

A Német Lovagrend Poroszországban: A népesség és a településszerkezet változásai [The Teutonic Order in Prussia: Changes in population and settlement pattern]. By László Pósán. Máriabesenyő: Attraktor, 2015. 312 pp.

Works in Hungarian on the history of the Teutonic Order focus primarily on two issues: the events of the 1210–20s, when the Order held territories in Burzenland in southeastern Transylvania, and the diplomatic connections between Sigismund of Luxemburg and the Teutonic Knights. However, the events preceding the presence of the Knights in Hungary, as well as their lasting and significant rule in the Baltics beginning in the 1230s, have not captured the interests or attention of Hungarian scholars. László Pósán, associate professor at the University of Debrecen, has been trying to fill this gap for decades by publishing numerous articles concerning the history of the Order in Prussia and Hungary. This monograph provides a summary of Pósán's research on this subject.

Pósán summarizes the relevant German, Polish, and English secondary literature and provides an excellent complement with a list of primary sources illustrating the major processes and changes that were at work in the region. His work is divided into four main parts, organized chronologically.

The first part offers a broad overview of the Prussian territories and the tribes that inhabited the region before the arrival of the Knights. Pósán provides a vivid description of the harsh and inhospitable conditions of the land, which has proved one of the biggest difficulties for the Teutonic Knights.

The second part presents the everyday life of the Prussian population and prevailing power relations up to the Treaty of Christburg (1249), which is often characterized as the conclusion of the First Prussian Uprising (1242–53), though the fighting did not actually cease until 1253. The treaty guaranteed liberties to all Prussians who converted to Christianity, but it did nothing to establish peace, as many Prussians did not wish to convert and the Knights swore to root out paganism. Pósán convincingly argues that the Christburg treaty brought consolidation to the lands belonging to the Teutonic Knights, as many members of the Prussian aristocracy were won over by the offer of various benefits. Nevertheless, Prussians who were dissatisfied with the rule of their new German lords or simply wanted to practice their old pagan religion undisturbed moved to the territories inhabited by the still independent tribes in East or North Prussia

and Pomerania. The chapter ends with a narrative of the Great Prussian Uprising (1260–74), a rebellion led by the Prussian aristocracy against the aggressive and drastic transformation of the whole power system in the region.

In the third chapter, Pósán discusses the transformation of the internal conditions in Prussia brought about by the Knights. This process included the reshaping the natural environment by deforestation and drainage, the organized colonization of Prussia with the help of *locators*, and finally the remodeling of property structures. The most significant merit of the chapter is the overview it offers of a pattern of a settler movement (which culminated between 1310 and 1370). The author also enumerates the *locators*, who were entrusted by the Order with colonizing vast but deserted or uninhabited territories. The key initiator (apart from bishops and landlords) was the supreme seigneur, the Teutonic Order itself, which gave *locators* lands in average between 10–100 *Hufen* (*Hufe* = peasant parcel) to found villages using settlers recruited from Germany and Poland. In the second half of the fourteenth century, the number of Polish settlers and *locators* who took part in the process of colonization increased significantly. Pósán draws his reader's attention to the fact that the Order also tried to lure more settlers from Lithuania in the second half of the fifteenth century by offering far more favorable conditions. In the frontier zones, the Order favored donating properties burdened with military obligation to create a solid background for campaigns. Pósán points out that, thanks to the constant flow of settlers, the Great Plague did not break the backbone of the Orders' economy. As a matter of fact, as was the case in other East European states, the epidemic had only a limited impact on the territories governed by the *Ordensstaat*. Around 1400, with about 480,000 people under their authority, the Teutonic Knights were at the zenith of their power and development. Nevertheless, if one compares other European countries with the state of the Teutonic Order, the latter was not among the most densely populated (8 people/km² for a territory of some 58,000 km²). However, the number of inhabitants and the settlement density were highly unbalanced in different geographical areas. The valley of the Vistula River and especially the region of Kulmerland were more densely populated, even exceeding the averages in Poland and Silesia. 23 percent of the population lived in the 93 cities that had been founded mainly by *hospites*.

The fourth and last chapter deals with wars waged by the Teutonic Knights against Poland–Lithuania and later the Prussian Confederation (the Thirteen Years' War, 1454–66). Both parties preferred or were forced to use mainly

mercenaries, and this had serious financial consequences. Worse, the unpaid mercenaries plundered the countryside even if the settlements belonged to the party that had hired them. Thus, one could observe a catastrophic decline in terms of economy and demography (depopulation in all Prussia reached 40–50 percent) in territories most exposed to military movements: the southern border areas, Kulmerland, and along the Vistula River, areas which were known as the most developed and urbanized regions in the state of the Teutonic Knights. The cost of food grew rapidly, causing famines, epidemics, and riots. Numerous territories never recovered completely from the damages caused by the war. In the first decades of the sixteenth century there were properties which had been abandoned in 1410 and remained deserted. War did not spare livestock either. The tremendous loss of (war)horses offers an additional explanation as to why the Order was forced to use more and more mercenaries after 1410 instead of its reliable and efficient cavalry. These negative tendencies were only tempered by fugitives and peasants fleeing from Lithuania (8,000 people in the middle of the sixteenth century) and Poland. Polish kings always tried to reclaim this manpower on border courts (*Richttag, iudicia*), an institution founded to observe the Treaty of Brest (1435). However, quite understandably, since the Order was in need of manpower, it did not show any great willingness to force these people to leave their lands.

According to the Second Peace of Thorn, which put an end to the Thirteen Years War in 1466, the Order lost its most developed regions (Pomerania, Kulmerland, the region of Marienburg, Elbing, and Ermland), which were ceded to the Polish Kingdom. In spite of being the vassal of the Polish king, the Teutonic Order did make huge and desperate efforts to regain its lost domains (Polish–Teutonic War, 1519–21), but it failed. In accordance with the treaty at Krakow, which was concluded between Grandmaster Albrecht von Brandenburg and King Sigismund in 1525, the Teutonic Order in Prussia was dissolved and Prussia turned into a secular Duchy under the suzerainty of the Polish crown.

Its title notwithstanding, Pószán's book deals a lot with political and military history, especially in the last chapter. However, this does not affect the structure and narrative negatively. Rather, the information concerning political and military history completes and explains the author's statements relating to economy, population, and settlement patterns. The list of primary sources cited constitutes one-third of the monograph. This illustrates Pószán's extensive use of primary sources. These documents allow the reader to acquaint him or herself

with contemporary names, measures, and customs of Prussia. Furthermore, the reader can observe the amalgamation of the languages, customs, and techniques of two different cultures: the Christian Germans and the Pagan Prussians. All in all, the book provides a great overview of Teutonic economy and colonization on the basis of diplomatic sources.

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