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Historical Cultural Spaces – Adaptation and Functioning. The Case of the Museum of the First Piasts at Lednica

ABSTRACT

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Interest in Ostrów Lednicki started in the mid-19th century. In 1858–1874, information was gathered about its stone buildings, burials, rampart construction, bridges, and numerous other finds. On 12th March 1930, Ostrów Lednicki was entered into the Register of Historical Monuments. Today, a team of archaeologists working on the island discovers new data and processes the materials found (numerous monographs have been written about the discoveries). In 1982, a team for interdisciplinary studies on Ostrów Lednicki and its settlement complex was appointed. In 1989, the journal 'Studia Lednickie' ('Lednica Studies') was created, followed in 1991 by the publishing series entitled Biblioteka Studiów Lednickich (Library of Lednica Studies). In 1988, the Lednica Landscape Park was created with the view to protecting the monuments on the island and the landscape in the areas around Lake Lednica. New branches and specialist laboratories were established: the Greater Poland Ethnographic Park, the Giecz Early Piast Stronghold Archaeological Reserve, the Grzybowo Stronghold Archaeological Reserve, and the Archaeological Laboratory on Ostrów Radziński. The Museum organises exhibitions in Poland and abroad. It is also a scientific research institution, which popularises knowledge by publishing prospectuses, guides and brochures, producing films, offering museum lessons, and organising mass events.

Keywords: Early Middle Ages, strongholds of the early Piast dynasty, stone architecture, baptism of Mieszko I, ethnographic park

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The year 2019 will mark the 50th anniversary of the Museum of the First Piasts at Lednica, situated in the heart of Greater Poland (Wielkopolska; Fig. 1). Although there are other museums in Poland which have a much longer history, the Lednica Museum should be considered especially important for acquiring knowledge about the origins of the Polish state. It was not established until 1969, but due to the high rank of the

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Fig. 1. The location of Ostrów Lednicki on the map of Poland (Drawn by A. Tabaka)

immobile and mobile finds from the island of Ostrów Lednicki (such as the stone ducal palace from the times of Mieszko I and Bolesław the Brave, connected to a baptismal chapel on the east side – Fig. 2, as well as remnants of other buildings – Fig. 3), scientists representing various disciplines have been interested in this place since the mid-19th c. (Wyrwa 2009a; Kurnatowska and Wyrwa 2016). Already in the ‘pre-scientific’ period, the medieval historian Jan Długosz wrote the following note in his Chronicle:

Lednica, a lake of considerable size in Greater Poland, located near the town of Pobiedziska, which has quite a big island, on which, as old men say, rather than put in writing, the Gniezno metropolitan cathedral used to stand (as ruins and remains of walls confirm), which with time, due to difficult access, was moved to Gniezno (Długosz I, 93).

In Poland under partitions, when an interest in antiquity developed, Polish aristocracy delighted in amassing all sorts of ancient relics and created private collections. Count Edward Raczyński (in 1843) took note of the ruins of the monumental stone buildings on Ostrów Lednicki, thinking they were a castle from the times of Bolesław the Brave. In his *Wspomnienia Wielkopolski* (*Memories of Greater Poland*; Raczyński 1843, 375–376), he included a description of the ruins, illustrated with a drawing of the arcade decorating the structure¹. The first field works around and inside the structure were carried out in 1845 by Grevenitz, landrat of Gniezno, and Gadov, a construction inspector (Fogel 1991; Górecki 2016, 30). At that time, the structures were partially destroyed, which was confirmed a few years later (in 1851) by Franciszek Staszic, a lover of antiquities. It was not until the island was bought by

¹ The arcade’s location within the Lednica Palatium continues to be an unsolved puzzle. It probably connected the columns in the Palace’s hall and supported the ceiling of its upper floor (Siewczyński 2004).



Fig. 2. Ostrów Lednicki, site 1. Palace chapel (Photo by M. Jóźwikowska)

Count Albin Węsierski (a great lover of history, patron of the arts, and a devoted ‘protector’ of monuments) that intensive interdisciplinary studies began (Węsierski 1875). In 1858–1874, valuable information was collected about the stone buildings, burials, rampart construction, bridges, and numerous other finds. Samples of the gypsum plaster binding the stones of the palatium on Lednica were sent for a specialist analysis to Berlin and Janowiec near Żnin. During the works, specialists such as Joachim Lelewel and Marian Sokołowski were consulted. As a result of the studies, it was concluded that the ruins on Lednica were the remains of Bolesław the Brave’s residence. This was followed by the first instances of popularising knowledge about the monuments on Ostrów Lednicki in popular science format (information in the Warsaw and Poznań press) and in scholarship (papers were presented at international congresses – in Copenhagen (1869) and Brussels (1872)). It is worth noting that Count Albin Węsierski’s lecture in Brussels was the only paper by a representative of Slavic nations published in the French post-conference reports.

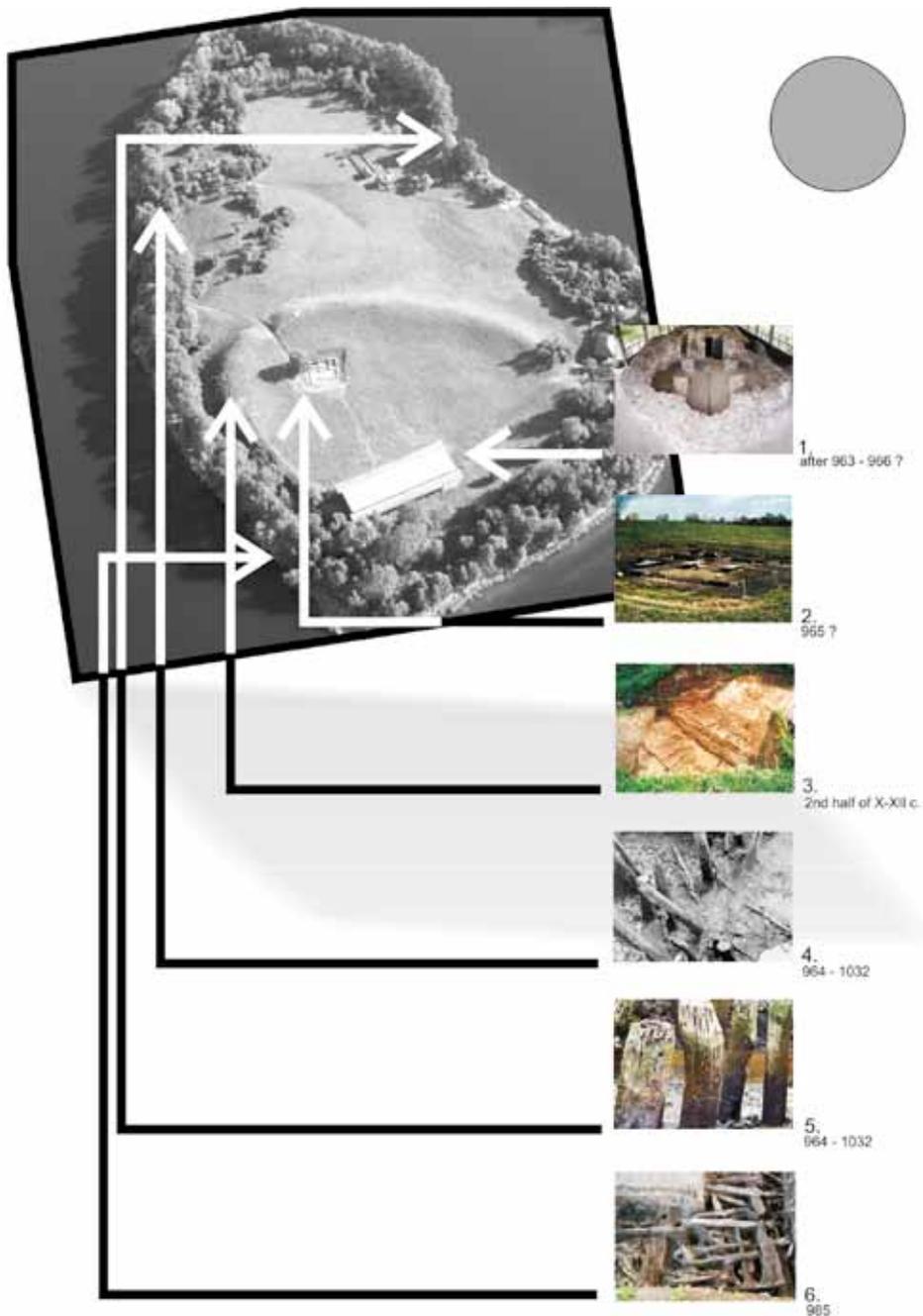


Fig. 3. Ostrów Lednicki. The topography of the island: 1 – palatium; 2 – stronghold's church; 3 – cross-section of the rampart; 4 – bridgehead of the Poznań bridge on the island; 5 – bridgehead of the Gniezno bridge on the island; 6 – fortifications on the western shore of the island (According to J. Górecki; computer graphics by W. Kujawa)

In 1874, architectural studies of the palace and church were conducted by Professor Marian Sokołowski from Cracow, together with Władysław Łuszczkiewicz, a documentalist and draughtsman. The result of their work was an architectural study with excellent drawings (plans, floor projection, architectural details; Sokołowski 1876). In the late 19th c., articles were also published in 'Poznańskie Zapiski Architektoniczne' ('Poznań Archaeological Notes') and their German counterpart (where the scale of the works and drawings of Lednica monuments were presented). The work concluded with displaying publications about Lednica monuments during a world exhibition in Chicago.

In the interwar period (the 1930s), scientists focused on studying the vicinity of the palace chapel (Zygmunt Zakrzewski) and the cemetery discovered in the stronghold (anthropologists Adam Wrzosek and Michał Ćwirko-Godycki). The finds included 2,100 graves and numerous artefacts, which, together with their documentation, were mostly lost during World War II (Zakrzewski 1933; Wrzosek 1934).

On the basis of the results of these works, which confirmed the site's high rank, Ostrów Lednicki was entered into the Polish Register of Historical Monuments on 12th March 1930.

An important discovery was made in 1944 by Gustav Masanetz (representing the Landesamt für Vorgeschichte in Poznań). During the exploration of layers in the trench cutting across the stronghold on the N-S line, remains of a previously unknown stone structure were revealed in the northern part of the stronghold². However, the archaeologist did not attempt to interpret his discovery.

After war operations finished, excavation works were restarted on Ostrów Lednicki already in 1948. Kazimierz Żurowski, who was in charge of very extensive excavations in many strategic points of the island (near the palace, on the ramparts, in the ward and suburbium), was one of the very many scientists working there. One of the monuments excavated at that time was the oldest Lednica stronghold (dated to 885–921, cf. Górecki 2016, 34), as well as fortifications on the western shore of the island, which were interpreted as remains of a pier at that time.

Underwater investigations were also started at that time, carried out by the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society (Klub PTTK) from Poznań

² Later, it turned out that they were relics of the stronghold's single-nave church with two stone tombs.



Fig. 4. The stronghold's church (Photo by M. Józwickowska)

(the discoveries included relics of bridges leading to Ostrów Lednicki, a nasal helmet, and a large dugout boat). Underwater studies have been continued, with intervals, until the present day by archaeologists from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (cf. e.g. Kurnatowska 2000; Kola and Wilke 2000; 2014).

In 1960–1965, excavations were carried out both in the suburbium (Gabriela Mikołajczyk) and in the ward (Jerzy Łomnicki, Andrzej Nowak); at the same time, architectural studies were also continued. Archaeologists revealed and documented e.g. successive levels of floors in the palace chapel, traces of a wooden floor in the hall, remains of pentices by the palace (in one of them, a large amount of various cereals was inventoried – perhaps a granary; in another the ferrule of a liturgical book was found), relics of the stronghold's church, excavated previously (cf. fn. 2; Fig. 4), as well as bridgeheads.

Apart from field works, laboratory studies on pottery from Ostrów Lednicki (Łucja Nowak) and on settlement changes on the island (Andrzej Nowak) were also started on a large scale.



Fig. 5. A set of militaria from Ostrów Lednicki (Photo by M. Jóźwikowska)

The fact that there was no permanent museum building and the investigations were conducted by scientists from various institutions led to the incredibly valuable finds and documentation being divided³. Ostrów Lednicki's rich collections with time inspired conservation services and local authorities to establish a dedicated institution which would serve museum and scientific research purposes. As a result of the efforts of Jerzy Łomnicki, the Voivodeship Conservator of Monuments, in 1969 the Museum of the Origins of the Polish State was established on Lednica, later (1974) renamed the Museum of the First Piasts at Lednica. Fieldwork and laboratory studies related to Ostrów Lednicki have continued until today. The team of Lednica archaeologists keep discovering new facts, interpreting and processing both materials from their own studies and archival data from decades ago. All this work has resulted in monographs about the sites (Górecki 2001a – stronghold) and individual complexes of monuments (e.g. Tabaka and Wyrwa 2013 – coin and treasure finds, Górecki 2001b – militaria, Fig. 5, 6; Wyrwa *et al.*

³ The staff of the Museum of the First Piasts at Lednica still deal with the consequences of this, as some of the documentation and relics belong to the collections and archives of the Archaeological Museum in Poznań, the Museum of the Origins of the Polish State in Gniezno, the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Poznań, the Voivodeship Conservator of Monuments in Poznań, and probably many more institutions.



Fig. 6. Incrustated spearheads from Lake Lednica (Photo by M. Józwickowska)

2011 – swords; Sankiewicz and Wyrwa 2013 – axes; Tabaka 2005 – weights; Banaszak and Tabaka 2008 – artefacts related to business activity and individual places and things ‘in a class of their own’, e.g.: Górecki 1996 – baptismal pools, Fig. 7; Górecki 2000 – liturgical comb; Wrześniński and Wyrwa 2011 – necklace with *kaptorga*; Wyrwa 2009b – staurotheke, Fig. 8). In 1982, on the initiative of the team of Lednica archaeologists and Professor Zofia Kurnatowska, a team for interdisciplinary studies on Ostrów Lednicki and its settlement was appointed and still operates (Dzięciołowski and Górecki 1989; Tobolski 1991; Kurnatowska 1993; 2009; Żurowska 1993; Kurnatowski 1993; Makowiecki 2001; Polcyn 2006; Křivanek and Tabaka 2014). The group includes scientists from various universities, as well as the Polish Academy of Sciences. With time (in 1989), the Museum also started to publish a journal – ‘*Studia Lednickie*’ (‘Lednica Studies’) and later (in 1991) the

publishing series entitled *Biblioteka Studiów Lednickich* (Library of Lednica Studies) (various series)⁴.

In the meantime (in 1988), the Lednica Landscape Park was created in order to protect the stone monuments on the island, the Museum which was being extended, and the landscape surrounding Lake Lednica. In 1994, the island of Ostrów Lednicki was entered onto the list of ten Monuments of History, which was created at that time.

Since its inception until today, the Museum of the First Piasts at Lednica has grown considerably. Over the five decades of its operation, new branches and laboratories were established (Fig. 9): the Greater Poland Ethnographic Park (1975), the Giecz Piast Stronghold Archaeological

⁴ The Library of Lednica Studies, in successive volumes of monographs, publishes both written sources (from medieval to early modern) and sources of material culture, obtained during many years of interdisciplinary (archaeological, architectural, natural, ethnographic and conservation) studies.

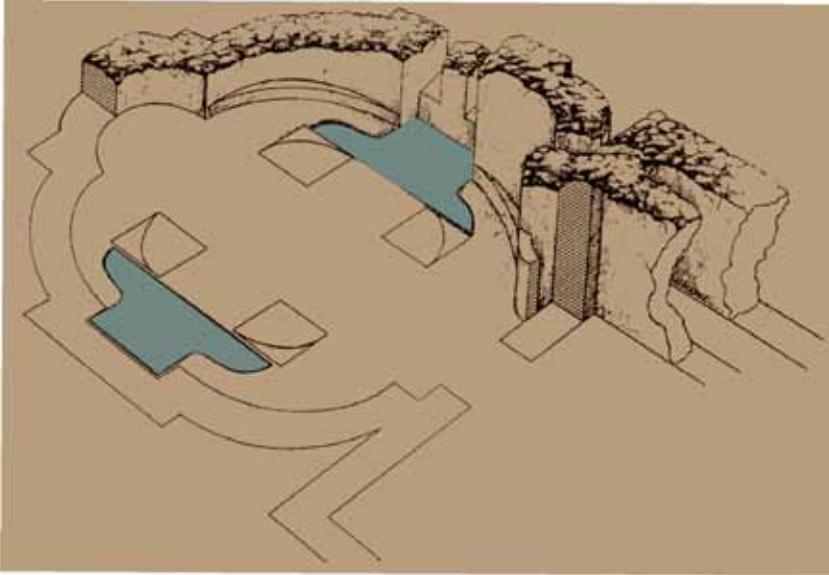


Fig. 7. Ostrów Lednicki, site 1. Baptismal pools in the palace chapel (Computer graphics by W. Kujawa)



Fig. 8. Ostrów Lednicki, site 1. A staurotheke – a container for relics of the Holy Cross (Photo by M. Jóźwikowska)

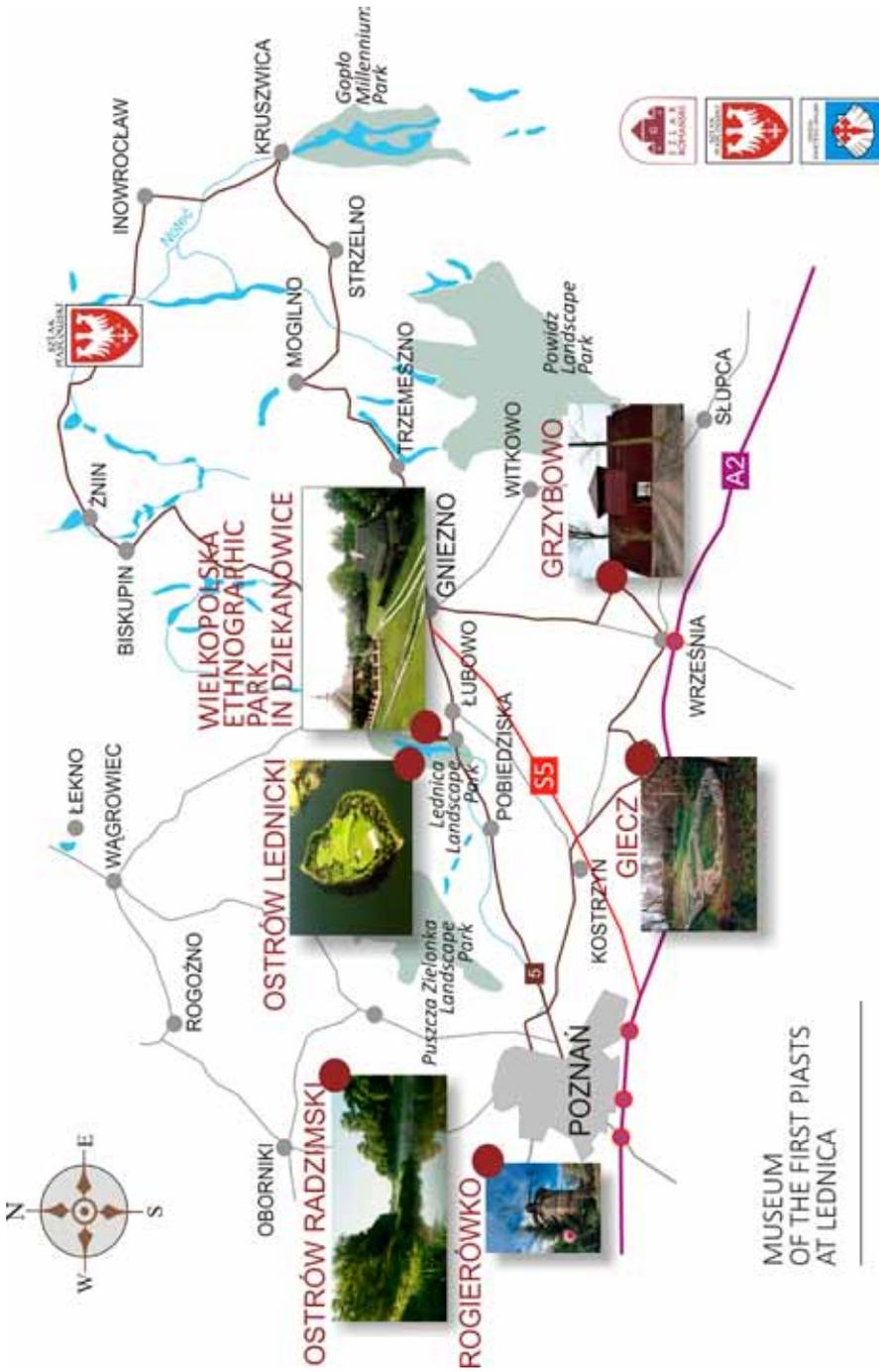


Fig. 9. A map showing the branches of the Museum of the First Piasts at Lednica (Computer graphics by W. Kujała). On the map in Polish: Park Krajobrazowy Puszczka Zielonka = Puszczka Zielonka Landscape Park; Lednicki Park Krajobrazowy = Lednica Landscape Park; Powidzki Park Krajobrazowy = Powidz Landscape Park; Nadgoplański Park Tysiąclecia = Gopło Millennium Park; Muzeum Pierwszych Piastów na Lednicy = Museum of the First Piasts at Lednica

Reserve (1985), the Grzybowo Stronghold Archaeological Reserve (1997), and the Archaeological Laboratory on Ostrów Radziński (2002).

The Greater Poland Ethnographic Park (Fig. 10) is one of the largest open-air museums in Poland (Pelczyk 2009; Fryza 2011). It was built near the south-eastern shore of Lake Lednica. It includes a reconstruction of a court complex (court, annexe, chapel, storeroom), a grange yard (stock buildings, granary, dovecote, barns), as well as a village (including several fully furnished farmsteads with their infrastructure – wells, a water mill, windmills, a hop drying room, a church, a roadside cross, cultivated fields, livestock). The Park also includes two ‘museum points’ – a fully furnished Dutch style windmill in Rogierówko near Kiekrz and an exhibition of three post mills, a barn, and a historic house in Lednogóra.

The Park’s main purpose is to protect, display and make accessible the heritage of the Greater Poland village culture from the turn of the 19th century (although the museum’s oldest building has construction elements dated to 1602). The reconstructed farmsteads (including translocated – dismantled and reassembled – original farm buildings) come from various areas of Greater Poland. As a result, it is possible



Fig. 10. The Greater Poland Ethnographic Park. A branch of the Museum of the First Piasts at Lednica (Photo by A. Ziółkowski)



Fig. 11. Relics of the palatium in Giecz (Photo by T. Krysztofiak)

to present both the history of rural construction from various parts of the Voivodeship (in comparison to the construction of buildings in the Prussian and Russian partitions) and the social position of people who lived in the countryside (from the richest, who functioned as the local 'official', e.g. *sołtys*, to wealthy peasants who went in search of seasonal labour, to the poorest).

Approximately 25 kilometres south of Ostrów Lednicki, there is another branch of the Museum – the Giecz Early Piast Stronghold Archaeological Reserve (Krysztofiak 2005; 2009; 2011; Fig. 11). Bogdan Kostrzewski started archaeological excavations in and around the stronghold in 1949, and they have continued until the present day. The excavations confirmed this centre's important role in the monarchy of the first Piasts. Initially, in the 860s, a stronghold was erected there, with the inner diameter of ca. 45 metres. Later, in the first half of the

next century, after it had been extended, it became one of the central strongholds of the Gniezno state. Probably in the 980s, the construction of a ducal palace and chapel was started in the southern part of the settlement.⁵ In the early 11th c. the large St. John the Baptist's Church was built of stone in the northern part of the stronghold. Inside it, under the choir, remnants of a relic crypt have been discovered. On the western side, the stronghold was enclosed by two drum towers connected by a square building. The rich history of the stronghold is attested by various artefacts (discovered e.g. inside the settlement and in the nearby cemetery). They can be linked with the elites who used to reside there in the past (such as gold and silver jewellery), warriors (a 'Greek' helmet, a sword, axes, arrowheads), as well as a place of trade (coins and weights). Gallus Anonymus described Giecz in Bolesław's times in his *Chronicle* as a strongly militarised stronghold with *300 mailed knights and 2,000 shield-bearers*, all of whom were *brave and fully trained for war* (Gallus, I.8., 47, 49). Today, the branch in Giecz is an active research unit of the Museum on Lednica, and owns a modern building serving museum, exhibition, and educational purposes, as well as a reconstructed early medieval settlement.

The Grzybowo Stronghold Archaeological Reserve (Kurnatowska and Tuszyński 2009; Wrzeński 2013; Fig. 12) includes one of the largest early medieval strongholds in Greater Poland (the surface of the ward is ca. 2.2 ha, and the entire settlement occupies an area approximately twice as big). In this case as well, excavations began in the 19th c. and have continued, with intervals, until the present day. In the course of the excavations it was established that the stronghold was built in the late 920s, its golden age lasted until approximately the mid-11th c., and its interior was still in use in the 12th c. During the excavations, relics of a paved road, pit houses and ground-level houses were discovered (some of them were probably also used for manufacturing or farming). A large number of so-called small finds were also found, including: everyday objects (antler combs, iron knives, needles, awls, spindle whorls), fragments of clay melting pots, militaria (chain mail rings, arrowheads), fragments of ornamental bone linings, game pawns, and jewellery (temple rings; glass, carnelian, amber and rock crystal

⁵ The construction of the palatium was never completed. During the excavations, only foundations (without any remnants or traces of usable parts of the building) were unearthed.



Fig. 12. The building which houses the exhibition, storeroom and offices in Grzybowo (Photo by J. Wrzesiński)

beads). Some of the most valuable finds from Grzybowo include an early medieval hacksilver hoard consisting of many fragments of coins and ornaments. In January 2011, a two-storey pavilion was opened in the stronghold; it houses an exhibition, storeroom and offices and presents exhibitions showing the excavations in Grzybowo, as well as numerous temporary exhibitions. Popular museum lessons are conducted in the reconstructed early medieval settlement. One of the flagship projects implemented by the staff of this branch is the annual International Rally of Slavic Warriors (organised since 2001; in 2014 renamed the Grzybowo Knight Tournament), during which various open-air shows and events are held.

The small so-called motte-and-bailey stronghold in Radzim near Murowana Goślina is also under the supervision of the Museum of the First Piasts at Lednica⁶ (Kowalczyk 2009; Kowalczyk and Paprocki

⁶ The island of Ostrów Radzimski was inhabited already in the Bronze Age. The oldest traces of this place being used in the Middle Ages date to the 8th c. In the

2009). This castellan seat was established in the 13th c. on a small, picturesque island surrounded by the Warta River on one side and by a boggy oxbow on the other. Interest in Ostrów Radzimski and the relics of its stronghold goes back to the end of the 19th c., and some of the scholars who visited this place include the outstanding archaeologists Józef Kostrzewski, Zygmunt Zakrzewski and Zdzisław Rajewski. The staff of the Museum of the Early Piast Dynasty conducted investigations there in 2002–2008. They examined fragments of the rampart construction, relics of a timber building of an unknown purpose, and rubble, interpreted as remnants of two buildings where castellans resided. During the excavations, approximately 200 small finds were discovered, including: silver coins from the end of the 11th c. and later, a sickle, a striker, a padlock key, whetstones, a quern-stone, spindle whorls, crossbow and bow arrowheads, a Silesian-type iron basin, fishhooks, etc.

Apart from protecting cultural heritage and looking after the strongholds mentioned above, their monuments and material remnants of their folk culture, another aim of the Museum of the First Piasts at Lednica is to promote knowledge about the valuable collections housed in the Museum. Consequently, the Museum organises various exhibitions, presented both in its branches and in other museums in Poland and abroad. Some of them have won accolades and awards in museum event of the year competitions held both by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage and by the Marshal of the Greater Poland Voivodeship. It is also worth noting that the fine craftsmanship and rank of some of the artefacts collected during the archaeological excavations is widely known, and they are therefore often loaned out to other museums and sometimes displayed in European exhibitions, e.g. in London, Berlin, Copenhagen, Prague, Budapest, Paderborn, Magdeburg, and many others.

The Museum of the First Piasts at Lednica is also a research institution. This is reflected in numerous publications which present the findings of the excavations mentioned above, as well as conferences organised (and co-organised) by the institution. It is worth mentioning at least two flagship international and cyclical conferences – the Lednica

second half of the 10th c., the first stronghold was established here, which was in use until ca. mid-11th c. Settlement on the island dwindled in the first half of the 14th c. (Kowalczyk 2017, 206).

Funeralia⁷ and the conferences related to the 1050th anniversary of Mieszko I's baptism⁸.

Another crucial element of the Museum's activity is popularising knowledge about the past by publishing prospectuses, guides and brochures⁹, producing popular science films¹⁰ and organising numerous museum lessons¹¹, as well as very popular open-air mass events (Fig. 13; 14)¹². The Museum's rank, in particular the relics of the palatium and baptismal pools, attracts visitors linked to both the Catholic Church and politics – e.g. the Primate of Poland, Presidents, Prime Ministers, politicians and members of the diplomatic corps from all over the world (Fig. 15). On state and church anniversaries, Masses are celebrated by the Primate or bishops here. One of the largest events of this kind was the organisation of the national state and church celebrations commemorating the 1050th anniversary of Mieszko I's baptism, which took place on Ostrów Lednicki on 14 April 2016, with the participation of the Episcopate of Poland and state authorities (Fig. 16)¹³.

⁷ Twenty international conferences devoted to diverse funerary topics have been organised. Post-conference materials have been published.

⁸ Three international conferences have been organised, which concluded with the publication of conference papers: 'The Battle of the Milvian Bridge: consequences', 'The theology and liturgy of baptism, from Christian antiquity to modern times', and 'Places of baptism, baptismal furniture and the ceremony of baptism from Christian antiquity to the Council of Trent'.

⁹ Prospectuses about all of the Museum's branches have been published in many languages (award at the Tour Salon fair in Poznań).

¹⁰ In recent years, various television companies have produced films about Ostrów Lednicki and the Museum of the First Piasts at Lednica (e.g. the 'Fall in Love with Poland' and 'Monuments of History' series); the production of 'The Island of Rulers: Ostrów Lednicki', directed by Zdzisław Cozac, is particularly noteworthy. The film received many prestigious awards in historical film competitions in Poland and Europe. It presents the history of Ostrów Lednicki – the magical 'island of rulers' – and shows the many aspects of the studies conducted there in an interesting way.

¹¹ The catalogue of museum lessons includes several dozen lesson topics for various age groups, as well as the disabled (including the blind).

¹² The flagship mass events include: 'Midsummer Night' – 49 editions (the Small Open-Air Museum by the ferry to Ostrów Lednicki); 'Live Open-Air Museum' – 32 editions (Greater Poland Ethnographic Park); 'Rally of Slavic Warriors' – 19 editions, since 2014 renamed 'Grzybowo Knight Tournament' – 5 editions (Stronghold in Grzybowo); 'Forefathers' Eve' – 8 editions (Stronghold in Giecz).

¹³ This was the third time that Ostrów Lednicki was connected to the Small Open-Air Museum by a pontoon bridge built by the military (the two previous instances were in 1992 and 2000).



Fig. 13. The Greater Poland Ethnographic Park. Bidding winter farewell (Photo by M. Jóźwickowska)



Fig. 14. Ostrów Lednicki. Floral crowns floating on the water on Midsummer Night (Photo by M. Jóźwickowska)



Fig. 15. Ostrów Lednicki. A play performed during the visit of a diplomatic corps (Photo by M. Józwickowska)



Fig. 16. Ostrów Lednicki. Solemn Mass celebrated on the 1050th anniversary of Mieszko I's baptism (Photo by M. Józwickowska)

One of the Museum's very important initiatives was the establishment of the Lednica Piast Eagle award, which is given to outstanding scholars specialising in the history and archaeology of the origins of the Polish state¹⁴.

The functioning of this multi-branch museum (which occupies almost 100 ha and nearly 100 buildings, as well as branches located from a few to as far as 40 km apart from one another) requires considerable logistical skills, an experienced staff of scholars and researchers, conservators and technicians (e.g. joiners and builders, who can efficiently dismantle and reassemble ethnographic buildings located on the Museum's territory), as well as personnel in charge of landscaping and gardening. This amounts to approximately 100 museum employees.

One of the primary tasks of all museologists is to skilfully protect monuments and artefacts, as well as to store them and make them available to the public. In the case of the Museum of the First Piasts at Lednica, these include both archaeological features and ethnographic monuments: large architectural constructions of stone, brick and timber, as well as small bone, wooden, and iron objects. The majority of the collection requires proper storing conditions and an exhibition space. To meet the expectations of modern museology, the institution has applied for and received European Union funds for the expansion of the exhibition and storing infrastructure, which will cover the cost of repairs and purchasing modern equipment for the main exhibition, educational, and storage spaces, as well as the cost of repairs and refurnishing of offices and specialist laboratories.

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¹⁴ So far, the award was presented to the following professors: Gerarda Labuda, Zofia Kurnatowska, Jerzy Strzelczyk, Zygmunt Świechowski, Klementyna Żurowska, Henryk Samsonowicz, Jerzy Lesław Wyrozumski, Antoni Gąsiorowski, Stanisław Suchodolski and Tomasz Jasiński.

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