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Review: Jörg-Dieter Brandes *Korsarze Chrystusa. Joannici – władcy Morza Śródziemnego* (Corsairs of Christ. Johannites: Masters of the Mediterranean Sea), translated by M. Dobija, Wydawnictwo M., Krakow 2010, pp. 254

The issue of military orders, primarily established in the Middle Ages, frequently in the Middle East, remains both an enormously interesting research and purely information question. This is a compelling apparition, an extraordinary phenomenon – not only religious, especially if data are presented in a communicative form and language. This is met by an interest in the Sovereign Military Order of Malta with origins in Holy Land and its official founder, Blessed Gerard.

A German publicist dealing for many years with the issue of the Middle East is an author of the paper under discussion. As a former general and a staff officer of the Bundeswehr he worked in an intelligence service and as a military attaché accredited in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Therefore, he exhaustively knows this environment – so important for the perception of the Knights of St. John. He is an author of, among others: *Die Mameluken. Aufstieg und Fall einer Sklavendespotie* (Sigmaringen 1996) and various minor studies and drafts.

As for its content, the book commences with introduction to the Polish edition by Fr. Prof. Dr. hab. Jan Kraciak from the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków (pp. 5–7). After the introduction by the author (pp. 8–10), several thematic blocks were included. In order to familiarize the content of the work, titles of the blocks rather are worth citing than discussing: *Zakon jako potęga lądowa w Palestynie i Syrii* (Order as Land Power in Palestine and

Syria) (pp. 11–23); *Przeistoczenie się w potęgę morską: Cypr* (Transformation into Maritime Power: Cyprus) (pp. 24–27); *Potęga morską: Rodos* (Maritime Power: Rhodes) (pp. 28–46); *Atak islamu* (Attack of Islam) (pp. 47–54); *Bastion chrześcijaństwa* (Bastion of Christianity) (pp. 55–63); *Przed szturmem* (Before Assault) (pp. 64–74); *Odwrót ze wschodnich rejonów Morza Śródziemnego* (Retreat from Eastern Regions of Mediterranean Sea) (pp. 75–89); *W poszukiwaniu nowej ojczyzny – na wygnaniu we Włoszech* (In Search of New Homeland – In Exile in Italy) (pp. 90–100); *Malta – centrum polowania na piratów* (Malta – Pirate Hunting Center) (pp. 101–114); *Dragut* (Dragut) (pp. 115–132). The further thematic blocks were titled: *Zwiastun nawałnicy* (Portent of Storm) (pp. 133–150); *Natarcie Turków* (Assault of Turks) (pp. 151–156); *Wielkie oblężenie – St. Elmo* (Huge Siege of St. Elmo) (pp. 157–167); *Wielkie oblężenie – port galer* (Huge Siege – Port of Galleys) (pp. 168–181); *Bitwa morską pod Lepanto* (Sea Battle of Lepanto) (pp. 182–193); *Skok w nowożytność* (Leap into Modern Era) (pp. 194–200); *Służba policyjna* (Police Service) (pp. 201–209); *Wojna na Peloponezie* (War in Peloponnese) (pp. 210–218); *Kryzys tożsamości zakonu* (Crisis of Order Identity) (219–223) and *Bonaparte* (Bonaparte) (pp. 224–233).

The entire content of the work is summarized by the conclusion (pp. 234–237). Moreover, an interesting supplement was added (pp. 238–245). It consists of the following parts: *Mistrzowie i wielcy mistrzowie zakonu* (Masters and Grand Masters of Order) (pp. 238–240); *Wielcy baliwowie języka niemieckiego, jednocześnie wielcy baliwowie zakonni, tj. osoby odpowiedzialne za fortyfikacje zakonne* (Great Bailiffs of German Language, Simultaneously Great Bailiffs of Order, i.e. individuals responsible for Order's Fortifications) (pp. 240–242); *Języki zakonu w konwencji, urzędy (wielkich) baliwów poszczególnych języków* (Languages of Order in Convent, Offices of Great Bailiffs of Particular Languages) (pp. 242–243); *Dynastia Osmanów do końca panowania zakonu na Malcie* (Ottoman Dynasty till the End of Ruling of Order in Malta) (pp. 243–244) and *Chrześcijańskie zakony rycerskie w średniowieczu* (Christian Knight Orders in the Middle Ages) (pp. 244–245). The list of literature (pp. 246–247) and the index of people were also added. The whole is compiled by the table of contents (pp. 253–254). Occasionally, supplementary titles of minor repertoires were incorporated (pp. 20, 32).

As noticed by the author of the introduction to the Polish edition:

The work by Brandes is the book not only for historians, which facilitates supplementing significant areas of their knowledge. This is the publication which may be of interest to enthusiasts of marine literature, reading novels about former raiders or more modern battles fought from ships. It turns out

once again that a real story, accurately reproduced and interestingly presented, constitutes more valuable reading than an imaginary one. Life has always been creating better scenarios than imagination of writers has been able to (p. 6).

So tumultuous is the century-old history of the Order of Malta. Certainly, a maritime theme is particularly interesting, especially when it comes to battles.

In turn, as stated by the author:

The book deals primarily with those activities of the Order which explain its presence in Mediterranean basin – combating piracy and preventing an invasion of Turks and Islam into an essential Mediterranean region. The book begins at the time of the fall of the Order as a land power after losing the battle of Hattin on Lake Tiberias (1187) and ends with the destruction of the religious state in Malta by Napoleon (1798). It is worth adding that the book describes aspects of Europeanization of this international Order, which could be learnt by all European countries. The book only briefly refers to the earlier history of the Order as a Palestinian-Syrian land power and its later role of a humanitarian organization is completely omitted. According to the author, none of those periods of activity – without diminishing charitable activities – is relevant to general history (pp. 9–10).

These are valuable introductory remarks providing vital indications regarding expectations towards the contents of the presented study.

Thus, the pages of the current work illustrate the turbulent history of the Order of Malta with the entire diversity of facts and events as well as their actors – people. It appears, however, that the title *Corsairs of Christ* is clearly a journalistic trick. It results from the fact that it is difficult to objectively define the broad activity of the Order by such a term. Therefore, it seems reasonable giving the work a closer subtitle interpretation, two-piece in the German original – *Johanniter & Malteser. Die Herren des Mittelmeers*.

The study under discussion presents a broad spectrum of various historical threads of the then Europe which is also affected by unusual challenges. The book by a German journalist, a passionate about history and an expert on Middle East countries, devoted to a military-naval stage of the history of armed hospitallers addresses a poorly known in Poland, thread of the European past (p. 6). However, it is to be admitted that in many parties the mentioned passion comes to the fore, which is not a good advisor when it comes to the objectivity of the presented opinions.

The rich historical narrative provides the book hallmarks of attractiveness and creative communicativeness. A variety of addressed facts, dates or names is however, complicated to cognitively comprehend without prior knowledge of even general history of the Order. What is more, a multitude of tensions around various interests, authorities, persons and religious motives, mainly political ones, creates a very condensed phenomenon.

Nevertheless, the Maltese spirituality inscribed in it resounds relatively weak and not particularly clear in its characteristic, and it was a significant advantage of the Order's dynamic throughout its entire history. It cannot be reduced to a purely secular structure although, occasionally some manifestations of a given activity seem to possess such features. This is completely inaccurate understanding; what is more, it constitutes an example of succumbing to certain tendencies that aim at deprecating the Order itself and its activities.

Most of the book presents century-old history at the crossroads of Christianity and Islam. It is a phenomenon that for centuries was visibly existing on a multithreaded level in the Mediterranean basin and at the same time shaped its political, cultural and ideological elements.

The problem of encountering those two phenomena demonstrates an extraordinary tension in which constitutive civilization elements of humanity can be heard, not only of this region – more and more visible nowadays. In the presented study, a military theme of these tensions echoes more meaningfully, although it is clearly unified and even oriented towards the Order of Malta and its broad involvement. Certainly, this constitutes an interesting element of history but it requires to be seen through the context of the entire wealth of the Order, particularly its multilevel activity.

It seems that the book is not only a fascinating journalistic account of a certain definitively closed past of the Order of Malta. It is rather, in a concrete example, the dynamics of events with ongoing effects; how dramatic they are even today. To what extent multitude of participants, problems and feelings is moving. All this creates a certain whole, relatively compact and legible. It is connected by spiritual dynamics which the Order tries to be faithful to preserve its identity.

In various parts of the book, one can also notice multiple attempts to assess and value people and facts. Perhaps sometimes the journalistic language facilitates the message itself, as it is relatively communicative, but unfortunately at the same time it often demonstrates a significant simplification, on occasion even a peculiar interpretation, to say the least.

The bibliography seems to be interesting. It is even a standard in the issue under consideration.

In his work, the author based on subject literature and personal experience. For many years he served as a military attaché in the Middle East and sought materials in Cyprus, Turkey, Italy and the island of Rhodes and Malta (p. 10).

This is a valuable addition by the author himself. However, what is striking is failure to indicate the famous and extremely valuable work of H.J.A. Sire *Kawalerowie maltańscy* (The Knights of Malta) (Warszawa 2000), which today is one of the fundamental studies for the entire history of the Order.

The index of names constitutes a curious and supportive appendix to the book. Nevertheless, it contains spelling inconsistencies, a peculiar alphabetical ordering and it omits certain characters. A valuable comparison of dates and numbers was included in the text (pp. 202, 206, 216). An overview listing nationality of slaves freed from Turkish galleys in 1652, 1656 and 1661 is worth mentioning. It turns out that the most numerous nations after the Russians (56%) and Venetians (10.9%) were Poles (8.1%) (p. 206). Poland is mentioned by the author in the context of the history of the Order after 1792 (pp. 222–223).

A chronological correlation of the most important events in the presented period of the Order's history is expected for broad reading of the book. This would provide a beneficial reference in the proper placement of individual content or people. Such a statement would be a chronological key to address the richness of the events presented. The list of masters and grand masters of the Order is certainly worth noticing (pp. 238–240). It is unfortunate that a description of a reproduction of the painting on the cover page was not indicated. It would also be appreciated to include at least a minor set of illustrations related to the history of the Order. It is also a shame that the book does not contain footnotes, but its popular science character seems to justify this fact. However, the richness of the content proposed justifies this expectation.

The presented study constitutes an attention-grabbing proposition introducing another thread from the history of the Order of Malta. Delineating of maritime history is an important component of the history of the Knights of St. John, especially in its early history. With this publication, the service of the sword is more widely understood, i.e. a classical knightly fight for faith, but always inscribed in the famous *tuitio fidei et obsequium pauperum*, the Order's motto and call. Therefore, a complementary view should always recognize and creatively combine these two trends, which should be de facto considered as one.

It must be remembered that this Order's commitment has not lost its relevance even today, and in fact, remains the main message of the contemporary extremely fruitful activity of the Knights of St. John. Naturally, it acquires significance in a divert sense, but ultimately it should come from the same

evangelical spirit. Contemporarily, it is manifested by a dynamic commitment to new evangelization coming from the instructions of John Paul II. In this work of proclaiming the Gospel, there is a place for every Christian, according to the baptismal vocation given and fulfilled, also the universal one, especially for a lady and a knight of Saint John.