



Karol Polejowski, *Matrimonium et crux. Wzrost i kariera rodu de Brienne w czasie wypraw krzyżowych (do początku XIV wieku)* [*Matrimonium et crux. The rise and career of the Brienne family during the Crusades (until the beginning of the 14th century)*], Ateneum – Szkoła Wyższa w Gdańsku, Gdańsk 2014, 331 pp., ISBN: 978-83-610-7929-3.

Karol Polejowski is a historian who has been dealing with various themes in medieval history and the history of medieval Poland, especially in the context of crusading movement in the Levant and Prussia, for over a decade. The first significant effect of his interests was his PhD thesis, completed in 2000, which focused on the Teutonic Order's possessions in the Kingdom of France until the mid-14th century. The thesis was published 3 years later (2003)¹. After this, Polejowski turned to another area of research, namely crusading activity of the Brienne family (originally from the region of Champagne) between the 12th and the beginning the 14th century. He carried out extensive historical queries in the archives of a number of different European countries (France, England, Wales, Italy, Germany). He also conducted meticulous and labor-intensive genealogical research based on scant and very dispersed sources. It was a common practice in the Latin West at this time, to acquire land and power through ties of kinship (marriage, children). The Brienne family was a perfect example of this practice. Thus, it is impossible to fully understand the political events in various states in Europe, the Levant and in the Latin Empire without knowledge of the genealogical connections between members of the Brienne family and other European aristocratic families (for example the families of Baudement, Montlhéry, Montbéliard, Dampierre, Ibelin, Lusignan, Courtenay, Montferrat, Joinville, Hauteville etc.).

The publication is composed of six chapters: 'Ród de Brienne, Szampania i Outremer do roku 1191' (eng. 'The House of Brienne, Champagne and Outremer until 1191'), 'Mariaże rodu de Brienne w XII wieku' (eng. 'Marriages of the House of Brienne in the 12th century'), 'Między Lecce i Akką: ród de Brienne, Italia i Outremer do roku 1210' (eng. 'Between Lecce and Acre: the House of Brienne, Italy and Outremer until 1210'), 'Akka, Ferentino i Konstantynopol: ród de Brienne i Śródziemnomorze w latach 1210–1231' (eng. 'Acre, Ferentino and Constantinople: the House of Brienne and the Mediterranean in the years 1210–1231'),

¹ K. Polejowski, *Geneza i rozwój posiadłości zakonu krzyżackiego na terenie Królestwa Francji do połowy XIV wieku*, Gdańsk 2003.

‘Ród de Brienne w Szampanii i na łacińskim Wschodzie do lat sześćdziesiątych XIII w.’ (eng. ‘The House of Brienne in Champagne and the Latin East until the 1260’s’), and finally ‘Monarsze ambicje: Jerozolima, Cypr i Ateny (do 1309 roku)’ (eng. ‘Royal ambitions: Jerusalem, Cyprus and Athens (till 1309)’). The entire publication allows the reader to track, chronologically, the changing fates of the lords and counts of Brienne, right from their rather minor role among the knightly class in north-eastern France between the 9th and 11th centuries, through the increasingly important roles some of its members played in the politics of the Mediterranean during the time of the Levantine crusades (12th till 13th century), thanks to this the family advanced to the ranks of aristocracy of interregional significance.

Polejowski aimed for the book to be a ‘crusader monograph of the Brienne family’ (p. 8). As has been stated earlier, the author presents the issue in chronological order. He begins by recounting the origins of the House of Brienne in 9th century Champagne. He then moves on to discuss the increasing importance of the family (together with the growing size of its landholdings) in this region till the 12th century. This rise of fortune was mostly the effect of successful marriage policies. At this time the family also provided a number of important clergymen from its ranks. From the end of the 12th century onwards, numerous members of the Brienne family took active part in far-reaching crusading politics (in the Levant, Cyprus, Latin Empire and Italy). Initially they were very successful, both due to their military skills and also thanks to their effective marriage policies which involved both female and male members of the family. A good example of this was the marriage of Walter III of Brienne to Elvira, the daughter of Tancred, count of Lecce, who was one of the pretenders to the crown of Sicily and ruled the kingdom after 1189. Walter’s brother, John of Brienne married the queen of Jerusalem, Maria of Montferrat (1210). After her death (1212) he became regent in the name of her daughter Isabella (Yolanda), who married Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II in 1225. Thanks to the marriage of another of John’s daughters, Marie of Brienne, to Baldwin of Courtenay, the heir to the throne of the Latin Empire, John was elected as emperor and co-ruler to Baldwin, who was then underage. John ruled the Latin Empire until his death in 1237. Numerous members of the House of Brienne were also engaged in crusading movement during the second half of the 13th century; however, because the power of the crusaders in the Latin Empire and in the Levant was waning at this time, these could not have been successful. Other members of the Brienne family tried raise their fortunes in Italy, but with little success.

One of the most original and innovative of Polejowski’s theories is his claim that Walter of Montbéliard, the uncle (or cousin) of John of Brienne, played a direct and decisive role in the election of John to the throne of the Kingdom of

Jerusalem. Polejowski demonstrates a number of times that there existed a close connection between the matrimonial policies of the house of Brienne in the 12th and 13th centuries, and the careers of its members in the Mediterranean. The only issue that is open for debate in Polejowski's analysis, is the view that a number of individuals from the House of Brienne took part in the first crusade; which Polejowski treats as something which has been proven (pp. 26–28). However these claims are based on hypothesis rather than strong evidence. However, it is important to emphasize that Polejowski's knowledge of the sources (also the unpublished ones) is impressive. His meticulous analysis of sources provided him with a strong basis to address the views of contemporary French and English speaking historians who often base their research on the House of Brienne on the (sometimes badly sourced) claims made by older, sometimes even 19th century, historians. Polejowski points out a number of problems with these interpretations and provides explanations and supplementations to these views, which makes this publication particularly worth noting.

One of the problems of the discussed publication is that at the beginning of the study, the author provides an overly brief discussion of the literature and the sources on which he based his analysis. However if one takes considers the content of the entire book together bibliography (which includes a list of published and unpublished sources, as well as secondary literature pp. 287–306), then it becomes clear that Polejowski has conducted sufficient number of historical queries in numerous archives and libraries, and that his knowledge of the topic is impressive. It would also be helpful if the author focused more on emphasizing the conclusions drawn from his research rather than providing short outlines of the fates of individual members of the House of Brienne until the end of the 14th century, which, after all, does not fall within the chronological framework of the publication.

All in all, it should be emphasized that Polejowski presents a broad and detailed account of the activities of the members of the House of Brienne in Europe, the Holy Land and in the Latin Empire until the beginning of the 14th century. His original research on the genealogical connections between various members of aristocratic families (with the Brienne family being the main focus) is impressive and it corrects many views and suggestions previously made by other scholars. The author also includes 9 genealogical tables which show the family connections of the House of Brienne between the 11th and 13th centuries (pp. 275–285). Thanks to this, Polejowski's book is an important and original contribution to studies on the lives and fates of significant persons involved in the medieval crusading movement in the Mediterranean.

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