



Alicja Dobrosielska. *Opór, oportunizm, współpraca: Prusowie wobec zakonu krzyżackiego w dobie podboju* [*Resistance, Opportunism, Cooperations: Old Prussian attitudes towards the Teutonic Order during the Age of Conquest*]. Monumenta Literaria Prussiae, Seria C, Monografie 7. Olsztyn: Oficyna Wydawnicza Pruthenia, 2017. 239 + 2 pp. ISBN: 978-83-934214-9-7.

Alicja Dobrosielska seeks to understand the processes of deep cultural change occurring among Old Prussian tribes during the time when their lands were being conquered by the Teutonic Order. Her premise is that the Teutonic Order was not the source of these changes, but rather served as a catalyst that initiated them. The main goal of her monograph is to identify and describe Old Prussian attitudes towards the Teutonic Order's conquest, and to assess the degree to which the Old Prussians participated in the creation of the new socio-political realities around them. The author does not use traditional research methods, centred around historical events, but instead focuses on the social context of analysed attitudes and juxtaposes the results of her study with the popular, very one-sided perception of Old Prussian culture. The work, therefore, attempts to highlight the pro-active role of Old Prussian autochthons whose role has so far been considered mainly on the margins of broader studies that focus on the creation of the Teutonic Order's state in Prussia.

The study's chronological framework spans from the 1230s to the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries. The analysis considers the entire area of the Old Prussian cultural sphere, namely all the lands inhabited by Old Prussians during this period. The author mainly uses narrative sources, the most important being the *Chronicon terrae Prussiae* (pp. 18–25).

The monograph consists of an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion that summarises the study's results. The first chapter, titled "Teoretyczne podstawy kulturowej analizy postaw" ("The theoretical basis for the cultural analysis of attitudes") is introductory in nature and focuses on the questions of terminology and methodology. The following three chapters, titled "Opór" ("Resistance"), "Oportunizm" ("Opportunism"), and "Współpraca" ("Cooperation") respectively, present various types of Old Prussian attitudes towards cultural change. According to the author, these attitudes form a part of the "collectively formed strategy of survival and development." Each chapter begins with an explanation of key terms and a characterisation of the attitude it describes.

The second chapter presents Old Prussian strategies of both passive and active resistance. These include strategies of waiting out the danger and avoiding fights, but also of armed conflicts and using the Teutonic Order's moves against it. The first type of strategy often involved Old Prussians accepting baptism, then recovering their strength, returning to their old faith, and once again taking up arms against the Teutonic Order. Quite often, Old Prussians presented their actions as those of religious Christians while, in fact, they were conspiring against the Order. The strategy of avoidance was easier for Old Prussians who had a chance of not being affected by the process of ongoing cultural change. This applied particularly to those who were too strong for the territorial ruler, those who were too far from the centres of power, and those who the ruler deemed insignificant. The author points out the absence of Teutonic Order's actions towards the assimilation of the local population, the poorly developed network of parishes in lower Prussia, and the lack of effective efforts towards the evangelisation of local inhabitants. Dobrosielska provides examples that indicate the dominant role of the Old Prussian language and the preservation of Old Prussian culture during subsequent centuries, as evidenced by the organisation of feasts, sacrifices, reverence for the dead, cremation burials, and using names related to Old Prussian ancestors. Migration is also considered as a strategy of avoidance, because Prussians who migrated to Pomerania, Masovia, Lithuania, and Ruthenia could still engage in activities against the Teutonic Order, such as plots and raids against the Order or its allies. The most spectacular form of resistance was military conflict. Its scale could have been local in character, including for example surprise attacks, ambushes, robberies, and assaults, but it could also be well orchestrated, with Old Prussians fighting in regular units and making political alliances directed against the Teutonic Order. This section, therefore, includes a description of the Old Prussian uprisings against the Order during the years 1243–1249 and 1260–1274. Here the author pays particular attention to Old Prussian leaders and the ways of conducting warfare. She also addresses the question of the cultural aspect of resistance, noting the changes in the social life caused by ongoing warfare. Old Prussians were able to use some of the Order's actions to redirect them against the Teutonic Order's interests. Old Prussian Christian converts sent complaints about the Teutonic Order to priests and even to the pope himself. Old Prussian prisoners and hostages could use the knowledge of their captors' customs, language, and war tactics to fulfil their own goals. Passive resistance, on the other hand, included Old Prussian negligence of their formal duties towards the territorial ruler. On an everyday basis, Old Prussians could oppose the Order economically by attempting to lower its income via robbery or setting fires. Once again, the author points to the cultural significance of the described forms of resistance which gave Old Prussians a way to survive and

to maintain autonomy, and was motivated by the desire to halt the activities of the Teutonic Order, as well as personal aspirations.

In the third chapter, Dobrosielska attempts to identify cultural and social indicators of the opportunistic attitude. In doing so, she refers to the concept of anomie and considers it on the basis of the process of deconstruction of both the institutional order and the symbolic universe. Old Prussian opportunistic attitudes are described primarily as a result of Prussians looking for security, personal safety, and gains through adjusting to existing conditions. The main driving force of opportunistic action was, according to the author, the discrepancy of the old order and the new, Christian, order. The deconstruction of the traditional symbolic universe was expressed through changes in religious practices and spatial arrangements of the environment in which they took place. Previous holy sites were appropriated by the new territorial ruler who uses this to enforce changes in religious rituals and ordered these to be conducted by new individuals. Old Prussians were obliged to build churches, provide for them, and follow new religious practices such as baptism, Sunday mass, and confession. The Teutonic Order's neglect of its duty to implement Christian teachings among its subjects, however, led to the development of syncretic practices which combined elements of new and old customs. Embellishing burials with grave goods is one example of this. The main indicators demonstrating the deconstruction of the institutional order were, according to the author, the introduction of new officers administering small, administrative units called *Kammerämter*, changes in the institution of marriage, a different understanding of private property, and the emergence of the position of knight.

The last chapter focuses on the cooperation of the Old Prussian autochthonic population with the Teutonic Order. The author first discusses the migration to the new world, in both a geographical as well as metaphorical sense (taking on the Christian faith and the Teutonic Order's cultural offer), which was imposed by the territorial ruler. The Old Prussian nobles and neophytes were being incorporated into a new way of life offered by the Teutonic Order, for example through granting them the coats of arms of Western families, or changing their social role, especially in the case of people holding minor administrative offices. The author also points out some examples of true conversion to Christianity. There were even cases of Old Prussians hiding the fact that they had converted. The Order could depend on informers as well as chieftains who would betray their own by informing about alliances and planned actions. The most conspicuous form of cooperation with the Teutonic Order was active, open military cooperation. Guides would help find good routes, places to set up camps, river crossings, or places to water horses. Scouts knew the local terrain, language, and customs. Warriors who joined the Order to fight against their own could also give advice on fighting techniques.

It seems that the main motivation for Old Prussians to cooperate with the Order was a conviction about the rightness of such actions, but there could also be material gains.

In her considerations, Dobrosielska attempts to present the Old Prussians, during the age of the Teutonic Order's conquest, as a society that was not unified and that represented diverse attitudes and views. She points out the disintegration of their group identity and tribal relations, which was caused by the changes to various aspects of life brought by the Teutonic Order, but also by the Old Prussians themselves as they were rejecting their community bonds. Dobrosielska emphasizes that the Old Prussian population was largely pro-active and had its own part in the building and development of the Teutonic Order's state in Prussia.

*Alicja Sumowska (Toruń)**

* ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0510-7395>