PART I

THE MIDDLE AGES

CONTACTS
EARLY COMMERCIAL CONTACTS BETWEEN ENGLAND, PRUSSIA, AND POLAND

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From the second half of the fourteenth century commercial contacts between Poland and England are rather well recorded, and have been studied by historians since the middle of the nineteenth century. Before 1350 the history of Anglo-Polish commercial relations are more obscure because the sources are sparse. Neither have they been subject to as much research as the more plentiful sources from after 1350. Examining the early epoch of trade relations between the two regions shows that it is not altogether a dark history. But before searching the early beginnings of commercial contacts between Poland and England it is appropriate to reflect on what is meant by Poland and England in the context of the period prior to 1350. History is in principle an anachronistic enterprise, and the more so when modern concepts are used as methodological guidelines. Poland as well as England are in historical perspective plastic concepts. Even in the Middle Ages, when they came into being, they were variable. Both concepts are therefore in the medieval meanings of them very unwieldy analytic categories and establishing rational geographical frameworks for either of the two is a difficult task.

In the eighth century the west Slavic tribe Polanie lived in Wielkopolska around the river Warta, a tributary of the Oder. According to tradition this tribe, under the rule of the Piast dynasty, in the tenth century founded a realm about the size of modern Poland. The first prince who appears in the sources was Mieszko I. In 966 he accepted Christianity and two years later established the bishopric of Poznan. Soon after in 1000 the Polish church was placed under its own archbishopric at Gniezno. The first king of Poland was crowned in 1025, and in the course of the next centuries monasteries were established and the number of bishoprics and churches increased.