

Alice Ehrmann-Pösch. *Bettler, Pfründner, Hausarme. Armenfürsorge in der frühen Neuzeit am Beispiel Mergentheim, Residenzstadt des Deutschen Ordens. Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des Deutschen Ordens* 89 / Veröffentlichungen der Forschungsstelle Deutscher Orden an der Universität Würzburg 5. Imtal-Weinstraße: VDG Verlag, 2022. 390 pp. ISBN: 978-3-89739-970-9.

The monograph under review was published in the esteemed series *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des Deutschen Ordens*. It presents a slightly revised version of a doctoral dissertation defended at Julius Maximilians University of Würzburg in 2020. The author's objective was to conduct a multifaceted analysis of the topic of care towards the poor in early modern times. Using the example of the small residential town of Mergentheim located in Baden-Württemberg and associated with the Teutonic Order, the author has presented a micro-historical overview of the practical implementation of the Order's hospital ideas.

The starting point of the work involves a discussion of the hospital activities of the Teutonic Order in medieval and early modern times. In this context, the author analysed, among other things, the rule and its subsequent reforms concerning the poor and the sick. Also addressed was the economic aspect of the problem, linked to the establishment of hospitals run by the Order and the associated cult of St Elizabeth within the Teutonic Order. The author proceeded to provide the social background for her inquiries, describing the town of Mergentheim and its population as the subject of her research. The city's social cross-section and socio-topography over the centuries enabled the sketching of a 'poverty profile' in the city, although the author acknowledges the challenge of drawing a sharp dividing line between the middle and lower social strata.

Subsequent chapters delve into various forms of support for the poor in the city, beginning with almsgiving in the parish as part of burghers' foundations. The author traced this issue within the context of the operation of the church's construction fund (*fabrica ecclesiae*) and the relationship between municipal authorities and the church's patron – initially the Order of St John and, from 1554, the Teutonic Order. The following chapter explores the matter of almsgiving in wills from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, taking into consideration the

profile of the recipients of the alms. An extended subsequent chapter examines the organization of almsgiving with a focus on regulations for beggars. Here, the author addresses issues related to the prohibition of begging, including its religious and labour contexts, and provides insights into the distribution of offerings. Subsequent chapters delve into the examination of poorhouses, the Hospital of the Holy Spirit, and the “Carolinische Krankenhaus” (Carolingian hospital). The author tackles issues related to the financing, construction, and organization of these institutions, considering them crucial elements on the map of urban poverty. Finally, she analyses the role of the Teutonic Order’s court in the distribution of alms, drawing from the regulations that govern its operation.

The source appendix contains many useful materials such as ordinances on begging, the operation of poorhouses, and hospitals. This is a valuable addition to the study. However, this section lacks a broader editorial apparatus, making the material appear more like a transcript than a complete scientific edition. It is essential to emphasize that this appendix serves solely to illustrate the analysis within the work. The monograph is further enriched by illustrative material, including city plans, as well as authentic plans of hospitals or poorhouses.

Overall, the monograph stands as a comprehensive and valuable study. The micro-historical approach broadens its potential impact on historical research. The author’s analyses prove interesting not only from the perspective of regional history but also offer valuable insights and inspiration of a more general nature. The study’s wide chronological scope is particularly noteworthy. While its primary focus is on the early modern period, the author frequently delves into the heart of the Middle Ages. This aligns with the increasingly common and legitimate tendency to transcend the boundaries of historical eras, allowing for a broad temporal perspective on the issues at hand. It is worth noting that the subject matter of the study weaves together social, economic, and religious issues, providing a comprehensive understanding of the complex problem of poverty in modern times. Additionally, the work contributes significantly to the history of the Teutonic Order, although its emphasis leans more towards the townspeople. The study sheds light on the (at times) overlooked hospital activities of the Order, expressed in the motto cited by the author: *Wehren, Helfen, Heilen*.

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