



Wojciech Lorek, Norbert Delestowicz, and Robert T. Tomczak. *Poczet wielkich mistrzów krzyżackich w Malborku 1309–1457* [*Lineage of Teutonic Order's grandmasters in Marienburg 1309–1457*]. Edited by Norbert Delestowicz. Kraków: Avalon, 2018. 341 pp. ISBN 978-83-7730-277-4.

The purpose of the reviewed book, as stated in the introduction, is to provide “a wider group of readers” with basic biographical data about the grand masters residing in Marienburg in the years 1309–1457 and to introduce the most important political events during their reign. Unfortunately, the implementation of this goal was hindered by the authors’ lack of scholarly achievement in the field of the history of the Teutonic Order in the Baltic-Sea region, as well as poor knowledge of the current state of research. The bibliography attached to the book does not take into account numerous significant publications; what is more, the mistakes made by the authors suggest that some of the works listed in the bibliography, especially in German, were not actually used.

The drawback of the book is the lack of a template that would serve as the basis for all individual biographies; instead, rather slim information on the background and clerical career of the grand masters is the only common element of all biographies. Furthermore, the publication lacks uniform arrangements regarding the spelling of names and surnames of the brother-knights of the Teutonic Order; the translation of only some of these into Polish raises concerns. For example, in the biography of Karl von Trier, only the name is translated into Polish (Karol), whereas the surname is given in German. Although the names “Dietrich” (Dytryk), “Heinrich” (Henryk), and “Siegfried” (Zygfyrd) are translated, “Ulrich” and “Paul” are not. The grand master Michael Kuchmeister is given the ahistorical nickname “von Sternberg,” which the Kuchmeister family did not use until the end of the fifteenth century. Instead of the form “Paul von Rusdorf,” which is commonly employed in contemporary historiography, the book uses the archaic form “Paul Bellitzer von Russdorf.”

The scholarly level of the articles is very uneven. Compared to others, the texts written by Norbert Delestowicz and devoted to the grand masters of the first half of the fourteenth century better reflect the current state of research. However, this author, too, did not avoid factual errors. There was no Elbing (Elbląg) diocese in medieval Prussia (p. 15). Karl von Trier as a grand commander is mentioned in a document issued by the grand master in Venice, not in Vienna (p. 23). The date

of the election of Karl von Trier to the position of grand master is incorrect – it was in mid-June rather than “after 25 June 1311” (p. 23). The decision to include a description of the conquest of the Pomerania by the Teutonic Order in the biography of this grand master is incomprehensible. A document issued by Karl von Trier, mentioning the treasurer and the grand hospitaller, is dated 28 August 1311, not 28 March 1311 as written in the biography (p. 33). Johann Schrape as vice-commander of Königsberg is mentioned in 1299–1306, not 1299–1303. In light of current research, the opinion regarding the great influence of the grand masters on the choice of the Livonian land-masters after 1328 is debatable. What dominates the biography of Dietrich von Altenburg is information on relations between the Teutonic Order and the Kingdom of Poland, while the grand master’s involvement in the urbanisation of Pomerania is ignored.

Much more errors, which indicate poor knowledge of the history of medieval Prussia, appear in texts written by Robert T. Tomczak and Wojciech Lorek. The biography of Winrich von Kniprode mainly presents information about the wars against Lithuania. Only half a page is devoted to the internal affairs of the grand master who ruled the country for thirty years. What is omitted are, among others, problems related to monetary reform, the spreading of the visitations of the Order’s convents, and the adoption of new laws regulating the functioning of the religious community. In the summary of the biography of Winrich von Kniprode, the reader will find a note: “[i]n addition, during the reign of Winrich, the Order indulged in luxury and enjoyed the company of women” (p. 123), which hardly holds up to the standards of even popular scholarly work. In the biographies of subsequent grand masters, Konrad Zöllner von Rotenstein, Konrad von Wallenrode, and Konrad von Jungingen, it is, again, the description of relations with Lithuania and Poland that dominates, at the expense of issues pertaining to internal affairs. The description of the reign of Konrad Zöllner von Rotenstein lacks information on the incorporation of the Alsace-Burgundy bailiwick into the grand master’s *Kammer*. Instead of the information on the trade conflict between England and Prussia in the 1380s and 1390s, the readers encounters a statement about friendly relations between the Teutonic Order and King Richard II of England, as well as about trade between Prussian cities and England, allegedly supported by the grand masters. Konrad von Wallenrode took the office of prosecutor (*Pfleger*) in Preußisch Eylau in 1368, not in 1370. Sigismund of Luxembourg could not, as King of the Romans, support the grand master Konrad von Wallenrode in his dispute with the Archbishop of Riga, simply because he was not crowned as such until 1411. The presentation of sources containing negative opinions about this grand master in Prussian historiography does not take into account the statements of Dorothea of Montau. The biography of Konrad von Jungingen overlooks the intense efforts of

this ruler to expand the country's administrative system, as well as his dispute with the Archbishop of Riga. The initiative of building the grand masters' palace is incorrectly attributed to this grand master. The author of biographies of Ulrich von Jungingen and Henrich von Plauen did not use a monograph on the war between the Teutonic Order and Poland and Lithuania in the years 1409–1411, published in 2010.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, the description of the political and military activities of the two grand masters does not reflect the current state of research, and some information, such as the one about 8,000 Teutonic knights fallen in the Battle of Grunwald (Tannenberg/Žalgiris), is confusing. The publication by Markian Pelech, the top expert on the reign of Heinrich von Plauen, is not taken into account in the biography of that master. The description of the repression undertaken by Heinrich von Plauen against cities and knights in 1411 is full of errors. The author of the biography does not mention the introduction of burghers supporting the Teutonic Order into the councils of the Main City of Danzig and the Old Town of Thorn; instead, he provides incorrect information about the dissolution of the Council of Danzig. Some information on repression is based on unreliable sources. The tax policy of 1411–1413 is presented incorrectly, and the relations between the Order and its branches in Livonia and Germany are neglected. Heinrich von Plauen received the office of the prosecutor in Lochstedt in 1429, not 1422.

The biographies of other grand masters residing in Marienburg in the first half of the fifteenth century contain many factual shortcomings, as well as erroneous comments and conclusions. The author of the text devoted to Michael Küchmeister and Paul von Rusdorf does not know that Sigismund of Luxembourg was crowned emperor only in 1433 and names him as such in the narrative of earlier years. In modern historiography, the name of the archbishop of Riga who presided over the delegation of the Teutonic Order at the Council of Constance is referred to as “von Wallenrode,” not “Wallenrodt” (p. 235). The assessment of trade income of the trade officials (*Großschäffer*) of Königsberg, which at the beginning of the fifteenth century allegedly exceeded the income of the Kingdom of Poland (which, by the way, are incorrectly referred to as “financial turnover”) is greatly exaggerated. At the time when this office was held by Michael Küchmeister (1402–1404), the symptoms of a trade crisis were already observable. There are no reliable sources to support the information about the alleged organisation of an assassination attempt against King Wladislaus II Jagiello by grand master Michael Küchmeister (p. 237). The revolt of the Danzig burghers in 1416 was primarily directed against the council, supported by the grand master. The author of the bi-

<sup>1</sup> Sławomir Józwiak, Krzysztof Kwiatkowski, Adam Szweda, and Sobiesław Szybkowski, *Wojna Polski i Litwy z zakonem krzyżackim w latach 1409–1411* (Malbork: Muzeum Zamkowe, 2010).

ography accuses Michael Küchmeister of passing death sentences on the participants of the revolt; at the same time, he does not mention the monetary reform introduced by the grand master, which became a direct cause of dissatisfaction for the Danzig burghers. The statement characterising the attitude of Michael Küchmeister towards the knights and the city, namely, “much more often than his predecessors, [he] invited the representatives of the estates for one-day trips to collect their votes” (p. 229), neither properly explains the essence of the estate representation in Prussia, nor is it evidence of the author’s knowledge of the topic. The image of the “Teutonic yoke” and persecutions suffered by the inhabitants of Prussia in the first half of the fifteenth century from the territorial ruler, evoked in the biographies of Michael Küchmeister and Paul von Rusdorf, is consistent with the stereotypical image, the typical black legend of the Teutonic Order; however, it is at odds with the results of modern scholarly research. An example of using stereotypes in the narrative is the assessment of Paul von Rusdorf’s policy towards cities: “many cities could not develop properly because they had to sacrifice a significant percentage of their income to the Order” (p. 257). Information on the large number of Hussites among the inhabitants of Prussia (p. 257) and about the fabrication by the emperor of alleged statutes of the grand master Werner von Orseln (p. 268) are pointless. Far from correct is the description of the grand master Konrad von Erlichshausen profiting from the contradictions between the great Prussian cities and the nobility (p. 283). Revenues from the pound duty are heavily exaggerated (p. 285), despite the fact that more than twenty years ago Jürgen Sarnowsky pointed to their moderate importance in the total revenues of the grand masters.<sup>2</sup> The claim that the demolition of Visby in 1448 enabled Prussian and Livonian cities to take over trade with Russia and, consequently, increase the income of the Teutonic Order (p. 287) is yet another proof of the author’s incompetence in the history of the Baltic-Sea region in the late Middle Ages. The description of the conflict between the Prussian estates and the Teutonic Order during the reign of Ludwig von Erlichshausen, too, is erroneous. It was the Prussian Confederation that lodged a complaint at the imperial court, not both sides of the conflict as the author of the biography writes (p. 298). The trial was to begin on 24 June 1453, not 24 June 1454 as stated in the text. The imperial judgment was not issued on 18 November but on 1 December 1453, and it did not include the death sentence for the 300 most important leaders of the Prussian Confederation. The authors of the biographies also made many mistakes in the naming of towns and villages. Ragne-

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<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Sarnowsky, *Die Wirtschaftsführung des Deutschen Ordens in Preußen (1382–1454)*, Veröffentlichungen aus den Archiven Preussischer Kulturbesitz 34 (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1993), 214–221.

ta is incorrectly labeled a city (p. 113). The correct name of the castle in which the office of the prosecutor (*Pfleger*) was held by Ulrich von Jungingen is Morteg (now Mortąg), not Mortack. The village of Murzynno in Kuyavia, belonging to the Teutonic Order, is referred to as either Murzynowo (pp. 231 and 251) or Murzynów (p. 228). Brandenburg appears in both German and in Polish form as Pokarmin. Lubawa is mistaken for Lubowla by the author of Paul von Rusdorf's biography (p. 250), whereas Lubicz at the Drwęca River is named Lubiszowo (p. 253). Starogród Chełmiński is named Stargard (p. 279). Located in Żuławy, the castle in Grabiny (German: Grebin) is referred to as Grabniki (p. 294), and the city of Łasin (German: Lessen) is referred to as Łaszyn (p. 297).

The critical remarks presented above are not a complete list of errors made by the authors of *Poczet wielkich mistrzów krzyżackich w Malborku 1309–1457*. However, they provide a sufficient basis to conclude that the authors failed to provide “a wider group of readers” with the history of the grand masters residing at the castle of Marienburg. The conclusions drawn from reading the reviewed book confirm the rule that the popularisation of historical knowledge requires thorough knowledge and, above all, a good understanding of historical phenomena.

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