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A NEW REVIEW OF LATVIAN CASTLES

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Andris Caune and Ieva Ose. Latvijas 12. gadsimta beigu – 17. gadsimta vācu piļu leksikons. Rīga, 2004 (590 pp).

Already in the late 1950s one of the authors of this book, archaeologist Andris Caune, planned to write a lexicon of Latvian castles. However, his permanent research work in Riga, the writing of articles and monographs on the results of that research, as well as large-scale fieldwork on the Bauska castle (in the 1970s–1980s) took up all his time. Only in the 1990s, when his daughter, art historian Ieva Ose, had become his match as a research companion, the opportunity appeared to realize the plan designed several decades before. To start with, Ieva Ose made a thorough study of the archival materials and archaeological literature available in Riga and Stockholm, as well as in Estonia. Fieldwork and photographing started in 1997. This approach gave an opportunity to proceed from the individual to the general, and already in 1999 Ieva Ose could publish the first volume of the series concerning Latvian castles – materials of the symposium “Latvijas viduslaiku pilis, I” (Medieval Castles of Latvia, I), focused mainly on the medieval castles of the Archdiocese of Riga. A review of the collected archival information was published in Ieva Ose’s next book, the historiographic monograph “Latvijas viduslaiku piļu petniecība 18.–20. gadsimta” (Studies of the Medieval Castles of Latvia in the 18th–20th Centuries), which was published in 2001. The next subject to be handled was the Order’s castles on the territory of present-day Latvia, leading to the publication of the third volume of the series, “Pētījumi par ordeņpilīm Latvijā” (Studies of the Order’s Castles of Latvia), written by 15 researchers and compiled/edited by Ieva Ose.

And now, in 2004, we hold the general lexicon of Latvian castles “Latvijas 12. gadsimta beigu – 17. gadsimta vācu piļu leksikons” (Latvijas viduslaiku pilis, IV). Actually this miscellany did not appear on a vacant space either. Since the publication of the German translation by Johann Gottfried Arndt of the chronicle of Henry of Livonia in 1753, with an appendix providing a table of the castles, towns and monasteries of Old Livonia, researchers have, ever and again, returned to the subject: the castles, established by Germans, remained administrative and economic footholds of foreign power for centuries, still arousing interest in considerably later times. This is clearly proven by the review by Andreas von Löwis of Menar “Über die Entstehung, den Zweck und den endlichen Untergang der Ritterschlösser im Alten Livland” // mitt.-Riga; Leipzig, published in 1840, as well as Alexander von Richter’s study of a somewhat later date. Karl Löwis of Menar was indisputably a great figure in this field, regarding not only Latvia but also Estonia. He started his research, as well as writing respective articles, in 1888. During the nearly forty years to follow he

managed to publish more than thirty papers enfolding the region from Narva to Klaipeda (Memel). Besides doing separate studies of sacral and profane architecture (also in Tallinn and Narva), his main attention was turned to castle architecture. The crown jewel of his study is the “Burgenlexikon für Alt-Livland”, published in Riga in 1922. Its 127 pages of text and 63 drawings comprise most of the information known to that day about the castles of Old Livonia. Owing to the scantiness of fieldwork the publication naturally enough could not achieve perfection, and certainly not the academic weight either. Since archaeological research both in Latvia and Estonia, particularly concerning medieval castles, in the period between the two World Wars was relatively inactive, a new quality was offered only 20 years later by Armin Tuulse, who defended and published his doctoral dissertation “Die Burgen in Estland und Lettland” (Dorpat, 1942). Unlike many earlier (and also later) researchers, Armin Tuulse was able (thanks to the scholarship from the University of Tartu) to study the castles of Germany, Holland, Belgium, France and Italy in 1937–38, and also to do research in the archives of Riga, Stockholm and Königsberg. All this enabled him to present a more thorough stylistic analysis and largely to establish a typology of the castles of Old Livonia, as well as their genesis, which in many cases is still valid today.

As for the book by A. Caune and I. Ose it comprises the entire information available about the medieval castles on the territory of the present-day Latvia, whoever their founders – the Order of the Brethren of Sword, or the Livonian branch of its successor the Teutonic Order (the Livonian Order), the Bishop (later Archbishop) of Riga, the Bishop of Courland, or the vassals of the aforementioned. They are grouped on the basis of their location in the territories of either the Order or the Bishops. Most of the 136 castles were also included in the lexicon of K. v. Löwis of Menar. On the other hand, among the castles of the late 12th–16th centuries there are some (Dīgnaja/Dubena, Dobe/Doben, Liepene/Lepene, Līva/Liva, Remīne/Remin and several others) that are mentioned in written sources but their precise location is still a point of disputation. The lexicon also enfolds those castles, which – founded earlier by local inhabitants and furnished with timber fortifications only – were used as abodes by Germans in the 13th–14th centuries. Such are Asote/Aszute, Jersika/Gercike, Mežotne/Mesothern, Svētkalns/Heigenberg, Tērvete/Terweten, Vectalsi/Alt-Talsen, etc. The lexicon also includes the mill with a watchtower of the brothers Bertholds (Brāļa Bertholda dzirnavas) from the first quarter of the 13th century, classified as a fortification in 1938 by L. Arbusow (jun.), and the so-called Red Tower (Rīga, Sarkanais tornis) of the same function at the lower mill in the present-day Tornkalna quarter of Riga, on Jelgava Street.

The composition of the book is simple. Each object is provided with basic data: including earlier names, address, a short description of the location, a short review of history, a description of the present-day state of the object, a review of architectural and archaeological investigations, a list of literature concerning the object and the location of the existing plans, drawings and photos of the object. Usually the year of the latest visit of the authors to the object is also mentioned. The book ends, as usual, with a list of references. Most of the short articles are illustrated with the oldest pictures, historical as well as modern plans or charts of the objects. As for historical pictures, the 10 volumes of “Sammlung verschiedener Liefländischer Monumente, Prospekte, Münzen, Wappen etc.” by the Baltic-German cultural historian Johann Christoph Brotze (1742–1823) have been of great value for the authors. These contain, alongside with materials on history, genealogy, numismatics, architecture, art, etc., also drawings of architectural monuments made by the author on the spot. We must also give credit to our Latvian colleagues for publishing the manuscript materials of Brotze, kept in the library of the Latvian Academy of Sciences – during the last decade (1992, 1996, 2002) three volumes have been published, and soon, they say, a volume discussing southern Estonia will follow.

Although the generalising text of the lexicon covers only twelve pages, it is extremely informative. There we learn about the building materials of Latvian castles – timber (late 12th–13th centuries), dolomite (north of the Daugava River and around the Gauja River) and erratic granite blocks brought to the Latvian area by a glacier sheet (in Courland, West Latvia, and in Vidzeme, Central Latvia). Red brick, so characteristic of Prussian castles, was used on a limited scale (Turaida/Treiden, Ludza/Ludsen, Grobiņa/Grobin, etc.). Generally brick was used only for framing doors and windows and as vault material. Lime mortar made of dolomite, used as a binding substance, made it possible to erect walls with a thickness of 1.3–1.8 m, which in the age of fire-

arms increased even to 4–6 m. Owing to the flat relief of Latvia most of the castles were located on riverbanks and some on uplands (Koknese/Kokenhusen, Augstroze/Hochrosen, Ludza/Ludsen, etc.). Moats filled with water provided additional defence. Only a few castles were built on islands (Sala/Holme, Viļaka/Marienhausen, Alūksne/Marienberģ). The period of building medieval castles lasted longer in Latvia than in Estonia – from the late 12th century until the beginning of the 17th century, which makes five centuries all together. Nevertheless the differences, compared with Estonia, are not great. And like in Estonia, castles are still in use, up to the present day, though not as defence constructions but reconstructed for a different purpose. Completely or partly, 11 castles – Alsunga/Alschwangen, Dundaga/Dondangen, Ēdole/Edwahlen, Jaunpils/Neuenburg, Krustpils/Kreutzburg, Lielstraupe/Gross-Roop, Mazstraupe/Klein-Roop, Nurmuiža/Nurmhusen, the existing castle of Riga, Šlokenbeka/Schlokenbeck, Ventspils/Windau – are still used as a dwelling, school, museum or an administrative building.

The four maps and four tables, giving a review of all Latvian castles, considerably increase the value of the book. The material presented there is chronologically divided between five centuries and begins with the founding of the Bishop's castle of Ikškile/Üxküll in 1185. The final objects, founded in the early 17th century, are suggested to be Priekule and Bramberge. Actually, the maps and tables contain 142 names instead of the 136 presented in descriptions. The reason lies in that several of the castles have been re-erected, particularly those which were originally built of timber (Grobiņa/Grobin, Jelgava/Mitau, Tērvete/Terweten) and a decade later rebuilt in stone. Changes also took place in the monastery of Daugavgrīva/Dünamünde, which was founded at the beginning of the 13th century as a fortified Cistercian monastery, but after 1305 was rebuilt into the castle of the commandery of the Order. For the same reason the castle of Riga has been regarded as several separate objects. As the second castle of Riga burned down at the end of the 15th century, the castle, newly erected in 1515 is regarded as the third. Besides the time of founding or first mention, the castles are (in the tables) classified on the basis of their masters or owners. Accordingly, we can find Order's, Bishop's, Archbishop's and their vassals' castles. Concerning the 13th century, the town of Riga and the Cistercians are also regarded as masters; in the final third of the 16th century, the Duke of Courland is added. Although it is common to consider foreign conquerors likely to build stone castles, we can observe an exceptional feature at Latvian castles: at least 14 of those founded in the 13th century and 4 even in the 14th century were built of timber.

Dividing by centuries, we can say that of the 142 German castles in Latvia, 49 were built in the 13th century, 54 in the 14th century, 20 in the 15th century, and 19 castles or fortified manor-houses in the 16th century. By owners the division is as follows: the Order founded 60 and their vassals 17 castles, the number of castles founded by bishops and archbishops is considerably smaller – 37, and their vassals built 28 castles.

Dividing the castles by their location in cultural-historical regions the result is: 73 of them are located in the central part of Latvia, i.e. in Vidzeme, 35 in the western part – Kurzeme, 21 in Zemgale and 13 in the southwestern part – Latgale.

The special value of the lexicon for other researchers springs from the following. The authors – one an archaeologist and the other an art historian – have assembled in the publication all information obtained by fieldwork up to 2003, adding references to publications in which one can find up-to-date additional information. After all, investigation of Latvian castles (medieval ones included) started already in tsarist times, continued, on a limited scale, in the Latvian Republic in 1920–1940, and was in full swing in the 1950s and 1960s. True, the latter was primarily due to extensive rescue excavations caused by the construction of a cascade of hydro-power-stations on the Daugava River. The investigations of Lokstene and Olīpkalns in 1959–1964, or the archaeological excavations of the castle complex of Sēlpils in 1963–1965 could serve as examples. But we might as well mention excavations in Bauska (Bauske), carried out by Caune himself in 1976–1992, or the investigation and conservation work of Cēsis (Wenden), which began already in 1952 and is still going on. That is one of the main reasons why the investigation of medieval castles of Latvia is remarkably well advanced, comparing to the situation in Estonia. The reviewed publication is a vivid illustration of the fact.