



Marcin Sumowski. *Duchowni i mieszczenie. Kler niższy w społeczeństwie późnośredniowiecznych miast pruskich [Clergy and Townsfolk. The Lower Clergy in the Society of Late Medieval Prussian Towns]*. Ecclesia clerisque temporibus medii aevi 8. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2022. 673 pp. ISBN: 978-82-231-5215-6 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-83-231-4548-6 (softcover).

Studies on the lower clergy (parish priests, vicars, altarists, and hospital clergy), whether in the Prussian dioceses or in the Gniezno metropolis in the Middle Ages, are still few in number. At the same time, in research works on the lower and higher (chapter) clergy, prosopographical approaches prevail, combining biographies of members of a particular group or community with a characterization (collective biography) of the entire community on the basis of a few selected aspects.¹

The monograph by Marcin Sumowski – an excellent researcher of the clergy in medieval Prussia² – is part of this research trend, and at the same time constitutes a significant novelty: the author, departing from traditional historiography and relying on his deep knowledge of the biographies of the lower Prussian clergy, shows them from a broad social perspective, as “a collective of clergy interacting directly with each other and with the townspeople, not only on the pastoral-liturgical or

¹ See e.g. Mario Glauert, *Das Domkapitel von Pomesanien (1284–1527)*, Prussia Sacra 1 (Toruń: Verlag der Nikolaus-Kopernikus Universität, 2003); Polish translation: *Pomezaniańska kapituła katedralna w czasach średniowiecza (1284–1527)*, trans. and ed. Radosław Biskup (Pelplin: Wydawnictwo Bernardinum/Kwidzińskie Centrum Kultury, 2021); Radosław Biskup, *Das Domkapitel von Samland (1285–1525)*, Prussia Sacra 2 (Toruń: Verlag der Nikolaus-Kopernikus Universität, 2007); Stanisław Jujeczka, *Duchowni średniowiecznej Legnicy. Studium prozopograficzne* (Legnica: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk w Legnicy, 2006); Marcin Sumowski, *Duchowni diecezjalni w średniowiecznym Toruniu. Studium prozopograficzne* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo A. Marszałek, 2012); Radosław Krajniak, *Duchowieństwo kapituły katedralnej w Chełmży do 1466 roku. Studium prozopograficzne* (Toruń: Europejskie Centrum Edukacyjne, 2013); id., “Z badań nad biografiami członków warmińskiej kapituły katedralnej w pierwszym okresie jej funkcjonowania (do połowy XIV wieku),” *Zapiski Historyczne* 80, no. 1 (2015): 65–83.

² See e.g. Marcin Sumowski, “Święcenia duchowieństwa w późnośredniowiecznych Prusach,” *Roczniki Historyczne* 85 (2019): 27–89; id., “Duchowni w testamentach mieszczańskich – mieszczenie w testamentach duchownych. Zapisy ostatniej woli jako źródła do badania powiązań (Prusy, XV – początek XVI wieku),” *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej* 68, no. 3 (2020): 315–334.

hierarchical level” (p. 20). As Sumowski writes: “I am closer to the model of ‘understanding’ history than ‘describing’ history” (p. 30). Thus, we are given a bird’s eye view of the society of a medieval city, revealing the network of connections and social references related to the clergy.

A similar social slant in describing the functioning of the lower clergy can be found in Ewa Wólkiewicz’s monograph *Proletariusze modlitwy? (Proletarians of Prayer?)*, which, as the author writes in the introduction, is “complementary” to his work (p. 55).³

In his research assumptions, the author postulates that the relations between the clergy and the laity in the town were largely culturally determined; they were relations of “cultural perceptions.” Therefore, historical sources can also be interpreted in a cultural context.

The work is divided into four chapters. In the first, “Klerycy i krewni. Portret zbiorowy duchowieństwa niższego” (“Clerics and relatives. A collective portrait of the lower clergy”), the author characterizes the studied community according to the adopted research survey form (covering not only social and territorial origin and education, but also intellectual culture or issues related to membership in the Teutonic Order). Above all, however, he tries to show the social aspects of the various components of the biography (origin, education, and membership in the Order), as well as the cultural significance given to them in urban society (for example, education was considered a designator, an “immanent” feature of a clergyman). An excellently constructed “model image of a member of the clergy operating in an urban environment” (p. 149) serves as the chapter’s conclusion.

In Chapter Two, “Plebani i wikariusze. Kler w mieście jako grupa społeczna” (“Parsons and vicars: The clergy in the town as a social group”), the clergy operating in towns are shown as a social group: a collective of people connected initially by objective ties (ordination and norms of church law), then subjective and, at the final stage, behavioral ones. The number and diversity of the clergy in towns is presented (parish priests, chaplains, vicars, and altarists, clergy in town hospitals, and in women’s monasteries), followed by ecclesiastical norms defining the distinctiveness of the clergy (tonsure and attire, as well as celibacy) and city norms aimed at eliminating this distinctiveness (especially with regard to taxes), and, finally, forms of clergy integration within the town (for example, functioning in a wide “social network” of clergy; common houses; and priestly brotherhoods). We encounter

³ Ewa Wólkiewicz, *Proletariusze modlitwy? Drogi karier, finanse i kultura materialna niższego kleru w średniowiecznej Nysie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Archeologii i Etnologii PAN, 2020).

here excellent subchapters on the self-identification of the clergy; on the authority of the parson over the city clergy (this concerned primarily liturgical issues but was also expressed in the financial privileges of parsons); and on the integrating role of priestly confraternities, which were, however, also open to the laity.

Chapter Three, “Kaplani i wierni. Duchowni w rolach społeczno-kulturowych” (“Priests and the faithful. The clergy in socio-cultural roles”), first characterizes the cultural pattern of a member of the clergy in Prussian church, conforming to norms well established in the general European culture as well as its reflection in the burghers’ milieu; it then describes roles performed by the clergy in the town (parish priest, priest’s chaplain, clergyman in a hospital and a convent, preacher, confessor, and parish school teacher); and it finally recounts criticism of the clergy (coming from the church itself as well as from the town circles) which was an “integral part of the pattern” (p. 57).

Chapter Four, “Duchowni i świeccy. Kler niższy wobec miasta i mieszczan” (“Clergymen and the laity. The lower clergy regarding the town and the townspeople”) presents direct relations between the clergy and the burghers: the forms of the clergy’s presence in the urban milieu (including their participation in the transformation of church space through foundations and legacies; the sacralization of urban space through religious processions; and the property ownership and residence of the clergy in the town). The role of the clergy “in creating urban space in the sense of an area of ‘human relations’” is highlighted here (p. 457), emphasizing the various dependencies and relations of the clergy operating in the town (for example, relations with the patron of the prebend, family, friendship, and neighborhood ties, relations with women, and financial ties). The concluding section of the chapter presents disputes between the clergy and the laity: those of an “institutional” nature (pastors with town councils) and those of a “private” nature (clergy with townspeople).

Marcin Sumowski’s work is the first monograph in Polish historiography to present a group of the clergy from a social perspective, where prosopographical research serves to exemplify the problem of relations between the clergy and the laity (p. 555). The work shows the reader four images corresponding to its four chapters: 1. A collective portrait of the lower clergy of late medieval Prussian towns; 2. The image of the clergy as a social group with a certain internal cohesion resulting from the self-identification of its members; 3. The cultural pattern and social roles of the clergy defined by church norms and the “social practice of the Church in Prussia;” and 4. The image of specific interactions between the clergy and the townspeople. These images are united by the author’s consistent, clear narrative, guiding the

reader through the successive unveilings of the issues under discussion. The result is an original, authoritative, and at the same time exemplary model for describing the functioning of the lower clergy in the urban community.

Such a rich, multi-faceted description could only have been created as a result of the skillful use of a variety of sources: town books and burghers' wills; guild and brotherhood records; documents of church expositors and synodal statutes of Prussian dioceses; documents and correspondence of the Teutonic Order; handbooks intended for the clergy; parsons' accounts; works in verse; and the town chronicle. The author often quotes sources *in extenso* – indicating to the reader the possibility of interpreting them by using a cultural key.

In the conclusion of the monograph, the author emphasizes that “the lines of social division did not always run along the ‘state’ boundaries, but often across them” (p. 558) – the town clergy, although excluded from the laity by the fact of higher ordination, came, after all, from a burghers' milieu and never left it. This conclusion is vividly reflected in the representation on the cover – a photograph of a detail from the First Commandment from *Tablica Dziesięciorga Przykazań* (*Tablet of the Ten Commandments*), tempera on board, from the end of the 15th century and displayed in the church of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Dąznig (Pol. Gdańsk). It shows a clergyman and townspeople kneeling together before Christ as he is giving his blessings: it is as if the clergyman is just one in the crowd (although he is distinguished by his attire and tonsure), while it is the laypeople who are directly supported and protected by an angel appearing behind them.

The work is supplemented by an extensive list of sources and literature (pp. 561–619), abstracts in German and English, as well as indexes of names and places.

Translated by Joanna Przewięźlikowska

Marta Czyżak (Toruń)*

* ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3746-4530>