, granted some privileges to noblemen (1496), which restricted the other estates and broke the equilibrium between them.⁷⁸ After that he led a campaign to Moldavia. It is said that the King wanted to recover the towns which had been taken by Turks in 1484 and (perhaps) to enthrone his brother Sigismund on the Moldavian throne as a *Hospodar*. The campaign failed. After

⁷⁶ The Genoese colony in Crimea, which was under the protection of Casimir Jagiellon; circa ten years later Turks took the next important commercial towns in the region (Kilia and Białogród, 1484).

⁷⁷ There is a story about a sailor – John of Kolno. It was believed that he discovered America in 1476. It is, of course, only a legend.

⁷⁸ For instance: townsmen could not purchase land property and cities were excluded from the Parliament, which was destructive in the future of Poland. The privileges restricted also the peasants. Only one peasant could leave a village a year.

that John made a truce with the Turks. Lithuania, during the reign of John Albert and his brother and successor **Alexander**, had to cope with the military actions which were being undertaken by the Duchy of Moscow.⁷⁹ Tatars and Moldavians caused problems as well. Alexander granted further privileges to the noblemen. They could refuse obedience to a King (1501) and “nothing new” could be decided without an agreement of the nobility as a whole (1505).

The privileges granted to noblemen – who were divided internally⁸⁰ and began to transform from knights into landowners in the 2nd half of the 15th century – during centuries, strengthened their position and caused growth of their political importance. The nobility had its representation. It was the Sejm (*Sejm* – the Polish Parliament), which had two houses: The Upper one (the King and his Council) and the Lower one. The Parliament sat twice a year and made decisions e.g. About war, peace, demanding and collecting taxes as well as calling noblemen under arms. The nobility also increased its economical incomes by enlarging of granges, making use of gratuitous labour force (*corvee*) and export of cereals.⁸¹ The processes mentioned above laid foundations for the existence of Noble’s Republic.

Alexander died in 1506. The Polish crown was given to **Sigismund**, the fifth brother, later called the Elder. That moment is considered by many historians as the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the modern Time in Poland because it was a turning point for the development of the Polish parliamentarism, which started during the reign of John Albert and Alexander, as well as for cultural transformations (an extensive entrance of renaissance), which took place during the reign of Sigismund.

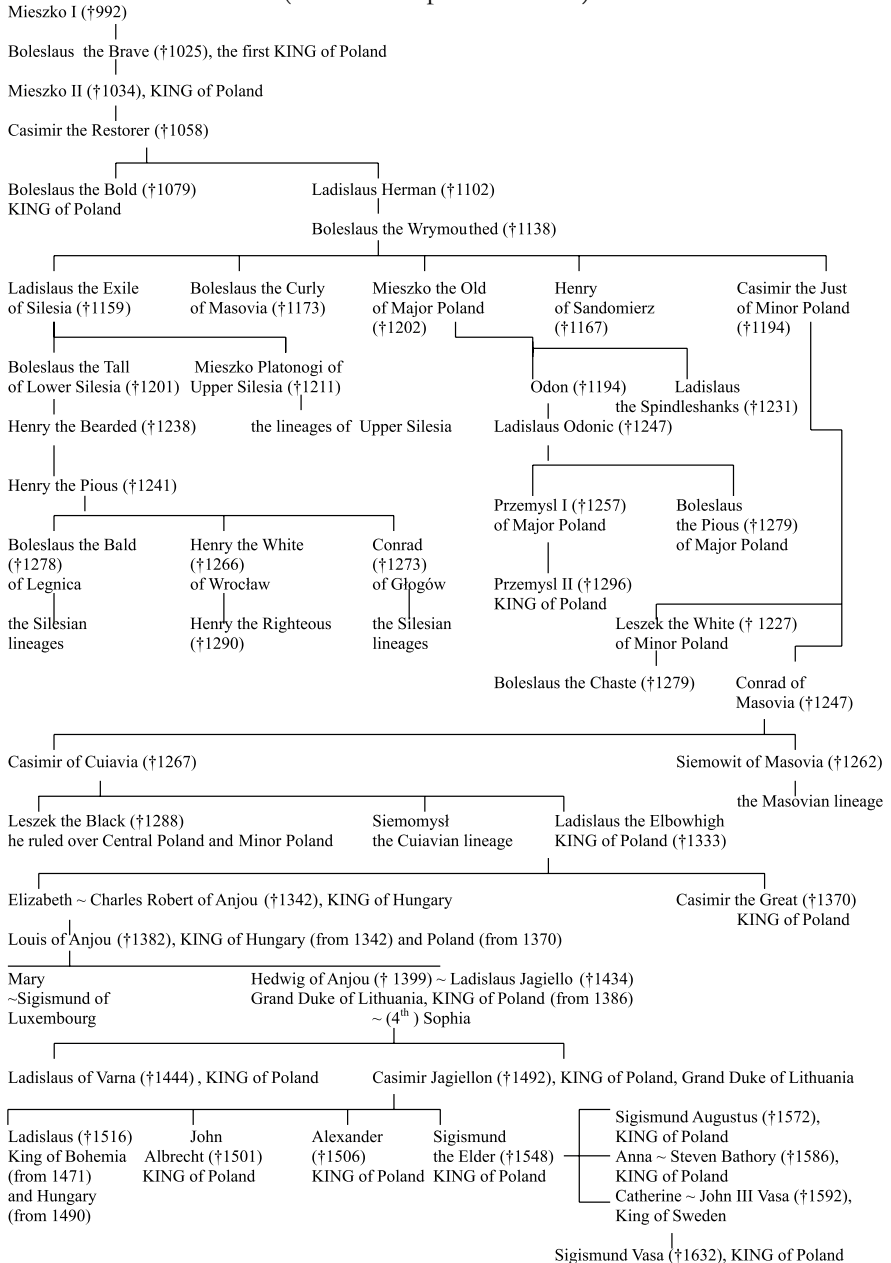
⁷⁹ Lithuania lost 1/3 of its Ruthenian territory in favour of Moscow in 1503.

⁸⁰ It was divided into upper stratum: the baronial caste (*magnates*) and the middle stratum (knights, in the later time called *middle-gentry*, *landholders*). Others estates were also divided.

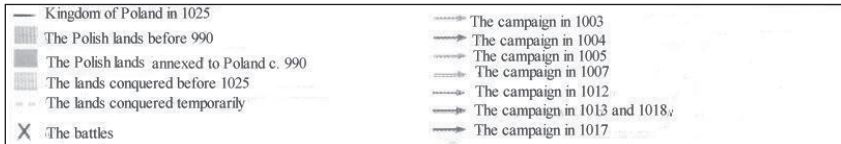
⁸¹ Poland became the main exporter of corn to Western Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The Dynasty in Medieval Poland: the Piasts, the Anjou, the Jagiellons

(the most important rulers)



Poland under Mieszko I and Boleslaus the Breve



Poland after Casimir the Great



Poland and Lithuania



The most important events in the history of medieval Poland

Poland under the Piast Dynasty (to 1370)

- 966 – Mieszko I and his people were baptized Roman Catholics
- 1000 – the meeting in Gniezno during reign of Boleslaus the Brave: the Emperor Otto III went to Poland; the first Polish metropolitan see was created in Gniezno
- 1025 – Boleslaus the Brave was crowned the first King of Poland
- 1138 – Boleslaus the Wrymouthed divided Poland into 5 parts. It was the beginning of the period called: the fragmentation of the country
- 1226 – Conrad of Masovia invited the Teutonic Knights to Poland
- 1308–1309 – Poland lost Eastern Pomerania, which was taken by the Teutonic Knights. They were beginning to build their state. It was the origin of the diplomatic difficulty as well as many wars between Poland and the Teutonic Knights.
- 1320 – Ladislaus the Elbowhigh was crowned King of Poland. It was a symbolic end of the fragmentation period.
- 1340–1366 – Casimir the Great was conquering Ruthenia
- 1364 – Casimir the Great founded the University of Cracow (the second one in Central Europe)
- 1370 – Casimir the Great died; he was the last King from the Piast dynasty

The Angevin dynasty – the period of Polish-Hungarian Union

- 1370 – Louis the Hungarian was crowned King of Poland; the beginning of the Polish-Hungarian union
- 1374 – Louis gave very important privileges to the nobles (in Koszyce)
- 1384 – Hedwig (Louis' daughter) was crowned Queen of Poland
- 1385 – The Polish-Lithuanian Union (in Krevo)

The Jagiellonian dynasty (from 1386) – the period of Polish-Lithuanian Union

- 1386 – Jagiello, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, was baptized. He was called Ladislaus Jagiello from that time. Ladislaus Jagiello got married to the Queen Hedwig and was crowned King of Poland.
- 1410 – Ladislaus Jagiello defeated the Teutonic Knights at the battle of Grunwald/Tannenberg
- 1440–1444 – the Polish King Ladislaus Jagiellon was the King of Hungary (it was the next Polish-Hungarian union)
- 1444 – Ladislaus Jagiellon (after his death he was called Ladislaus of Varna too) was killed by the Turks at the battle of Varna.
- 1454 – Casimir Jagiellon (the Polish King from 1447) got married to Elizabeth of Habsburg (she gave birth to 4 kings, who ruled over Central Europe).
- 1454–1466 – the Polish -Teutonic war
- 1466 – the treaty in Torun; Eastern Pomerania (called Royal Prussia) came back to Poland; the eastern part of Prussia (called Ducal Prussia) stayed in the Teutonic State. After many years Brandenburg joined Ducal Prussia and became Kingdom of Prussia.
- 1471 – Ladislaus Jagiellon (the eldest son of Casimir and Elizabeth) became the King of Bohemia
- 1490 – Ladislaus Jagiellon became the King of Hungary
- 1505 – *Nihil novi.*