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Marcin Grulkowski, *Najstarsze księgi miejskie Głównego Miasta Gdańska z XIV i początku XV wieku. Studium kodykologiczne*, Instytut Historii PAN, Wydawnictwo Neriton, Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne, (Studia i Materiały do Dziejów Kancelarii w Gdańsku, 1), Warszawa 2015, 546 pages, ISBN 978-83-7543-392-0.

Marcin Grulkowski, affiliated at the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, is well known due to his spoken and written contributions concerning the history of medieval Gdańsk (Danzig). His expertise has been confirmed in his study of the oldest town books of the Main Town of Gdańsk, accomplished under the guidance of professor Beata Możejko. It was published by Neriton Publishers as the first part of the new editorial series, concerning history of medieval chanceries of Gdańsk.

In general, the comprehensive thesis is composed of two ample parts. The first of them presents the state of research on the municipal registers and elaborates a series of theoretical questions concerning the way of studying them. The second part contains a detailed analysis of the external and inner features of the Gdańsk chancery books which – in Author's opinion – formed an interconnected “chancery system”.

Chapter 1 (pp. 19–57) provides the series of introductory remarks on the investigated material in the context of prior investigation. Gdańsk municipal books are treated here as an object of study of codicology and in the wider perspective of records produced in the largest Prussian towns. The results of earlier research and existing source editions made it possible to designate the strict object of Grulkowski's investigation, that is, eleven books elaborated by the chancery of the Main Town of Gdańsk. However, in a special subsection Author suggests that several registers existing in the

late Middle Ages did not survive until our times. The chapter ends with a brief presentation of ways in which the records were preserved through the centuries.

The second chapter (pp. 58–94), composed of two subchapters, addresses the substantial methodological issues, concerning definitions and typology of town books. The detailed overview of these definitions and typologies, appearing in German, Polish and Czech scholarly literature, is accompanied by the series of useful graphs which convey the subtle differences between various approaches, and facilitate the understanding of further analysis. The author strongly emphasizes that the term “town books” (German: *Städtebücher*; Polish: *księgi miejskie*) is used maybe too widely in the Central European scholarly discussion. For this reason, the term lacks precision as it used to be applied not only for the town books *sensu stricto* but also for some other products of municipal chanceries. Therefore, a new, more precise definition is really needed.

Starting from this point, the Author identified various types of records which, in his view, belong to the category of town books, including records produced by the municipal officials as well as other types of documents, stored in the town’s archives. Some results of this identification are surprising as the Author denies this denomination to some items which are broadly known as the “town books” in the scholarly literature, but more as the result of custom than of careful consideration. However, several convincing arguments are presented to support his opinion. Another interesting part of this chapter is the presentation of the system of graphical signs which facilitated the daily work of town clerks, i.e. helped to retrieve certain topics or personal names. So, the sign of the crown used to be put at the notes concerning the matters involving the king of Poland while the sign of the hammer accompanied affairs of smiths etc.

The second main part of the book discussed here contains the itemized analysis of the eleven registers produced by the chancery of the Main Town of Gdańsk. Chapter four (pp. 175–244) presents their external features, following three main types of registers: the cadastral and financial records as well as council books. In fact, the Author proposed a well working model of description of every item, including the very detailed description of the cover, followed by the description of the content of each volume and the analysis of its layout. The elaborated codicological scrutiny had been supported by the references to the German quire formula (with the improvements of Frank Bischof) as well as to the U-scheme, and the quire model of Peter Rück, all well known in the scholarly literature. One should emphasize the thoroughness of this codicological analysis which can serve as an example for the scholars dealing with this material in the future.

The fifth chapter consisting of almost two hundred pages (pp. 245–443) constitutes the core of the publication not only because of its size dimensions. It embraces the analysis of the content of every single town book, presenting in detail their contents one by one. The Author proved to be very consistent in applying previously established categories of cadastral registers, council books and financial records. However, unlike in the previous chapter, Grulkowski did not develop here a consequent pattern of presentation. He rather had chosen to follow the properties of every source in order to explain its special features.

The last chapter (pp. 444–465) is an interesting attempt to compare the production of the chancery of the Main Town of Gdańsk to the institutional literacy of other Ger-

man-speaking towns on the south coast of the Baltic Sea. The Author distinguished no less than three models for the development of the chancery system. In the first model the cadastral registers were the primary type of town books (as in Cologne, Hamburg and Reval) while in the second model only one type of matters was entrusted to writing (e.g. debt registers, as in Riga and Hannover). The third possibility was to start a general town book embracing all matters of the municipality, as it happened e.g. in Kołobrzeg (Kolberg), Szczecin (Stettin), Anklam and Wismar. In Grulkowski's opinion, the evolution of the chancery system of Gdańsk can be seen as a mixture of the first and the third model.

The short conclusion (pp. 466–468) constitutes a brief and well thought-out summary of the entire work. It is followed by the list of tables, graphs and pictures of analyzed manuscripts as well as by well-structured index of personal names and the abundant bibliography. The Author did not provide the index of subjects but the very detailed table of contents (indicating also sections and subsections of every chapter) helps the reader to navigate through the book.

Also the impressive number of fifty two diagrams and graphs is included. Apart from that, the book contains thirty three black-and-white and eight colorful pictures of the studied registers. They definitely help to connect the abstract concepts of the theoretical analysis with the physical items which await the scholars in the archives.

The codicological study published by Neriton Publishing is already pleasing to the reader with its tasteful cover that depicts a page of the source. The image of the handwritten source contextualizes the analysis by providing a vivid depiction of the source. Also for the title and the name of the author a retro font was chosen.

To conclude, the book of Marcin Grulkowski is a remarkable scholarly achievement. Not only because of the considerable number of sources and literature used but also because of its methodological consistency and analytical depth. It sets a new standard for the research of urban pragmatic literacy in general, and especially – for the further investigation of town books. One might only regret that the language of publication makes it accessible only to the Polish scholars. The translation into German or English would certainly enlarge the number of its readers.

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