



Maciej Dorna. *Knights of Christ of Prussia, a forgotten 13th century military order.* Tallinn: Eostre, 2024. 48 pp., 27 illus., 6 maps. ISBN 978-9916-767-06-1.

This short book by Maciej Dorna summarises the knowledge that is available about the small Order of the Knights of Christ of Prussia, also known as the Brothers of Dobrzyń. Their mission was to fight against the pagans who were still resisting Christianity in the Baltic region and defending their own faith's borders. Conducting research on the history of this group of Knights is limited by the small number of primary sources and by their respective credibility. The Order existed for roughly twenty years in the first half of the thirteenth century, and while it numbered only a few dozen knights, the author argues that they must have represented some kind of military strength, as opposed to what the Teutonic Order's sources say.

The book begins with clarifications regarding the names by which the Knights of Christ of Prussia were known. It then focuses on the two main documents regarding the Order, which are grants of land by Duke Konrad of Masovia: the first donates the castle of Dobrzyń to the Order, and the second grants them the castle of Drohiczyn. The Order's history is therefore divided into two separate stages, namely, their time in Dobrzyń and their subsequent time in Drohiczyn. Much more is known about the first period, which is confirmed in several texts, while the period in Drohiczyn is largely a mystery, as not many sources remain. The book concentrates on these two chapters in the history of the Knights of Christ, however, it also tries to shed light on the Order's story before and after the reach of the main sources. It does so well, and all the points made seem very probable. Among the most interesting aspects of the work are attempts to clarify the confusion around the Order's founder, Bishop Christian of Prussia, as well as the reasons why it found itself in Duke's Konrad service. Even more questions pertain to the later merger of the Brothers of Dobrzyń with the Teutonic Order. The author tries to unravel the connections between the Brothers of Dobrzyń and the Teutonic Knights as well as the circumstances under which the former were incorporated into the latter. This incorporation presented a problem for Duke Konrad, resulting in a legal dispute between him and the Teutonic Order. All this makes for an inter-

esting case of politics pertaining to all parties involved and raises the question why Duke Konrad chose to employ the Order in his service again, after they had caused him such trouble. The author tries to answer this and other questions and in doing so sheds new light on this topic and clears up some misconceptions generated by the older historiography, contrasting his theories with those of others and arguing convincingly in their favour.

The book is written well and constitutes a very accessible read, not demanding excessive knowledge on the matter to follow its arguments. It also contains many photographs of documents, seals, and the locations where the Order's castles once stood, as well as maps highlighting the geographical scope of the Knights' operations. I found it to be a good, short read, and I appreciate that it takes an interest in this small military Order, which is often completely overlooked due to its diminishing importance when compared to the Teutonic Order. Focusing on the Teutonic Order's perspective and sources has made it easy for the historiography to make some incorrect claims about the Knights of Christ, therefore clarifying these claims was necessary. At the same time, the author acknowledges the small number of sources and does not try to stretch them to make any overarching claims, thereby offering a good, compact work on the topic.

*Igor Waraksa (Toruń)**

* No ORCID-number.