PART ONE

ON THE TRAIL OF TRADITION
Apart from the few narratives that present a vision of the past of the Polish ruling dynasty over a longer chronological span, we have at our disposal a group of sources in which parts of that history are preserved like individual snapshots. They have an important value in that due to them, we may observe not only (or rather not so much) the shape of the Piast tradition in a given period, but above all the ongoing manner in which it was utilized.

1. The Starting Point—“Dagome Iudex”

It is in the document known as “Dagome Iudex” that we find the first trace of the deliberate creation by the Piasts or those around them of a specific vision of the connections which linked the ruling family. The group of people mentioned as the family of the ruler does not however include his first born son, which some researchers see as a sign that he had been disinherited from ascending the throne after his father. This would be a remarkable departure from the legal customs regulating the principles of the exercise of power over the state by members of the Piast clan. If that is true, the picture of the family relationships of the ruler contained in this document would have to be an element of the tradition of the functioning of the ruler’s family deliberately created by the royal court.¹ To what degree is that tradition accessible to us?

In order to answer that question, it is essential to define the circumstances in which the text was created. These were as follows. Some time in the years 1084–1086/7 Cardinal Deusdedit during the compilation

¹ See Roman Michałowski, Princeps fundator. Studium z dziejów kultury politycznej w Polsce X–XIII wieku, Warszawa 1989, pp. 99–100. There is no agreement whether the source of this text was only a petition from the Polish ruling family, or whether it was created based on a papal bull which was the answer to one, see for example a summary of the different views in the article by Gerard Labuda, Akt Dagome iudex—pierwsza "konkordatowa" umowa między Polską a Stolicą Apostolską z czasów papieża Jana XV (985–996), "Pamiętnik Biblioteki Kórnickiej", 25 (2001), pp. 17–18.