

Ewa Wólkiewicz, *Proletariusze modlitwy? Drogi karier, finanse i kultura materialna niższego kleru w średniowiecznej Nysie* [Proletarians of Prayer? Career Paths, Finances and Material Culture of the Lower Clergy in Medieval Nysa], Warsaw: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 2020, 612 pp.

In recent years we have been observing the development of prosopographical research into the clergy that is focused primarily on an analysis of cathedral and collegiate chapters. To date, the lower clergy has garnered considerably less interest in Polish historiography, even though the prosopographical method is also promising regarding this category.<sup>1</sup> An example of an attempt to take up the issue is a work written by the author of the present review on the topic of the clergymen of Toruń (German: Thorn).<sup>2</sup> An appreciably fuller response to the shortage of such studies is Ewa Wólkiewicz's monograph on the lower clergy in medieval Nysa (German: Neisse; Czech: Nisa). The book is a sui generis continuation of her research into the history of the Church in Nysa.<sup>3</sup> In her previous monograph, she included lists of clergymen who became the protagonists of her study this time around.

The book is divided into two parts. The first — analytical — discusses the issue of how the clergy functioned and comprises five chapters. The second — factual — presents the biographical notes of clerics in seven annexes. In the introduction, apart from reference to typical matters, such as the state of research and the source basis, the author has undertaken an analysis of terminological issues that are vitally important in the context of the diversity of the lower clergy (pp. 8–11). Starting from the classical interpretation of the term

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<sup>1</sup> See Enno Bünz and Klaus-Joachim Lorenzen-Schmidt, 'Zu den geistlichen Lebenswelten in Holstein, Lauenburg und Lübeck zwischen 1450 und 1550', in *Geistliche Lebenswelten: Zur Sozial- und Mentalitätsgeschichte der Geistlichen in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Manfred Jakubowski-Tiessen, Neumünster, 2005, pp. 11–57 (pp. 15–16).

<sup>2</sup> Marcin Sumowski, *Duchowni diecezjalni w średniowiecznym Toruniu: Studium prozopograficzne*, Toruń, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Ewa Wólkiewicz, *Kościół i jego wierni: Struktury kościelne i formy pobożności w średniowiecznej Nysie*, Cracow, 2014.

'lower clergy' (German: *Niederklerus*), proposed by Dietrich Kurze,<sup>4</sup> the author has defined this group as 'holders of lower benefices' (p. 10), which constitutes the most apt definitional proposal for future research.

Chapter 1 concerns Church institutions and benefices in Nysa. The sacral topography of the city, which the author presented in detail in her previous book<sup>5</sup> constitutes an excellent point of departure for her deliberations on the clergy. Firstly, it allows an attempt at determining their number in the city. However, in light of the fragmentary nature of data, this can only be a rough estimate — as has been rightly stressed in the monograph. The chapter is supplemented with a tabular list of prebends held by altarists, with information about the date of foundation, the invocation, stipends, and founders.

Chapter 2 references the classical research questions of prosopographical research and includes an analysis of the social and territorial origins, educational backgrounds, and career paths of various categories of clergy. The author has presented these issues separately for parish priests, altarists proper, preachers, chaplains, vicars, mansionaries, and Church servants. Particularly interesting is the comprehensive subchapter devoted to altarists. This contains prosopographical analyses and presents significant issues concerning the entitlements and duties of this category of the clergy, and outlines the path to receiving a prebend. The matters mentioned above are associated with the problem of the material foundation upon which the lower clergy functioned, which is discussed using a most intriguing source, namely extant bills from one prebend.<sup>6</sup>

The next three chapters go outside the realm of traditional prosopography and propose a much broader look at the lower clergy. In Chapter 3, the author presents the issue of the living conditions of the lower clergy (a topic strongly neglected by historiography), focusing on fascinating matters such as the residences of the clergy and their furnishings. At the same time, Chapter 4 discusses the book collections and writings of the lower clergy, which constituted an element of the intellectual culture of this milieu. The final — fifth — chapter is a brief review of the clergy's stance towards the Reformation.

Two-thirds of the work is devoted to biographical notes of clerics from Nysa, which are preceded by a list (Annex 1). The author has included the profiles of thirty-one parish priests of the parish of St James and three parish priests of the Church of St John in a chronological arrangement (Annex 2). Annex 3 contains five biographical notes of clergymen whom historiography has incorrectly recognized as having held the parish of Nysa. In contrast, in

<sup>4</sup> Dietrich Kurze, 'Der niedere Klerus in der sozialen Welt des späteren Mittelalters', in idem, *Klerus, Ketzer, Kriege und Prophetien: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. Jürgen Sarnowsky, Marie-Luise Heckmann and Stuart Jenks, Warendorf, 1996, pp. 1–36 (pp. 2–3).

<sup>5</sup> Wólkiewicz, *Kościół i jego wierni*, pp. 41–156.

<sup>6</sup> Conclusions drawn from this chapter have already been published in English: eadem, 'The Ecclesiastical Proletariat? The Income of the Lesser Clergy in the Late Middle Ages Is Exemplified with the Accounting Book of St. Martin's Altar in Nysa', *HKHM*, 67, 2019, 1, pp. 3–16.

Annex 4, the author has assembled clerics who held ineffective provisions for the parish of St James. The biographical notes of the remaining clergymen from Nysa, arranged alphabetically, have been incorporated in Annex 5, which contains the numbered biographical notes of six hundred and twenty-three clerics who were confirmed as having held benefices in Nysa and biographical notes of persons who were unconfirmed holders of benefices. These two groups have been presented jointly and in alphabetical order. However, persons of uncertain status have been omitted from the numeration, and their personal details entered in square brackets. In her analysis, the author turns attention to a problem that remains of considerable significance when studying the lower clergy: the difficulty of unequivocally determining which clergymen associated with Nysa held benefices in the city. This was connected, among others, with the activities of the local priestly fraternity, of which even parish priests from nearby villages could become members. As we can see, providing a universal and all-encompassing definition of the 'lower clergy' is no easy matter. Analytical categories such as 'the clergymen of Nysa' will always be open, which is aptly stressed by the very arrangement of the biographical notes. The book ends with presenting a cleric erroneously considered an altarist from Nysa (Annex 6) and of seven clergymen who held ineffective provisions for prebends in the city (Annex 7).

It is worth noting here that the author's research questions do not simply follow other studies into canonical milieux regarding issues of prosopography. As she has correctly indicated, when analysing the lower clergy, we should not 'simply apply the research tools developed in the course of studies of the higher clergy. In particular, practically all statistics based on prosopographical materials should be treated as highly conventional' (p. 10). This appropriately expresses the specific autonomy of research into the lower clergy, which requires a separate methodological procedure. The need for such a reflection on the part of scholars follows from the sheer number and variety of clergymen and the somewhat different source base, which necessitates a different interpretational approach.

The gathering together of detailed biographical data is without doubt an immense achievement of the reviewed work. The elaboration of biographical notes that are as full as possible is the basis of prosopography, as Radosław Krajniak has stressed in his comprehensive research into the clergy.<sup>7</sup> However, the method would lose much of its potential without an in-depth analysis of the collected data and their placement in the broader context of living conditions, culture, and social relations. Thus, the author has rightly observed that 'the classical prosopographical study does not exhaust the subject matter connected with the presence of the lower clergy in the city' (p. 22). Her proposed conjoining of biographical notes with an analysis of various issues from the life of the clergy must be

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<sup>7</sup> See recently Radosław Krajniak, 'Around the Late Medieval Clergy of the Wieluń Region: Notes and Additions on the Margins of Tadeusz Nowak's Book, *Duchowieństwo ziemi wieluńskiej w drugiej połowie XV i początku XVI wieku: Studium prozopograficzne*, Wieluńskie Towarzystwo Naukowe, Wieluń 2017, pp. 177', *Res Historica*, 50, 2020, pp. 627–44 (p. 641).

considered as particularly important and, indeed, as a considerable contribution to prosopography as we know it.<sup>8</sup> Such an approach fits in with the research of Dietrich Kurze, cited above, who also stressed that the financial affairs and social life of the clergy were important research topics.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, the contents of the monograph fully correspond with the promise of its title. In its analytical part, the work focuses on careers, finances, and the material culture of the lower clergy. And while it may have been worth the effort to analyse the clergymen of Nysa as a group with the activities of the priestly fraternity, the author has, in fact, already discussed this confraternity in her previous book.<sup>10</sup> However, the lack of a summary to gather together answers to questions posed in the work may be a drawback.

My remaining comments are solely technical. Perhaps the alphabetical order numbering and joint arrangement of all biographical notes and using these numbers as references to specific persons in the analytical part and the list in Annex 1 would have provided greater clarity. At the same time, a list of tables would have further increased the ease of use of the study. Additionally, the book lacks an index, although the alphabetical arrangement of most biographical notes ensures that finding individual persons is not markedly difficult.

As a side note, it is worth mentioning the Polish translation — a practice concordant with Polish historiographical tradition — of the names of persons from the German linguistic circle, to which a large part of the clergymen of Nysa undoubtedly belonged. The author has systematically employed the Polish wording of names. Perhaps, however, the appropriateness of this approach should have been given more consideration, with it being limited — for example — to names commonly recorded in this way in historiography. It is challenging to decide the matter unequivocally, especially if we consider the problem of determining the descent of many members of the lower clergy. Maybe the addition of variant spellings of names and surnames to the biographical notes would have been helpful. The matter is interesting, all the more so as attempts at revising the traditional approach are becoming increasingly more frequent; Krzysztof Kwiatkowski has been particularly active in this regard,<sup>11</sup> while the author of the present

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. a similar proposal: Alois Trenkwalder, *Der Seelsorgeklerus der Diözese Brixen im Spätmittelalter*, Brixen, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Kurze, 'Der niedere Klerus', pp. 9–36. Cf. questionnaires: Kazimierz Dola, 'Der Breslauer Diözesanklerus im Mittelalter', in *Geschichte des christlichen Lebens im schlesischen Raum*, ed. Joachim Köhler and Rainer Bendel, 2 vols, Münster, 2002, vol. 1, pp. 393–420; Marcin Sumowski, 'Kler diecezjalny w społeczeństwie średniowiecznego Torunia — przyczynek do badań nad funkcjonowaniem duchowieństwa miejskiego epoki', in *Kościół i duchowieństwo w średniowiecznej Polsce i na obszarach sąsiednich*, ed. Andrzej Radziwiński and Radosław Biskup, Toruń, 2013, pp. 167–96.

<sup>10</sup> Wólkiewicz, *Kościół i jego wierni*, pp. 186–95.

<sup>11</sup> See Krzysztof Kwiatkowski, *Zakon niemiecki jako 'corporatio militaris', part 1: Korpacja i krąg przynależących do niej: Kulturowe i społeczne podstawy działalności militarnej zakonu w Prusach (do początku XV wieku)*, Toruń, 2012, p. 79.

review and Radosław Krajniak<sup>12</sup> have taken a similar stance with respect to the Prussian clergy. A discussion on the topic could prove beneficial for contemporary Polish historiography.

Ewa Wólkiewicz's book is an example of the successful broadening of the classical research focus of prosopographical research. The author has tackled a complex of important issues that continue to be marginalized in historiography and thereby helped open new research fields for Polish historians. In this sense, her monograph will prove its worth as a complete study of the clergy in one city and provide an impetus for further research. I am convinced that the book will constitute a point of reference for scholars specializing in the history of the clergy for a long time to come. Therefore, we should express the hope that it will contribute in particular to furthering research into the living conditions and book collections of the lower clergy, or, to put it more broadly, into the material and intellectual culture of the titular 'proletariat.' Finally, it would be beneficial if this were undertaken for a broader territorial scope, and perhaps with the participation of a larger research team.

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<sup>12</sup> See Radosław Krajniak, *Duchowieństwo kapituły katedralnej w Chełmży do 1466 roku: Studium prozopograficzne*, Toruń, 2013.