



Werner Paravicini. *Adlig leben im 14. Jahrhundert. Weshalb sie fuhren: Die Preußenreisen des europäischen Adels.* Tl. 3. Vestigia Prussica 2. Göttingen: V & R unipress, 2020. 807 pp. ISBN: 978-3-8471-1128-3.

At the very outset it must be confessed that another Werner Paravicini would be required to do full justice to a work like this and, since this is near impossible to expect, the present review will be an overview rather than a critical engagement on all sides. This volume represents part of the still ongoing project launched way back by Professor Paravicini: its first two volumes were published in 1989 and 1995.¹ This 2020 publication stands out as a testimony to an enviable perseverance and purposefulness on the part of the author. The first two volumes of the *Preußenreisen des europäischen Adels* were devoted largely to the geography and technique of military raids undertaken against the pagan Lithuanians by the Teutonic Order and its Western European noble allies. The intended fourth volume (IV or III/2, cf. pp. 11, 15) shall seek to answer the question of why, when, and how they fizzled out. The fifth volume shall contain all necessary documentary evidence. The sixth volume is reserved for the inclusion of the emergent new empirical data, but its main practical value will lie in the general indices, maps, illustrations, and lists of primary and secondary literature. The third volume specifically addresses the question of why on earth the nobility of Western Europe took care to undergo every kind of hardship and was happy to spend huge amounts of money in the pursuit of its knightly ideals. To pose such a question is one thing, to give a well-informed answer is quite another. The previous publications produced under the pen of Paravicini and by some other scholars have already provided a student of the Northern crusades with a means to form an educated guess as to why fourteenth-century Western nobles were in the habit of setting out abroad to fight the infidel “other”. But the Question remains: what was more and what was less important in a multitude of reasons? To answer this big question Professor Paravicini embarked on a formidable task of reconstructing the life world (*Vorstellungswelten, Lebenswelt*, pp. 11–12) of European nobility in its ideal and down-to-earth dimensions by taking to interrogation all available evidence of every sort and kind: narrative and heraldic sources, romance and occasional literature, letters and ledg-

¹ Werner Paravicini, *Die Preussenreisen des europäischen Adels*, Tl. I, Beihefte der Francia 17/I (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1989); Tl. II, Beihefte der Francia 17/II (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1995).

ers, frescoes and tombstones – taking along some of items reaching well into the early modern period when the *Preußenreisen* were but a dim memory. In the opening chapter Paravicini makes a strong case for casting the world of nobility as a parallel Church of sorts with its knightly orders, saints (the Nine Worthies), secular hagiography (*Ehrenrede*, no longer extant books of deeds), secular priests (heralds), and its own Bible containing Arthurian-like romance. All this elaborate structure was meant to help live up to the all-consuming ideal of achieving the all-redeeming honour and glory, *Minne* vs. *Glaube* (pp. 17–28, 31). Afterwards the reader is immersed into the deep waters of medieval romance and courtship. This chapter reads like a concise history of late medieval literature covering France, England, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and Spain. The author takes into account not only those writers and poets who referred to Prussia (and Lithuania) directly, but reviews also those who were influential enough to mould the knightly ideals and behaviour and at the same time may serve as indicators of the omnipresence of the *Preußenreisen* in the collective mind of late medieval nobility (e.g. Jean Froissart, pp. 208–209). Then the reader is invited to go along into the realm of heraldry where panegyric tracts and coats of arms of the most renown Prussia-travelling nobles are dealt with. Biographical vein is strongly pronounced in chapter 4 as well in which an attempt is made to reconstruct an incredibly mobile life of noble knights. They were animated by the same spirit that urged them to reach out to India (p. 316) and led them from Prussia to the Canary Islands (p. 449) and, finally, to the discovery of the New World. The literary and heraldic evidence is confronted with hard facts gleaned from official records to provide grounds for the assertion that previously widely held views about the otherworldly character of such *belles-lettres* and thus their limited use in the study of history do not hold water and these tracts must be regarded as reflecting the knightly life truthfully enough even though the images depicted there have been mediated along the lines of literary conventions and by having focused on those facets of heroic life that were truly important to writers and their noble audience alike (pp. 356–360, 403). The author has supplied compelling evidence as to the fact that the fight against the pagan was an indispensable part in the overall understanding of what the noble life should have looked like in the later Middle Ages (pp. 63, 116, 656–657), and at the same time provided scattered though quite eloquent instances of the critique of such deeds (John Gower, John Wycliff, Heinrich der Teichner). Even though the author has admitted in advance that this volume will have almost nothing to do with local Prussian and Lithuanian history (p. 12), an attentive reader may find there something of interest in this respect too. To me as Lithuanian native speaker, for example, it became apparent in no time that while reading Jean de Mandeville's story (ca. 1356) about the infidel watchmen

crying “Cara, cara, cara”! to alert their countrymen of the advancing Christian army, we come across the very first known Lithuanian word written down comprehensibly – “karas” is a Lithuanian word for “war”!² In view of the high-handed Western approach to aboriginal infidel population, this picking up of local idiom represents a very rare and worthwhile instance of transmission indicative of close contact despite divides generated by warlike nature of dealing with one another. Paravicini has excellent command of all pertinent sources and secondary literature stemming from what may loosely be called Western Europe. His view directed from West to the East allows him and his readers to arrive at a generally correct view of what kind of people lived in what country beyond the river Nemunas at the high time of *Preußenreisen*. Reading hundreds of pages of detailed description of the life of nobility and its paraphernalia, I could find just a few instances that call for some critical comment. On my part, looking from East to the West, it comes to me as a small surprise that the author had to admit that the outlook of the so-called “Prussian shield” remains unknown (p. 142). This is not so. At least in Poland, Czechia, and Lithuania it has been known for decades that Prussian or Lithuanian shields represented medium-sized pavises that could be used by mounted warriors.³ One of the best instances of what they looked like may be viewed in the 1379 seal of duke Kęstutis of Trakai (accessible online). Commenting Guillaume de Machaut’s remark on pagan Lithuania’s tributary relationship to the Tatar Khan, Paravicini is quite correct in disbelieving its veracity, but his adage that this relationship was “eher umgekehrt” is simply superfluous (p. 66). The Lithuano-Tatar relations in the fourteenth century are notoriously difficult to unravel and understand, but, in general terms, they represented a cobweb of ever shifting balance between different spheres of influence where the regime of condominium rather than outright hostilities formed the tenor of every-day international relations.⁴ Paravicini has discovered probably the latest known instance of human sacrifice of the prisoner of war in Europe at the turn of fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (pp. 374–375). On the other hand, his view that it was at this time that ransoming of war prisoners was started to be practiced on the Teu-

² Cf. Loïc Chollet, *Les Sarrasins du Nord: Une histoire de la croisade balte par la littérature (XII^e–XV^e siècle)* (Neuchâtel: Éditions Alphil-Presses universitaires suisses, 2019), p. 325.

³ Vladimir Denkstein, “Elementy wschodnie i zachodnie w czeskim uzbrojeniu XV wieku,” *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej* 21, np. 2 (1973): 283–288; Kazimierz Ascikas [Kazimierz Aścik], “Lietuviškas skydų tipas,” *Mokslas ir gyvenimas* 12 (1978): 26; *Uzbrojenie w Polsce średniowiecznej 1350–1450*, ed. Andrzej Nadolski (Łódź: Polska Akademia Nauk, Instytut Historii Kultury Materialnej, 1990), 94–95.

⁴ See chapters on Lithuano-Tatar relations in: *The Routledge Handbook of the Mongols and Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. Alexander V. Maiorov and Roman Hautala [2021 forthcoming].

tonic-Lithuanian frontier is less convincing (cf. p. 375). Such practice is known at least from the late thirteenth century as far as Polish and Lithuanian relations are concerned, so the lack of comparative evidence from another neighbourhood may be just the problem of source coverage.⁵ For logistical transport reasons alone, it is hard to believe that *Prusse*, one of the biggest bombards of the Duke of Burgundy, might be a gift sent from Prussia (cf. p. 640). Topics like these are, however, peripheral to the central thrust of Paravicini's detailed and ample description of the life of fourteenth-century Western nobility. I suspect that the author had premonition that only history buffs can read his book from cover to cover. This may be inferred from a repeated caveat that a would-be Prussia-crusader Thomas Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, did not reach his goal owing to bad weather conditions in the North Sea in the autumn of 1391 (pp. 469, 529). Much of direct references to the sources have been consigned to the tables (in continuation of the previous tables in the previous volumes of the *Preußenreisen*, from no. 108 to no. 143), providing biographical details, costs of service, heraldic evidence etc. This will serve well for present and future researchers in enabling them to come to know more swiftly as to what is already known and what and where something new might still be found (in studying, for example, Hennegau nobility that supplied unusually high numbers or *Preußenreisen* enthusiasts, but is still insufficiently explored, p. 221). Some seemingly simple conclusions have been arrived at after meticulous research on personal names and literary works (e.g. relatively high frequency of Arthurian names among Prussia-crusaders p. 49; an exceptionally strong influence on the behaviour of fourteenth-century nobility exercised by fiction, pp. 40, 134, 199, 515, 661), so anybody willing to challenge them will have to make a comparably ambitious pan-European tour. Similarly, the actual state of knowledge is demonstrated in the case of the crusading nature of the *Reisen* (pp. 519–542), with regards to the role of gifts (falcons, amber, Prussian, Lithuanian and Ruthenian curios, falcons, and least but not last holy relics) in maintaining mutual relations between the Teutonic grand master and the Western potentates (pp. 567–596, 562–563). The same may be said with regard to the table of honour (*Ehrentisch*, pp. 456, 598–605), and on much else. Paravicini has produced a book on Western nobility that allows its reader to grasp the pulse of the knightly life dependent as it was on the general rhythms within and without Latin Europe. Perhaps one of the most interesting revelations of this book is the opportunity to see how deeply and actively

⁵ Individual instances of the ransom of prisoners of war are provided by Grzegorz Błaszczyk, *Dzieje stosunków polsko-litewskich*, vol. 1, *Trudne początki* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1998). See also *Livländische Reimchronik*, ed. Leo Meyer (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1876), lines 3063–3074.

the same people were involved in offering battle to the Lithuanians in the North, to the Ottomans in the Southeast, and to the Arabs in Iberia and beyond. The sense of duty and adventure must be overwhelmingly strong to gather social, symbolic, and real capital in thus way (cf. pp. 644–647, 659). Relying on every sort of available evidence Paravicini has produced a comprehensive and multi-faceted picture of the Western noble elite and their entourage by assigning a proper place to various motives according to the social pecking order that moved them forth and back to enjoy life and undergo hardship abroad and competition at home where not only honour and fame counted but also money and ladies talked much. The Prussia of the Teutonic Order was for them the men's affair more so than anywhere else (p. 653). All in all, this book is a prime example of German *Sozialgeschichte* at its best. This volume may also be viewed as just a step in producing the *magnum opus* of the *Preußenreisen des europäischen Adels*, but it obviously represents a huge one, and it remains for all of us to pray and render help and advice so that its completion would come sooner than later.

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