



Kristjan Toomaspoeg. *The Teutonic Order in Italy, 1100–1525: Building Bridges in the Medieval World. The Military Religious Orders: History, Sources, and Memory* II. London: Routledge, 2024. 216 pp. ISBN: 978-1-032-15347-6.

The military orders of the Middle Ages are without a doubt a kind of phenomenon. Originating from the time of the Crusades to the Holy Land, they are strongly tied to the complexity of high medieval society – its mentality, worldview and overall people’s way of living. This unique form of social organization provided a new, quite refreshing approach to spirituality and religious practice. Colloquially termed “warrior-monks”, the military orders had proven to be quite an effective force not only on the battlefields, but also on the field of establishing socio-cultural connections throughout the Christian world. The societal impact of the military orders’ activity was undoubtably significant, the local foundations frequent, and donations hefty. The Teutonic Order was by no means an exception to this. It was an international institution that created a wide network of social ties throughout Christendom. The Teutonic Order’s presence in the Italian Peninsula, although numerically small, has indeed made an impact on the local society in many ways. Even if oftentimes overshadowed by the legacy of the two bigger contenders in the region, the Templars and the Hospitallers.

The activities of the Teutonic Order in Italy are the subject of study in the reviewed volume, authored by Kristjan Toomaspoeg, a professor of medieval history at the university of Salento in Lecce, Italy. He is a renowned expert in the history of medieval military orders in Italy, especially The Teutonic Order in many aspects: diplomacy, religiosity, economy, prosopography, as well as art and architecture related to them. The focal point of Toomaspoeg’s book is to present a perspective on the Teutonic Order’s presence in the Italian Peninsula as a sort of bridge – an intermediary between different realms of the Christian world, cultures and social classes. The author offers a deep insight into many fields such as politics, commerce, society and social mobility, art, and notable individuals. The content is presented as a cohesive summary of earlier studies, as well as a well-balanced monograph. Handling the topic as a whole is surely a welcome addition to the overall studies on medieval military orders.



The book contains an introduction, (pp. 1–18), the main body of the book (pp. 19–159), a conclusion (pp. 160–167), bibliography (pp. 168–186), an index of persons, families, and geographical toponyms (pp. 187–202). Added to this are a useful list of illustrations and abbreviations. The notes are situated at the end of each chapter. The list of source materials used is impressively large.

The introduction presents the relevance of the researched subject, establishes the goal of the book and states research questions to be answered (pp. 1–4). Here, the author clarifies some of the important terms he uses in the later segments. There is also a section where he provides information and insight into the sources used, details on where to obtain them, as well as the current state of historiography regarding the subject (pp. 5–12). Toomaspoeg shares his experience with acquiring access to all the mandatory (and scattered) archival material and consults a wide array of scholarly literature in German, Italian, English and French. Toomaspoeg harmoniously divides the narrative into three parts with each representing their primary focus of insight. Such an approach makes for a convenient and useful tool for the researcher.

Part 1, titled “The Structures”, is comprised of Chapters 1 through 3. It is dedicated mainly to geographical distribution of the Order’s footholds, territorial concessions, donations and privileges at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries. It starts with a chapter (pp. 21–36) explaining the geopolitical context of the first settlement of the Teutonic Knights in Italy, which happened as early as the late 12th century. The author emphasizes the importance of southern Italy, as a point of departure to the Holy Land for many pilgrims. Later on, Toomaspoeg engages with some views that overexaggerate the influence of emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen on the Order, further explaining the complexity of that relationship by analyzing the brothers’ activity and received foundations through the first half of the 13th century using available sources (pp. 24–32). The second (pp. 37–46) and third chapters (pp. 47–60) are devoted to outlining the geographical distribution of certain bailiwicks, the land and properties they owned, along with their potential income.

Chapters 4 through 6 make up Part 2, titled “Politics and Administration”. This part sets the stage with classical political and diplomatic history of the Order in Italy. Chapter 4 (pp. 63–77) starts with a brief encapsulation of the most important chronology of events that affected the community of the brethren, beginning with the last years of the reign of Frederick II and what occurred directly after his death. The second half of the 13th century is presented as a very tumultuous period that casts its shadow on the Order. The decline of the Kingdom of Sicily

corresponded with a power shift in the Order's local structures but also provided vital opportunities. Southern Italy became a stage for political struggle between foreign powers of French Angevins, the Aragonese and the Pope, with the Order in the middle of it. Then, Toomaspoeg gives his insight on the fall of Acre in 1291 and how it was a turning point for the Order's presence in Italy, given that the Grand Master's official residence was located in Venice from then up until 1309 (pp. 68–74). It is here where the author states that the fall of Acre indeed sparked a period of unpopularity for the military orders overall, but it was quite the opposite for the Teutonic Order in Italy, which reached the height of their popularity and wealth, evidenced by the numerous donations received since 1291 (p. 70). The radical changes were yet to come. In chapter 5 (pp. 78–93), Toomaspoeg describes the gradual process of waning importance of the Italian bailiwicks as the Order shifted its ideological focus from the Levant to the Baltics. This process ultimately led to the Italian province being left to the Master of Germany (Germ. *Deutschmeister*). Later, the author focuses on the Order's involvement in local politics, namely the role of its general procurators (Germ. *Generalprokuratoren*) (representatives of the Order present in the Papal Courts in Rome and Avignon). Toomaspoeg lays out the power dynamics within the Italian branch of The Order and most importantly – the connections between the Master of Germany, and the Italian bailiwicks. Chapter 6 (pp. 94–102) is dedicated to the topic of the so called “retreat of the Teutonic Order from the South”. This being a systematic loss of the Order's holdings in Italy. The author shares his thoughts on it, dealing with the traditional view of German historiography, which focuses on the macro-scale factors. Toomaspoeg adds nuance to that by pointing out the vibrant examples of controversial individuals that may have greatly contributed to the Order's downfall in the region. Those individuals being: Stephan Grube, a high-ranking Teutonic priest who gave out the Order's land to the pope for his own benefit, Heinrich Hoemeister, provincial commander of Sicily, who among many other scandals, engaged in debauchery and homosexual relations, and also Andrea Lippomano, a member of a wealthy Venetian family, a familiar of the Order who exploited the Order with his numerous connections with influential people.

Part 3, “Teutonic Brethren and Their Activities in Italy”, contains Chapters 7 to 11. It encompasses the social history of the people related to the Order and the brethren themselves, but also the cultural impact of the Order's presence in the region, displayed by various forms of art and architecture. As a result, it is also the most robust in terms of source studies. In Chapter 7 (pp. 105–115) The author starts with a brief overview of the Order's organizational structure, how it functioned in

Italy and what we can extrapolate about this from the perspective of the sources. Toomaspoeg then divides the brethren into two groups: those of the bailiwicks who answered to the Master of Germany after the Grand Master left for Prussia (commanders, lieutenants, local commanders), and those who served as the general procurators and who were always submitted to the Grand Master directly. The distinction is seen through their status, education and social backgrounds.

Next up, Toomaspoeg handles the matter of the origins and career paths of the Order's members (pp. 108–113). This segment is particularly interesting, as it shows exactly how the Order's uniqueness in terms of personnel management influenced the role of Italy as somewhat of a leverage point for future careers elsewhere, especially Prussia after 1291. Toomaspoeg states that the Order's ranks were almost never filled with the local population sources. Instead, the Order relied on the men imported from abroad who seldom ended their careers in Italy. Going further, into chapter 8 (pp. 116–125), the author lasers into the spirituality and overall moral condition of the local Teutonic brethren, answering the questions related to their spiritual and intellectual imprint on the local society, for example, in terms of certain cults (most importantly – Virgin Mary), and vice versa, how the local cults influenced the Order's religiosity. Toomaspoeg then gives a slightly darker perspective on some of the Order's more questionable or even immoral behavior regarding matters of conflicts with the locals, incompetence or other misconduct, that resulted in scandals (pp. 119–124). Chapter 9 (pp. 126–135) deals with the people related directly to the brethren: the familiars and *confratres/consorores* (also called half-brothers or half-sisters). Toomaspoeg also takes a closer look at the relations between certain minority groups, including Jews, Arabs and of course Germans (pp. 130–133). The relationship between the local German populace and the Order is the most intriguing of the author's observations that he makes here. He remarks that, contrary to what may first come to mind, their cooperation was surprisingly minimal (p. 133). The Order did not serve as a representative body of the local German speaking population and was overshadowed by other institutions, especially in Lombardy and Venice, where the German minority was significant. Chapter 10 (pp. 136–143) focuses on explaining the economy of the Teutonic Order's activity in Italy, such as land lease or managing rural and urban estates, the legal forms of such activity, as well as estimated income. The last chapter of the book (pp. 144–159) concerns the Order's art and architecture, in addition to reconstructing the everyday life of the brethren. The segment is filled with illustrations that aid in accomplishing this task. Here, the brethren are depicted as individuals, often pursuing lives similar to the local nobility, an image which con-

trasts heavily with their perceived image as “warrior-monks”. Toomaspoeg draws on a rich variety of sources to highlight the secular activities of the knights, which involved playing games, hunting and enjoying luxury (pp. 152–158). The volume ends with a well written conclusion (pp. 160–167) that synthesizes all the claims the author has made.

To conclude, Kristjan Toomaspoeg’s book is a comprehensive overview and summary of the Teutonic Order’s history in medieval Italy. It serves its purpose equally as a starting point of study, but also as a rich supplement to the ever-growing field of documenting the history of the military orders of the medieval era. The sources used are varied and include, among others, narratives, annals, legal documents, visitations, protocols, and visual sources. The way that Toomaspoeg presents his findings throughout the book is professional, all in line with formal academic standards. At the same time, the text is accessible and clear, which deserves praise not only to the author of the book but also to the editorial board of the series.

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