

CHRISTIANITY ON STAMPS OF

Poland

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PART IV



Mieszko I

It is not certain whether in the early centuries the Christian faith was known to the Slavic tribes living between the Odra and Warta rivers. It is certain, however, that the first historic ruler of the Polish state, Mieszko I, before 963-992 had relations with the Christian world. In 965 this pagan duke (stamp no. 979) married a Christian, Dobrawka, the daughter of the Bohemian Duke Boleslaw I, and in 966 ordered the baptism of his subjects and his court. Mieszko I opened very widely the gates of young Poland to the Western civilization and the Roman Church. As far as it is known, he founded nine churches in Poland, the first of them in Gniezno, probably in the place where now stands the cathedral of St. Adalbert as seen on stamp no. 947.



Founding the Archbishopric of Gniezno

Mieszko's son, Boleslaw the Valiant (992-1025) understood his father's intention and had carried out his plan to unite all the Slavic tribes in the Christian faith. He brought to Poland Adalbert, bishop of Prague, to preach in Pomerania and to convert the Pomeranian tribes and the Prussians to Christianity. When Adalbert was martyred by the Prussians near Gdansk (Danzig), his body was buried in the stone church of Gniezno in 997. Boleslaw, in memory of this occasion founded there the first archbishopric in the year 1000. The ceremony was attended by Emperor Otto III who came to Gniezno as a pilgrim to St. Adalbert's tomb. This event is pictured on stamp no. 320 and nos. N33, N34 of the "General Gouvernement" (1940).



Cathedral of Gniezno

The existing structure of the Gothic cathedral in Gniezno dates back as far as the 14th century. However, several chapels in Renaissance and Baroque styles were added to it in the ensuing centuries. Boleslaw the Valiant also later founded the bishoprics in Krakow, Wroclaw and Kolobrzeg in addition to one existing in Poznan.



Cathedral of St. Peter & Paul, Poznan

The two-towered cathedral of St. Peter and Paul in Poznan is featured on stamp no. 950. On this site, during the years 966-1038, there stood a three-nave stone basilica, probably one of the nine churches built in Poland by her first ruler, Mieszko I, who was buried there in 992. The bishopric in Poznan was established by Pope John III in 968. The basilica was destroyed in 1038 as a result of the Moravian invasion and was rebuilt several times until the 16th century. In 1772 a fire burned the church and a new one was erected — once again in Baroque style — in the 18th century. The cathedral had suffered considerably during World War II, especially in 1945.

St. Mary's church and the Psalterium as separate edifices are also seen on this stamp, just a few steps from the cathedral. The three-naved St. Mary's church was built of red brick in 1433-1444 in the place of an old one from the 10th or 11th century. The Gothic

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Psalterium was finished in 1512 and was left at the disposal of the cathedral psalterists.

On the right side of stamp no. 948 is seen the Wawel cathedral in Krakow as it looked a few centuries ago (see **The COROS Chronicle** no. 87). On this site there once stood a small stone church which was built, probably by Mieszko I, and later rebuilt by his son when the bishopric in Krakow was established about 1000. The cathedral was rebuilt several times in the 12th and 14th centuries, but remained Gothic from 1346.

Wroclaw, in Lower Silesia, was the seat of another bishopric established there by king Boleslaw. Recent excavations by Polish archeologists indicate that a settlement existed there as early as the 5th century and signs of an advanced culture seem evident in the remains from the 10th century.

Two churches existed there before the cathedral construction was started: the first of wood, the second of stone in Romanesque style. The last construction of the Wroclaw cathedral dates back to 1244. The church was completely destroyed during World War II, then restored in 1945-1955 as seen on stamp no. 706.

Kolobrzeg (Pomerania) already existed in the 8th century as an organized Slavic center of a defence nature. The bishopric established there by Boleslaw the Valiant did not exist for a long time. Stamp no. 961 represents the general view of the city with two churches, but only one of them, Gothic St. Mary's (to the right) which dates back to the 13th century, still stands there. In the 15th century, two naves were added to its construction.

Claudius Ptolomaeus of Alexandria (Egypt), an astronomer and geographer (2 century), had mentioned in his work "Geographia" a number of settlements in Eastern and Central Europe. Among them was Slavic "Calisia", present Kalisz (no. 952) which already existed as an organized trade center in what is now the Poznan Province of Poland.

A general view of Kalisz is pictured on stamp no. 952. On the left side of the stamp is seen St. Nicolas church which was built in Gothic style in 1253 and became parochial in 1303. The church is very well known in Poland for its large painting, "Descent from the Cross," which decorates the main altar. The painting was bought in Antwerp and brought to Poland in 1621 by Peter Zeromski, the head of Bygdoszcz county and a royal secretary, and donated to St. Nicolas church in Kalisz. According to some experts, the painting was not a genuine work of Rubens as was believed, but rather his workshop replica of that painting from St. John Evangelist's church in Arras, France. On the right side of the church can be seen the tower of the Kalisz townhall.

In the background of stamp no. 954 appears St. John's parochial church in Torun (on the Vistula river), which was built during the period 1250-1497. Its presbytery in Gothic style is the oldest part of the church. Never finished, the tower of the church in its present shape dates back to the end of the 15th century. One of the chapels of this church had been dedicated to Nicolaus Copernicus who was born in Torun and baptized in St. John's in 1473.

A portrait of the astronomer and a memorial relief from 1580 are found in the chapel. A bust of Copernicus from the 18th century is also found there.

St. John's church in Torun was used as a Protestant



Cathedral of Krakow



Cathedral of Wroclaw



St. Mary's Church
Kolobrzeg



St. Nicholas Church,
Kalisz



St. John's Church,
Torun

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church in the 16th century, and by the Jesuits in the 17th and 18th centuries. It later again became a parochial church of the city of Torun. The 40-meter tower on the left side of the church belonged to the city hall and is the oldest object of present Torun.

Frombork (in Warmia) is also connected with the life of Nicolaus Copernicus. On the right side of stamp no. 953 is found the Gothic cathedral of Frombork which was erected in the 14th century. Here is the tomb of Copernicus who died in this city in 1543. On the left side of this stamp can be seen Copernicus' observatory tower in which he had lived for 40 years, working there on his monumental "De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium."

Puck had been known for centuries as a main naval port and Polish stronghold on the Baltic Sea. It was incorporated by the Prussians in 1772 during the first partition of Poland with many other cities of Polish Pomerania. On stamp no. 955 is represented a part of the naval port as it looked a few centuries ago. St. Peter's and Paul's parochial church of Puck is seen in the far background. The church was built of stone in the 13th century and the two naves were added to it in the 15th century.

It should be remembered that the designs for the stamps of ancient cities series were taken mostly from old engravings and very often do not picture the present panorama of these cities.

(to be continued)



Cathedral of Frombork



Church of Sts. Peter and Paul, Puck

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2. Saar SP54—Praying Hands
3. USA A554—Geophysical Year Stamp
5. Norfolk Is. - All 9—Open Bible
6. Pitcairn A12—The Bounty Bible
8. Armenia A22—Mt. Ararat
9. Vatican AP8—Raphael & Tobias
11. Vatican AP12—The Annunciation
12. Philippines A122—Immaculate Conception
14. East Germany A77—"Holy Family"
15. Malta A48—Baptism of Christ
21. Spain A247—Crucifix
22. Belgium SP95—Descent from the Cross
23. Argentina SPAP2—Pieta
24. Austria SP167—Christ Enthroned
25. Italy A68—The Great Commission
27. Turkey in Asia A29—The Koran
28. India A115—Buddhist symbols

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