

Thomas Neijman, with Kurt Villads Jensen, *The Battle of Visby 1361 and Its Contemporary Heritage* (War and Conflict in Premodern Societies), Arc Humanities Press, Leeds 2025, 202+xiv pp., 26 illustrations, 8 maps, 2 tables, ISBN (Print) 9781641890632, ISBN (PDF) 9781802702088.

The campaign conducted by the army of King Valdemar IV of Denmark on Gotland in the summer of 1361 became known to a relatively wide circle of scholars specialising in late medieval military history primarily through the highly acclaimed, two-volume English-language study by the Swedish archaeologist Bengt Thordeman (1893–1990), published in 1939–1940. This work presented and analysed, above all, the findings from the mass graves discovered near Visby at the beginning of the twentieth century and subsequently excavated, particularly during the 1920s¹. The osteological and military materials recovered during several excavation campaigns, owing to both their quantity and the relatively good state of preservation of at least some of the finds, long constituted a unique body of evidence for the study of the course of medieval military campaigns, and especially of major battles. Within the sub-discipline of battlefield archaeology, which has developed steadily since the 1980s and has experienced a marked increase in popularity across Europe over the past two decades, while also gradually evolving into the more methodologically and theoretically mature discipline of conflict archaeology, the excavations near Visby have come to be regarded as a classic case study. The reviewed volume, published in 2025 by the young Swedish researcher Thomas Neijman in collaboration with Kurt Villads Jensen, one of the leading figures in Scandinavian medieval studies, represents the first attempt in historiography to provide a comprehensive and genuinely interdisciplinary examination of the military operations conducted in the late spring and summer of 1361. Building upon the findings of Thordeman and his collaborators, it substantially broadens both the source base and the scope of the inquiry. The result is a concise and relatively compact, yet highly substantial and well-structured study that addresses archaeological, arms- and armour-related, social, economic, military, and, ultimately, historical issues. Considered together within an interdisciplinary framework that emphasises their mutual contextual interconnections, these perspectives produce a successful and valuable historical and cultural study of late medieval military campaigns on the periphery of Latin Europe – namely, the Baltic region, understood as both Scandinavia and the southern coast of the Baltic Sea. Moreover, the concluding section of the volume examines the campaign and the battle as elements of the collective memory of the inhabitants of Gotland and, more broadly, of Scandinavians. The book thus presents itself as an attempt to offer a genuinely comprehensive examination of the historical phenomenon that was, and remains, the campaign on Gotland in 1361.

The publication consists of eight chapters, preceded by a brief Preface (pp. xiii–xiv), which outlines the circumstances that led to the initiation of research on the 1361

¹ Bengt THORDEMAN, *Armour from the Battle of Wisby 1361*, vol. 1–2, Stockholm 1939–1940.

campaign, dating back to 2011. The equally concise Introduction (pp. 1–3), in turn, sets out the principal issues addressed by the two authors. Among the research questions posed is that of the alleged – or indeed actual – hostile attitude (treacherous from the perspective of Gotland as a unified political entity) adopted by the townspeople of Visby towards the Gotland militias engaged in resisting the invading army of the king of Denmark. The introductory material is supplemented by lists of the numerous photographs, maps, and tables included in the volume, as well as a list of bibliographical abbreviations (pp. vii–xi). The concluding section comprises a bibliography (pp. 189–197) and an index (pp. 199–202) covering persons, places, and subjects. The main body of the book was written by Thomas Neijman, whereas Kurt Villads Jensen, as stated in the Preface (p. xiii), authored the chapters presenting the broader historical and military context of the events of 1361.

The general historical background to the Danish invasion of Gotland is presented concisely and clearly in Chapter 1, *Why Gotland?* (pp. 5–27). Among other issues, the chapter discusses the relationship between Gotland and its formal political overlord, the Swedish monarchy, as well as the relations between the Hanseatic town of Visby – inhabited predominantly, though by no means exclusively, by German-speaking merchants – and the island's rural population. Contrary to earlier historiographical trends, which emphasised above all the conflictual nature of relations between these two communities (particularly with reference to the armed conflict between them in 1288), the authors draw attention, on the one hand, to the intensity of economic interactions between Visby and its rural hinterland and, on the other, to the fact that ethnic divisions only partially coincided with social divisions (pp. 10–15). In the following subchapters, the spring–summer campaign of 1361 undertaken by the Danish king, first on Öland and subsequently on Gotland, is presented as part of the monarch's broader efforts (during his reign of 1340–1375) to restore the position of the Kingdom of Denmark. These efforts are also situated within a wider historical context extending back to the third decade of the fourteenth century and are examined primarily in relation to the western Baltic region (pp. 16–18). This broad contextual overview of Scandinavian political history around the middle of the fourteenth century is complemented by an outline of the condition and transformations of the Swedish monarchy under King Magnus Eriksson (r. 1319–1364, ruling independently from 1332). One of the indirect consequences of the internal crisis – and, ultimately, the civil war – that affected the Kingdom of Sweden during the second phase of Magnus Eriksson's reign (from 1356), following the failure of his attempts to establish dominance in the eastern Baltic and to gain control over Hanseatic trade with Veliky Novgorod (pp. 18–20), was the renewal of conflict with Denmark. This conflict arose from disagreements between the two monarchs during Valdemar IV's campaign in Scania, where the Danish king had supported Magnus in his struggle against his rebellious son (pp. 24–25). In 1360, Scania was conquered by the forces of the king of Denmark (pp. 25–26). In the authors' view, this conquest paved the way for Valdemar IV's subsequent expansionist ventures. It is worth noting that the discussion of the political history of the two Scandinavian monarchies between 1319 and 1361, although presented here in broad terms, does indeed enable readers unfamiliar with the history of late medieval Scandinavia to navigate this sometimes complex sequence of events. Nevertheless, it contributes relatively little

to an understanding of the immediate causes and circumstances of the Gotland campaign (or, more precisely, the Öland–Gotland campaign) of 1361. The reason is that, as the authors themselves acknowledge, the specific motives that prompted Valdemar IV to launch a military expedition into the central Baltic in the late spring of 1361 remain, in essence, unclear due to the limited availability of source material (pp. 6–7).

Chapter 2, *Invaders and Defenders* (pp. 29–56), is devoted to an examination of military structures. It presents the principal issues relating to the military organisation of the Danish and Swedish monarchies, as well as that of the island of Gotland. Given the scarcity of sources illuminating the organisation and structure of the armies of both sides involved in the conflict of 1361, the authors seek to address this problem by placing it within a broader historical context. A separate subchapter is devoted to the Swedish *leding*, namely the practice of assembling military contingents for naval expeditions. Here, particular attention is given to the gradual transformation of this organisational model into the concept of the *expeditio*, understood as an external military campaign that did not necessarily involve the use of ships. A key element of these gradual transformations, which had been occurring since the thirteenth century, was the introduction of an annual monetary levy (*ledingslama*) that exempted individuals from participation in the *leding*. This practice was also implemented on Gotland, as unequivocally attested by a source from 1351. However, in the case of an expedition ‘against the pagans’, the Gotlanders were still obliged to participate in the *leding* by providing ships and armed men (pp. 32–39). In the following subchapter, the authors argue that Valdemar IV’s expedition should be understood as an *expeditio*, undertaken on the basis of contingents provided by the Danish nobility. Although ships were to be supplied as part of the *leding* in the form of a tribute, these were not small, deckless Scandinavian longships, but rather larger and more modern cogs. Mercenary contingents from the North German lands constituted a significant reinforcement of the Danish king’s forces. Considering their presence and the combat experience they had acquired in recent campaigns (including those in Scania and on Öland immediately prior to the invasion of Gotland), the authors rightly emphasise the considerable degree of experience and cohesion possessed by at least a part of Valdemar IV’s army (pp. 40–45). The third part of the chapter addresses the principal issues concerning the organisation of the Gotland militia (*landvärn* – a term whose etymology is comparable to the High German *landwere*, meaning ‘land defence’) and the guards responsible for monitoring sections of the coastline, islets, cliffs, settlements, and ships. Crucial to understanding the course of the first phase of Valdemar IV’s invasion is an analysis of the organisational structure of the Gotland militia, which was based on the division of the entire island into so-called ‘sixths’ (*settingar*), a system that, in turn, derived from the earlier *leding* organisation. Within these units, local contingents, commanded by a local judge (*landsdomare*), were mustered whenever necessary (pp. 45–53). Chapter 2 concludes with a relatively brief section devoted to the military organisation of the town of Visby. It highlights, on the one hand, the town’s military potential, founded upon institutions characteristic of Hanseatic towns, including its fortifications, and, on the other, the incorporation of the town commune into the *leding* system administered by the Swedish monarchy (pp. 53–55).

The following chapter, *The Fallen* (pp. 57–81), is devoted to an analysis of the remains of those who perished in the Battle of Visby, drawing primarily upon Thordeman's research on the skeletal remains of 1,185 combatants discovered during twentieth-century excavations. These considerations constitute an attempt to identify as many clues as possible that might shed light on the composition of the Gotland militia that opposed Valdemar IV's invasion. The chapter opens with a concise and informative account of the history of archaeological discoveries and research conducted on the battlefield near Visby, including the site of the Solberg monastery, dating back to 1905 (pp. 58–60). The following subchapter addresses the issue of mass post-battle burials in the late Middle Ages. Here, the authors draw upon the examples of the battles of Aljubarrota (1385), Towton (1461), and Uppsala (1520), which subsequently serve as comparative material for their analysis (pp. 60–62). Drawing in particular on Thordeman's analysis of osteological trauma, the authors conclude that one distinct group is represented by skeletons bearing evidence of cuts to the lower limbs (p. 70), suggesting that these individuals relied on a relatively limited range of defensive armour. Grave No. 3 represents a particularly noteworthy case, containing the remains of exceptionally young and elderly individuals, which were partially re-examined using new methods in 2007. The injuries observed on these skeletons indicate that they wore substantially less effective protective armour, a finding that may be associated with the assignment of the least well-equipped individuals to a reserve contingent. However, Neijman is right to refrain from drawing definitive conclusions on the basis of this evidence. Given the relatively small number of such skeletons, he carefully outlines several possible explanations for the findings while fully acknowledging the fragmentary nature of the available source material (pp. 71–73). Comparisons between the data obtained from the Visby material and evidence from the three fourteenth- to sixteenth-century European battlefields discussed above are conducted with a similar degree of caution. On the basis of these comparisons, the authors formulate, among other hypotheses, the suggestion that the soldiers who fell at Visby possessed less combat experience than those who fought at Aljubarrota and Towton (pp. 73–77). One of the questions addressed in this chapter concerns the possibility of verifying the origin of the human remains and attributing them either to the Gotlandic or to the Danish side. The assumption, first advanced in the 1920s and 1930s by Thordeman, that only members of the Gotland militia were interred in the mass graves near Visby is treated by the authors merely as a working hypothesis. They argue that this assumption may, in the future, be subject to verification through research capable of establishing the precise geographical origins of the combatants, although the limited studies conducted to date on the strontium isotope ratio $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$, which serves as a geographical indicator, have so far produced inconclusive results. In this context, the authors also draw attention to the potential of the Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometry (ICP-MS) technique, which enables the detection of trace elements present in low concentrations and thereby makes it possible to analyse dietary patterns and, consequently, the social and geographical contexts in which the individuals under investigation lived. Finally, the authors refer to DNA analysis – a field that has developed rapidly over the past two decades – an investigation that the skeletal material from Visby has not yet been subjected to (pp. 78–81).

Chapter 4, *Armament* (pp. 83–107), is devoted to the weaponry and defensive equipment of the combatants on both sides of the conflict. The authors' principal objective is to reassess the picture derived from the concise yet rhetorically stylised late medieval narrative sources – a view largely accepted by earlier critical historiography – according to which the local militias recruited from the Gotlandic *settingar* were supposedly significantly less well equipped than their royal opponents. The first part of the chapter presents a detailed analysis of the *folkvavn* ('people's armament'), the possession of which was compulsory for every free man under the provincial laws of the Kingdom of Sweden, including the law of Gotland (pp. 84–87). The authors then rightly place these legal provisions within the broader economic and cultural context of Gotlandic society (pp. 90–94). As a consequence, the aforementioned interpretation is subjected to fundamental criticism. Members of the Gotlandic *landvörn* in the mid-fourteenth century were by no means merely peasants equipped with rudimentary weapons; rather, they possessed a relatively broad range of defensive equipment, including mail armour, modernised lamellar armour (analysed in detail by the authors), and coat of plates. The authors propose a new interpretation of the social and cultural foundations of Gotlandic military organisation, explicitly departing from the earlier view of the islanders' culture as exclusively rural while emphasising evidence of its greater diversity. This diversity is reflected, for example, in the use of socially distinctive house marks by the most prominent members of the community (p. 93). In light of this interpretation, the authors argue that it is no longer tenable to regard the Gotlandic army as consisting solely of a peasant levy composed of impoverished island farmers, culturally isolated both from the elite models of the Scandinavian world and from those of the Hanseatic world (pp. 93–94). The differences in armament between the Gotlandic army and the Danish forces were, in the authors' view, not so much qualitative (p. 107) as quantitative, relating to the proportions of individual categories of equipment. Among the combatants of Valdemar IV's army there may have been a greater number of armed men equipped with coats of plates, but this does not imply that this type of armour was absent among the Gotlanders. Also worthy of note are several more specific observations, including the use by some of the king's soldiers of exceptionally old weapons – for example, a sword approximately 150 years old (p. 97) – as well as the strong evidence suggesting the use of pyrobolic weapons (firearms) during the campaign (p. 99). At the conclusion of the arms-and-armour analysis, the authors emphasise that Grave No. 4 has not yet been examined. Consequently, the evidence currently available remains incomplete and may therefore not be fully representative (p. 107). It is worth noting, as an aside, that the same caveat also applies to the osteological analyses discussed earlier.

Chapter 5, *The Invasion of Gotland in 1361* (pp. 109–130), examines the course of the summer campaign on Gotland itself. Building upon the preceding analyses and conclusions, the authors propose a comprehensive interpretation of the sequence of military events between the landing of Valdemar IV's forces on the island – between Kronvall and Västergarn, approximately 23 to 39 km south-south-west of Visby (pp. 111–114) – on 22 July and the Battle of Visby on 27 July. The first part of the chapter is devoted to the Battle of Mästerby, the initial engagement between the invading army and the local militia, which had been assembled on an *ad hoc* basis from what

was most probably a single *setting* (Hejde) (pp. 114–119). According to the interpretation advanced by the two authors, the militia attempted to block Valdemar IV's army at the militarily important bridge near the settlement of Ajmunds (now Ejmunds), spanning the small river Sudertingssån, which flows westwards from the Fjäle marshes towards the nearby Baltic Sea. Ajmunds also served as the site of the local *thing* and as the assembly place for the armed contingent of the Hejde *setting* militia. The royal forces attempted to outflank the defended position at the bridge by advancing from the east towards the marshy terrain, where the obstacle was probably at its narrowest along the north–south axis. It was there that the battle took place, as indicated by approximately 500 military-related artefacts discovered in the area in recent years by Maria Lingström. These discoveries should be regarded as having confirmed hypotheses that had previously rested solely on the late seventeenth-century account contained in Hans Strelow's chronicle and on legends recorded in the early nineteenth century. Drawing upon the spatial distribution of the military artefacts, including arrowheads and projectiles probably fired from firearms, while also taking into account a topographical analysis based on eighteenth-century cartographic material, the authors propose a reconstruction of the course of the engagement. In their interpretation, the battle began with the advance of the royal army and the barrage of fire directed at the defenders guarding the crossing points through the marsh. It subsequently developed into close combat – as indicated, among other evidence, by the discovery of 27 combat knives – and gradually evolved into a rearguard action fought along the road crossing the Fjäle marsh. This phase of the engagement extended over a distance of approximately 600 metres and ultimately ended with the retreat of the local militia. In the authors' view, there is no evidence to support Strelow's account of a second battle fought in the same area on the following day (pp. 114–119).

The second part of the chapter is devoted to the battle fought on 27 July outside the southern gate of Visby. As in the case of the Battle of Mästerby, the written sources are extremely sparse. Consequently, in reconstructing the course of this engagement, the authors rely primarily on the data and evidence derived from their analysis of the mass graves discussed in the preceding chapters 4 and 5. As with their examination of the osteological material, they also make extensive use of the comparative method. The central issue, already raised earlier (pp. 3, 10, 109), concerns the question of why the Gotlandic army chose to engage in an open battle immediately outside the fortifications of Visby. Their scepticism towards the suggestion that the townspeople of Visby adopted a hostile – and, from the Gotlanders' perspective, treacherous – attitude towards the Gotland militias leads the authors to propose that the decision to fight a decisive battle may have been taken entirely on the initiative of the militia commanders themselves. Neijman and Jensen conclude that this decision need not have been a reckless one. On the contrary, it may have offered a realistic prospect of success against Valdemar IV's army. In support of this interpretation, they compare the Battle of Visby with the Battle of Vottem of 1346, fought only a short time earlier. In that engagement, the army of the city of Liège, supported by contingents from several other Low Countries towns, successfully resisted the forces of the local bishop and his allies, repelling a mounted attack in terrain that, in the authors' view, displayed important similarities to that outside Visby. In both cases, the defenders took advantage

of natural and artificial obstacles in the landscape situated before the town fortifications. Neijman and Jensen do not even exclude the possibility that the Gotlandic commanders may have possessed some knowledge of the battle fought fifteen years earlier, given Gotland's extensive commercial connections with the Low Countries within the Hanseatic economic sphere (pp. 122–125). In their view, the similarity between the deployment of the Gotlandic army and that of the forces of the city of Liège at Vottem lay in the protection of the right flank by anchoring it against a steep sea cliff, while securing the rear against a direct enemy attack by taking up positions immediately in front of the town fortifications (p. 126). The battle probably began with artillery fire from the royal side, followed by what was most likely a frontal assault on the militia formation. Valdemar IV's troops succeeded in breaking through the best-equipped front ranks of the Gotlanders and, during the final phase of the engagement, defeated the less well-armed reserve units. The battle was exceptionally bloody, resulting in the deaths of approximately 2,000 men, which, in the authors' estimation, may have represented between one-third and as much as one-half of the island's male population at the time (pp. 129–130). The authors' overall interpretation of the Battle of Visby may be summarised in the argument that, contrary to the previously dominant view, the Gotlandic army was by no means doomed to defeat from the outset. Despite receiving no support from the townspeople of Visby, it deliberately accepted battle from what they regard as a relatively advantageous tactical position.

Chapter 6, *Results: Danish Dominium* (pp. 131–143), provides a relatively concise account of the immediate aftermath of the Battle of Visby, namely the town's surrender to Valdemar IV (presumably on 29 July) and the Danish monarch's exaction of a substantial – though unquantifiable – tribute or ransom from the municipal authorities, while at the same time confirming the town's rights and privileges. Even in the case of these events, recent research – this time based on dendrochronological analysis – has corroborated the account preserved in one of the local traditions, according to which the king entered the town through a breach deliberately made in the town wall. According to dendrochronological dating, this section of the fortifications was repaired in 1363 (p. 132). Valdemar IV's expedition to Gotland, which lasted just over a month, came to an end on 28 August, although virtually nothing is known about the king's activities after 29 July (p. 138). The authors then provide a very general overview of the subsequent developments, which were now primarily political in character and ultimately led to the formation of an anti-Danish coalition in the autumn of 1361. Danish rule over Gotland did not last long, coming to an end between 1362 and 1364. Thus, Valdemar IV's unquestionable success in securing control of two strategically important islands in the central Baltic, despite the speed and effectiveness of the military campaign, ultimately proved to be short-lived (pp. 139–141).

The final two chapters of the book under review address the theme, already mentioned above, of the Battle of Visby as a place of collective memory. Chapter 7, *Gotland and Gothicism* (pp. 145–163), is devoted primarily to an analysis of legendary narratives (as well as songs) recorded in the seventeenth century and subsequently in the first half of the nineteenth century, relating to a variety of events and episodes associated with the Gotland campaign of 1361. The authors skilfully demonstrate the processes through which some of these accounts came into being, as well as the cultural

contexts in which they were produced (pp. 145–160). At the same time, they emphasise that certain elements of these narratives may reflect actual events or, at the very least, particular types of historical experience – for example, the looting of the southern regions of the island (pp. 152–153). The chapter concludes with a discussion of several Swedish and Danish historical publications dealing with the campaign of 1361 that already conform to the standards of so-called critical historiography, highlighting the role these works played in shaping and perpetuating particular perceptions of the Battle of Visby (pp. 160–162).

In Chapter 8, *The Impact of the Mass Graves* (pp. 165–187), Neijman and Jensen analyse the influence that the discovery of the mass graves, and the subsequent archaeological investigations carried out during the first half of the twentieth century, had on the evolution of perceptions of the battle. Their discussion also takes into account school textbooks published from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. Without entering into a detailed discussion of these issues, it is worth noting what I regard as a clear inertia in the perception of the Battle of Visby as a place of collective memory. This continuity persists despite the authors' choice of the title *A Changing Memory* for the final subchapter (pp. 186–187) and notwithstanding the genuine transformations in the narratives, themes, imagery, and interpretations through which the battle has been represented. This underlying continuity has endured despite changing cultural currents and trends – particularly during the twentieth century – as well as shifts in the means of expression. It is discernible even in the Medieval Week (*Medeltidsveckan*) festival, organised annually in Visby since 1984, which serves as a public outreach event featuring various historical re-enactments (pp. 183–184).

Among the considerations presented by Neijman and Jensen, two points may give rise to certain reservations. The first concerns their proposed interpretation of the deployment of the Gotlandic army outside the fortifications of Visby on 27 July. The authors do not specify the precise extent of the battle line, referring only to the seafront escarpment to the west, which secured the right flank, and to the southern town gate, situated approximately 460–480 metres to the east (p. 126). Admittedly, they had earlier referred to Thordeman's concept, according to which the left flank of the Gotlandic battle line extended as far as the Solberga monastery complex, contrasting it with an alternative proposal put forward by Guna Westholm, which they regard as unlikely (pp. 121–122). Whether this should be taken to imply acceptance of Thordeman's hypothesis remains unclear. In the subsequent discussion, the role of the Solberga monastery is no longer mentioned, whereas the authors refer, among other things, to the 'front ranks' (pp. 126, 128) and the 'ranks to the rear' (p. 127). Here, in my view, a rather significant problem arises. These formulations suggest that the Gotlandic militia was deployed in at least four ranks, with two front ranks and two rear ranks. If one follows, for example, the findings of Kelly DeVries's research on the engagements of infantry contingents in the fourteenth century², to which the authors themselves refer, it seems reasonable to assume that, in order to conduct an effective defensive action, the footmen forming both the main battle line and the formations of single units/groups would have

² Kelly DeVRIES, *Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century: Discipline, Tactics, and Technology* (Warfare in History), Woodbridge 1996.

been deployed in relatively close order. Assuming a theoretically very dense formation, in which each armed man occupied the width of a single pace (approx. 0.74 m), one would have to envisage a force of approximately 2,480–2,600 infantrymen deployed in four ranks along the stretch extending from the seashore to the southern gate of Visby. If one further accepts Thordeman's proposed eastern extension of the battle line³, running for approximately 400 metres between the southern gate and Solberga monastery, this would require an additional force of approximately 2,160 infantrymen. The total strength of the Gotlandic infantry deployed in the battle line in four ranks would therefore amount to approximately 4,640–4,760 men. Even if the formation were reduced in density by half, with one armed man occupying every two paces (approx. 1.48 m), between approximately 2,320 and 2,380 infantrymen would still have been required to occupy the position described in a formation four ranks deep. In this context, it is worth recalling the evidence analysed by the authors concerning the strength of the Gotlandic army, which indicates a force of approximately 2,300 men (this figure is well attested in the military inspection of 1413; p. 52). It should also be borne in mind that a four-rank-deep infantry formation was by no means particularly deep, especially if its purpose was to withstand an enemy assault. It cannot be ruled out that the position extending between the seashore and the monastery complex, although highly advantageous from both a topographical and tactical perspective, as it protected the flanks against enemy outflanking manoeuvres, proved too extensive to be effectively occupied by the numerically limited Gotlandic forces, given the capabilities of the island militias in both collective and individual combat. One possibility, therefore, is that the Gotlanders adopted a relatively loose and shallow formation in order to extend their battle line sufficiently to anchor both flanks on strong defensive positions and thereby secure their wings. Alternatively, the opposite may have been the case: the battle formation may have been deployed in a denser and deeper arrangement than one four ranks deep. Such a solution, however, would necessarily have come at the cost of a substantial reduction in the overall length of the battle line and, consequently, the exposure of at least one flank. In the light of the available source material, this question must remain unresolved. Nevertheless, any discussion of the tactical aspects of the Battle of Visby would benefit from taking into account the spatial constraints, numerical estimates, and practical considerations that are absent from the publication under review.

A second issue that, in my opinion, gives rise to certain reservations concerns the analysis of the events on the first day of Valdemar IV's campaign on Gotland. The authors appear to favour Västergarn as the landing site of the royal forces, although they do not state this explicitly, while also mentioning alternative locations, including Kronvall, Fröjel, and Klinte. It seems, however, that the area around Västergarn, being the northernmost of the proposed landing sites and situated some 8 km west of the future battlefield at the Fjåle marshes, does not fully explain why Valdemar IV's army initially advanced directly eastwards towards Mästerby, given that the principal objective of the expedition, which was presumably Visby from the outset, lay to the

³ B. THORDEMAN, *op.cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 23–24.

north-east. By contrast, from the Kronvall and Fröjel area, located some 10–15 km farther south than Västergarn, the route via Ajmunds and the parish village of Mästerby would indeed have constituted the shortest approach to Visby, as the authors themselves observe (p. 114). This was not necessarily the case, however, if the army had landed in the vicinity of Västergarn. From the latter location, the route leading through the parish village of Tofta, which must almost certainly have been connected by road to the neighbouring parish village of Västergarn, and then through the parish village of Westere (now Västerhejde) towards Visby was not only shorter (approx. 26 km, compared with approx. 30.5 km), but would also have appeared more intuitive to travellers without the benefit of maps (as the authors rightly emphasise; p. 117) and therefore relying primarily on a general sense of geographical orientation, together with information obtained from local inhabitants or guides. From such a perspective, a route that initially led directly east, and thus away from the general direction of Visby, would have appeared considerably less obvious than one that more consistently followed the intended destination. The mere fact that the 1646 map of Gotland used by the authors does not depict a bridge across the river Sudertingssån downstream of the bridge at Ajmunds (i.e. to its west) does not necessarily mean that no crossing existed there in 1361. Moreover, even a preliminary examination of this map suggests that it records only the principal roads forming part of the island's supra-local communications network, whereas the undoubtedly existing network of local roads connecting the parish villages is not represented at all. For this reason, I would be reluctant to regard the depiction of the landscape on the 1646 map of Gotland as either a detailed or a faithful representation even of the topography and landscape features of its own period, quite apart from the authors' suggestion, albeit made in relation to a different issue, that the geo-environment remained essentially unchanged between the mid-fourteenth and the mid-eighteenth century (p. 117), an assumption that, in my opinion, should not be accepted uncritically. It is also worth noting that the book lacks a more detailed assessment of the two maps employed as cartographic sources, particularly with regard to their cartographic quality, informational value, and, consequently, their usefulness for the analyses undertaken.

In light of the reservations outlined above, an alternative interpretation of the opening phase of the campaign on Gotland may be proposed. It is conceivable that the royal army landed at several locations, disembarking in the areas of Kronvall, Fröjel, Klinte, and Västergarn, while one of these sites may have served as the principal landing place for the largest part of the force. One could point to several reasons behind such a solution, whilst acknowledging that it carries a certain degree of risk. Firstly, from the very outset, the Danish king would have a greater operational range for his forces and, consequently, a better opportunity to assess what was happening on both his flanks, which would have formed at the very moment of landing on the island. Secondly, it would have safeguarded the central landing sector against an enemy counter-attack. Thirdly, and finally, to a greater extent than if troops had been landed at a single point, he would have been able to counter the actions of an opponent attempting, within the local *settingar*, to muster under arms and concentrate their own forces. The authors emphasise that the four settlements in question were situated within two different *settingar*: the first within Hoburg, the last three within Hejde (p. 114).

There is another premise supporting this interpretation. Namely, if the first battle at the Fjäle marshes took place on the very day the royal army landed, 22 July, whilst the battle of Visby did not take place until 27 July, that is, the sixth day after the landing, this means that Valdemar IV's forces had four full days to undertake various operations. This is not only a matter of operations to the south (as the authors note, pp. 135–137), which may be reflected in certain early modern legends (e.g. the destruction of the watchtower at Sundre, pp. 135, 152; the skirmish in the parish of Fide, p. 135), but above all it creates a temporal space for the second clash in the vicinity of the Fjäle marshes, which, according to Strelow's account, took place on 23 July, the day after the first battle. An interpretation assuming that a second battle did in fact take place in the vicinity of Mästerby – and it should be noted that neither of the two researchers has presented arguments explicitly refuting this element of Strelow's account – would imply that the first clash on 22 July was an encounter between the local militia and only a part of the royal army. This contingent, having landed on the island that very same day, may have been conducting a reconnaissance operation towards the north-east and north in search of a suitable route for an advance towards the centre of the island, namely Visby, when it encountered the assembling militia. According to this interpretation, the second engagement would have been a continuation of the first encounter, during which the Gotlandic *landvärn* had located and pinned down part of the invading forces on the initial day of the campaign. This would have compelled the Danish monarch to commit a larger part of his army to this confrontation, despite the fact that the engagement was taking place along a route that was by no means the shortest possible approach for his march towards Visby.

Another issue, although of considerably lesser significance, that may raise some doubts concerns the interpretation of the spurs discovered in the Fjäle marshes, which the authors regard as evidence for the deployment of riders on the royal side (p. 118). In my opinion, these finds should rather be interpreted as belonging to mounted men who, confronted with the difficult conditions of the marshy terrain, dismounted from their horses in order to fight on foot, without taking the time to remove their spurs.

The errors and shortcomings identified in the book under review are entirely minor. However, in the interest of a balanced critical assessment, it is worth noting the use of the terms 'Russia' and 'Russians' (pp. 5, 17, 19 [map], 20, 22, 91, 138) to denote the extensive and politically fragmented East Slavic lands of the mid-fourteenth century and their inhabitants. In this context, however, the historically more appropriate designation would be the ethnonym Rus', since the political entity known as Russia emerged only gradually during the sixteenth century in connection with the expanding Muscovite state⁴. Some inaccuracies are also apparent on Map 1 (p. 6), which is intended to depict the political situation in the mid-fourteenth century, particularly with

⁴ In this respect, the publications of Anti Selart set a commendably high standard. Recent examples include, among others, Anti SELART, *Crusade, Trade, and Economic Warfare in the Baltic, 1200–1400*, [in:] *Economic Warfare and the Crusades*, ed. Stefan K. STANTCHEV (Croisades tardives, vol. 8), Toulouse 2025, pp. 177–195; idem, *Secret Language: Knowledge of Rus'ian in the Medieval Baltic*, [in:] *Borders, Borderlands, Language: Culture and Society in the Slavic World through the Centuries*, ed. Monika SACZYŃSKA-VERCAMER, Ales ZÁŘICKÝ (FOKUS, vol. 18), Paderborn 2026, pp. 74–94.

regard to the borders in the Pomeranian region and the boundary between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Livonia. The bibliography does not include descriptions of the cartographic sources. The volume contains a number of repetitions (for example, on p. 74 in relation to pp. 72–73 and 62, and on p. 110 in relation to p. 27). In most cases, however, these function as useful reminders and contextual explanations within individual sections of the text and are therefore justified. From the editorial and typographical point of view, the publication has been produced to a very high standard.

In conclusion, the book by Thomas Neijman and Kurt Villads Jensen is a well-conceived, methodologically rigorous, analytically perceptive, and intellectually valuable study of late medieval warfare, examining it both as a sequence of historical events and as a phenomenon of collective memory, as well as a subject of historiographical inquiry. This genuinely multifaceted approach to the subject deserves particular emphasis. The publication is undoubtedly a valuable and significant contribution not only to scholarship on the Gotland campaign of 1361, but also, from a broader perspective, to the study of late medieval warfare in its widest sense and, more generally, to historical and cultural research on war.

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