

Sebastian Kubon, *Die Außenpolitik des Deutschen Ordens unter Hochmeister Konrad von Jungingen (1393–1407)*, (Reihe, *Nova Mediaevalia. Quellen und Studien zum europäischen Mittelalter*, Bd. 15), Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016, 316 S. ISBN 978-3-8471-0537-4; ISSN 2198-6231

The documentary evidence of all kinds left by the Teutonic Order has been a blessing for generations of historians involved in the study of the Order and its domains all over Europe and the Middle East. It is of paramount importance when we deal with regions that are poorly served by historical records. A case in point is Medieval Lithuania, a major power in East-Central Europe, which, owing to its largely oral political culture, has left a small amount of written records from the period from the 13th to the first half of the 15th century. The fewer written sources we have, the less historians are inclined to look at topics that require a lot of time and thought and thus become a risky undertaking in the present 'publish or perish' academic climate. So this is why the appearance of the book by Sebastian Kubon should be appreciated from the point of view of Lithuanian studies, as a useful contribution to the discussion of Teutonic/German and Lithuanian relations, even though, as the title suggests, its focus is on the rule of Grand Master Konrad von Jungingen. The author has noticed a paradox: that the largest territorial expansion of the Teutonic Order occurred under the rule of this peace-loving and mild-mannered grand master. It is, however, less surprising that past historians have equated the size of the territory with the strength and power of a given polity, and therefore have tended to see the peak of the Order in the period just before the catastrophic defeat it suffered at the battle of Tannenberg in 1410. Even though there have been some preconditions, going as far back as Kurt Forstreuter, for taking to task the black-and-white picture of Prussian *Ordensstaat* before and after 1410, Kubon is the first to go out of his way to deal with the somewhat irenic, and at the same time deceptive, vision of the Prussian 'Golden Age'. As a result, we have a perceptive analysis of how the policy was not so much orchestrated by the grand master himself, but rather forced on him. In my view, the most interesting and revealing parts of the book are those that bring into relief the interplay between the Teutonic

grand master on the one hand, and Grand Duke Vytautas of Lithuania on the other. It has been received wisdom for generations of scholars and their readers to believe that Žemaitija/Samogitia (the western part of Lithuania) was, to all appearances, the most coveted prize of the Teutonic Order in its permanent crusade against Lithuania, because this area could serve as a land bridge connecting Prussia and Livonia. Kubon questions this sort of geopolitical reasoning at the time, and demonstrates that the issue of Žemaitija was not only far from being a priority on the political agenda of the Teutonic Order, but has been subject to somewhat wider, and, let us say, softer considerations. It turns out that the propagation of the Christian faith, the peace with Lithuania, and making sure that the neophyte Vytautas behaved like other good Christian princes should, were far greater concerns for the Teutonic Order than the mere acquisition of the land called Žemaitija (pp. 71–72, 75–76, 83, 104). One of the most interesting results of Kubon's investigation is his contention that Vytautas himself was the first to offer territorial concessions in exchange for the Teutonic support that was so much needed in the grand ducal efforts to acquire more power in the lands of Rus' and vis-à-vis the Tartars (pp. 78–79, 84, 104–105). From the analysis of various drafts and pieces of correspondence, and the final peace treaties of Salinwerder (1398) and Raciąż (1404), Grand Master Konrad von Jungingen emerges as a passive actor who is forced to react to challenges, rather than initiating them. In Kubon's opinion, Grand Master Konrad von Jungingen was anything but a strongman (*Machtpolitiker*, p. 103). On the other hand, Vytautas emerges as a live wire to such a degree that sometimes it is virtually impossible to tell what his rationale for this or that course of action, or what he was striving for, was (pp. 101–103). In the end, the Treaty of Salinwerder, which had been used as a prime example of the expansionist policies on the part of the Teutonic Order, was recalibrated in order to show that the Teutonic acquisition of Žemaitija signified a rounding-up of domains, with the concomitant renunciation of claims to the rest of Lithuania, while the more secure political gains in terms of expansion into Rus' and Tartar-dominated lands were to fall within the purview of the Grand Duke of Lithuania (pp. 120–121). To the latter, the Žemaitijans were far from being prioritised in the greater scheme of things. All in all, it was Vytautas who was the ultimate winner (*Hauptgewinner*) in the Treaty of Salinwerder (p. 123). This change in historiographical fortunes should serve as a welcome invitation to reevaluate the mutual relations between Lithuania and the Teutonic Order on a more general plane, and in the

longer-term perspective. However impressive the art of *Quellenkritik* on the part of Kubon is, however compelling his reasons to accept his arguments may appear, it is my impression that the bottom line of the passive policy of the Teutonic Order and its grand master was driven down a bit too far. The argument that the Order wanted to get hold of and keep Žemaitija for good by dint of its faithful and honourable adherence to what had been put down on parchment is not sufficient to explain fully the tenacity with which the Order clung to Žemaitija. We can readily imagine Vytautas the fisherman offering the bait to Konrad von Jungingen the fish. However, it is far harder to explain why the Teutonic fish went to such extraordinary lengths in order to try the bait again and again once it had been taken away, and this even after it had been battered badly in 1410. The fish seems to have been more proactive after all. To sum up, Kubon has produced a well-balanced account of Teutonic and Lithuanian interaction at the turn of the 14th century, allowing us to understand better what was on the front line of political actions and (mis)calculations. However, the twilight still lingers in the back of Teutonic and Lithuanian minds, calling for inquisitive researchers to try their luck in this domain of historical enquiry. The strange love-hate affair between the Teutonic Order and the Žemaitijans is one such place where scholars like Kubon might shed more light into the dark recesses of the minds of the supposedly stridently Catholic warrior-monks and the allegedly most recalcitrant pagans.

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