

Introduction

Historical Studies: papers read before the Irish Conference of Historians.
The following is a complete list of the volumes already published and of the conferences to which they refer.

Historical Studies: papers read before the Irish Conference of Historians

vol.	conference	editor	date of publication
I	Trinity College & University College, Dublin, 11-13 July 1955	T. D. Williams	1958
II	Queen's University, Belfast, 22-4 May 1957	Michael Roberts	1959
III	University College, Cork, 27-9 May 1959	James Hogan	1961
IV	University College, Galway, 25-7 May 1961	G. A. Hayes-McCoy	1963
V	Magee University College, Londonderry, 30 May-1 June 1963	J. L. McCracken	1965
VI	Trinity College, Dublin 2-5 June 1965	T. W. Moody	1968

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The Medieval Empire and the Early Piast State

Herbert Ludat

Events which occurred exactly one thousand years ago provide us with the first reliable reference to the existence of Poland as a state. They form a prelude to a far-reaching historical development which had hardly less influence on the growth and structure of Europe than had the linking of the Ottonian kingdom with the Holy Roman Empire by Otto the Great, on 2 February 962, at St Peter's in Rome. The thousandth anniversary of that memorable day in Rome attracted little attention in Germany or in the rest of Europe.¹ In contrast, certain events which happened in the years 963 to 966, and which were associated with the emergence of the Polish nation, formed the historical background to the thousand-year celebrations of the Polish state.² The majority of national anniversary celebrations can be veritable nightmares for the historian, not only because anniversaries are countless in number but also because they are generally only occasions for interpretations and panegyrics which bear little or no relation to actual historical truth and which are seldom genuine attempts to comprehend the historical truth, but are more often designed to bolster self-confidence and encourage optimistic hopes about the future.

The idea underlying Poland's millennium celebrations was, however, by no means just a mere political expedient.³ This concept of

¹ See H. Beumann, 'Das Kaisertum Ottos des Grossen. Ein Rückblick nach 1000 Jahren', in *Hist. Zeitschrift*, 195 (1962), pp. 529 f.

² *Początki państwa polskiego* (The beginnings of the Polish state), ed. K. Tymieniecki, G. Labuda, H. Łowmiański, i (Poznań, 1962), pp. 7 ff., 261 ff.; O. Halecki, *The millennium of Europe*, p. 105 f.; H. Ludat, 'The oldest historical basis of German-Slav relations', in *Handbook of eastern Germany*, ii (Würzburg, 1963), pp. 25 ff.

³ H. Ludat, 'Die Anfänge des polnischen Staates und das Verhältnis der Polen zu ihrer Geschichte', in *Gesch. in Wissenschaft u. Unterricht* (1960), pp. 581 ff.

Medieval Empire and the Early Piast State

the autonomy and independence of the early Piast state and its political function as a barrier to stop the German 'Drang nach Osten' or expansion to the east is one of the basic concepts and convictions of the modern Polish nation, the so-called Piast idea.¹

As we are forced to restrict ourselves to one partial aspect of this whole complex of questions, I should like to consider the relationship and interaction of the two powers, the empire and the Piast state, in the initial stages, about the year 1000, at a critical moment in the development of medieval Europe. In considering this relationship I will try to examine the basis of the Piast conception of history and raise the question of the accuracy of the view, once widely held and still popular with German historians, that the relationship between the Piast state and the Ottonian empire was primarily one of national opposition.

In raising this question we are touching on a problem which marks a crucial point in German history: namely, the dispute about a fair evaluation and correct assessment of the policy of Otto III and his successor, Henry II. But the prerequisites for such an attempt to clarify this question (and I should like to stress this right at the beginning of my account), the details which can help us to illuminate the argument, have only become fully available in the results of the most recent research by Western European, German and Polish medieval historians.

For example, we have only recently become aware of the full impact of the fundamental idea of the historic role of Carolingian Lorraine, of the lands along the Schelde, the Meuse and the Rhine, as the cradle of the Carolingian idea of empire, of 'Reich', of 'Imperium', and as the cradle of a flourishing culture, which we term 'Reichskultur', based on the nobility and especially the clergy who had undergone a reform. In addition, too, we see the important link between this idea of empire and the fresh insight it gives us in trying to interpret and understand the policy of the German rulers of the Saxon dynasty, namely, the importance which this geographical area of Lorraine had in the rise of the dynasty to a position of a leading power and to the acquisition of the imperial crown of the Occident.²

¹ Z. Wojciechowski, 'Dwa ośrodki państwowotwórcze w Polsce na przestrzenie dziejów i ich zasięg geograficzny' ('Two centres of state formation in the history of Poland and their geographical extent'), in *Kwart. Hist.*, 51 (1937), pp. 471 ff.

² The importance of Lorraine for the Carolingian and Ottonian periods has been pointed out in many studies during the last decades. See the articles in the recent monumental work on Charlemagne, *Karl der Grosse*,

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Now let us look at a final example of the critical reappraisal made necessary by recent research. The enormous achievements of Polish medieval and archaeological studies, especially in the last decades, have enabled us to disassociate the history of the beginnings of the Polish state and its culture from the limited perspectives of German-Polish antagonism and to evaluate them in the broader terms of European politics and culture.¹ Having said this, we are still only at

ed. W. Braunsfels, H. Beumann, B. Bischoff, H. Schnitzler and P. E. Schramm, i-iii (Düsseldorf, 1965), and *Das erste Jahrtausend*, ed. V. H. Elbern, i-iii (Düsseldorf, 1964). See further F. Rousseau, *La Meuse et le pays Mosau en Belgique* (Namur, 1930); E. de Moreau, *Histoire de l'église en Belgique*, iii (1945); E. de Moreau, *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, ii (1950); J. Lejeune, *Liège et son pays* (1948); H. Sproemberg, 'Lüttich und das Reich im Mittelalter', in *Beiträge zur belgisch-niederländischen Geschichte* (1959), pp. 346 ff.; H. Sproemberg, 'Die lothringische Politik Ottos des Grossen', in *Rhein. Vierteljahresblatt*, 11 (1941), pp. 1-101; P. E. Hübinger, 'König Heinrich I und der deutsche Westen', in *Arch. Hist. Vereins f. Gesch. Niederrheins*, 131 (1937), pp. 21 ff.; Th. Schieffer, 'Die rheinischen Lande an der Schwalle der deutschen Geschichte', in *Historische Forschungen und Probleme, Festschrift f. F. Rassow* (1961), pp. 18 ff.; H. Büttner, 'Der Weg Ottos des Grossen zum Kaisertum', in *Archiv. f. mittelh. Kirchengesch.*, 14 (1962), pp. 44 ff.; H. Büttner, *Heinrich I und der Westen* (1964); K. Hallinger, *Gorze-Kluny*, i-ii (Rome, 1950-51).

¹ Mention must be made of the valuable results accomplished by Polish research in the fields of the history of art and of archaeology. See especially: P. Skubiszewski, 'Badania nad polską sztuką romańską w latach 1945-64', in *Biuletyn historii sztuki*, xxvii (1965), pp. 135 ff.; Z. Swiechowski, 'Die Bedeutung Italiens für die romanische Architektur und Bauplastik in Polen', in *Acta Historiae Artium Acad. Scient. Hung.*, x (1964), pp. 5 ff.; also by the same author, 'Romanische Baukunst Polens und ihre Beziehungen zu Deutschland', in *Westfalen*, 43 (1965), pp. 161 ff. For a new assessment of the cultural, social and constitutional history of early Piast Poland, see the contributions of J. Bardach, A. Gieysztor, G. Labuda and T. Manteuffel, in *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 67 (1960), pp. 893 ff., and also the accounts in *Początki*, I-II, as well as A. Gieysztor, 'En Pologne médiévale. Problèmes du régime politique de l'organisation administrative du Xe au XIIIe siècle', in *Annali della Fondazione italiana per la Storia amministrativa*, 1 (1964), pp. 135 ff. See also H. Ludat, 'Soziale und politische Strukturprobleme des frühpiastischen Polen', in *Agrar-, Wirtschafts- und Sozialprobleme Mittel- und Osteuropas in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (1965), pp. 371 ff., where the most important of the older and more recent Polish specialist literature is cited, and F. Graus, 'Die Entstehung der mittelalterlichen Staaten in Mitteleuropa', in *Historica*, X (1965), pp. 5 ff. The standard work of J. Bardach, *Historia państwa i prawa polskiego* (History of the Polish state and law) I (2nd ed. 1965) and the material published in *Acta Polonica Historica* should also be consulted.

the beginning of our historical consideration in the course of which we must try to assess the events which took place in this European frontier area in terms of general historical phenomena and yet seek to avoid doing this in terms of modern national attitudes. However, without the stimulus of the various points of view put forward in the different studies, which form the basis for a revaluation, my attempt to provide a new interpretation of the first phase in German-Polish relations would not be possible and, indeed, could hardly be convincing.¹

In the ten centuries of German-Polish relations, the congress of Gnesen, in the year 1000, is, without doubt, an event of the greatest significance.² In this encounter the Emperor Otto III met the Polish Duke Boleslaw at the tomb of their mutual friend, the martyr Adalbert. In the sources describing this meeting in Gnesen, in March of 1000, many of the details have still not been completely clarified. Scholars are, however, generally agreed that on this occasion Boleslaw received extraordinary honours from the emperor and that Poland, in accordance with the *Renovatio* plan of Otto III, was raised to the rank of a self-determining member within the Holy Roman Empire. Seen against the background of the preceding political relations between, on the one side, the Piast state, and on the other side the German kingdom and the Ottonian empire, this congress or act of Gnesen appears even more puzzling, at least in the light of the few available sources which are almost exclusively interpreted from a national aspect, and especially problematical when one thinks of the German-Polish conflict which broke out shortly afterwards.³

It appears that the emperor's plans, which were aimed at securing control and order in the whole non-Byzantine sphere of power, received a palpable blow; and the sudden death of the young emperor

¹ See H. Ludat, *Saeculum*, xiv (1963), pp. 325 ff., for fuller references to the subject matter of this present study.

² M. Z. Jedlicki, *Kronika Thietmara* (1953), pp. 205 ff., also M. Uhlig, *Die Regesten des Kaiserreichs unter Otto III* (1957), no. 1349 d. and e., and also by the same author, *Jahrbücher des Deutschen Reiches unter Otto II und Otto III*, ii (1954), pp. 320 ff., 549 ff. See also A. Brackmann, *Kaiser Otto III und die staatliche Umgestaltung Polens und Ungarns* (1939); A. F. Czajkowski, 'The congress of Gniezno in the year 1000', in *Speculum*, xxiv (1949), pp. 339 ff.; Z. Wojciechowski, in *Studia historyczne* (1955), pp. 78 ff., and G. B. Ladner, 'The Holy Roman Empire of the tenth century and east central Europe', in *The Polish Review*, v (1960), pp. 3 ff.

³ See L. Koczy, 'Le Saint-Empire et la Pologne', in *Riassunti delle Comunicazioni* (X International Congress of Historical Sciences, 1955), vii. 210 ff.

and the ensuing hostilities between his successor and the Polish duke prevented the realisation of these plans. The historical judgement as to the feasibility of their realisation remains an open question.¹ Thus, the political agreements in the act of Gnesen did not have immediate or far-reaching results, or so at any rate it appears. The only apparent result is that the newly created church organisation for Poland, with a metropolitan see at Gnesen, was able, for the future, to withstand the claims of the archbishop of Magdeburg. This fact, scholars are agreed, was an outstanding political contribution to the future consolidation of the Polish state, which, in the German view, makes the Gnesen congress appear as a mistake, a fatal disaster. In Polish eyes, however, it is seen as the inevitable and merited reward crowning the preceding expansion of the authority of the Piast state.

The German view of the relations of Poland to the empire have been determined and shaped by the events after the year 1000, and above all by the critical voices raised in contemporary accounts, especially Bishop Thietmar of Mersburg's criticism of the politico-ecclesiastical measures taken by Otto, and Thietmar's completely negative evaluation of the character of Boleslaw I of Poland, whom Thietmar describes as an enemy of the state. It is only recently that a deeper understanding of the world of ideas in which the young emperor lived has enabled us to make a more objective assessment of the Gnesen plans and proceedings; an objective evaluation which, however, has not divested the event of its reputed episodic and utopian character, since its failure made necessary a return to the 'well proved, realistic, sound' policy of Otto the Great. We cannot accept such an assessment of the policy of Otto the Great without the strongest reservations. Helmut Beumann's recent studies have shown in a convincing manner that the overall policy of Otto the Great, seen from the standpoint of traditional assumptions and historical impulses, is only to be comprehended in terms of a universal and not as a national German policy.² In contrast to this we have the Polish view which is still under the spell of the compiler of the *Chronica Polonorum*, the so-called Gallus Anonymus, probably a cleric from Flanders, who came to the court of the Polish Duke Boleslaw III in Cracow, around 1110. In Polish research, the work of Gallus has recently been aptly described as the first formulation and definition of

¹ This illustrates the weakness, in a general way, of the medieval system and does not involve a judgement on the realistic or utopian character of the negotiations as such.

² H. Beumann, 'Das Kaisertum Ottos des Grossen', in *Hist. Zeitschrift*, 195 (1963), p. 572.

daughter of the Count Palatine Ezzo and his wife, the emperor's sister, Mathilde. In addition Boleslaw's youngest son, at his baptism received the same name as the emperor. Similar proceedings had taken place shortly before in Hungary and Venice; the parallel to the Byzantine family is unmistakable.¹

(5) The elevation of Boleslaw to the kingship, for unknown reasons, did not take place, although the same conditions existed as in the case of Hungary. Perhaps the emperor may even have had some such plans, but from Gallus's account it is not possible to infer that any coronation ceremony took place in Gnesen.² Gallus only remarks that the Emperor Otto placed the imperial diadem on Boleslaw's head as a sign and seal of friendship '*in amicie fedus*'.³

(6) The honours which were accorded Boleslaw by the act of Gnesen, cannot be interpreted as absolving him from his responsibilities and duties to the *imperator*, an interpretation which has attracted criticism from the Polish side as being a deliberate, conscious, obscuring of German hegemony aspirations. Just as it is misleading to impute German motives to the emperor's universal-Christian policy, so too it is absurd to think that, having received insignia of power from pope and emperor, Boleslaw interpreted the agreement of Gnesen as a severance from the *imperium* in the sense of full sovereignty.⁴

¹ The use of the term *frater* (Gallus, op. cit., i. 6) emphasises the equality of rank and birth (see M. Wielers, 'Zwischenstaatliche Beziehungsformen im frühen Mittelalter', dissertation, University of Münster, 1959). See also M. Uhlirz, op. cit., pp. 322, 416 and 558; O. Balzer, *Genealogia Piastów* (1895), pp. 70 ff.; St. Zakrzewski, *Boleslaw Chrobry Wielki* (1925), p. 374; F. Dölger, *Hist. Jahrbuch*, 60 (1940), pp. 397 ff.

² M. Uhlirz, op. cit., pp. 538 ff.; W. Meysztowicz, *Sacrum Poloniae Millennium*, iii (1956), pp. 309 ff.; R. Wenskus, *Zeitschrift f. Ostforsch.*, 5 (1956), p. 533; 10 (1961), pp. 357 ff.

³ Certainly the chronicler (Gallus, op. cit., i. 6) described proceedings which were characterised by a novel and unusual ceremonial to mark the conclusion of politically most significant treaty negotiations between the *Imperium Romanum* and one of its *regna*. This is emphasised by the decisive phrase *in amicie fedus*. There is no reason to reject the account given by Gallus as untrustworthy or unhistorical. The problematical element lies in the lack of parallels. It is, therefore, worth mentioning that the treaty made between Konrad II and Knut of Denmark, in 1025, was likewise characterised by Adam of Bremen (c. 56) with the term *in fedus amicitiae*. The phrase used elsewhere by Gallus, *Igitur Boleslaus in regem ab imperatore tam gloriose sublimatus* can be explained from the trend of the *Liber de passione* and the living regal tradition at the Piast court.

⁴ Also followed by recent Polish research (G. Labuda, *Kwart. Hist.*, 67 (1960), p. 1025; A. F. Grabski, *Boleslaw Chrobry*, p. 98).

The assertion made some hundred years ago by a German scholar, that Boleslaw did not take the agreement seriously, but only made cynical misuse of it as a shrewd politician to further his plans in power politics, is shown, by a critical study of sources, to be neither likely nor logical, when we consider the situation at that time, the relations of the Piast state before 1000 and the attitude and behaviour of Boleslaw immediately after the congress of Gnesen.¹ On the contrary, he was probably just as impressed by the exceptional visit of the emperor to Gnesen as were his contemporaries who participated in and reported on the imperial visit.² And for Boleslaw the congress of Gnesen could only have represented the successful culmination of a consistent and systematic policy on the part of the Reich. It is more than mere conjecture when we hold that the policy of the Saxon emperor, understood in terms of universal motives, systematically favoured, from the very beginning, the consolidation and expansion of the power of the Piasts as a flank protection against the Bohemian Premyslide state in the east. The traditional links of the Premyslide dynasty with the heathen *Lutizi* confederation between Elbe and Oder and their hostility to the rival Bohemian princes, the *Slavnikidi*, who apparently stood close to the Ottonians, were much less in harmony with the interests of the empire. Therefore the *renovatio*-conception of Otto III can be called, 'a reasonable, realistic policy of synchronising the worldly and ecclesiastical demands of the time'.³

The ruler's passionate zeal for the propagation of Christian doctrine and his constant personal interest in the campaigns against the heathen Slav tribes on the eastern borders of the empire suggest that the *renovatio*-policy derived partly at least from the wish for a thorough reform in the sense of a definitive settlement, and pacification of the Elbe Slavs too. On his last campaign against them, after he had learned of the martyrdom of Adalbert, this conception at any rate took on for the first time more pronounced features. He decided immediately to promote the canonisation of Adalbert, which presumed the closest co-operation with Boleslaw of Poland. On these

¹ See H. Zeissberg, 'Über die Zusammenkunft Kaiser Ottos III mit Herzog Boleslaw I von Polen zu Gnesen', in *Zeitschrift f. d. österr. Gymnasien* (1867), p. 348. See also A. F. Grabski, op. cit., p. 112.

² See Thietmar, op. cit., iv. 44: *Nullus imperator maiori umquam gloria a Roma egreditur neque revertitur* and (ibid., iv. 45): *Qualiter autem caesar ab eodem tunc susciperetur et per sua usque ad Gnesin deduceretur, dictu incredibile ac ineffabile est*.

³ H. Beumann, *Archiv f. Diplomatik*, 1 (1955), pp. 233 ff., and M. Uhlirz, op. cit., p. 415.

suppositions grew up the plan of reorganisation of the *imperium* with Rome as *caput mundi*, when the emperor started his second campaign in Italy.

Again, Otto III's approach is revealed as only the logical continuation of a realistic policy introduced much earlier on the threatened eastern flank, when the claims of the archbishopric of Magdeburg to be considered as the ecclesiastical metropolis for the whole of Sclavinia brought with it an element of unrest.¹ These claims were waived, presumably because in the opinion of all the participants, namely the emperor, the pope and the Polish duke, the enormous expansion of the area under the sway of the Piast monarchy, including the conquest of Pomerania, Silesia and the district of Cracow, made the setting up of an ecclesiastical organisation imperative. The solution of this problem by the congress of Gnesen was evidently in the interest both of the empire and of the Piast state.

It is highly significant that even later, during the wars between Henry II and Boleslaw, Magdeburg's claims did not achieve political recognition. And during and after the restoration of the Piast state, which Casimir I accomplished, with the help of Conrad II and Henry III, Magdeburg's claim to jurisdiction over the Polish church was no longer even mentioned.² This fact has only been ignored because of the national-political interpretation superimposed on the problem, the political significance of which has been overestimated by modern research. The congress of Gnesen, in addition, was based on a community of outlook linking the emperor with the Piast princes in their mutual friendship with Adalbert. The congress revealed, too, in Boleslaw a congenial partner for the emperor with his universal Christian policy.

The threads of this policy ran as far as Kiev. Hungary and Venice were included in this *renovatio* concept. The gate to the east was thrown wide open for the *imperium* and the spread of the Christian doctrine. The Aix-la-Chapelle-Rome axis had received with the congress of Gnesen a new outpost of culture and power far to the east. In such a world was Boleslaw able to think in terms of national Polish power-politics?

Let us turn and consider the attitude of the Piast duke after the congress of Gnesen. From the tomb of Adalbert, he escorted the emperor, by way of Magdeburg, to Aix-la-Chapelle, where Otto had just begun building the shrine to the memory of the apostle of the

¹ M. Uhlirz, op. cit., pp. 415 ff.

² A. Brackmann, *Magdeburg als Hauptstadt des deutschen Ostens*, (1937), pp. 30 ff.

Prussians.¹ For this journey of Boleslaw, which the chronicler Thietmar significantly omits, there were no doubt important grounds. In the first place, there was the fact of his participation in the adjourned negotiations on Magdeburg's claims, in opposition to Archbishop Gisiler of Magdeburg, who rejected the Gnesen settlement as an infringement of his rights, and secondly, there were the consultations with the Count Palatine, Count Ezzo, and his wife, Mathilde, the emperor's sister, about the marriage of Richeza, their daughter, with Mieszko, Boleslaw's son. But above all, this journey represented a demonstration to stress the spiritual bonds between the newly-founded church of Poland and the residence and burial place of the Emperor Charles the Great, who converted and pacified the heathens. At that time, Otto had the grave of his predecessor opened, and, according to later tradition originating in Flanders, presented Charles the Great's throne to the Piast duke, who in return gave Otto relics of Saint Adalbert.² In any case we may assume that this direct contact with the living imperial Carolingian tradition made a deep impression on Boleslaw, and from subsequent events it can be induced with certainty that Boleslaw, on his way through the empire and especially at the court in Aix-la-Chapelle, made the acquaintance of the emperor's ministers and was able to contact and make friends with the leading members of the empire's aristocracy. In sharp contrast to these signs of complete harmony are the controversies which began, after the early death of Otto, between Boleslaw and Henry II and which ended with the attainment of independence and a regal crown by the Piast ruler. Why was the *renovatio* policy not continued? The answer given by historical research to this question is, by and large, unanimous. It is that this conception was utopian and unrealistic and, in the last resort, it depended on agreement between the two personalities who represented the whole concept in Gnesen. The only point of disagreement between German and Polish research lies in the problem of deciding what brought the Gnesen concept to an end so abruptly. Was it due to Boleslaw's aspirations, regarded by the Poles as legitimate, and his endeavours to achieve full sovereignty as a major power, or was it due,

¹ *Annales Quedlinburgenses* a. 1000; in addition, M. Uhlirz, op. cit., pp. 326, 333, 559. For the foundation of the St Adalbertstift in Aachen, see H. Gatzweiler in *Zeitschrift d. Aachener Geschichtsvereins*, 51 (1930), pp. 64 ff. Otto III's particular attachment to Aachen, which he wished to make a second Rome, is well known.

² *Adémar de Chabannes*, ed. I. Chavanon (1897), p. 154. See also A. F. Grabski, op. cit., pp. 104 f., and on the subject of the relics, H. Gatzweiler, op. cit., pp. 70 ff., 87, 262, and M. Uhlirz, op. cit., p. 559.

as German historians have maintained, to a conscious and imperative return by Henry to a programme of a stricter subjection of Poland to the German *regnum*?¹

The succession of events in the subsequent period has overshadowed and distorted the picture of the first phase of the relations, to the year 1000. This has led to the first phase being seen almost exclusively in the context of Polish aspirations to achieve equality and independence. The question whether the decisive impulse for Piast policy can be found in the antagonism between Polish national interests and German attempts to achieve a hegemony, in the guise of universal policies, has, up till now, hardly been raised.

Within the limits of this paper it is impossible to provide a full, critical assessment of German-Polish relations prior to 1000. It must, however, be said that the still prevalent view that the spread of Christianity and the impressive rise of the Piast state, from the sixties of the tenth century onwards, ultimately resulted from Polish-German antagonisms, is an extremely doubtful one, in the light of the meagre sources available.²

Without the consent of the Ottonian *imperium*, without the active help and support of the Reich, neither the political co-operation of these two powers nor the manifold complex dynastic, cultural and ecclesiastical entanglements during these decades become comprehensible. Recent archaeological finds in the cultural centres of the early Piast state, in Posen, Gnesen, Łęczyca and many other places, demonstrate in fact exactly this point, namely that this new member of Christendom derived its energy and its examples from the world of the Ottonian *imperium*.³ I should like to concentrate on the period after the year 1000, however. In this period we have a whole series of sources which have been subject to a too one-sided interpretation, or which have remained entirely disregarded, because they did not fit into the traditional, preconceived, picture. They all show clearly that, after the death of Otto III, there must have existed important motives to induce Boleslaw and the empire to retain the Gnesen concept. They appear to me to cast doubt on the theses of the nationally-based character of the

¹ The assumptions made in research works, namely, Boleslaw's attempt to create a West Slav empire and Henry II's return to a policy of asserting German supremacy over the east, are no proof that Otto III's universal policy was unrealistic.

² For a similar view, see A. Gieysztor, 'Christiana respublica et la politique orientale de l'Empire', in *Renovatio imperii* (1963), p. 54.

³ See the references to the extensive literature in the Polish language mentioned above, p. 3, n. 1.

conflict and of the damaging effects of the emperor's policy on the east.

I should like to adduce a few of the more important arguments in support of my statement. The events of 1002 and 1003 are regarded as marking a turning point in Boleslaw's relations with the empire. His sudden attack on the Middle Elbe lands, in the spring of 1002, and his seizure of power in Bohemia, in 1003, are generally accepted as clear proof of his plans to make his state a major power, and as incontrovertible evidence of his shrewd policy directed against the empire. A critical examination of all the sources, however, shows this thesis to be a questionable one. It is worth stressing, first of all, that Boleslaw took part in the election of the Saxon lords in Merseburg, on 25 July 1002, and paid homage to Henry II whose claim to the throne was disputed.¹ Henry's way to the royal throne was undoubtedly facilitated by the murder of one of his rivals, the Margrave Ekkehard of Meissen, in April 1002. Ekkehard, who was related to Boleslaw, had been closely allied with the policy of Otto III. Boleslaw's attack and his seizure of German marches only demonstrate his assumption of the interests of the related Ekkehard dynasty.² King Henry II, in any

¹ *Adalboldi Vita Henrici II*, MG SS iv. c. 10, p. 686, and Thietmar, op. cit., Vols. 15-18. According to this reliable witness, whose statements are not in conflict with Thietmar's, Boleslaw, the '*dux Sclavorum*', gave the king along with the other Saxon notables the *acclamatio* and *fidem promiserat et promissam sacramento firmaverat* . . .

² For Ekkehard of Meissen, see H. Beumann and W. Schlesinger, 'Urkundenstudien zur deutschen Ostpolitik unter Otto III', in *Archiv f. Diplomatik*, 1 (1955), pp. 207 ff., and H. Patze, *Die Entstehung der Landesherrschaft in Thüringen*, 1 (1962), pp. 120 f. For the relationship between the Piast and the Ekkehard lines, see R. Holtzmann, in *Sachsen u. Anhalt*, 8 (1932), pp. 123 ff., and R. Schölkopf, *Die sächsischen Grafen* (1957), pp. 64 ff. For the relationships between the Piast and Wettin families, see K. A. Eckhardt, *Genealogische Funde zur allgemeinen Geschichte* (2nd edn., 1963), pp. 64 ff. The events have been subject to very different interpretations, frequently due to the unsubstantiated assumption of the existence of a previous alliance between Boleslaw and Henry against Ekkehard. Important for an understanding of the events is the clear agreement between Boleslaw Chrobry and his relatives from the Ekkehard line, Gunzelin, the brother, and Hermann, the son, of the murdered Margrave Ekkehard (see Thietmar, op. cit., v. 8-9, who obviously has suppressed much in his account). This association was strengthened by the marriage, at this time, of Hermann with Boleslaw's daughter, Regelindis. After the death of the great Margrave, the position of the Ekkehard line was doubtlessly endangered by the rivalry between the Saxon notables. Hermann and Wilhelm of Weimar were involved in a feud and Liuthar of Walbeck had crossed Ekkehard's plans for the throne.

case, gave unconditional recognition to the state of affairs by his enfeoffment of Boleslaw with these marches on the eastern frontiers of the empire. Thus the Piast duke acts at the court diet in Merseburg like a prince of the empire. But then a strange event happened. On leaving Merseburg, Boleslaw and his retainers were ambushed. Secretly the Piast duke held the king responsible for this outrage. The personal relationship between Henry and Boleslaw became somewhat clouded by this incident. Shortly thereafter Boleslaw, himself a Premyslide descendant, became involved in the Bohemian struggle for the succession. In this connection it is very remarkable that the Polish ruler twice supported the claims of other Premyslide pretenders before deciding to accede to the pressure of the nobility-faction and himself assume power in Prague.¹ This solution to the Bohemian problem must have proved very welcome to Boleslaw himself, since it excluded a revision of the Polish frontiers and also extended Sclavinia in a way which Boleslaw, as a Premyslide, approved.

That even Henry II had no misgivings about this solution is clear from his approval. He only attached the condition that Boleslaw would retain Bohemia *de sua gratia ut jus antiquum possit* and would serve the king in true allegiance.² It was this condition, however, which led to the break between Henry and Boleslaw. Boleslaw's decision to refuse to swear the oath of fealty for Bohemia must be seen against the background of the failure of the policy of his predecessor, Vladivoj, who had paid homage to Henry II. To explain Boleslaw's attitude we may, perhaps, take into account that he possibly regarded himself as a direct heir of Ekkehard of Meissen and, therefore, both the ruler and administrator of the Bohemian dukedom, which had been a direct fief of Ekkehard.³ With this decision, Boleslaw had disregarded the legal right of the empire, which, on the basis of the Gnesen settlement, he was not entitled to do within the framework of the *imperium*.

Whether he was fully aware of the import of his decision we do not know. The chronicler Thietmar only remarks that Boleslaw received Henry's demand ungraciously.⁴ Probably Boleslaw only felt strengthened in his attitude to Henry by the strong opposition of the princes.

¹ See V. Novotný, *Česke dějiny I*, 1 (1912), pp. 661 ff., 671 ff. (on the subject of Vladivoj), 676 ff. (on the subject of the return of Boleslaw III).

² Thietmar, op. cit., v. 31.

³ Thietmar, op. cit., v. 7, writing of Ekkehard, *Boemiorum ducem Bolizlavum, qui cognominatur Rufus, ad militem sibi . . . adipiscitur*. See also W. Schlesinger, in *Archiv f. Diplomatik*, 1 (1955), p. 221.

⁴ *tamen Bolizlaus indigne suscipiens*, Thietmar, op. cit., v. 31.

Henry, for his part, must have seen Boleslaw's action as a challenge and a direct threat to his authority as king which was still insecure. Henry answered this challenge, at the court diet in Quedlinburg, at Easter 1003, by taking an unusual step. He formed an alliance with the heathen Elbe Slavs, hitherto the arch-enemies of the empire, by turning the Lutizi 'from foes into companions and friends'.¹

This reversal of imperial policy had without doubt epochal significance and it had far-reaching consequences in relation to the political structure of central Europe.² It interrupted the work of Christianisation and it finally allowed the Piast state to release itself from all ties to the universal *imperium*, without being able to pacify and incorporate within its borders the heathen lands between the Elbe and the Baltic before the twelfth century.

That this departure in political policy met with opposition and condemnation from within the aristocracy of the empire, especially where the Carolingian-universal traditions were still strong, is perfectly understandable. The participation of the Elbe Slav contingents on Henry's side during the prolonged conflict with his opponents in the west can hardly have helped to lessen this dislike of change.³ In view of the many links with Boleslaw, these developments could not remain without some influence on Henry's eastern policy. Brun, the Saxon missionary, in his celebrated intervention, sent from Boleslaw's court and in which he praises Boleslaw as the ideal ruler and a new Constantine, proposed that he should act as mediator. He went on to urge King Henry to end the disastrous war and to devote himself, together with the Polish duke to the task of converting the heathens to Christianity.⁴

It has long been noticed by scholars how reluctantly and unenthusiastically Henry's wars against the Polish duke were supported in particular by the Saxon nobility, who had to bear the brunt of the burden.⁵ This attitude can only be explained in terms of their general

¹ Thietmar, op. cit., v. 31. See further G. Lukas, 'Die deutsche Politik gegen die Elbslaven vom Jahr 982 bis zum Ende der Polenkriege Heinrichs II'. (Dissertation, University of Halle, 1940), pp. 75 ff. For Thietmar's criticism of the alliance with the Lutizi and its consequences, see Thietmar, op. cit., vi. 22, 23, 25, and viii. 64.

² K. Tymieniecki, *Polska w średniowieczu (Poland in the middle ages)*, 1961, pp. 66 ff.

³ Thietmar, op. cit., vi. 51.

⁴ W. Giesebrecht, *Geschichte der deutschen Kaiserzeit*, ii (5th ed., 1885), 703 ff., and *Mon. Pol. Hist.*, i, ed. A. Bielowski, pp. 223 f.

⁵ See the witnesses mentioned by Thietmar (Thietmar, op. cit., v. 6, 10, 15, 19; vi. 27, 33, 54, 56, 69, 79; vii. 9-12, 18, 22, 51, 57, 59, 60, 65. See

dissatisfaction with Henry's new policy, of the innumerable ties of family and friendship linking the Piast house with the Saxon nobility and of their common tradition of hostility to the heathen communities. One cannot detect any national feeling on either side in these conflicts.¹

Among the most bitter opponents of Henry II, from the beginning, was the Count Palatine Ezzo, Otto III's brother-in-law. As son of the Count Palatine Hermann II, Count Ezzo came from one of the leading families in Lorraine and was closely related to the Carolingians and Ludolfingers.² By his marriage to the emperor's sister, Mathilde, Ezzo had moved into a position of equality with a duke, and had become one of the most powerful and respected men in the empire. He only lacked the *regium nomen*, as the chronicler says.³

There are no real grounds for doubting the tradition, according to which Otto, before his death, is said to have ordered that the insignia of the empire, and thereby claims to a ruling position, should be taken to Ezzo.⁴ The fate of the holy lance, which Henry was only able to wrest from Heribert of Cologne by force, would seem to indicate that Henry intended it for a third person. In view of Ezzo's nearness to the king and the rapid rise to power which his family experienced under the Salians, it is not unlikely that Ezzo was one of the contenders for the throne. Instead of this, a bitter conflict broke out over the estates to which Mathilde had claims and which Henry confiscated

also G. Lukas, op. cit., especially pp. 73 f., 82 f., 88, 91, 99, and H. Zeissberg, 'Die öffentliche Meinung im 11. Jahrhundert über Deutschlands Politik gegen Polen', in *Zeitschrift f. österr. Gymnasien*, xix (1868), pp. 83 ff.

¹ In contrast to the national emotive content of modern interpretations of military and political happenings.

² J. P. J. Gewin, *Die Herkunft der Grafen van Limburg-Stirum* (1962); E. Kimpfen, 'Die ezzonische Verwandtschaft der rheinischen Pfalzgrafen', in *Coburg mitten im Reich*, ed. F. Schilling, i (1956), pp. 184 ff., and S. Corsten, 'Rheinische Adels Herrschaft im ersten Jahrtausend', in *Rheinische Vierteljahrsblätter*, 28 (1963), pp. 112 ff., 128.

³ *Fundatio (Brunwilarensis monasterii fundatorum actus)*, ed. G. Waitz, MG SS xiv. c. 10. Ezzo was at the time the most powerful man in the Frankish Rhineland (F. Steinbach, 'Die Ezzonen', in *Das erste Jahrtausend*, ii. 859).

⁴ See *Jahrbücher Heinrichs II*, i, ed. S. Hirsch, pp. 451, 438 n. 1. For the details of the election of Henry, see R. Schmidt, 'Königsütritt und Huldigung in ottonisch-salischer Zeit', in *Vorträge u. Forschungen*, 6, pp. 114 ff. For the presentation of the Lance as a sign of designation, see P. E. Schramm, *Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik*, ii. 494, and R. Schmidt, op. cit., pp. 123 ff.

and declared to be imperial property.¹ Boleslaw must have been deeply interested in the outcome of this prolonged conflict, which lasted a decade, because of his agreement to the marriage of his heir and successor to Ezzo's eldest daughter. In any case, Boleslaw clung steadfastly to his goal of securing the realisation of this marriage agreement.

The connection between this whole question and Henry's eastern policy becomes obvious at the point when, in the middle of his conflict with Boleslaw, Henry suddenly, in 1012, became reconciled to Ezzo, recognised his claim to Mathilde's inherited estates, and, in addition, granted Ezzo such important imperial lands as Kaiserwerth, Duisburg and Saalfeld as private property.² This surprising decision can only be understood as an honour and reward for particularly important services.

In direct connection with this settlement, on Henry's recommendation, the marriage of Richeza and Mieszko, agreed upon at Gnesen, took place.³ As we know, in 1013, the peace of Merseburg was concluded. This peace was designed as a definite end to hostilities with Poland, and it was greeted throughout the empire with great relief

¹ See R. Gerstner, 'Die Geschichte der lothringischen und rheinischen Pfalzgrafschaft', in *Rheinisches Archiv*, 40 (1941), and F. Steinbach, op. cit., pp. 858 f., as well as the articles dealing with the history of property holdings in *Coburg mitten im Reich*. It is clear that from the beginning, Ezzo was counted a loyal supporter of Otto III, and because of his family connection with the Konrad line he was regarded as a representative of the universal idea and an opponent of Henry. See *Jahrbücher Heinrichs II*, ii, ed. H. Pabst, pp. 310 ff. The Brauweiler tradition exaggerates Ezzo's role.

² 'Itaque rex consultius arbitratus virum egregium beneficiis placare quam molestiis iam ullis infestare: pro abolenda ducis et concaptivorum calamitate eo accersito, offensas ignoscit, fidem amicitiamque exposcit; utque non minore etiam apud se quam a maioribus suis familiaritatis vel honoris emeriti gratia potiat, insulam quae est in Rheno sancti Suitperti cum omnibus suis appenditiis, Duysburg etiam atque Salvaveld, non modica regni subsidia, sibi suisque liberis perpetua hereditate possidenda largitur' (*Fundatio*, c. 13).

³ Nam eodem tempore Poliniorum rex nomine Misecho, cum diversis, regiae tamen personae congruis, munerum speciebus missis procis, per praefati regnatoris interventum filiae eius quae primogenita erat Richazae petit consortium. Cuius—ut desiderabat—puella sponsalibus, quo decebat cultu, multorum favoribus adaptatur; quoniam eiusdem occasione coniugii regnum Sclavorum regno Teutonicorum confaederari a multis spe non inani credebatur. Quo non multo post tempore rex suarum de statu securus rerum, quarum procul dubio vir excellentissimus tutum erat firmamentum, Romam profectus imperator creatur (*Fundatio*, c. 13).

and jubilation.¹ Henry's role in all these developments leads us to the conclusion that the ten years of war on the western and eastern fronts and the disappointments which the dubious alliance with the heathen Elbe Slavs had brought with them all convinced Henry of the impossibility of achieving a permanent solution of his problems. Furthermore, Henry was about to put his Roman plans into operation. The cessation of hostilities, therefore, appeared imperative. A peace treaty with Boleslaw apparently presupposed compliance with the Gnesen marriage agreement, and this in turn could only be accomplished by coming to terms with the Count Palatine Ezzo and by the restitution of Otto III's *allodia* or freeholds.

The peace of Merseburg, in 1013, although in a different way, came close to the Gnesen conception. After the conclusion of a mutual alliance agreement between Henry and Boleslaw, which reveals the conditions laid down by Boleslaw, the Polish ruler paid homage to the presumptive emperor as Henry's vassal for the whole Piast state and thereby received the disputed eastern marches in fief. Thus a solution had been found which was similar to that reached by Otto's *renovatio* concept.²

The ruler of *Polonia-Sclavinia* was a member of the universal *imperium* and simultaneously a liege of the German empire; and the Piast dynasty by its *connubium* with the imperial family had advanced into the ranks of the élite princely families of Europe. Proof that these are not mere speculations or suppositions is given by the previously neglected Brauweil tradition which springs directly from the house of Ezzo and Richeza.³ In this tradition it is claimed that the marriage between Richeza, the emperor's niece, and Mieszko, Boleslaw's son, was concluded in order to link the two *regna*. The words used are: *regnum Sclavorum regno Teutonicorum confaederari*.⁴

The significance of this matrimonial alliance of the Piasts and the Ludolfings for Boleslaw's policy and for the conception of the Piast court is unmistakably revealed by the name given to the son born in 1016 to Richeza and Mieszko. He was baptised Casimir or Kazimierz

¹ *UB. Erzstift Magdeburg*, ed. F. Israel and W. Möllenberg, i (1937), pp. 190 ff.

² On the subject of the preliminary negotiations and the peace of Merseburg, see Thietmar, op. cit., vi. 89-91; *Annales. Quedl.*, a. 1013.

³ H. Pabst, in *Archiv. d. Gesellschaft f. ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde*, xii (1872), pp. 141 ff.; E. Wisplinghoff, in *Jahrbuch d. Kölner Geschichtsvereins*, 31-2 (1956-7), p. 52.

⁴ *Fundatio*, c. 13.

and given the additional programmatic cognomen Carolus.¹ What the naming was intended to express is unmistakable. The baptism was a testimony to the validity of the Gnesen arrangement and the universal-empire-concept of Otto III, and, in addition, a direct declaration of the intention to pursue Charles the Great's tasks and aims. Boleslaw evidently considered himself Charles the Great's successor in the east. Both his contemporaries and later court tradition have compared him to Charles the Great.² Significantly enough, he also acquired the title of *Magnus*, a title known even to the oldest Russian tradition.³ This marriage of Mieszko with Richeza, the emperor's niece, of Carolingian, Ludolfing and Greek blood, who was to be the progenitor of the whole Piast dynasty and of the Hungarian too, was considered by Mieszko himself to be significant. As a later account shows, he was considered to be in line for the succession to the throne by virtue of his marriage to Richeza, or as it was expressed, *propter dignitatem uxoris*.⁴

From Casimir-Carolus I onwards, all the members of the Piast dynasty were also descendants of the Carolingians and Ottonians. It is thus clear in what way the Piast constellation wanted itself to be seen, namely as a member of the *Christianum imperium Romanum*.

The renewed outbreak of war between Henry and Boleslaw, bringing with it a new alliance with the Elbe Slavs, clearly demolished Boleslaw's hopes of realising his plans. With the peace of Bautzen, in 1018, Boleslaw dropped all legal and constitutional links with the German king and the empire.⁵ Boleslaw now held the marches of the

¹ *Galli Anonymi Cronica*, i, c. 17. The tradition as given by Gallus, which is not an interpolation, is also confirmed from other sources (see K. Maleczyński's editorial reference, p. 40 n. 4). See also O. Balzer, *Genealogia Piastów*, pp. 81 ff.

² See Bruns letter (see p. 15, n. 4), and for a fuller discussion of the cult of Charles the Great, see J. Adamus, in *Studia Wczesnośred.*, 4 (1958), pp. 132 ff.; A. F. Grabski, in *Roczn. Hist.*, 27 (1961), pp. 55 ff.; St Kętrzyński, in *Przegl. Hist.*, 36 (1946), pp. 19 ff. and 'Oimionach piastowskich Jo końra XI w.' (On Piast names up to the end of the 11th century, in *Polska X-XI w.*, pp. 593 ff.)

³ See Gallus and the annals R. Gansiniec, 'Nagrobek Bolesława Chrobrego' (The memorial to Boleslaw Chrobry), in *Przegl. Zachodni*, 7-8 (1951), p. 462 n. 38; *Povest' vremennykh let*, ed. D. S. Lichačev, i (1950), p. 301. For the name Magnus, see P. Lehmann, in *Hist. Jahrbuch*, 49 (1929), pp. 215 ff., and by the same author, 'Das literarische Bild Karls des Grossen', in *Sitzungsberichte d. Bayerischen Akad. d. Wissenschaften*, 9 (1934), p. 8.

⁴ *Mon. Pol. Hist.*, iii, ed. A. Bielowski, p. 445.

⁵ Thietmar, op. cit., viii. 1; for an important study of the subject, see A. F. Grabski, *Bolesław Chrobry*, pp. 203 ff., 241 ff., 255 ff.

German kingdom, both of the Lausitz regions and Moravia, by virtue of his position as ruler of Sclavinia. The conclusion of peace, in which the archbishop of Magdeburg played an instrumental role, was greeted with relief, especially in Saxony.

One can only conclude that Otto III's *renovatio* policy still survived to a large extent among the German nobility. This in turn demonstrated the continuance of close political and cultural ties with the Piast court. But was the peace of Bautzen really the end of the imperial policy of Gnesen? This is doubtful if we just recall the considerable part played by German contingents in Boleslaw's Kiev campaign in the summer of 1018, after the conclusion of the peace of Bautzen, and the sending by the Piast prince, from Kiev, of a declaration of loyalty to the Emperor Henry stating that, in future, he would continue to act in accordance with the emperor's wishes. These circumstances rather support the view, especially when we consider the threatening tone of the message sent, at the same time, to the Byzantine emperor, that what was involved was probably a question of a large-scale combined action against Byzantium. Certainly Boleslaw knew that he was still bound and linked to the Emperor Henry.¹ Perhaps we have to seek here, too, an explanation of the remarkable fact that Boleslaw, apparently out of respect for the emperor, had himself crowned king, in the spring of 1025, without the pope's consent, only after Henry's death.²

If thereby the act of Gnesen was reduced to a mere episode in the sphere of Poland's official political relations with the empire, it is nevertheless a fact that the congress of Gnesen had a decisive influence on the formation of the Piast-Polish historical tradition. It was, therefore, logical and close to historical reality when the Piast tradition ascribed the roots of its kingship to the congress of Gnesen in the reign of Otto III. The epitaph on the tomb of Boleslaw I paraphrases the situation: *tibi contulit Otto coronam*.³ It was fully in keeping with the political climate and views of the first Piast rulers and especially of Boleslaw when court tradition, as transmitted in the Chronicle of Gallus, completely erased all reference to the conflicts with the empire from their accounts.⁴

¹ Thietmar, op. cit., viii. 33.

² See A. F. Grabski, op. cit., pp. 283 ff.

³ *Mon. Pol. Hist.*, i. 319 ff.

⁴ The only reference to the wars of Boleslaw against the empire to be found in Gallus: 'Indomitos vero tanta virtute Saxones edomuit, quod in flumine Sale in medio terre eorum meta ferrea fines Polonie terminavit' (Gallus, op. cit., i. 6).

The conflict which broke out, a few years later, probably about the Lutizi question, between the new rulers, the Emperor Conrad II and the king of Poland, Mieszko II, and which ended with the surrender of the crown insignia and the fall of the first Piast state, in a heathen and social revolution, finally ruled out the possibility of any further realisation of the Gnesen concept.

We cannot here go into the question of how long and how intensively the Christian-imperial concept continued to be effective even after the fall of the Polish crown and the subsequent restoration of unity by Casimir-Carolus in the Piast house. In the imperial conception of the Salians, the Piast state, having lost its pre-eminence in Sclavinia, no longer held its former leading place. The kingdom died out with the death of Mieszko II. Richeza did not live to see the short-lived restoration of her grandson Boleslaw II. But in her lifetime Richeza bore the proud title of *regina Poloniae*, and the Ezzo tradition recalls her pride in the restoration of the Piast state by Casimir.¹

The observations which I have advanced are primarily designed to strengthen the existing doubts about the validity of the views held hitherto of the predominantly national nature of the antagonism in the relations between the early Piast state and the empire. I have endeavoured to show that it is important to clarify many of the contradictions and absurdities in the tradition and interpretation of a historical phenomenon which, despite its apparently limited scope, is of much significance for the European middle ages. The European task of the early Polish Piast state is, in my opinion, not to be viewed in the light of a West Slav major-power concept, a predominant antagonism to the Ottonian empire, as modern historical research still persists in doing, and as the Polish millennium celebrations have further accentuated.

The foundation of this state and the basis of its ideology are to be understood primarily in terms of the Piast state's close links with the universal-Christian imperial policy of the Ottonian age, in which the Piast state deliberately took over and fulfilled its task of being a member and mainstay of a *Christianum imperium Romanum* stretching far to the east.

¹ '... Gazimerum, cuius generosa posteritas divitiis et potestate nobiliter insignis permanet usque hodie...' (*Fundatio*, c. 25).