

Uncovering Our Polish Roots – Part 2

Why would an academic organization (Polish “corporation”) name itself “**Lechia**”? The name is cryptic at best, meaningless at first reading, and certainly unknown to most modern linguists. Perhaps Polish historians may be privy to its foundation or derivation but the ordinary layperson is unaware of its origin.

What began with our search for a Franciszek Rużyłowicz ended with a question instead of an answer ... what is a “**Lechia**”?

The answer to the above question is not straightforward nor is it easily explained. The convoluted history of Poland prior to Mieszko I (ca. 930 – 25 May 992), the duke of Polans and first ruler of unified Poland, centers on a land that was a tribal federation, without a cohesive structure and fragmented among many Slavic people. What we learned was that ...



The brothers Lech and Czech, legendary founders of West Slavic lands of Lechia (Poland) and Bohemia in "*Chronica Polonorum*" (1506) by Maciej Miechowita
Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org>

The term **Lechitic** derives from the most popular form of the name of the legendary forefather of Poland, **Lech** (apparently a distorted form of ***lēch**).

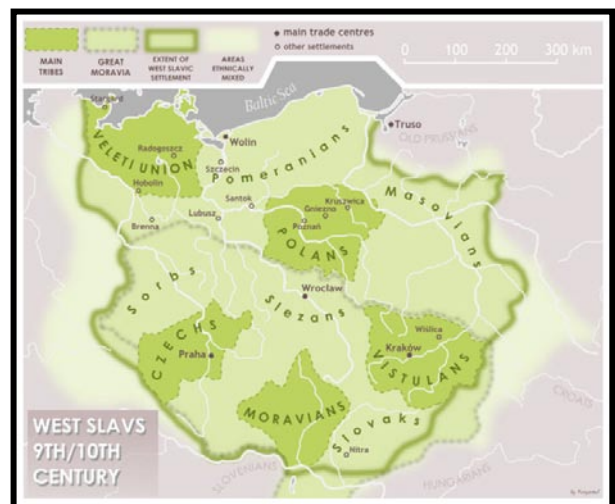
Furthermore, **Lechites** (Polish: *Lechici*) was an ethnic and linguistic group of West Slavs, the ancestors of modern Poles and the historical Pomeranians and Polabians. Historically, the term Wends (Latin: *Venedi*, *Venedae*) was similar in meaning, though it sometimes referred only to West Slavs within the Holy Roman Empire. However, Mieszko I, the first historical ruler of Poland, also appears "as Dagome, King of Wends".

History

When Mieszko I inherited the ducal throne from his father, he probably ruled over two-thirds of the territory inhabited by eastern Lechite tribes. He united the Lechites east of the Oder (Polans, Masovians, Vistulans, and Silesians) into a single country – Poland. His son, Bolesław the Brave, with the assistance of Saint Adalbert, eradicated heathenism, and founded the bishoprics at Wrocław, Colberg, and Cracow, and an archbishopric at Gniezno. Shortly before his death Bolesław became the first King of Poland in 1024.

Rise of the Polans

By the time Mieszko I took over from his father, the Polans' tribal federation of Greater Poland had for some time been actively expanding. Continuing this process, perhaps in the first years of Mieszko's reign, if it had not been done already by his father, Mieszko I conquered Masovia. Mieszko's interests were then concentrated mainly on areas occupied by the eastern (near the Oder River) branches of the Polabian Slavs; some of them subordinated by him. As *Widukind of Corvey* wrote ... "Mieszko ruled over the tribe called the *Licicaviki*, now commonly identified with the Polabian Lubusz Land". Having the control over those more western (in respect to the original homeland of the Polans) tribes, Mieszko entered the German sphere of influence.



Polans within the West Slavic settlement area, 9th/10th c.
Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org>

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In 963, the German *Margrave Gero* conquered territories occupied by the Polabian, Lusatian, and Słupian tribes, and as a result came into direct contact with the Polish state. At the same time (about 960) Mieszko I began his expansion against the Velunzani and Lutici tribes. The war was reported by *Abraham ben Jacob*. According to him, Mieszko I had fought against the *Weltaba* tribe commonly identified with the *Veleti*. *Wichmann the Younger*, a Saxon nobleman who was then a leader of a band of Polabian Slavs, defeated Mieszko twice. The frontiers at the mouth of the Oder River were also desired by the German margraves. Allied with the *Veleti Bohemia*, which at that time possessed Silesia and Lesser Poland regions, constituted a danger for the young state of the Polans.

Lechitic group

- Poles
 - Masovians
 - Polans
 - Vistulans
 - Goplans
 - Lędzianie
 - Silesian tribes
 - Biezuńczanie
 - Bobrzanie
 - Dziadoszanie
 - Gołszyce
 - Lubuszanie
 - Opolanie
 - Ślężanie
 - Trzebowianie
 - Pomeranians (†)
 - Kashubians
 - Slovincians
 - Pyrzyczanie
 - Wolinianie
 - Polabians (†)

Lechitic languages

The western Slavs included the ancestors of the peoples know later as Poles, Pomeranians, Czechs, Slovaks, and Polabians. The northern so-called Lechitic group includes, along with Polish, the dead Polabian and Pomeranian languages (†). The languages of the southern part of the Polabian area, preserved as relics today in Upper and Lower Lusatia, occupy a place between the Lechitic and Checho-Slovak groups.

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* states that "**Lechitic** languages, also spelled **Lechitic**, are a group of West Slavic languages composed of Polish, Kashubian, its archaic variant Slovincian, and the extinct Polabian language. All these languages except Polish are sometimes classified as a Pomeranian

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subgroup. In the early Middle Ages, before their speakers had become Germanized, Pomeranian languages and dialects were spoken along the Baltic in an area extending from the lower Vistula River to the lower Oder River. Kashubian and Slovincian survived into the 20th century; there were still a considerable number of native speakers of Kashubian in Poland and Canada in the 1990s. The extinct Polabian language, which bordered eastern Germany, was spoken by the Slavic population of the Elbe River region until the 17th or 18th century; a dictionary and some phrases written in the language exist".

The name Laesir/Lech

The name **Lech** or Leszek, Lestko, Leszko, Lestek, and Lechosław is very popular name in Poland. **Lech** was a popular male name among members of Piast dynasty like ... Lestko ... Leszek I, the White ... Leszek II, the Black ... Leszek, Duke of Masovia ... and Leszek of Racibórz. The oldest part of **Gniezno**, located in the center of Greater Poland, is known as "*Wzgórze Lecha*" (Eng. "Lech's Hill"), also known as "*Góra Królewska*" (Eng. "Royal Hill"). A variant of a legend (described below), involving the two brothers Lech and Cech, is also known in the Czech Republic. The legend was described in "*Kronika wielkopolska*" (Eng. "Greater Poland Chronicle") written in 1273 in Latin and *Chronicle of Dalimil* written in the Czech language in 1314. **Lestko** (also Lestek, Leszek) noted in the *Gesta principum Polonorum*, completed between 1112 and 1118 by *Gallus Anonymus*, is the second legendary duke of Poland, and son of Siemowit, born ca. 870-880. *Res gestae saxonicae sive annalium libri tres* chronicle of 10th century Germany, written by *Widukind of Corvey*, noted that Mieszko I, son of Siemomysł and grandchild of Lestek, ruled over the tribe called the **Licaviki** that lived in what is now known in Poland as "**Lestkowici**" – a tribe of Lestek associated by some historians with Lendians (i.e., *Lechites*).

The meaning of the names of **Pole** and **Lach or Lech** is obscure (however, the Polish work *pole* means "field"). While the name *Polani* may be *Slavonic*, the name Lach or Lech seems to be of foreign origin. Some historians have, as in the case of the name Rus, looked for a Scandinavian etymology. But in this connection they have overlooked the fact that Greater Poland, the real mother country, has never been called *Lechia* or *Lachia*. The name *Lach, Lech, Lechi* is connected with the names *Walch, Wlach, Walach*, and is indisputably of southern origin. Even in the present day, the Slavs call the Italians – *Włochy* (Polish) or *Lachy* (Slavonic) and the Romanians – *Walachy, Wołosza*.

The names of **Lechitae** (Lechites), **Lechiticus** (lechitic) and **Lechia** to describe of all medieval Poland was used many times by Wincenty Kadłubek in *Chronica seu originale regum et principum Poloniae* (Chronicles of the Kings and Princes of Poland) written between 1190-1208. "Greater Poland Chronicle" of 1273 described Casimir I the Restorer as "king of Poles, meaning Lechites". Both Poles and Lechites were used in medieval Poland as equal terms. "**Laesir**" is the Old Norse term for the Ljachar, a people near the Vistula River in Poland. Different forms of the name Lechia, to describe the Polish state, is still present in several European languages and some languages of Central Asia and the Middle East ... "Lenkija" in the Lithuanian language ... "Lengyelország" in the Hungarian language ... "Lehia" in the Romanian language ... "Lahestân/لہستان" in Persian (and by way of borrowing from Persian: "Lehastan" in the Armenian language, and "Lehistan" in the Ottoman (Turkish) language).

Sources mentioning Lendians (i.e., *Lechites*):

- Bavarian Geographer** (843) – *Lendizi*,
- Constantine VII** (912–959) – *Lendzanenoi, Lendzaninoi*,
- Josippon** (Jewish chronicler) (890–953) – *Lz'njn*,
- Nestor the Chronicler** (11th century under the date of 981) – *Lachy'*,
- Kinamos** (Byzantine chronicler, 11th century) – *Lechoi*,
- Al-Masudi** (Arabian chronicler, c.a. 940) - *Landzaneh*

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Lech, Czech, Rus and the White Eagle, as painted by Walery Eljasz-Radzikowski (1841-1905)

Source:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lechites>

Legend

As indicated previously, in Polish literature, Lech was also the name of the legendary founder of Poland. Legend describes three brothers – Lech, Čech, and Rus – who founded the three Slavic nations: **Poland** (also known as **Lechia**), **Bohemia** (*Čechy*, now known as the Czech Republic), and **Rus** (*Ruthenia*) - Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. In this legend Lech was the founder of Gniezno. The legend states ...

Three brothers Lech, Czech, and Rus were exploring the wilderness to find a place to settle. In time they saw a hill with an old oak and an eagle on top. Lech said: this white eagle I will adopt as an emblem of my people, and around this oak I will build my stronghold, and because of the eagle nest (Polish: gniazdo) I will call it Gniezdno (modern: Gniezno). The other brothers went further on to find a place for their people. Czech went to the South (to found the Czech Lands) and Rus went to the East (to create Russia and Ukraine).

Our conclusions on Lechia

After the 3rd partition of Poland in 1795 (by Russia, Prussia, and Austria), Poland (as a nation) ceased to exist. It was not reconstituted until 1918. In the intervening years the name “Poland” was suppressed and relegated to history’s dust bin. In Austria’s Chernowice region, at the turn of the 20th century, there was an immense sense of Polish pride and patriotism among the educated, based principally on bloodlines to an ancestral heritage. When a local academic “corporation” was proposed and then established in 1910, the “corporation’s” name could not be directly associated with Poland the former state. To skirt a politically-charged convention, and with a view to its ancient past, the “corporation” settled on “**Lechia**”, in honor of the legendary name of Poland ... the **Lechitic** federation of tribes that existed prior to their consolidation as the first Polish state.

Now we know: **Lechia = Poland**

Sources, References, and Further Reading:

Mieszko I of Poland	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mieszko_I
Lechites	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lechites
Polans	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polans_%28western%29
Abraham ben Jacob	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_ben_Jacob
Margrave Gero	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gero
Wichmann the Younger	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wichmann_the_Younger
Lendians (Polish: <i>Łędzianie</i>)	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lendians
Gniezno	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gniezno
Gallus Anonymus	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gallus_Anonymus
Widukind of Corvey	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Widukind_of_Corvey
Wincenty Kadłubek	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wincenty_Kad%C5%82ubek