



László Pószán, *A Német Lovagrend Poroszországban. A népesség és a településszerkezet változásai* [The Teutonic Order in Prussia. The Changes of Population and Settlement Structure], Attraktor, Máriabesnyő 2015, 311 pp., ISBN: 978-615-5257-93-3.

László Pószán is a well-known researcher of the history of the Teutonic Order both in Hungary and in a wider European context. Several books and dozens of articles published over a quarter of a century have helped the academic (and wider public) readership to learn more about the history of the Order both in Eastern Europe and in general. The most characteristic feature of Pószán's studies is his multifocal approach which goes far beyond a politico-historical approach or a traditional understanding of the history of a military-religious order in making use of results in diverse fields: legal history, church history, economic history, historical topography and demography, climatology, epidemiology, military history and more. This manifold approach can be observed in his numerous articles and the present book is a perfect synthesis of his recent research on the history of the Order as well as that of the region.

The overall goal of the book is not only relevant but undoubtedly a timely approach and re-contextualization of both well-known and less recognized facts and figures in the author's chosen field. The content of the volume is based on an amazingly wide range of primary sources as well as that of scholarly literature, a fact which is of particular importance for a Hungarian readership that may be less acquainted with the relevant Polish scholarship than with, say, German academic publications. Nonetheless, the study clearly deserves a translation into foreign language in order to reach a wider international readership.

The overall objective of the book is to characterize those factors which had an impact on the population of the region, on its mobility, its ethnic and legal composition as well as on settlement structure. In his analysis Pószán investigates climatic changes, military undertakings, the devastation of wars, epidemics, and settlement policies as well as economic measures of different sorts. The structure is chronological, divided into four chapters: 1) The Prussian territories prior to the rule of the Teutonic Order; 2) Changes in the Prussian population and the settlement structure during the thirteenth-century wars; 3) The settlement of Prussia; 4) The fifteenth-century wars and the demographic decrease.

The first chapter (pp. 9–44), while presenting a detailed geographical introduction, portrays the Prussian tribal territories which later became the major provinces of the Teutonic Order. Pószán argues that prior to the settlement of the knights and Western settlers, the basic settlement structure of Prussia was characterized by farmsteads and farm complexes. No major settlement was to be found in this period in the region. Pószán also argues that the erection of dams as well as the creation of water supply systems clearly functioned as a precondition of the inhabitation of Prussia.

The second chapter (pp. 45–70) investigates the role of thirteenth-century wars and political measures in the transformation of the population and the settlement structure of Prussia. Besides the very detailed description of the period, the chapter shows that this was not a period of Christian-pagan antagonism; Prussian tribes were divided both by political and military standpoints (p. 49). The “perennial” crusade (more than eighty campaigns proclaimed by the papacy) clearly had a huge impact on this period (pp. 86–87) but the internal warfare of Prussian clans also worsened the lot of the native population. This disunity was further accelerated by the policies of the Teutonic Order from the mid-thirteenth century (p. 55): the knights recognized those high-standing Prussians who sided with the Christians as equal to Western knights and made them eligible to live according to Polish law (p. 57). Pószán emphasizes that while the demographic situation and the settlement structure of Prussia fundamentally changed during the period of 1230 and 1283, the prevailing ethnic composition was not altered.

The third and longest chapter (pp. 71–144) discusses the characteristic features of the period between 1283 and 1409. One of the major observations is that the period was not only characterized by the arrival of foreign settlers but also by internal horizontal mobility. It is tempting to compare the system of colonization, that followed the custom of the archbishopric of Magdeburg (pp. 87–90), with that of the Burzenland (Barcaság) in south-eastern Hungary, or that of Upper Hungary in the thirteenth century. Despite any eventual parallels, the climatic changes in Prussia (and in Northern Europe generally) caused radical changes (pp. 119–121, 125): for example, demographic growth could not follow the intensive dynamics of settlement. By contrast, it must be emphasized that urbanization in Prussia greatly exceeded the level of other regions of the Baltic Sea. Almost a quarter of the population (ca. 100,000) lived in 93 towns established during the period of colonization (p. 143).

The last chapter (pp. 145–205) provides an overview of the late medieval period (1409–1525). Following a relatively peaceful period, the fifteenth century saw enormous devastation (p. 147) due to the subsequent wars, notably that between the Teutonic Order and the Poles (1409–1435) as well as the civil war

(1453–1466) – that had no particular ethnic dimension (p. 170). Numerous peasants' farms were deserted, a process accelerated by the recurrent effects of epidemics, particularly the Black Death in the last third of the fifteenth century (1467–1494) (p. 183). The first quarter of the sixteenth century saw no improvement of the demographic situation, and the last war between the Teutonic Order and Poland, known as the *Reiterkrieg* (1519–1521) further deepened the crisis, as was manifested, *inter alia*, in a serious lack of manpower (p. 182). It seems obvious that the Treaty of Cracow (1525), which concluded the war, aimed at the repopulation of the region (pp. 203–204).

There are several references to Hungarian political relations ranging from King Charles I (p. 113), up to King Matthias (p. 113, 148, 180) as well as economic links (pp. 150–151), but the importance of the book for a Hungarian readership is the comprehensive picture of the region over several centuries. The depth of this study is clearly manifested in the bibliography which runs to more than forty pages, as well as in more than 1700 notes. László Pószán has provided a seminal work in the field.

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