Chapter 2

The Founding of the Archbishopric of Gniezno: Religious Premises and Political Consequences

1 Introductory Remarks

Very little can be said about the beginnings of the church organization in Poland. We know that Bishop Jordan began his work in Mieszko I’s state in 968 at the latest and that he was succeeded by Bishop Unger. It seems beyond doubt as well that shortly before the breakthrough of 999–1000 Uunger headed a regular diocese with a specific see and at least approximately marked borders. On the other hand, we cannot be certain as to where this see was located: in Gniezno or in Poznań.

I am more inclined to agree with the traditional view, shared by most scholars, that the oldest Polish bishopric had its see in Poznań. Two arguments are especially important, in my opinion. Firstly, German accounts from the early 11th century list Poznań as the episcopal see of a diocese which existed in Poland before the breakthrough years of 999–1000. Yet I have to agree that the authors of these sources, well-informed as they were, do not inspire confidence. They

---


2 Research results which I find generally convincing include results of studies carried out in Poznań: Józef Nowacki, Kościół katedralny w Poznaniu. Studium historyczne, idem, Dzieje archidiecezji poznańskiej, vol. 1 ([Poznań]: Księgarnia Św. Wojciecha, 1959), 11–43; Marian Banaszak, “Charakter prawny biskupów Jordana i Ungera,” Nasza Przeszłość 30 (1969): 43–123. To this group I should now add an important study by Weiss, who examines the issue against a broad background (Weiss, Biskupstwa bezpośrednio zależne, for information about Poznań, see 255–259).

3 This view was for many years consistently advocated by Gerard Labuda, “O najstarszej organizacji Kościoła w Polsce,” Przegląd Powszechny (1984), no. 6/754: 373–396 and publications listed in fn. 1; also Trawkowski, “Początki Kościoła,” 65.
were too biased when assessing Polish affairs and were too personally involved in church policy. However, this charge can be counterbalanced by the following observation: no text mentions Gniezno as an episcopal see before 999. The second argument runs as follows. When describing the events associated with Otto III's pilgrimage to St. Adalbert's tomb, Thietmar states that Unger did not consent to the founding of an archbishopric in Gniezno and suggests at the same time what the legal grounds for the protest were: the Archbishopric of Gniezno was established within the territory of Unger's diocese.4 If Unger had been the Bishop of Gniezno, he would have protested mainly because of having been forcibly removed from his see. This would indeed have been an unheard of event and the Magdeburg circles, to which Thietmar himself belonged in a way, hostile to the Polish church province, would not have failed to point out such iniquity.

As Mieszko I was being baptized, the lands on the Warta and Middle Vistula rivers were a virgin pagan territory. Never before—neither in Antiquity nor in the early Middle Ages—had Christianity reached the region. In any case, even if some missionaries, of whom we know nothing, reached this land, there are no traces of their activity.

The church organization was thus created in cruda radice, and the people who determined its form did not have to contend with any prior legal arrangements, nor could they refer to them, for none existed. When in the 9th century a diocesan network was being established in the lands that were within Moravia's sphere of influence, some role was played by the fact that there had been ecclesiastical structures in Antiquity in the areas in question. Although during the Migration Period they disappeared completely, memory of them had survived and they became an argument used in the dispute between the Holy See and Bavarian bishops. The papacy unwaveringly stood by the position whereby if in ancient times the lands in question had been part of the province with its metropolitan see in Sirmium, the claims of the Salzburg province to supremacy over these lands were groundless.5

There were no such reminiscences in the Polanian state. This does not mean that it existed in some ecclesiastical and political vacuum. When Mieszko I was adopting Christianity, the western border of his dominion was the eastern frontier of the Mainz province, while the border with Bohemia was also the border with the Salzburg province. Over the following decade the situation changed insofar as the eastern frontier of Saxony as well as Polabia became

4 Thietmar, lib. IV, cap. 45, 184.