



**Juhan Kreem. *Ordu sügis. Saksa Ordu 16. sajandi Liivimaal [The Autumn of the Order. The Teutonic Order in Sixteenth-Century Livonia]. Tallinna Linnaarhiivi toimetised 17. Tallinn: Tallinna Linnaarhiiv, 2022. 584 pp., ill. ISBN: 978-9949-7352-7-3.***

On November 28, 1561, with the so-called *Pacta subjectionis*, the Teutonic Order in Livonia (today's Estonia and Latvia) was submitted to King Sigismund II Augustus of Poland, and its master, Gotthard Kettler, became the first duke of Courland. After more than three centuries of its history in Livonia, spent fighting against Lithuanians and Orthodox Russians, the Teutonic Order had to face new circumstances, created at first by the Protestant Reformation and then by the war against Ivan IV of Moscow. This book is the result of some 20 years of research on the Teutonic Order in sixteenth-century Livonia that the author has conducted since the completion of his Ph.D. dissertation, published in 2002, on the relations between the city of Tallinn and the Order, namely, *The Town and Its Lord: Reval and the Teutonic Order (In the Fifteenth Century)*. The present book is written in Estonian, a detail that could pose some obstacles to readers, but a German and perhaps also an English edition are envisaged.

*Ordu sügis* does not just deal with the Order itself, as well as its structures and its military and political history, but also with Livonian society during the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern era. Its chronology ranges from the rule of Master Wolter von Plettenberg and his successful war against the Grand Principality of Moscow in 1501–1503 to the aftermath of the Order's secularisation in 1561. The book's first chapter considers the Teutonic Order as a corporation, focusing on the prosopography, careers, mentality, spirituality, and self-awareness of the brethren. The second chapter addresses the non-professed persons in its service, and it contains an interesting excursus on the role of women and a description of everyday life in a castle of the Order. The third chapter features an in-depth study of the Order's economy, incomes, and resources. The fourth chapter turns to the Reformation in Livonia as well as in the Teutonic Order and its local possessions. The fifth chapter describes the final years of the Order in Livonia, then the war against Moscow that begun in 1558, and finally the Order's dissolution.

All these chapters and their topics offer a great quantity of new data, ideas, and interpretations and are based on a relevant number of unedited and edited sources of several categories. This is, in fact, the first complete study on the topic; consequently, many historiographical preconceptions and prejudices are swept away after reading this book. The basic idea is that our perception of the history of the Teutonic Order in Livonia as an institution in crisis after the initial success of Plettenberg at the beginning of the sixteenth century is an oversimplification. As Kream proves, the Protestant Reformation did not destroy the pillars of the Order that, over time, had taken the road of progressive evangelization and of transforming itself into a modern corporation of nobility. Similarly, the Order's military activities during the war against Ivan IV were not as hopeless or disastrous as some narratives of the sixteenth century and some historians of our times have suggested. The problem was, above all, the need for funding sources to pay the mercenaries, especially when facing a numerically superior enemy.

This does not mean that the Teutonic Order in Livonia was in perfect health in the sixteenth century. It was a closed corporation, formed by some 100–200 noblemen, hailing mostly from Westphalia, dominated by a small group of officers – the commanders and *Vogts* of the castles –, living like laymen, having concubines and children, and disposing of the Order's resources at will. Thus, the collapse of medieval Livonia did not result from its internal difficulties but, rather, from the pressure exerted by external powers such as Moscow, Poland, and Sweden. It has to be observed, too, that, just like in Prussia, the secularisation of the Order's Livonian possessions led to the creation of a new, prosperous state, the duchy of Courland.

This book is certainly a cornerstone for the history of Livonia, but I also appreciate its writing style, which is not excessively “academic” and rather suitable for a wider audience, as well as the relevant quantity of illustrations (among them, for example, the photos of the remains of all the Order's castles in Livonia). We eagerly await this volume's German and English edition, which will be much appreciated by professional historians and history buffs alike.

*Kristjan Toomaspoeg (Lecce)\**

---

\* ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5179-9041>