

CHRISTIANITY ON STAMPS OF

Poland

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PART IV



St. Mary's Church
Gdansk



Old Gdansk



Church of St. Nicholas
Elblag



Church of St. Jacek
Slupsk

The city of Gdansk (Danzig), on the Baltic Sea, was already a very important stronghold of the Polish rulers in the 10th century. Influenced by the German dukes of the West, Gdansk had been partly germanized, especially when it was taken and occupied by the Knights of the Teutonic Order in 1308. During the 13-Year War (1456-1466) Gdansk was the main cause of the conflict between Poland and the Order. It became a part of Polish territory in 1466 and remained as such until 1772, at which time it was incorporated by Prussia as a result of the first partition of Poland (see also **COROS Chronicle** no. 88).

This short history of Gdansk will help to better understand why so many Pomeranian churches had often changed their "faith" in the course of the centuries, once being Roman-Catholic, becoming Protestant, and vice versa.

One of the largest churches in present Poland is St. Mary's Gothic church in Gdansk. It is pictured on stamp no. 957, as it appeared a few centuries ago (the left upper corner), and on stamp no. 640 in much more modern design. Stamp no. 640 was later overprinted with "Balpex 1 - Gdansk 1959" (stamp no. 866).

The present structure of the church was probably erected in the place in which once stood a wooden chapel founded there by the Polish dukes of Pomerania in the 10th or 11th century. The construction was started in 1343 and the works around it were completed in the first decade of the 16th century. The big tower of the church was raised in 1466. The royal chapel alongside of the church, built in 1678-1682, was founded there by king John III Sobieski especially for the Catholics who had lived in the city of Gdansk when St. Mary's church was used by the Protestants. In 1945 the church was seriously damaged and then rebuilt a few years after the last World War.

The same St. Mary's church is seen on stamp no. 198 of Danzig, issued in 1924 by the German postal administration (see "Danzig" in the Scott's Catalogue). The skyline of Gdansk, with the characteristic silhouette of the church, can be also seen on stamps nos. 219-220 and on many air-mails of Danzig issues. Germany 492 shows a good view of the church.

On the river Elblag in the Gdansk Province, southeast the city of Gdansk, is situated the city of Elblag. It was founded in the 12th century and received the rights of a town in 1246.

The general view of old Elblag is seen on stamp no. 639, which was issued in a set of five to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Pomerania's return to Poland. The high towers, as they appear on the stamp, belonged to St. Nicholas parochial church, one of the oldest edifices in the city of Elblag. This monumental church was founded in 1242 but the construction of the entire struc-

149

ture lasted to the 14th century. St. Nicholas church had been a Catholic parochial church until the Reformation, after which it was taken over several times by the Protestants and returned again under the protection of the kings of Poland as a Catholic church.

Over the centuries St. Nicholas church played the role of a Polish bastion on the Elblag soil. For its beauty, it had gained the name of "Ornamentum civitatis Elbigensis" (the ornament of the city of Elblag). The church was twice partially damaged by fires in 1758 and 1777 during which the vaults of the church and the towers were completely destroyed. One of the towers was rebuilt in the 19th century. World War II left the church in ruins, with only a certain part of the old altars and the ancient figures from the altars surviving. The church was rebuilt in the years 1947-1956.

It contains in its walls some precious monuments of the past: the waterfont from 1388; the wooden sculptures of the Apostles and St. Nicholas from 1414; and the pulpit from 1588.

Slupsk lies also in Pomerania on the main track Szczecin (Stettin) to Gdansk (Danzig) and shared the same fate as the whole Pomeranian territory, having in its history several different landlords. It had belonged to the Polish Kingdom in the early centuries of the existence of the country and in 1945 came back to Poland again.



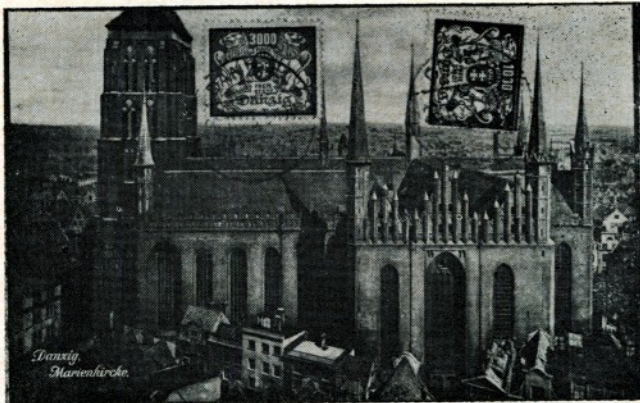
Cathedral of Our Lady
Plock



St. Jacob's Church
Paczkow



150



St. Mary's Church, Danzig (Gdansk), largest Lutheran church in the world, as it appeared in 1923.

The general view of the city is represented on stamp no. 956. The higher tower, which is seen on the left side of the stamp, belongs to St. Jacek Church. On the right side of the stamp can be seen the Marian church of Slupsk. The first church, lately called the church of St. Jacek (Hyacinthus), was erected in 1278 as a monasterial church of the Dominican Order. The early Baroque style is still basically seen in the present structure of the church which had remained Dominican until 1524, when the Order was liquidated and most of the monks slain as victims of the complications caused by the Reformation. For several years the remains of the church passed into silence until 1602 when it was restored as a castle church, with the main altar in late Renaissance style. For it again became the Roman-Catholic church of Slupsk.

The other church, pictured on the stamp, St. Mary's, was erected in 1270 and later rebuilt in Gothic style. In its present shape the Marian church dates back to the 14th-15th centuries. Damaged during the last war, it is now under reconstruction. Since the days of Reformation until 1945 the church had been in the hands of the Protestants. It became one of the three Catholic, parochial churches of the city of Slupsk afterwards.

Stamp no. 951 depicts the general view of Plock, which lies in the Mazowsze Province in central Poland on the cliffs of the Vistula river. According to the chronicles, one of the nine churches built in Poland by her first ruler, Mieszko I, was founded there, as well and the bishopric established in 1075. The city of Plock became a seat

of a few Masovian dukes some of whom later became kings of Poland; for instance Wladyslaw Herman (1079-1102) and Boleslaw Krzywousty (1102-1138).

The two-towered cathedral, today bearing the name "Our Lady of Masovia", the oldest edifice of the city (seen on stamp no. 951), was erected in Romanesque style in 1136-1144. In the 16th century the cathedral was rebuilt by Italian architects in Renaissance style. The third reconstruction of the cathedral took place during the period 1784-1787—this time, with a little touch of Classicism. The last reconstruction took place in 1903.

To the right side of the cathedral, portrayed on stamp no. 951, is seen a tower (located about one block away) which had once been a part of the city defense wall. In 1492 the tower was heightened and the bells of the cathedral transferred there, as the construction of the cathedral was no longer strong enough to bear these heavy bells.

The little tower, just on the edge of the riverbank, which in the 14th century was also a part of the city wall, had previously served as a prison for persons of noble birth. This is the reason that to this day this tower is called "wieza szlachecka" which in Polish means with a little irony, the "tower of the noblemen".

The cathedral of "Our Lady of Masovia" in Plock is rich in many monumental relics of the past. Also found there are the tombs and the sarcophagi of two Polish kings, Wladyslaw Herman and Boleslaw Krzywousty, mentioned previously.

Quite different in style and in structure is St. Jacob's church in Paczkow in Opole Province, with only 6000 inhabi-

(Continued on page 89)