

# Short Story about the Origin of the Family Names Radzimski and Radziemski

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## Abstract

This is a story about the origin of the Radzimski/ Radziemski family lineage. According to historical documents, it starts with Maćko Borkowic, General of Wielkopolska, who lived in Poland in the 14th century. We start with a short history of Poland around this time, the life of Maćko Borkowic, and his inheritance, which was the starting point of the Radzimski lineage. At the present time, it is difficult to make a direct forward connection with any person living today. Actual records allow us to trace the lineage backwards from the present-day surnames to about 1760. We note that there were at least two common spellings of surnames in this lineage, Radzimski and Radziemski, and several others with slightly different spellings used less frequently. For simplicity and because, for the most part, Radzimski was the surname actually used in Poland, in this article we only use Radzimski unless individuals we cite actually had differently spelled surnames in the sources we cite. A numbered list of those sources used as references appears as Section VII at the end of the article; superscript numbers in the text refer to that list.

## I. Early History of Poland

After being the homeland of illiterate Slavic tribes for many centuries, Poland bursts into recorded history with unparalleled suddenness. The first mention of the Polanie tribe is in 963, when a German knight, pressing eastwards, comes into contact with them. Prince Mieszko had become their leader within the past year or two. Threatened by German expansionism, Mieszko moved with extraordinary speed, using the structures of feudal Europe to secure his territory. First, he had himself accepted as a vassal of the newly-crowned emperor, Otto I. The next step was even more dramatic. In 965, Mieszko married a Christian Czech princess, Dobrawa. The following year, he adopted the Roman Catholic faith for himself, his family, and all his people. To secure Poland's position even further, he subsequently placed all his lands under the direct authority of the pope—thus providing the Poles, in principle, with the special protection of Rome.

Mieszko also gained territory for Poland, extending it north through Pomerania to the Baltic coast. He bequeathed a powerful kingdom to his descendants, known as the Piast dynasty, who developed and strengthened his united kingdom. Poland became fragmented after the reign of a particularly strong and successful ruler, Bolesław III. On his death in 1138, the Piast inheritance was divided between several sons, and the division led to periods of weakness and losses. Incursions of pagan Prussians and Lithuanians, the Teutonic Knights, and the Mongols plagued the Polish principalities. For several decades,

the power was often in the hands of German bishops and merchants. By the end of the century, there was even a military threat from neighboring Bohemia.

Władysław, a Piast prince, whose own inheritance was the small territory of Kujawy, achieved the revival of Polish national spirit. In 1296, he acquired a more prominent role when the nobles of Wielkopolska or Greater Poland elected him as their prince. After many years of trouble with Bohemians and Poland's own nobles, especially in Kraków, Władysław took the city, ejected the bishop, and banned the use of the German language in the council. On January 20, 1320, Władysław I Łokietek (the Elbow-high) was crowned king of Poland. Significantly, he chose for his coronation not the traditional Gniezno, but the recently rebellious Kraków. It became his capital city and, henceforth, the place where all kings of Poland were crowned and buried.

The successor to King Władysław's son was Kazimierz III Wielki (the Great) (1333–1370), who presided over a period of peace and prosperity in Poland. He had close family links with two powerful neighbors—he was married to the daughter of Gediminas, Grand Duke of Lithuania, and his sister was the wife of Charles I, king of Hungary. This left only the Teutonic Knights in the north and Bohemia in the southwest as hostile neighbors.

The growth of towns, advances in learning (linked with the founding of a university in Kraków in 1364), and the provision of public buildings all testify to the wise patronage of Kazimierz. Another was his wise but unconventional decision to welcome to Poland the

Jews displaced by persecution elsewhere after the horrors of the Black Death. Kazimierz Wielki was the last Polish king from the Piast dynasty.

It is during the reign of these two kings, Władysław I Łokietek and Kazimierz the Great, that we hear about Maciej (Maćko) Borkowic, coat of arms Napiwoń, a general from Wielkopolska. According to several sources, he should be considered as a starting point of the lineage of the Radzimski family. More information on this subject can be found in Section III.

[Portions of this history of Poland were taken from reference 1).

## II. Origin of Polish surnames

The most popular last names in Poland, often called typical Polish surnames, are those that end with *-ski* or *-cki*. Examples of common surnames following this pattern, along with a count of how many Polish citizens were registered by these names as of 1990, are Kowalski (131,940), Wiśniewski (104,418), Orzechowski (15,656), Szymański (84,527), Wróblewski (36,435), and Czarnecki (32,525).<sup>12</sup> These types of names appeared first in the 14th century and gained popularity in the middle of 15th century. Typically, such names originated from the names of places or villages that were owned by these people; later, they were also used by people who lived in these places. As the names became more popular, they were not necessarily inherited. Therefore, especially among nobles, brothers could have different surnames, since they inherited different villages or towns. The noble people with the same *-cki* name didn't have to be related because the villages were often sold, exchanged, or lost/won in gambling. Each new owner could use the village name as his surname. A classical case would be that of the inheritance of General Borek.

## III. Maćko Borkowic

The life of Maćko Borkowic, General of Wielkopolska, is relatively well documented in Polish history. The first reports often reference the writings by Jan Długosz, a Polish priest, chronicler, diplomat, and soldier who lived between 1415 and 1480. Recent historical studies show that the family of Maćko Borkowic is related to the very old wealthy Borek family from Pomorze (West Pomerania). It was most likely Wojśław Borek Borkowic, coat of arms Napiwoń, who settled in Wielkopolska, in Sierakowo near Kościan. His descendants

became very influential in this region. It was his son, Borek, known since 1279, who had three sons: Przybysław Borkowic, voivode of Poland; Andrzej Borkowic, castellan of Kalisz, and Wojśław from Gryżyna, judge in Poznań, (1310-1353).<sup>3</sup>

Przybysław Borkowic from Sierakowo, son of Borek, became starosta (elder) of Poznań during the period 1319-1324, and he helped Władysław Łokietek in his struggles with Teutonic Knights who occupied the north-eastern part of Poland, and Czechs who claimed territorial rights to the southern part of Poland (current Lower Silesia). More trouble came from the Czechs and their King Jan Lucemburský (John the Blind), who made alliances with the Knights. It was most likely in mid-1320 when the Knights entered Polish territory again, and this time the invasion was coordinated with Lucemburský. The Knights' and Czech's armies were supposed to meet near town of Kalisz and attack it together. According to references #4 and 5, "Fryczko Borek, a general from Wielkopolska, gathered people from Kościan powiat or county and the area of Wschowa and pushed back the Czechs, which allowed the defeat of the Knights. In recognition of his efforts in defense of Wielkopolska, King Władysław Łokietek awarded General Borek with the city of Gostyń and 40 villages, among them Koźmin, Pleszew, Raszków, Potaszyce, and Radzymie." We believe that the "General Borek" mentioned in the previous quote was Przybysław Borkowic, who is referred in this story as Fryczko Borek. Przybysław died on August 4, 1328, leaving behind two sons, Maćko and Borek from Grodzisk, both inheriting the coat of arms Napiwoń. A more detailed discussion of the connection between names and villages is found in Section IV.

Maćko Borkowic, son of Przybysław, played an even more important political and military role in the in the history of Poland. In 1340, Maćko Borkowic led knights of Wielkopolska in a military excursion to Ruś (Ruthenia). He became the governor of the Poznań territories in 1343. In 1348, Kazimierz the Great, pressed by noble families of Wielkopolska, withdrew the position of the Lord of Wielkopolska and replaced it with two posts: the Lord of Poznań, that was headed by Maćko, and the second Lord of the Kalisz territories. This move led to some skirmishes and King Kazimierz dissolved these two positions and re-established the single position and named Wierzbęta from Paniewic (Silesia) as the Lord





Figure 1 – Maćko Borkowicz placed in the “hunger cell.” Jan Matejko, 1873<sup>3</sup>

of Wielkopolska. The nomination created a revolt among nobles of Wielkopolska. This led to the formation of the confederation in 1352 with Maćko as their leader. King Kazimierz defeated this revolt, and Maćko swore loyalty to the king in Sieradz on February 16, 1358. During this oath, for the first time in the history of Poland, the word Republic (*Respublica* in Latin) was used.<sup>3</sup>

Maćko was not completely loyal to the king, and in 1360 he was arrested in Kalisz and sentenced by the king to death by starvation. He was imprisoned in the Olsztyn castle near Częstochowa, where he died on February 9, 1360. This event was a theme for a painting by one of the most famous Polish painters, Jan Matejko, in 1873 (see Figure 1).

#### IV. Origin of the Radzimskis' lineage and Coat of Arms Napiwoń

As mentioned in the historical overview in Section III, both Przybysław and his son Maćko rendered all manner of assistance to King Władysław Łokietek and his son, Kazimierz the Great, in their fights for Polish territories. They were rewarded with land and villages for this help. There are several references in the records about this recognition. For example, we can find in Kasper Niesiecki's *Herbarz Polski*: “The family of Przybysław received from King Łokietek the city of Koźmin and 15 adjacent villages as a reward for win-

ing over in 1324 castles of Zbąszyń, Kopanica, and Przyprostynia from the Prince of Głogów.” A similar story can be found in Reference 5.

The story described in references 4 and 5 brings us closer to the name of the Radzimskis. The story of Fryczko Borek, mentioned in the previous section, tells us also that it was Marcin Borek Gostyński, heir of Gostyń and Włoszakowice, who had three sons, Maciej, Stanisław, and Marcin, with the noble lady Suchorzewska of Pleszewie and Radzim. Maciej inherited Pleszów, Raszków, Poturzyce and Radzym, from which the Borek family took the name Radzimski. Stanisław received Włoszakowice with 15 villages, and Marcin received Gostyń with 14 villages.

A similar story can be found in the Polish armorial of Count Seweryn Uruski<sup>6</sup>: “They (Radzimskis) are related to the very old and noble family from Pomorze, Borek. Their ancestor is Fryczko Borek, a general from Wielkopolska, who was given the city of Gostyń with 40 villages by Polish king Władysław Łokietek for his help in getting rid of the Czechs from Wielkopolska and maintaining him on the throne of Poland. Families of Gostyński, Borkowicz, and Radzimski are initiated from this Fryderyk Borek. The Radzimski family took their name from Radzim, which was given to them as a part of this reward ...”

We believe that the inheritance story starts with Przybysław, who passed the properties to Maćko. Strong evidence here is the fact that it was King Kazimierz the Great who confirmed that Koźmin belonged to Maćko, who inherited it from his father, Przybysław. However, it is difficult to define the connection between Maćko and Marcin Borek Gostyński. Despite this gap, one can assume that multiple references to Radzimski's name in Borek's family story, and the sharing of the same coat of arms Napiwoń, place the origin of the Radzimski name near the late 14th century.

Summarizing the records we have been able to identify so far, here are the towns and villages in Wielkopolska that can be traced to Borek's family:

- Sierakowo: most likely place of Maćko's birth, his father Przybysław Borkowicz was from Sierakowo near Kościan.
- Gostyń, Pleszew, Raszków, Poturzyca, Włoszakowice, Radzim granted to Przybysław by King Władysław I Łokietek in 1331.



Figure 2— Coat of arms Napiwoń<sup>3</sup>

- Golina, Koźmin, and Kobierno, places granted in 1338 to Maćko by King Kazimierz the Great. Koźmin was actually given earlier to Przybysław, but Kazimierz the Great confirmed the ownership to Borek's family.

It is important to remember that the main connection between generations in the earlier history of Poland was not through the last name but through a coat of arms. As mentioned earlier, Borek Borkowic inherited his coat of arms, Napiwoń, from his ancestors in Pomerania. Following tradition, the coat of arms was passed on to all descendants of Borek, including Przybysław, Maćko, and his relatives. That is why it is understandable that the following story in *Herby szlachty polskiej* [The Coats of Arms of Polish Nobility], written by Zbigniew Leszczyński,<sup>7</sup> published in Poznań in 1908, Volume 1, page 273: "The coat of arms called Napiwoń belonged to the following families, from Wielkopolska: Borkowicz from 1250, Gostyński from 1500, Ossowski from 1700, Radzimski from 1480, Włoszakowski from 1440." The Borek Borkowic mentioned in this text would be the first Borek who started his family trail in Wielkopolska. According to reference #8, these are additional families that used the Napiwoń coat of arms: Bortkiewicz, Cierpiński, Jutrowski, Napiwoński, Nargiałowicz, Nargiało, Nejman.

Most of these names originate from the names of settlements that Borek's family inherited.

The most referenced of several versions of the Napiwoń is shown in Figure 2, at left. There are also, however, earlier references to the image showing two wolves, one on top of each other.

The name of the coat of arms, Napiwoń, originates from a very common call, *Na piwo*, that translates to "buy yourself a beer." Translation of the individual words breaks down as *na*, meaning for, and *piwo*, meaning beer.<sup>3</sup> One can find an anecdote in literature stating that Borek was hunting with the king of Poland and saved the king from a tragic death. The king, in return, took out some gold coins from pocket and said, "General, please accept this money to drink to my health." Beer was a very popular drink at the time, so one could say that the general received money *na piwo*. Various authors have repeated the story, but its origin cannot be traced to a specific source.

#### V. Where is Radzim ?

Considering the above story about Borek's family and its interesting connection with the origin of the Radzimski name, it is obviously useful to try to identify the place Radzim, which was passed on to one of the sons of Maćko Borkowic. A search of historical documents turns up many places that existed or, in some cases, still exist in Poland with the name Radzim or other similar names, such as for example, Radzimie, Radzym, Radzimin, and Radzyn. In our story we should focus, of course, on places situated in Wielkopolska, home of Borek's family. If we take into consideration all the places associated with Borek's family records from the 13th and 14th centuries, we are talking about a search area of about 500 square miles, extending from Włoszakowice on the west to Pleszew on the east, Raszków on the south, and Grodzisk on the north. The following places in this area can be identified according to reference #9, the late 19th-century gazetteer *Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego*, Volume 9 unless otherwise noted:

1. Radzynie (sometimes called Radzim) near Pleszew, with the last owner listed in 1506 as count Mikołaj from Raciborz. This place no longer exists (page 488).
2. Radzimia, a settlement with a watermill on the Pokrzywnica river in Konin county, Dąbroszyn township, Rychwał parish. Radzimia no longer exists as such; it is





Figure 3—A map of the region of Wielkopolska or Greater Poland, in which one can find most of the places associated with Borek's family can be found. A number of them are circled for easier reference. From Google Maps

- incorporated in the village of Wola Rychwalska (page 472).
3. Radzyń in parish Rdułów near Kutno. There is a record stating that in 1576 the village had four owners with the last name Radzyński and first names Marcin, Jakub, Stanisław and Anna (page 483).
4. Rybno Wielkie, near Gniezno, which prior to the 15th century was called Radzimińskie, Radzimskie, and Rybno Radzim. In the 17th century, the Radzimiński family is listed as landlord of this place. (Volume 10 of the Słownik geograficzny, page 65).
5. Radzyń near Szamotuły, formerly called Radziny (page 483).
6. Radzimin in Szubin county, near Kcynia. This place belonged to the Radzimińskis until at least 1845 (page 472).
7. Radzim near Oborniki in Poznań district. This place is well documented since 1236, when the first church was built. In 1256, the first known record speaks of a castellan and its castle. The first castellan was Beniamin (coat of arms Zaremba), and it appears the castellan lasted until 1425. While the records mention nothing about

General Borek, it is interesting that in 1360, as part of a territory exchange, King Kazimierz transferred Radzim to the Malta Order. This was the year when General Borek was sentenced to death by this king. This Radzim no longer exists (pages #471 and 472).

8. Radzyń Chełmiński, mentioned by Długosz in 1278 as Radzim and Radziń. First records on this town can be traced to 1224 (page 483).

If one goes by the following record—“Maciej, the eldest, received Pleszew, Raszków, Potarzyca with 12 villages, with Radzim among them”—the search area for the land Maciej inherited from Maćko would cover roughly 80 square miles. In this area, the most likely places on the list above would be #1 - Radzim near Pleszew, #2 - Radzim near Rychwał, or #3 - Radzyń near Rdułów. Interestingly, the highest concentration of people in Poland with the name Radzimski or its derivatives live currently in this region.

#### VI. Radzimskis and Radziemskis in Poland Today

According to the website “Moi krewni” (My relatives)<sup>10</sup> there are 1,054 people with the last name of Radzimski (with the feminine



Figure 4 – Map of Poland showing counties with highest population of people with the names Radzimski, Radziemska, Radziemski, and Radziemska.<sup>10</sup>

form Radziemska) and 340 people going by Radziemski and Radziemska living in Poland now. There are also 823 people with the name Radziński or Radzińska and 419 people with the name Radziński or Radzińska. The numbers are based on 2002 data from the Polish government database PESEL.

A map showing the counties with the largest numbers of Radzimskis/ Radziemskis is shown as Figure 4, above.

The highest number, 152 people, is in county Konin; next is Turek, with 100, and then Radziejów with 69. These three counties are situated next to each other in Wielkopolska. We can see that this region of Poland has the most significant portion of Radzimskis. As earlier shown, this is also the area to which Maćko Borkowic and his descendants can be traced.

As far as we know, no current Radzimski person can be directly traced to Maćko. We are aware of several lineages that are going back to period from ~1750 to 1800. For example the genealogical trees of:

- Michał Radzimski, born in 1757 in Dobra in Turek county

- Paweł Radziemski, born in 1759 in Sługocinek in Konin county

- Łukasz Radziemski, born 1775 in Sługocinek in Konin county

- Franciszek Radziemski, born around 1780 in Mąkoszyn in Konin county

- Kazimierz Radziemski, born around 1785 in Małanów in Turek county

- Walenty Radziemski, born 1797 in Lisiec Wielki in Konin county

These lineages are supported with original documents related to birth, marriage, or death of the ancestors. Some of these lineages were researched and identified by Bernard Radzimski using church and, most recently, online records being provided by the Polish government (see reference #11). In 2012, Polish professional researcher Iwona Dakiniewicz independently corroborated the lineage of one of the authors (Leon Radziemski) dating back to Paweł in 1759. Zbigniew Radzimski completed the records of Michał Radzimski's tree; he was born in 1757. From those three data sources,

trees including some 1,500 names have been assembled so far. The majority of these lead to current concentrations of Radzimskis in Konin and Turek counties. In 2013, there was a reunion of some 60+ persons with Radzimski heritage in Krągola, organized by Sławomir and Bernard Radzimski (see Figure 5 on page 13).

It is interesting that all these places mentioned above are within counties with highest number of Radzimskis currently living in Poland. However, most of the identified lineages going back to ~1750 and many individual records that exist from the 15th and 16th centuries remain to be connected.

There are some clues to a connection between these trees with descendants of Maćko Borkowic. Following references 1 and 2, it was most likely Maćko who received Pleszew, Raszków, Potarzyca, and Radzymie, from which the Radzimski name originates. His son, Piotr, who had a son, Wojciech, inherited the name. Wojciech had two sons with Dorota Mysińska: Piotr, who was a knight (1558), and famous Stanisław Radzimski with coat of arms Napiwoń (1563–1622), Jesuit and pedagogue in Kalisz University. He was born in Zacharzew near Ostrów Wielkopolski and





Figure 5—The Radzimski Family Reunion in Konin on May 17, 2014. Photograph courtesy of Foto Sypniewski, Konin.

died on October 22, 1622. It is interesting to note that Stanisław Radzimski was also referred in documents as Radziński, Radzym-ski, or Radzyński.

At this stage of our research, the lineage of the Radzimski's and Radziemski branches of Borek's genealogical tree ends. Further studies are required. We hope this paper will be of use to the many persons with the family name of Radzimski and Radziemski who live currently, not only in Poland, but also in the United States and other countries.

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