

J. van Duijl, *Goederenverwerving van het Duitse Huis te Utrecht 1218-1536* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2022). 373 p.
ISBN 9789464550184.

DOI: 10.52024/tseg.18035

For a long while, it was quite fashionable to write the histories of the many institutes that littered the preindustrial West-European landscape, resulting in waves of studies on hospitals, churches, abbeys, and the like. This trend has died down a bit in the past decade, yet the studies on particular institutes that do still appear are often marvelous works. This book, the published doctoral dissertation of Jerem van Duijl, is no exception. In three parts, he investigates the history of the Teutonic House (*Duitse Huis*) in Utrecht, from its early beginnings in the thirteenth century until around 1536, focusing especially on the acquisition of goods.

The book opens with a brief history of the Teutonic Order in general, followed by a presentation of the scope the research, the sources, and the methodology. In the first part of the book, titled ‘The fundamental years: 1218-1256’, van Duijl adequately combines and adjusts existing narratives on the foundation of the Teutonic House in Utrecht, further supplementing these with his own analyses of the sources, while shedding new light on these formative years of Teutonic House in Utrecht, and on their connections to the counts of Holland.

The second part focuses on the ‘expansion period’ of the Teutonic House between 1257-1365. Using the bountiful amount of sources available for 1365, van Duijl first gives an overview of the diverse portfolio of goods of the Teutonic House at that time: leases, hereditary tenures, rents, tithes, patronage rights, and so on. Next, he goes back in time to reconstruct the acquisition of these goods. He also zooms in on the role of the Crusades, both to the Holy Land and to Prussia, and of patronage and the political struggles in and around Utrecht. Lastly, the development of the Teutonic branch in Utrecht towards a bailiwick is illuminated.

The third and final part focuses on the crises and reforms between 1366 and 1536. The end date was chosen because of the death of the land commander van Amstel van Minden – whose death signifies a whole new phase in the history of the Teutonic House. First, van Buijl starts again with the portfolio of goods of the Teutonic House around 1530, followed by a reconstruction of how it had evolved to that point

from 1366 onward. Afterward, he focuses both on the growth that characterized this period, expressed in increased acquisitions and spiritual reforms, and on the crises that plagued the Teutonic House: infighting, political struggles, an agrarian crisis, and so forth.

Throughout, van Duijl also tries to determine the main factors behind the acquisitions. In his conclusions, he emphasizes five drivers: the Crusades, devotional practices, politics and patronage, the managerial skills of individual land commanders, and – lastly – economic conditions.

Investigating the acquisitions of goods by an institute in the Middle Ages is no easy feat. Not only are there many unknowns and gaps in the sources – which already plagued the chronicler of the Teutonic House in the sixteenth century – but these acquisitions also did not take place in a vacuum. By combining multiple sources, van Duijl manages to write an extensive history of the Teutonic House, bridging many gaps in the sources and correcting previous works. By interweaving the narrative with the broader regional and international developments (the political conflicts in Utrecht, the Low Countries, and the Holy Roman Empire, in addition to the Crusades etc.), he contextualizes the many acquisitions of the Teutonic House. This account is further supplemented by a prosopographical study of the actors behind these transactions.

The downside is that the reader is sometimes overwhelmed by the many names appearing throughout the book, especially as the narratives in the individual chapters do not strictly follow the chronological outline set by the three main parts, but often switch back and forth through time. This latter method is often used to illuminate certain developments or broader events. Although this approach results in a rich narrative, it also sometimes pulls the reader out of the narrative. Particularly in the broader discussions of the Crusades, the focus on the Teutonic House sometimes gets lost.

Furthermore, while the book is an exemplary socio-political and cultural history, a deeper socio-economic perspective is sometimes lacking. As a result, some analyses remain rather superficial. For example, van Duijl hardly engages with the role of annuities and rents as part of the medieval credit system in chapter three and what this means for the Teutonic House. Only in later chapters does he, very briefly, touch upon the role of the brethren as bankers. Additionally, the rights to property were quite complex in the Middle Ages. Van Duijl himself often remarks that not the property itself but, for example, the usufruct rights were acquired by the Teutonic House, or that there were

other people who held rights to certain goods. However, he does not divulge anything further on these aspects and the consequences hereof. Also, his investigation of the impact of the plague and the agrarian crisis suffers due to the lack of a stronger socio-economic analysis. Lastly, in several cases acquired land is given in hereditary tenure to the seller/donator, which might suggest that other important drivers could also be at play here, such as retirement strategies (especially as several cases are about older people who also entered the Teutonic House later on), inheritance-strategies, and so on.

Van Duijl deserves credit for the dynamic way in which this book brings life to even relatively dry material, such as transactions of goods. The structure and format of a doctoral dissertation are clearly present, and there are some weird word choices now and then. All in all, though, the book is a well written narrative that can be highly recommended to any historian or layperson interested in the Teutonic House in Utrecht or the broader history of the Teutonic Order and the Crusades in the Low Countries or in the socio-political history of Utrecht.

Arnoud Jensen, University of Antwerp