

History of Poland: Fragmentation period and the Mongol Invasion of Poland

Let's talk about the history of Poland again!

Last time we ended on the year 1058 and the death of the king Casimir I The Restorer. He was succeeded by his sons: first Bolesław II the Bold (r. 1058–79), and later by Władysław I Herman. In their foreign policy both rulers pursued stable relations with the neighbors through alliances. In order to strengthen Poland's position among the Christian countries they supported further Christianization through e.g. founding many churches throughout Poland. After Władysław I Herman died, his son Bolesław III Wrymouth took the throne in 1107. He continued the policy of his predecessors. He was able to defend the kingdom from German invasion but his biggest success was the conquest and conversion of Pomerania region with its harbor, Gdansk. Bolesław died in 1138 leaving a testament known as "The Succession Statute" in which he divided the country among his sons by the senioral principle. Although the will was an effort to keep the unity of the state, it quickly led to almost 200 years of feudal fragmentation of the Polish Kingdom during which its position deteriorated.

It was in this period of domestic turmoil that the Mongol invasion of Europe began, with the Mongol army striking Poland three times, starting from 1240, ravaging and plundering invaded regions. One of the first important battles was the Battle at Legnica where Polish and Christian forces were defeated and the Silesian Piast Duke Henry II the Pious died at the battlefield. In 1287 the Mongols reached the capital city of Cracow and besieged it. According to a legend, people living in the surrounding areas gathered an army, launching a surprise raid defeating the invaders. This story became the origin of the Lajkonik folk festival held in Cracow every year till this day. Soon after, the Mongol army retreated from Europe.

The danger coming from an outside enemy became one of the main factors in new attempts to reunite the country. Finally, the Piast Kingdom was restored by the prince of Kuyavia region who was crowned as king Władysław the Elbow-high in 1320, in Cracow. However, the kingdom he united was much smaller than before the fragmentation, with e.g. Silesia and Pomerania outside its borders. Władysław I tried to reinstate his rule over these lands, which led to a defeat in the conflict with Teutonic Knights over Pomerania. In domestic policy the king established a uniform legal code and centralized his power. He died in 1333 succeeded by his son, Casimir.

Let's summarize the most important events:

- 1138 – the death of Bolesław I, and "The Succession Statute"
- 1138 – 1320 – the fragmentation period
- 1241 – 1288 – the Mongol Invasions of Poland

- 1320 – unification of Poland and Wladyslaw I the Elbow-high's enthronement
That's it for today!

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