

21. History of Poland – king Casimir III the Great, the last of the Piast dynasty.

I would like to continue my introduction to history of Poland. This post will be about one of the most important figures in Polish history, King Casimir the Great.

King Casimir inherited the throne from Władysław I the Elbow-high. The kingdom, although unified, was facing danger from neighboring countries. Casimir turned out to be a very skillful diplomat. As a result of summits that took place twice in 1335 and 1339 in Vyshegrad Casimir gained close alliance from Hungary. In return designating his nephew Louis I of Hungary as his successor should he produce no male heir. Next, he made a truce with Teutonic Knights in 1343, gaining back Kuyavy region, although for the price of losing some territories at Baltic seacoast. After long negotiations he also signed a peace treaty with Bohemian Kingdom, conceding sovereignty over Silesia region. During his reign he was able to conquer Halych and Vladimir (now regions in western Ukraine) as well as part of the Masovia region. Thanks to land addition in the east Poland double sized its territory.

Casimir was a great reformer who made the country prosperous and wealthy. He strengthened the kingdom by unifying the laws and putting in place a modern government bureaucracy with appointed governors in each of the regions. Casimir rebuilt the country by endowing new towns and building new castles, many of them along the borders, thus, strengthening the kingdom against the foreign invaders. There is a popular saying about Casimir III: "He inherited a Poland built of wood, but left the world a Poland built of stone". During the reign of Casimir III trade and industry flourished and merchants largely contributed to the prosperity of the kingdom. Cracow became an important medieval center of merchandising and commerce, connecting the eastern and western trade routes. The growth attracted immigration, most significantly from Jews towards which the king was favorably disposed. Casimir also paid great attention into cultural development of the country and in 1364 he founded in Cracow the first university in Poland, Casimir III the Great transformed Poland into a major European power with great prospects for the future.

Although he was married four times he died in 1370 without leaving a male heir. As agreed at the Vyshegrad summit, the crown went to the hands of Louis of Hungary, effectively putting an end to the Piast dynasty.

The most important facts to sum up this post:

- 1333 - the beginning of Casimir III reign

- 1335 and 1339 Vyshegrad summits
- 1343 - truce with Teutonic Knights
- 1348 – truce with Bohemia Kingdom
- 1364 – establishing of Cracow University
- 1370 – Casimir's death

History of Poland to be continued some other time!

That's it for today!

Hanna