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## **The capture of the Marienwerder Castle, or where the Teutonic Order's expansion to the East was stopped**

### **Sources and historiography concerning the event**

The capture of the Marienwerder castle was memorable to its contemporaries and thus described extensively in quite numerous sources, compared to other events of that time. The sources have been widely discussed by such archaeographers as Theodor Hirsch, Ernst Strehlke, Max Töppen. Historians Zenonas Ivinskis, Mečislovas Jučas, Rita Trimonienė, Gerard Labuda and others have also assessed the sources critically, indicating their most important characteristics and possible biases. An overview of the sources concerning Marienwerder is provided hereinafter, and their main features important in the context of the present research are discussed in short.

A distinctively long text devoted to the event appears in the chronicle of Wigand von Marburg (Marburgietis, 1999, pp. 187–192; *Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., pp. 625–631)<sup>1</sup>. The chronicle was amply characterized by Theodor Hirsch, who prepared it for pub-

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<sup>1</sup> In this case and hereinafter the abbreviations for the historical sources appearing in the *Scriptores rerum Prussicarum* are used: Dusb. – for Petri de Dusburg, Marb. – for Wigands von Marburg, Thor. – for Annalista Thorunensis, Detm. – for Detmar, Pos. – for Johann von Posilge, Alt. – for Ältere Hochmeisterchronik, Summ. – for Summarium von Jagel und Wytaut, Litera – for Litera ad papam, ad collegium. *Scriptores* is used for the *Scriptores rerum Prussicarum* itself.

lishing, and Rita Trimonienė, who wrote an introductory text to the publication of the chronicle's Lithuanian translation (Marburgietis, 1999, pp. 5–45; *Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., pp. 429–452). The author of the work was a member of the Teutonic Order and a herald of the grandmaster at least from 1393. Wigand von Marburg completed his chronicle in 1394. It relied on the preceding writings of Peter von Dusburg, Nicolaus von Jeroschin, Hermann von Wartberge, and the Oliwa chronicle. Besides that, being a herald, Wigand von Marburg had an opportunity to communicate with the Order's knights and rely on their spoken information; such phrases as “heard from old people” (*audibi ad antiquis*)<sup>2</sup> appear in his chronicle. Konrad von Wallenrod himself, the Order's marshal when the construction, siege and capture of the Marienwerder castle took place, later – the grandmaster, could be among them, as the herald was his courtier. There could have been more eyewitnesses of the events at Marienwerder in Wigand von Marburg's surroundings. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the source provides one of the most extensive descriptions of this event.

Originally the chronicle was written in Middle High German and it was rhymed, but only its fragments survived until now. Yet, these do not contain a description of the Marienwerder castle. The abbreviated Latin translation in prose, done in 1464 at a request of historian Jan Długosz, reached the present day. It was written by Konrad Gesselen in 22 days. As it is highlighted in extent historiography, the translation is quite cobbler and imprecise (Ivinskis, 1986, pp. 80–83; Marburgietis, 1999, pp. 5–45; *Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., pp. 429–452), and this is not to be overlooked while relying on the source. The absence of the original can be partially compensated by examining the Danzig (Gdańsk) chroniclers' fragmentary transcripts made from it in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. There are three fragments conveyed by Stenzel Bornbach among them where the construction of the Marienwerder castle and its capture is described (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., pp. 627–631).

The Torun annals, written in Latin by several authors in the Torun Franciscan monastery, also stand out as another source where the event has been described extensively (*Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., pp. 129, 134–136). The source has been discussed comprehensively by archaeograph Ernst Strehlke (*Scriptores*, 1866, pp. 13–57). It intended to describe the events of the years 941 to 1410 annually. The authors probably worked under the supervision of the Teutonic Order's local komtur<sup>3</sup>. The first part of the annals had been compiled at about the years 1317 to 1327 relying on previously created chronicles and written documents, and then they were elongated by different chroniclers (Labuda, 2007, pp. 335–367).

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<sup>2</sup> In this case and hereinafter the words in italics are Latin or Mittelhochdeutsch quotations from primary sources.

<sup>3</sup> Komtur – a chief of the Teutonic Order's administrative division, and a commander of the division's military unit at the same time. A deputy to the komtur was a vicekomtur.

As noted by historian Mečislovas Jučas, the annals do not contain detailed descriptions of military raids, but the political perspective of their creators was wider in comparison with many other chroniclers of that time (Jučas, 1964, pp. 14–15). As the annals' content shows they were based on fairly many sources. First, the authors relied on preceding chronicles (e. g., *Breve Chronikon Silesiae*, *Annales Pelplinenses*, *Chronicon Livoniae* written by Hermani de Vartberge), as well as various documents of 13–14<sup>th</sup> century. Second, as it is known, the Torun Franciscans maintained close relationships with officials of the Teutonic Order, therefore their verbatim information could be used by the chroniclers. According to historian Ivinskis, the Torun annals' composers were "well informed" about the siege and capture of the Marienwerder castle (Ivinskis, 1986, pp. 71–72).

Researchers also emphasize the chronological accuracy of the annals (Ivinskis, 1986, pp. 71–72; *Scriptores*, 1866, pp. 13–57). Admittedly, it is not easy to find exact arguments to support these comments. It is likely that this is due to the initial structure of the annals: the intention was to describe events *annually*. By the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the annals gradually began to turn into a chronicle, but the tendency to emphasize dates remained. The chronological accuracy is important in case of Marienwerder, having in mind that information concerning the dates of its capture does not coincide among several sources; the Torun annals stand as priority here.

Starting with the ninth (or maybe even from the eighth) decade of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the narration of contemporary events begins. This can be seen as a factor that increases the credibility of the source.

The suppositional primary audiences for the annals were members of the Order and their collaborators who participated in the military raids, as well as other supporters of the Order. As it was mentioned already, the Torun annals' authors maintained close relationships with them. Thus, the annals' narrative was rather favorable to the crusaders and unfavorable to their enemies, Lithuanians and Poles. As an example, the duke Vytautas was called there perverse betrayer (*traditor perversus*) (*Scriptores*, 1866, p. 130).

Some supplements to the information concerning the events of the years from 1360 to 1419 are provided by Johann von Posilge (*Scriptores*, 1866, Pos., pp. 129, 134–136, 309). The source has been discussed by Ernst Strehlike (*Scriptores*, 1866, pp. 13–57). The chronicler, a parish priest and ecclesiastical judge in Prussia, continued writing the chronicle until his death in 1405. He lived in Riesenburg since 1379 and wrote considerable part of the chronicle there. It was written in Latin, but only its translation into German remained to this day. According to Jučas (1964, p. 15), the source's characteristic is the variety of information and the chronicle may be treated as the main source describing the fights between Lithuania and the Teutonic Order of that time; on the other hand, its inherent bias is a tendency to justify the Order's expansion.

The chronicler relied on the Torun annals describing events which took place before 1393, thus, the Marienwerder's construction and capture among them. He abbreviated and supplemented the annals' information at his discretion, and this is important to have in mind while relying on the Posilge's chronicle. On the other hand, he was a contemporary of the construction and capture of the Marienwerder castle, thus, he had an opportunity to be informed by eyewitnesses, and even by the Order's chief personalities (Ivinskis, 1986, pp. 83–85; *Scriptores*, 1866, pp. 13–57). But, again, the information provided in the Torun annals seems to be a priority when comparing the two sources.

Detmar's chronicle written in Lübeck is also based on the Torun annals mostly, but it contains some original information as well (*Scriptores*, 1866, Detm., pp. 131). In 1385 Detmar, a teacher at the Franciscan monastery, had been tasked by the town council to write chronicle of the Lübeck town. Detmar's work was not limited to local facts; it described Lübeck's past in a broad context. The author not only relied on the Torun annals but also on the preceding Lübeck's chronicle (which was lost later) and other sources. Detmar had proceeded with this work until 1395, when other authors took over the writing. When comparing Detmar's chronicle text with those of the Torun annals and Johann von Posilge, it is apparent that Detmar's chronicle is the least informative and accurate. (Ivinskis, 1986, pp. 78–79; *Scriptores*, 1866, pp. 13–57). Despite being the town's chronicle, Detmar's work is not without biases typical to the above-mentioned sources: it presents all the actions of the Teutonic Order in exceptionally bright colors.

Marienwerder itself has not been directly mentioned in Detmar's chronicle. Nevertheless, presumably there are several informative sentences regarding the castle in it as well (*Scriptores*, 1866, Detm., p. 131). They are worth attention and comparison with other sources, since the text was completed within a short time after the events of 1384, and the author could rely on information of different origin than other chroniclers.

Information concerning Marienwerder provided in one more source available nowadays, the "Ältere Hochmeisterchronik", is less original in comparison with all the above-mentioned chronicles. As it has been indicated by archaeograph Max Töppen, the source had been compiled several decades later, in the 1430s, relying basically on the previous chronicles (*Scriptores*, 1866, Alt., pp. 519–539). Thus, the information provided in the source is to be treated more critically and compared with preceding texts, though the Marienwerder's capture is described quite extensively in it (*Scriptores*, 1866, Alt., pp. 606–608).

All of the above-mentioned chronicles were written "from the perspective of the bearers of Christianity" (Eihmane, 2009, p. 36). Having been created by members of the Teutonic Order or by those close to them, the chronicles clearly had a tendency to present crusaders favorably and in an exclusively positive light. This was also what the considerable part of the implied audience of the chronicles expected to hear, as it surely contained collaborators and supporters of the Order from across Europe. That is necessary to have in mind while relying on the sources, as the Order's successes can be exaggerated there, and the failures

justified in biased ways. The German chronicles' biases could be "counterbalanced" by other sources, maybe by Polish chronicles, which authors could oppose the Teutonic Order, but no references concerning Marienwerder were found in them until now. Thus, the aforementioned German chronicles' texts remain as main primary sources concerning the Marienwerder issues, and they were critically used for the research.

Besides the chronicles, a few sources of a different character may be referred to here as well, such as two letters of the grandmaster of the Order written to the Pope and the Roman Curia in 1384 (David, 1815, pp. 193–196; *Scriptores*, 1863, *Litera*, pp. 625–626, 628). These personal letters contain some beneficial information, as they present some situations differently than the chronicles, which were intended for general public. Subjectivity of the letters, by no means should not be overlooked, as the grandmaster was keen to boast his achievements while presenting them to curia, to flatter and to justify his decisions. For example, "huge funding and expenditure" were mentioned in the first letter, where the grandmaster tried to explain how the received support was used. In the second letter, variety of ways and words were found to reason the loss of the costly Marienwerder castle. Hence, the letters provide interesting details regarding the events in 1384, but only the claims which appear in other sources as well seems to be more reliable. In other cases, it remains to raise the rhetorical question: was it really so?

The capture of Marienwerder is also mentioned among the main offenses of the Lithuanian dukes in the "Summarium von Jagel und Wytaut", a document written about 1412–1413 (*Scriptores*, 1874, *Summ.*, pp. 223–227). The text is of a propaganda nature on the whole, with similar biases as the above-mentioned. But having in mind the limited sources the information contained in it is also to be taken into account, maintaining critical attitude.

To sum up, it is possible to analyze the construction and capture of the Marienwerder castle relying on these primary sources too, treating them critically and analyzing comparatively.

The written sources' information could be supplemented by archaeological evidence. But it has been almost absent until now. As the Marienwerder castle was localized only preliminarily, archaeologists did not deliberately attempt to trace it. Moreover, the geographical situation at the Neris and Nemunas confluence (possible location of the castle) has been changed enormously since the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and a thick layer of silt has become an obstacle to investigation.

Johannes Voigt, a German, was perhaps the first historian to write in more detail about Marienwerder in his *History of Prussia* (Voigt, 1832, pp. 438–441). However, the text is characterized by a lack of a critical approach to the sources, as is typical for the time of its creation. Thus, Voigt simply conveyed the chronicles' information without considering its reliability. Yet, knowledge presented in the chronicles was not accurate in many cases, as it is shown further in this article. Another German historian, Karl Heinl, explored the sources treating them more critically. He concentrated

on the circumstances attending the construction of the castle, but his description of its capture is quite fragmentary (Heinl, 1925, pp. 34–36, 45–47).

Marienwerder was also frequently mentioned in the works of Polish historians. Antoni Prochaska was one of the first among them. The castle's construction and collapse were quite broadly discussed by him relying mostly on the Wigand von Marburg chronicle (Prochaska, 1914, pp. 46–48). Those who wrote later – Marceļi Kosman, Henryk Łowmiański, Jadwiga Krzyżaniakowa, and Jerzy Ochmański – did not focus on Marienwerder in particular, issues concerning the castle were discussed in a general context of events of 1384 (Kosman, 1967, pp. 36, 40; Krzyżaniakowa & Ochmański, 1990, pp. 78–81, 2010, pp. 87–90; Łowmiański, 1997, p. 33). Antoni Romuald Chodyński highlighted the military aspect of attack on Marienwerder, and discussed the use of firearms (Chodyński, 2006, pp. 11–12). Marek Radoch and Jarosław Nikodem, authors of the newest works, did not develop Marienwerder's history also, limiting it to chrestomathic claims that the castle was constructed by Teutonic Order in 1384 in a strategic location, but Lithuanian forces captured it soon (Nikodem, 2013, pp. 84–85, 96–97; Radoch, 2011, pp. 74–76).

Lithuanian historians have also written about the Marienwerder castle either briefly and in a general way or in the context of other events (Rūkas, 2013, pp. 231–232; Z. I., 1959; Žalnierius, 2004, p. 210). The text of Jurgis Oksas in his book *Kaunas in the Epoch of the War with Crusaders* may be considered to be the most comprehensive treatment (Oksas, 1995, pp. 54–58). However, not all available sources are assessed in his work. For example, the researcher did not rely on Johann von Posilge and Detmar chronicles at all.

American historian William Urban described Marienwerder's construction and its capture in his monograph *The Samogitian Crusade*. Again, the author perhaps did not rely on all the available sources, and he had probably no opportunity to analyze precisely the geographical situation of the region concerned. These could be reasons why his version of the events is sometimes debatable. For example, the Marienwerder castle is placed at the mouth of the Dubysa River (Urban, 1989, pp. 177–180, 2005, pp. 210–213). Actually, it was built at the mouth of the Neris River, as it is obvious after comparison of all the sources. Next, Urban proposes that Lithuanian forces were “building a bridge across the Memel for better access to wood and food” (Urban, 1989, p. 179, 2005, p. 212). But the sources have no hints concerning Lithuanian forces' problems in obtaining supplies of wood and food, thus, Urban's interpretation of the purpose of the bridge seems to be doubtful. As the Wigand von Marburg chronicle claims, the bridge had two towers, thus, the building could be of strategic value – not to allow the Teutonic Order's ships to navigate along the river. Urban indicates further that “the chief engineer in the castle was having difficulties with his catapult”. Ostensibly, the Lithuanian forces destroyed it. This could be treated as an inaccurate interpretation of the event's presentation in the available sources, as the Wigand von Marburg chronicle only states the opposite: that the castle crew's artillery commander Herman hit the Lithuanian heavy stone-throwing machine and damaged it twice (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 629). There are more similar imprecise comments in the work of Urban.

The Marienwerder castle's importance and its capture are also briefly dealt with by Stephen Turnbull in his popular science book *Crusader Castles of the Teutonic Knights, 1* (Turnbull, 2003, pp. 23–25). All in all, it may be said that research of the Marienwerder story has not been comprehensive until now. The author of this article takes the opportunity to examine it more deeply.

### **Political context of the event**

Having finally quelled the Great Prussian Uprising in 1274, the Teutonic Order proceeded expanding its borders to the east of the Baltic region. During the next nine years it conquered the Baltic tribes' lands Nadrovia, Scalovia, and Western Sudovia; then in 1283 it started a permanent war with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. This lasted until 1422, even longer than the Hundred Years' War in Western Europe. Having reached Nemunas from the south, the Teutonic Order was faced with the defensive structures of the Grand Duchy and found the way much harder than in Prussia. Starting the offensive in 1283, the Order captured the Bisenė castle situated at or near Jurbarkas (*Scriptores*, 1861, Dusb., p. 147).

As Stephen Turnbull points out, the strategy of the Order on the eastern Baltic frontier, starting with the very beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, was to establish a line of castles and forts to support its military operations. Castles were located at the rivers, often at their confluence, as these were main ways of communication across the forested and swampy Baltic lands (Turnbull, 2003, p. 25, 2009, pp. 307–311). Perhaps the frozen rivers could be used for traveling in winter as well. These communication ways were important to Lithuanians also, not to mention that their enemies, the crusaders, used them as routes for transportation of their troops and ammunition. Thus, the defensive system of several dozen of castles on the rivers' banks was built concurrently by the Grand Duchy.

Continually attacking castles on the banks of Nemunas and in Samogitia, after 79 years of struggle the Teutonic Order reached Kaunas in 1362, destroying the Lithuanian stone castle there (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., pp. 531–538). The distance from Jurbarkas to Kaunas is about 80 km, so it could be said that the Order moved its positions eastward at about 1 km per year.

The Lithuanian Kaunas castle was located at the confluence of the Nemunas and Neris Rivers. The latter was usable for inland navigation, providing opportunity to reach the capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Vilnius, and the former capital, Kernavė. Marching by land from the confluence, it was possible to reach Vilnius as well, and Trakai, the second most important center of the Grand Duchy. The Kaunas castle, built up in the strategically important location, was a masonry work, whereas all the other Lithuanian and the Order's castles along the Nemunas River below the confluence were timberworks then.

After the Kaunas castle fell, the struggle became desperate. The crusaders captured four castles in Kernavė and reached the capital of Lithuania, Vilnius, in 1365 (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., pp. 550–553, *Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., Detm., Pos., p. 84). To consolidate its achievements, the Teutonic Order built castles one after the other upstream on the banks of the Nemunas. It seems that by 1384 the crusaders had already built and used four wooden castles. Georgenburg had been constructed near the mouth of Mituva, in current Kalnėnai village, where its hill's remnants can still be seen (Baliulis 1996, p. 29; Baubonis & Zabiela, 2005, p. 222); New Marienburg arose downstream the mouth of Dubysa (Ivinskis 1989, pp. 65–66; Marburgietis, 1999, p. 70). According to archaeologist Gintautas Zabiela, Bayerburg had been built on Maštaičiai hillfort, however, history of this castle is still pending investigation (Zabiela, 2005, pp. 169–171). One more castle – Gotteswerder – arose in 1369 at the very front line, on the island which existed at the confluence of the Nemunas and Nevėžis rivers (Kiaupa, 2013, pp. 17–25). The German Order had strengthened its position further by building the Marienwerder castle at the confluence of Neris and Nemunas. The fortress was built of stone, at least partially, and this is proof of getting them much stronger those days. Thus, the threat to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania grew even bigger, as the crusaders had never achieved so much formerly, nor had they penetrated so deep into the territory of the state. It was obvious that the Order's principal next goal was to take control of the confluence of the Nemunas and Neris rivers. The ways to Vilnius, the capital of the Grand Duchy, and to the eastern part of the state were open from here.

The Teutonic Order's thrust was facilitated by an inner conflict that rocked Lithuania in 1382. The retinue of the Grand Duke Jogaila (Jagiełło) restrained and assassinated his uncle Kęstutis. The latter's son, Vytautas, was arrested too, but he escaped from prison and took shelter with his former enemies, the crusaders. In concert with them, and supported by his allies, mainly from Samogitia (Western Lithuania), Vytautas started raids into eastern Lithuania (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., pp. 618–622, *Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., Detm., Pos., pp. 121–127). But, as it will be discussed hereinafter, Vytautas and his supporters were not loyal and long-standing allies of the German Order.

In the beginning of 1384 the military conflict evolved. On January 1, the grandmaster of the Order issued a letter to Vytautas promising him military assistance in re-conquering his ancestral lands (*Codex epistolaris saeculi*, 1876, p. 1).<sup>4</sup> In return, Vytautas had to pay even a higher price. On January 30, 1384, he issued an act ceding western Lithuania up to the Nevėžis River, including the Kaunas settlement, to the Order (*Codex epistolaris Vitoldi*, 1882, pp. 3–4).<sup>5</sup> On June 14, 1384, in the Marienwerder castle, Vytautas and the grandmaster of the Order Conrad Zöllner von Rothenstein

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<sup>4</sup> There are doubts concerning the dating of the act (*Codex epistolaris Vitoldi*, 1882, p. 3).

<sup>5</sup> Vytautas also promised to administer his ancestral lands as a Teutonic Order fief after regaining them.



reaffirmed their mutual promises (*Codex epistolaris Vitoldi*, 1882, pp. 5–6). The legal points of these documents were unenforceable because Vytautas was only a fugitive duke at that time and did not represent the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Nevertheless, they indicated eloquently the threats arising to the state at that moment.

On February 4, 1384, in Memel (Klaipėda) the representatives of two Samogitian districts, Medininkai and Vangiai, announced their loyalty to the Order and their readiness to support it against all its enemies (*Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., p. 129). This and several similar events showed that Samogitia became in some sense subordinate to the Teutonic Order, and this was a direct splitting of the Grand Duchy. In the beginning of 1384 raids into the eastern Lithuania continued. The Order's forces together with Vytautas's troops invaded Vepriai (now Ukmergė district) and Vandžiogala (Kaunas district) areas (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., pp. 623–624).

Despite these drastic forays, Vytautas did not actually score major victories prior to 1384. However, he became increasingly dangerous to the Grand Duke Jogaila (Jagiello). Moreover, the possibility of Lithuania's being officially baptized and getting closer to Poland was being discussed, and Vytautas's actions did not help in this respect. Therefore Jogaila (Jagiello) decided to invite him to join Lithuanian efforts again. Vytautas left the Order on July 9, 1384. Before his withdrawal, he still managed to cause considerable damage to the Order by leaving the castles of Georgenburg and New Marienburg burnt and taking numerous prisoners (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., pp. 627–628, *Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., Detm., Pos., pp. 130–134, 607–608)<sup>6</sup>. Such Vytautas' actions were a serious defeat of the Order. What the crusaders had gained for decades they had lost in a glimpse of an eye.

These events can be treated as a turning point. Starting from the middle of 1384, Vytautas and Jogaila (Jagiello) began to fight jointly against the Teutonic Order. Their number one goal was to destroy the Marienwerder castle.

## **Construction of the Marienwerder castle: special efforts of the Teutonic Order**

As it was highlighted above, the construction of fortified places was an essential element of the Baltic Crusades. By building the Marienwerder castle the Teutonic Order sought to overtake strategic location which could enable to control the communication route from the Neris and Nemunas confluence to the estuary of the latter. It was evident that Marienwerder would become an important point enabling the Order to ship its troops

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<sup>6</sup> In one passage of the Wigand von Marburg chronicle, repeatedly describing the actions of Vytautas, the author states that the duke destroyed the Bayerburg (*Beyeren*) castle (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 631). In this case most probably he meant Georgenburg, which was called Bayerburg later, since 1387 (see more, footnote 13). Thus, Vytautas destroyed presumably two castles in total, not three.

and ammunition from Ragnit (Ragainė) and to concentrate them here for further military operations towards the centers of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: Trakai and Vilnius.

The Marienwerder castle was built when Vytautas still upheld the Order's side. As claimed in the Torun annals, in 1384, "on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May the grandmaster had moved with a great army to Lithuanian territory where the Kaunas castle had once stood and completed a stone castle in four weeks" (*Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., p. 129). A later date of the expedition, the 24<sup>th</sup> of May, was indicated in a letter of the grandmaster to the Pope (David, 1815, p. 193; *Scriptores*, 1863, Litera, p. 625). Here we may accept the opinion of historian Karl Heintz that the Torun annals most likely mentioned only the departure of the expedition (Heintz, 1925, p. 34), while the letter probably mentioned the actual start of the construction work.

The chronicle of Johann von Posilge states that the grandmaster had repaired, "on boats with great force", to the site of Marienwerder's construction, which took four weeks. "Much work was required" because "bricks and lime" were being transported on demand from Prussia (*Scriptores* 1866, Pos., p. 129). Wigand von Marburg's chronicle also mentions bricks and remarks that the construction took place with the approval of Vytautas (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 626).

Assessing the extent of this military expedition, historian Zenonas Ivinskis wrote that Lithuania had never before seen anything quite like it (Ivinskis, 1991, p. 278).

The importance, to the Teutonic Order, of Marienwerder's construction may be illustrated by the fact that the grandmaster Conrad Zöllner von Rothenstein himself oversaw it from the beginning to the end (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 627). On July 7 he wrote a letter to the Pope boasting about his achievements. The grandmaster stressed at first that the castle was constructed not without immense "funding and expenditure" of the Order. A journey to the site by boat was "not without danger to life and property." The grandmaster's letter specifies the chroniclers' information stating that the construction took less than for four weeks. He finishes by expressing the hope that the castle will be able to "withstand attacks of the aforementioned infidels." (David, 1815, p. 193; *Scriptores*, 1863, Litera, p. 625).

Unfortunately, it is impossible to specify exactly how much manpower and other resources the Order needed to build the Marienwerder castle from such expressions in the sources as "a lot of work" and "huge funding and expenditure". It is even more difficult to answer this question because the size of the stronghold is unknown; there are only some data on the height and width of its walls (see below). However, certain considerations are possible on the basis of an analogy: the data concerning wooden Dubysa castle construction in 1406–1407 from the extant Marienburg treasurer's book. This important fortress of the Order was also built by the Nemunas, at the mouth of Dubysa River, and soon it began to take a shape of economical center (Almonaitis, 2013, pp. 206–243). Thus, although not all the costs were recorded, 250 marks were spent for the construction of this castle only in three months in 1407. Dozens of carpenters and other craftsmen, about 800 ordinary workers were employed there (Almo-

naitis, 2013, pp. 219–225; Ivinskis, 1989, pp. 67, 326; *Das Marienburger Tresslerbuch*, 1896, pp. 443–444). Marienwerder castle, according to the sources, was larger, and masonry work, and arose in very short time. Then, more than a thousand of builders could be employed in the construction, and its cost could reach a four-figure sum.

### **Misleading raid of the Order**

Apparently to distract the Lithuanians' attention from the construction, the Order organized a raid deep into Lithuania, the Vilkmėrgė (now Ukmergė) area. The event is described in the chronicles; it is also referred to in the above-mentioned letter of the grandmaster to the Pope. Consequently, the raid was arranged following the grandmaster's "decision and commission". The forces were led by Ragnit (Ragainė) komtur Wigand von Baldersheim, Vytautas's godfather. A Lithuanian unit of Vytautas' supporters, led by Duke Sudimantas, also participated in the raid. There is mention of 500 men-at-arms marching out, but it is not clear whether this figure includes the Lithuanians. During an unexpected attack, the invaders plundered, burned, and "killed a lot." But the grandmaster, "with a heart heavily burdened by sadness," had to inform the Pope that the raid ended in a complete failure. Probably trying to justify the komtur, he presumed that the komtur allowed the army to march forward, himself remaining in the rear "for the security of others." Meanwhile, Wigand von Marburg reported that the komtur of Ragnit (Ragainė) stayed behind the main army simply because he decided to take a rest and have a bite to eat. The Torun annals depicted the event similarly (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., pp. 625–627, *Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., Pos., pp. 129–130, 134, *Scriptores*, 1874, Summ., p. 224).

Thus Wigand von Baldersheim simply acted too boldly and was caught by Lithuanian forces in the Kulva area (now the Jonava district). According to the grandmaster, they were led by Grand Duke Jogaila (Jagiełło) himself and his brother, Duke Skirgaila. All the sources state that the komtur was killed. The grandmaster points out that some of the brothers (the members of the Order) died as well, many of them were captured; on the whole, the Order lost 23 brothers in the raid. Besides that, eight noble visiting knights and 50 ordinary fighters were killed. Similar figures are given in the Torun annals. Their author expressed the opinion that such a failure occurred only because of Vytautas's "most knavish snares." Later the Teutonic Order also claimed that Vytautas and Sudimantas deceived the crusaders (i.e., led the troops into an ambush). Such a possibility exists. However, speaking about the events of May, we do not know if Vytautas had already decided to abandon the Teutonic Order. But even if the plan had already been conceived Vytautas would hardly have taken the risk to call attention to himself this way (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., pp. 625–627, *Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., Pos., pp. 129–130, 134, *Scriptores*, 1874, Summ. p. 224).

## Location of the castle

Where could the Marienwerder castle be located? The historian William Urban placed it on the Dubysa estuary, but it is obvious that he simply confused the castles of Dubysa (*Thobys*) and Marienwerder (Urban, 1989, p. 179, 2005, p. 212). Karl Wagner wrote that the Kaunas castle's ruins are "the remains of Marienwerder, built in 1384" (Wagner, 1933, p. 65). Apparently following this author, Zenonas Ivinskis also argued that the remains of Marienwerder lie among the recent ruins of the Kaunas castle (Ivinskis, 1989, p. 67; Z. I., 1959). Polish historians Jadwiga Krzyżaniakowa and Jerzy Ochmański claimed that Marienwerder was built next to the ruins of the Kaunas castle (Krzyżaniakowa & Ochmański 1990, p. 78, 2010, p. 87). But the name of the castle – Maria Island – suggests that it is not appropriate to equate Marienwerder with the Kaunas castle which stands on the river bank, but not in an island. Also, no debris of Marienwerder was found during archaeological research conducted in the territory of the Kaunas castle (Žalnierius, 2004, pp. 212–219). Thus, one should look for it elsewhere.

Wigand von Marburg's chronicle says that Marienwerder was built "on an island in front of Kaunas" (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 626). Even more specifically the place of Marienwerder is described in the chronicle of Johann von Posilge: it is "at the Neris River [...] in front of the town where the Kaunas castle stood, on an island" (*Scriptores*, 1866, Pos., p. 129)<sup>7</sup>. The grandmaster noted in his letter that it was written in "Marienwerder ad Nergam" (*Codex epistolaris Vitoldi*, 1882, p. 6). Thus, the castle was associated with the Neris River; and the former village on the left bank of the Nemunas could be seen out of it (*Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., Pos., Alt., pp. 134, 607). Summarizing the data from the sources, it seems justified to accept the opinion of Jurgis Oksas that the castle stood on an island in the estuaries of the Neris (Oksas, 1995, p. 52).

It is important to note at the end of this discussion that according to the maps of the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the confluence of Nemunas and Neris then still looked quite different than now. There were two islands – a bigger one and a smaller one – in that area (*Kauno miesto planai*, 2007, pp. 7–10). The truth is that the maps were composed four centuries after the end of 14<sup>th</sup>, and the geographical situation could have changed essentially over such a long period of time. However, it can be assumed that Marienwerder was on one of these islands. Unfortunately, later the Neris amended its bed. The islands had disappeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and now neither they nor any visible remains of the castle can be seen in the confluence area. However, it seems by comparing old and current maps that the islands could be not washed, but simply "harboured" at a land triangle in the confluence, joining it. Thus the possibility remains that remnants of brick walls of Marienwerder still lie under a layer of silt at the Neris coast, near the mouth of the river.

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<sup>7</sup> Kaunas was named as a town in this passage of Johann von Posilge chronicle. In fact it didn't exist at the time yet (Žalnierius, 2004, p. 210).

This hypothesis was partially supported by some finds of an archaeological reconnaissance survey performed by the author in the summer of 2015, when water level of the Neris and Nemunas rivers was extremely low. Brick rubble and half broken bricks lied around on the bottom at the left bank of the Neris River near its mouth (N 54°53'58" E 23°52'28"). One nearly intact brick was also found there, and it was 29.5 cm in length, 13.5 cm in width and 7.5–8 cm in height. These dimensions are very similar to those of the bricks used in Prussia at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Specifically, two bricks from the Pabėtai (German Pobethen, Russian Romanovo) church built at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (*Mažosios Lietuvos enciklopedija*, 2006, p. 364) were used for comparison, and their dimensions were, accordingly, 28.8–29.5, 13.5–14 and 7.5 cm. Actually, the bricks in the Neris River could be remains of the Kaunas castle located at the river bank some 600 m higher, which come from their former place. The Kaunas castle was built in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century using locally produced bricks of varying sizes (Žalnierius, 2002, p. 19), thus, some of them could be similar to the bricks made then in Prussia. The Kaunas castle was heavily eroded by the Neris stream in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. Significant part of the castle had crumpled into the river before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the process stopped. However, in the author's opinion, an archaeological research in the area of the Neris River mouth may be beneficial in trying to identify exact location of the Marienwerder castle.

Although the castle is not localized definitively until now, historians Marcelli Kosman and Henryk Łowmiański emphasized that it was built “in an important strategic and communicative node”, near confluence of the Nemunas, Neris and Nevėžis rivers. The German Order had opportunity to control all Lithuania from this place (Kosman 1967, p. 36; Łowmiański, 1997, p. 33). One can only go along with this proposition.

### **Exceptional features of the castle**

The chronicler Johann von Posilge dubbed Marienwerder “a great stronghold” (*schone veste*) (*Scriptores*, 1866, Pos., p. 309). Summarizing data from the sources, a German historian Heinel called the castle “impregnable.” So how was it unique, and what did it look like? It is worth starting with the fact, emphasized everywhere, that the castle was brick-built (*muratum*); all the sources state that bricks and lime had been transported to the building site, as stated above (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 626, *Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., Pos., p. 129). The grandmaster in his letter to the Pope also mentioned stonebreakers (*latomis*) involved in the construction, so perhaps at least partially the masonry was made of stone (David, 1815, p. 193; *Scriptores*, 1863, Litera, p. 625).

Describing the attack on the castle, battering rams (wall breakers) (*arietes*) were mentioned (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 630). They were usually used for crushing stone or brick walls. So there was something to break, and this information again confirms

that Marienwerder had such walls. However, was it possible to build a brick castle in less than four weeks? This is hard to imagine, even keeping in mind the Teutonic Order's capability and castle-building skills. On the other hand, there is evidence that the Order was able to mobilize very significant forces in such cases. It is known, for example, that approximately 800 workers were sent to build the Dubysa (Thobys) castle in 1406, excluding craftsmen and the troops who had to ensure protection of the site (Ivinskis, 1989, pp. 57, 326, 1991, p. 332).

But, most probably, at least part of the castle was made of wood. For this rammed clay and wooden logs could have been used, such as those found in another of the Order's castles, Bayerburg, situated near Veliuona (now in Jurbarkas District) (Tautavičius, 2001, pp. 73–74).

Moreover, the chronicles claim there were two castles, the lower one and the upper one. The latter, as reported in the Torun annals, was “tower-shaped” (*Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., p. 136). However, there might only have been a defensive wall around the upper castle, which was then seen as the lower castle.

The Torun annals and Detmar's chronicle are likely to provide knowledge concerning the height and thickness of the castle's walls. There should be noted here that the Torun annals were composed earlier, and the chronicler Detmar relied on the annals' transcript (Ivinskis, 1986, pp. 78–79). Both sources mention an unnamed castle built by the Order in Lithuania with Vytautas's approval and entrusted to him to administrate. This happened in 1384 (*Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., Detm., p. 131). Historian Algirdas Baliulis supposed this was said about Georgenburg (Baliulis, 1996, p. 29). But other sources present no information whatsoever about work done on that castle in 1384. Only Marienwerder was built in that year. So maybe those sources had the latter in mind? At first glance this does not seem so, because the Torun annals provided information about Marienwerder in one of the earlier paragraphs (*Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., p. 129). But even there this name was not used, perhaps because it just was not well-known to the author.

The passage analyzed here mentions “a stone castle”; and that is exactly what Marienwerder was. Georgenburg and other castles built by Teutonic Order at the Lithuanian border were not stone castles, at least not until 1384. One more important thing to mention is that, as the Detmar chronicle reports, the unnamed castle was captured and burned by Vytautas with the help of Jogaila (Jagiełło) and Skirgaila. It is known that Vytautas, leaving the Order on July 9, 1384, had burned Georgenburg and Marienburg by himself (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., pp. 627–628, *Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., Detm., Pos., pp. 130–134, 607–608). Only Marienwerder was captured with the help of Jogaila (Jagiełło) and Skirgaila. We have no choice but to conclude that the two paragraphs in the Torun annals refer to Marienwerder; i.e., that the information about this castle was repeated twice. There are other such repetitions in the chronicle. For example, Vytautas's destruction of the Order's castles in July of 1384 is also depicted twice in the Torun annals (*Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., pp. 130, 133–134).

The “stone castle” having been identified as Marienwerder, it is necessary to transmit the information the chroniclers give about the castle walls. Thus they claim the walls were four rods high above the ground (*altitudo muri supra terram IIII virgarum*, or *veer roden hoch*) and ten bricks or feet thick at the top (*Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., Detm., p. 131). We do not know what particular units of measurement the chroniclers had in mind, but most likely they were so-called old Kulm which used throughout Prussia. A foot equals 28.8 cm in this system. A rod contains 15 feet, so it equals 4,32 m. Thus the walls of Marienwerder were indeed firm – as much as 17 m high and 3 m thick at the top, provided the chroniclers did not exaggerate the figures<sup>8</sup>.

The sources also mention *vorborch*, a lower ward reinforced by embankments, stockades, and moats. These were mentioned in the grandmaster’s letter, too. It is known that during the siege of Marienwerder, the crusaders’ ships reached it and had entered the castle’s “internal waters” (*aquas intermedias*). This indicates that Marienwerder had an inner harbor, as it was often the case in the Order’s castles (David, 1815, pp. 193, 195; *Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., pp. 625, 628, *Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., pp. 135–136).

There are few data on the appearance of the castle; however, from the foregoing it is possible to assume that it might have resembled the so-called motte-and-bailey castles. These were often built in England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Germany, and several neighboring countries in the 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. In Germany around Berlin there remain some 20 motte-and-bailey type castles dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries (Hermann, 1960, pp. 84–94). In neighboring Poland there were about 100 such castles in use until the 15<sup>th</sup> century. “Exporting” its castle-building skills eastward, the Teutonic Order raised up such castles in the lands it conquered.

At first, a small cone-shaped earthen hill, the motte, was formed for such a castle. On it the main part, an inner courtyard (otherwise bailey), particularly well prepared for defense, was constructed. It included a keep (tower). A second, outer, courtyard, not as well fortified, was placed next. Wood and stone were often combined in building such castles. Stone began to replace timber by the 11<sup>th</sup> century in Western Europe, and they were combined at first. This was not unusual in the forested Baltic lands even centuries later until such fortifications lost their military significance (Kaufmann, Kaufmann, & Jurga, 2004, p. 23; Turnbull, 2003, pp. 23–25; Zabiela, 2001, pp. 11–38). The partially remaining earthworks of the former Dubysa (*Thobys*), Bayerburg, and Georgenburg castles along the Nemunas River are good evidence of such fortifications (Baubonis & Zabiela, 2005, pp. 222, 234, 240). Actually, only wooden, medium sized

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<sup>8</sup> Apparently, there was nothing accidental about their measuring the thickness of the walls in bricks, not in feet. In 2014, the author of this article measured several bricks randomly taken from the wall of the currently crumbling Pabėtai (German Pobethen, Russian Romanovo) church, built at the end of 14<sup>th</sup> century just as Marienwerder was (*Mažosios Lietuvos enciklopedija*, 2006, p. 364). It turned out that their length ranges from 28.5 to 29.5 cm, i.e. it corresponds to the old Kulm foot.

forts were built on these earthworks. The Marienwerder castle was different: made at least partially of stone and bricks, probably was much larger.

The new castle was named Sankt Marienwerder (*Senthe Marienwerder*). The name was not original, another Marienwerder castle had already been built in Prussia on the island of the Vistula (Wisła) River; the town nearby is now known as Kwidzyn.

Among all the castles built by the Teutonic Order on the banks of the Nemunas River, Marienwerder stood out as one of the strongest. Presumably the crusaders considered it especially safe, because almost the entire leadership of the Teutonic Order – the grandmaster Conrad Zöllner von Rothenstein, the great komtur Cuno von Liebenstein, the marshal Conrad von Wallenrod, the clothier (*Trapier*) Heinrich Gans<sup>9</sup> and four komturs – met there on June 14, 1384, to confirm the above-mentioned agreement with Duke Vytautas and perhaps use the occasion to celebrate the completion of the castle's construction (*Codex Diplomaticus Prussicus*, 1853, pp. 23–24).

The statement that Marienwerder “was the crusader base for attacks on Samogitia and central Lithuania” expressed by Urban can be fully accepted (Urban, 1989, p. 179). This is also confirmed by the fact that, as soon as the construction of the castle was finished, the Order's marshal sent a letter to his subordinates in Insterburg ordering them to reconnoitre the routes from there to Marienwerder. This task was taken up by as many as seven path guides (*leitesluten*) with their “fellows” and *knechts*. On June 29, the military route weaving through the deserted region of southwestern Lithuania had already been described. Soon the marshal was informed by the Insterburg's officer about it. One month later, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August, one more route was described and even delineated (*Scriptores*, 1863, pp. 682–684).

## Crew, armament, and provision of the castle

The castle garrison was led by the komtur Heinrich von Cleen (*de Cleen*), who had a deputy. It is hard to say how large the garrison was, especially since it received reinforcements while it was besieged. However, the approximate number can be guessed at: one of the sources states that 40 brothers were settled into the castle after its completion (*Scriptores*, 1874, Summ., p. 224). The number of ordinary fighters, going by analogues, should have been at least several times larger. More specific information about the garrison could be provided by data on the dead and captured. Unfortunately, these are not precise (see below). Still, the number of 150 imprisoned defenders of the castle mentioned by the Order's grandmaster looks quite realistic (David, 1815,

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<sup>9</sup> As issued by Hartmut Boockmann, when in Palestine, the Order's clothier acted as a minister, being responsible for the weaponry. In Prussia, this was more an honorary position, but it could be counted among the six highest officials of the Order (Boockmann, 2003, p. 159).



pp. 195–196; *Scriptores*, 1863, Litera, p. 628). Thus the garrison could have consisted of 300 to 400 men. Similar opinion was also expressed by Polish historian Marek Radoch, who claimed that a crew of the Marienwerder castle consisted of “more than 300 men” (Radoch, 2011, p. 74).

One of the chronicles mentions there having been fishermen in the castle (*Scriptores*, 1866, Alt., p. 607)<sup>10</sup>. In such a big fortress there should have been other people serving the garrison as well. This assumption is made likely by information available on other Teutonic castles. For example, various servants, several cooks, a baker, and a priest worked in Dubysa (*Thobys*) castle which existed from 1406 to 1409 near present-day Sereďzius (now in the Jurbarkas District). Most probably, a tailor and a shoemaker lived there, too (Almonaitis, 2013, pp. 229–230).

The castle had gunpowder firearms; there were bombardars, larger ones, and the so-called *pixidibus* of smaller calibre. Presumably the latter were quite numerous; as Wigand von Marburg states, the castle defenders “struck” with them “from everywhere” and killed many attackers (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 629).

### **The attack on and siege of the Marienwerder castle**

Marienwerder could have been destroyed in July already, but initially it was saved from its fate by chance, or, more exactly, by the somewhat careless behavior of Vytautas’s men. As the Torun annals and other sources report, the deputy komtur and some other men of the garrison noticed when they got up in the morning on July 10, that in the former village across the Nemunas where their herd had been grazing there no longer were any animals or people. Becoming suspicious, they soon saw two men drifting down the river by a boat. They were Vytautas’s people. Called to come near, they of course did not obey. The deputy komtur sent his people out to chase them; as a result, one of them was caught up with, and subdued. Under torture, he betrayed Vytautas’s plan and the castle began preparing for its defense. The second man managed to escape and warn the duke who at first did not take any action (*Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., Pos., Alt., pp. 134, 607).

That an attack on the castle was imminent most probably did not surprise the garrison. The chronicle of Wigand von Marburg quotes a conversation between two Lithuanian dukes. Vytautas, asked by Jogaila (Jagiello) whether he was able to take down Marienwerder, said: “You have got lands and people, bring your bombardars, etc. With our power we’ll do it quickly.” (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 629).

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<sup>10</sup> The chronicler Johann von Posilge, describing in the same episode in short, indicates the fishermen of Vytautas, not of the Order (*Scriptores*, 1866, p. 134). It’s not clear which of the sources provide the more accurate information.

Seeing the scale of Marienwerder's fortifications, the Lithuanian dukes had mobilized significant forces for the assault. As pointed out by Johann von Posilge, Jogaila (Jagiełło), Vytautas and Skirgaila came to the castle "with all their forces". The operation involved not only Lithuanian, but also Ruthenian regiments from the eastern lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as well (*Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., Pos., p. 135). The grandmaster wrote later that the castle was attacked by eleven "kings" (i.e., dukes) and "countless pagans and Orthodox" led by Jogaila (Jagiełło) (David, 1815, p. 195; *Scriptores*, 1863, Litera, p. 628).

As can be concluded from the sources, the Lithuanian forces had modern military equipment. Skirgaila brought two trebuchet-type stone-throwing machines called *bleyden* (in German) and plenty of ammunition. The Lithuanian troops also had a more powerful stone-throwing machine (*tumelern, tumelariis*) that seemed especially intimidating to the crusaders. The Lithuanians, like the Germans, surely possessed gunpowder firearms and appropriate projectiles; Johann von Posilge clearly identifies them as *buchsen und geschosse*. The Torun annals also identify the smaller calibre artillery guns *pixidibus* (*Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., p. 135). The grandmaster later stressed as well that the crusaders had difficulties while defending the castle because the attackers wielded siege engines, bombardars (*bombardarum*), and other equipment (David, 1815, p. 195; *Scriptores*, 1863, Litera, p. 628). By the way, Polish historian Antoni Romuald Chodyński noted that this is probably the earliest mention of firearms used by both battling sides (Chodyński, 2006, p. 12).

On the basis of the Torun annals, recognized as sufficiently precise, it may be stated that the great attack on the castle began on September 19<sup>th</sup>. Wigand von Marburg refers to September 21<sup>st</sup>, and Johann von Posilge – even to a later day, September 29<sup>th</sup>. It seems that at first Marienwerder was surrounded by the forces of Vytautas: they besieged the castle so tightly that "no one could leave it". Lithuanian men were not only spread out along the banks of the Nemunas, but they blocked the river as well. It seems the real barrier was erected later, but the Lithuanians laid their "guards" on the banks at once, and this caused great worry to the crusaders. Soon the attackers started to thrust towards the castle, and the first battle took place, bringing fatalities (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 629, *Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., Pos., p. 135).

On the second day of the siege Skirgaila's forces came to Marienwerder as well as, most probably, those of Jogaila (Jagiełło). Continuing their attacks, Lithuanian forces began shooting at the castle from their trebuchets and building a bridge, reinforced with towers, over the Nemunas; in addition, according to Wigand von Marburg, they decided to "dig beneath the castle" (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 629). It is not clear whether the Lithuanians were laying in their own fortifications, or whether they were trying to undermine the embankments of Marienwerder. The latter seems more realistic, insofar as the Torun annals note that later the Lithuanians "made holes in the outside fortification called *vorborch*" (*Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., p. 136).

The struggle see-sawed forth for approximately four weeks. The crusader gunners did well at firing from bombards, hitting and damaging the most powerful Lithuanian siege machine twice. But the Lithuanians kept pace: their ordnance hit and killed the artillery commander Herman himself (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 629, *Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., Pos., Alt., pp. 135–136, 607).

As their attack progressed, the “stockades and moats” were ripped up and the crew had to withdraw from the lower ward (*vorborch*) to the lower castle. Most likely they would not have lasted out there for long; the Torun annals reported that “food reserves and resources were scarce.” But on October 16, the marshal, Conrad von Wallenrod, came by boat to Marienwerder’s aid together with the komturs of Ragnit (Ragainè), Christburg, Elbing, and Osterode. There were also several noble visiting knights from Holland. The marshal had initially settled down nearby, in the Gotteswerder castle close to the mouth of the Nevėžis River. Then he sent the Ragnit (Ragainè) komture Johann von Rumpenheim on a reconnaissance mission. The latter, it seems, was unable to get into Marienwerder himself but somehow managed to let those in the castle know that the marshal’s expedition had arrived and wanted news of their situation. Brother Johann von Straten (*de Strose*), taking great risks, visited the marshal. He recounted the difficult situation facing the castle and asked for help to “chase away” the Lithuanian army. The marshal gave him a very diplomatic answer: “We’ll discuss this” (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 630, *Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., Pos., p. 135).

As the Torun annals point out, next day several crusaders’ ships set out to Marienwerder, despite continuous fire from the Lithuanian *pixidibus* located along the banks. The marshal together with the Christburg and Elbing troops moved on horses and perhaps helped the ships to reach their destination by pushing the Lithuanian forces aside. Protected by “the grace of God” and without noticeable losses, the ships were able to reach the castle, though it remains unclear how they managed to slip by the above-mentioned bridge reinforced with towers. Perhaps the structure had not been completed yet, or it had been destroyed during the armed struggle. Or maybe the chronicler, Wigand von Marburg, described the course of events inaccurately.

In any event, the ships brought food and other supplies, took away the injured, and also brought reinforcements to the garrison. Despite the danger, two noble visiting knights, Johann Buchholtz and another of unknown name, stayed behind in the castle. Then the ships left and apparently stopped again in the adjacent Gotteswerder. Brother Johann von Lorich had arrived from Marienwerder and once again asked the marshal for help. Although he promised it, no help was forthcoming, and this caused great disappointment among the castle’s defenders. The chroniclers gave the excuse that the marshal’s troops were short on food for the men and feed for the horses; frosts were coming soon; therefore they had to withdraw (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., pp. 628, 630, *Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., Pos., p. 135). Polish historians Jadwiga Krzyżaniakowa and Jerzy Ochmański inclined to believe in the chronicles’ statements that the marshal

withdrew “because of food shortage” (Krzyżaniakowa & Ochmański 1990, p. 80, 2010, p. 90). But the truth could have been a little different. The marshal saw that his forces were not sufficient to stand up to the Lithuanians. That is why, according to Urban, he “left the garrison to its own devices” (Urban, 1989, p. 180). It seems the defenders of the castle understood this too and therefore did not fight to the end.

Wigand von Marburg relates that just when the marshal arrived in Marienwerder, he saw a stone (or stone projectile) hurled by the Lithuanians decapitating the castle’s komtur, Heinrich von Cleen (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 630). The defense was then led by the deputy komtur. He faced a difficult situation because after the marshal’s forces withdrew, the Lithuanians finished erecting the bridge (with two towers) across the Nemunas; in addition, they mounted two battering rams. Their attacks became so frequent that the crew, it was said, were not even able to have a quiet meal.

Seeking to determine the situation at the castle garrison, the Lithuanians came up with a ruse. They sent a man to the wall of the castle who told the deputy komtur he was from Ragnit (Ragainė) and had a wife and child waiting for him there. If the deputy komtur were willing to write a message on how long the garrison might be able to hold out, he would deliver it to Ragnit (Ragainė). The deputy komtur took the bait. He handed the “messenger” a letter which was delivered straightaway to Jogaila (Jagiello). In this way the Lithuanians found out that the garrison did not think it possible to resist any longer than two weeks (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 630, *Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., Pos., p. 135).

## The capture of the castle and its destruction

This trick-elicited information raised the morale of the besiegers considerably. On or about November 1, their decisive attack began, launched by using battering rams, catapults, and firearms<sup>11</sup>.

As counted by Wigand von Marburg, during a single day the Lithuanians fired 84 stones or projectiles towards the castle. They also tried to invade the castle by using ladders. When they succeeded in destroying part of the lower castle wall, the ladders were no longer needed. Brother Stober was killed, and the defenders suffered other casualties as well (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., pp. 630–631).

Unable to defend the lower castle, the garrison retreated to the upper one. The Torun Annals indicate that its fortifications were also partially demolished, but still lasted and ensured minimal protection. Then Jogaila (Jagiello) called on the deputy

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<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to remark that, as Wigand von Marburg states, the Lithuanians were called to the decisive attack by “the sounds of trumpets.” Thus, there already were trumpeters in the Lithuanian forces then, preceding the first military bands (*Scriptores*, 1863, p. 631).

komtur to surrender: he threatened that otherwise the castle would be burned with all it contained. It seems that the threat was not bogus, as Wigand von Marburg mentions the attackers had poured pitch and thrown firewood into the castle's moats. The defenders of the castle agreed to surrender, but only on condition that they'd be guaranteed their lives and that each of those surrendering get a handshake from Grand Duke Jogaila (Jagiełło) personally. The Lithuanians agreed and the garrison of Marienwerder capitulated on November 6 after holding out for six and a half weeks. (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 631, *Scriptores*, 1866, Alt., p. 607)<sup>12</sup>.

The main reason for the capture of the castle was the preponderance of the Lithuanian forces. Having ended their internal conflict and unified their forces, the Lithuanian dukes were able to raise a sufficiently large army not only to mount a siege of the castle but also to rebuff the relief forces. It is also worth mentioning that the Lithuanian forces were well-prepared technically. Their tactics justified themselves as well: instead of attacking indiscriminately, the Lithuanians kept up the siege of the castle and piece by piece shattered its walls.

The grandmaster of the Order indicated in his letter to the Pope and the Roman Curia that the Lithuanian forces imprisoned or killed "150 elite men" after the capture of the castle (David, 1815, p. 195; *Scriptores*, 1863, Litera, p. 628). The text of the source is confusing, so there is a question whether the number also includes those killed during the defense of the castle. However, it is more likely that the number refers to the captives only, some of whom were murdered. The letter further states that at the time of writing (i.e., in 1384) 55 brothers and 250 other soldiers still were in Lithuanian captivity.

The chronicle of Wigand von Marburg also states that 55 brothers were captured because of Vytautas's "betrayals" (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., pp. 631). Nevertheless, upon analysing the chronicle it becomes clear that these 55 included not only those captured in Marienwerder but also those captured in Georgenburg (called Bayerburg in the chronicle, as this was the later name of the castle)<sup>13</sup>. It is very probable that about 20 brothers captured in the battle at Kulva were also added in. The Torun annals and another passage of Wigand von Marburg's chronicle mention that some "Christians" were also taken prisoner when the New Marienburg castle was taken (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., pp. 628, *Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., p. 134). Thus it may be said in conclusion that only some 30 brothers of the 55 mentioned could have been captured during the Marienwerder takeover.

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<sup>12</sup> Urban "extends" the siege of the castle until December 1384 (Urban, 1989, p. 180, 2005, p. 213). But the Torun annals state clearly that the castle was defended until *VI Novembris* (*Scriptores*, 1866, p. 135).

<sup>13</sup> According to Theodor Hirsch, an archaeographer and historian, the chronicler meant here the castle which is usually called Georgenburg (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 631, comment 1759). But, since the castle had been rebuilt in 1387, it was called Bayerburg (*castrum Bavarie*), the name another castle had had before (*Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., p. 149). All that caused some confusion of the names in the sources.

The same number of ordinary captives – 250 – was cited once again in a document created in 1412 or 1413 and called the “Summarium von Jagel und Wytaut”. In fact, this document states that all these captives had been imprisoned by the Lithuanians in Marienwerder only (*Scriptores*, 1874, Summ., p. 225). However, this source is less reliable than the grandmaster’s letter mentioned above; the document was written much later and is more propagandistic in nature.

Brother Thegart and several noblemen were decapitated even though their lives had been guaranteed by Jogaila (Jagiełło). Apparently the Lithuanians had unresolved issues with them. Surely, the decapitation was not executed by Jogaila (Jagiełło) himself, though this is what Wigand von Marburg, trying to undermine the Grand Duke’s (and King’s of Poland, subsequently) authority, claimed. (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 631). The rest of the captives were to be ransomed or exchanged for Lithuanian prisoners, since their names appeared again in later sources. One of these was Heinrich Swelborn, who did not surrender immediately, hid in a tower, but was found and thrown down out of it. However, he survived and was put together with the other prisoners. But from 1396 on, Swelborn reappeared as deputy komtur in Königsberg and later held the position of komtur in several castles of the Teutonic Order (Marburgietis, 1999, p. 360; *Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 631).

After capturing Marienwerder castle the Lithuanians demolished it completely. The question arises as to why they did so instead of just continuing to use it themselves as their own fortification. Perhaps the castle had already been severely damaged in addition to having caught fire immediately following its capture. As the sources report, Lithuanian fighters descended into the cellar of the castle using torches for light and chanced upon a barrel of gunpowder which exploded. Many Lithuanians were killed; the castle burst into flames; and this embittered the hard-won victory (*Scriptores*, 1866, Alt., pp. 607–608). Another version is that in 1384 Lithuania did not have the wherewithal to repair such a big fortress and to house and support the appropriate garrison there, so it was deemed advisable finally to destroy the castle.

## **Remarks concerning the second Marienwerder**

There are claims in the historiography that Marienwerder castle was restored already in 1392. Allegedly Duke Vytautas resided in it, and his sister Ringailė’s wedding was held there (Jonynas, 1996, p. 218; Rūkas, 2013, p. 234). However, the sources clearly indicate that the Ritterswerder castle was Vytautas’ residence then, and that is where the wedding took place (*Scriptores*, 1863, Marb., p. 648, *Scriptores*, 1866, Thor., Detm., Pos, Alt. pp. 172–174, 179, 622). Marienwerder was not mentioned in written sources for 18 years after 1384. It must be kept in mind that another Teutonic castle at the Vistula (Wisła) River had the same name; this castle is mentioned quite often in the sources.

Thus in each particular case of future research it is worth checking which of these castles is actually meant.

Wagner and, following him, Ivinskis asserted that after the Salynas Treaty Vytautas helped the Order to rebuild Marienwerder, but demolished it himself in 1410. Supposedly Marienwerder was rebuilt for a third time after that and already then named Kaunas (Ivinskis, 1989, p. 67; Wagner, 1933, p. 65; Z. I., 1959). However, the authors did not refer to any sources, so it is difficult to verify their suggestions, which seem to raise serious doubts. Most probably the authors identified Marienwerder with the Kaunas castle, which was started to be mentioned in the sources again from 1401 on (*Scriptores*, 1866, Pos., p. 241).

Nevertheless, Marienwerder was most probably rebuilt. This could have happened after 1401, when at the end of September the Lithuanians themselves burned down their partially rebuilt Kaunas castle and gave up their positions at the confluence of the Nemunas and the Neris (*Scriptores*, 1866, Pos., pp. 247–248). Apparently, during this Lithuanian retreat the Teutonic Order took the opportunity and tried to rebuild their Marienwerder castle. This is strongly suggested by some information in the Torun Annals. A section devoted to events following the 25<sup>th</sup> of May, 1402 tells us that Vytautas's forces captured two castles, Ritterswerder and Marienwerder, the latter being on the bank of the Neris River (*Mergenwerder super Nerea*). This geographical indication makes it clear that the reference in these Annals is to the object talked about in this article. In fact, it may be suspected that the author of the Torun Annals may have confused the issue. Another chronicler, Johann von Posilge, describes events of the same period and concentrates his entire attention on the capture of the Gotteswerder castle without so much as mentioning Ritterswerder and Marienwerder at all (*Scriptores*, 1866, Pos., pp. 257–258).

Finally, we might stress that the sources do not mention the second siege of the Marienwerder castle; the Torun Annals only state the fact of its capture. This probably shows that the castle was not strong and Lithuanian troops took it with ease. In summary, the fragmented information in the sources says that the second Marienwerder most probably existed briefly and was not significant.

### **The significance of Marienwerder's capture**

By capturing Marienwerder, the Lithuanian forces delivered a very strong blow to the Teutonic Order, thereby causing the huge investments of the Order and its supporters to go to waste. The Order lost a multitude of brothers and ordinary fighters, much ammunition, and many other resources as well. Henceforward it became impossible for them to use the castle as a support for further attacks on Lithuania, and the Order was pushed back from a strategic location: the intersection of two waterways. Position of the Order on the banks of Nemunas had weakened decisively.

On the other hand, the destruction of Marienwerder did not yet mean that the war between Lithuania and the Teutonic Order was totally over. The crucial turning point was reached in the Battle of Grunwald in 1410, when Lithuania and Poland teamed their effort. The peace treaty was concluded even later, in 1422. Nevertheless, this victory at Marienwerder enabled the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to interrupt, and in a certain sense even to stop, the Order's expansion which had been started from Torun. For in a geographical sense, Marienwerder was the farthest Teutonic castle in the east, the most remote from the Order's main support bases: Königsberg, Ragnit (Ragainė), Insterburg, and Memel (Klaipėda). When this castle was destroyed, the Lithuanians finally stopped the crusaders' 101-year-old penetration along the Nemunas River towards the core of the Grand Duchy. Although in 1402 Marienwerder was briefly rebuilt, the Order never moved any further to the east. Hence it may be concluded that the expansion of the Teutonic Order to the east in the Baltic region was stopped right there, at the confluence of the Nemunas and the Neris.

For the Lithuanians, the capture of Marienwerder was a kind of revenge for the defeat they suffered when trying to prevent the destruction of Kaunas castle in 1362. This allowed them to regain their self-confidence; and it fortified the understanding that a unified Lithuania, having put an end to its internecine warfare, can overcome the might of the Teutonic Order. The victory also allowed the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to take a breath; to concentrate its forces for new combats; and to quietly prepare for the Krėva Treaty with Poland to be signed in 1385 and for the baptism to take place in 1387.

## Conclusions

In the first half of 1384, as Lithuania was still split by internecine conflicts, favorable circumstances for further penetration of the Teutonic Order into the central and eastern part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania emerged. The Order took advantage of the situation by building Marienwerder, the castle (military base) that ventured most deeply into the Lithuanian territory and was the furthest in the east with respect to other Teutonic castles.

By building the Marienwerder castle the Teutonic Order sought to overtake strategic location which could enable it to control the communication route from the Neris and Nemunas confluence to the estuary of the latter.

The Teutonic Order paid exceptional attention to the construction of Marienwerder, with all relevant activities being coordinated by the grandmaster himself. An island at the mouth of the Neris River was chosen for the castle. A large military expedition having been organized it was built very quickly: the work started in the middle of May and was finished in almost four weeks. Most of the materials needed, despite



the expense, were shipped from Prussia. The extent of this operation itself shows the importance placed by the Teutonic Order on the Marienwerder castle.

Among the other castles of the Teutonic Order, Marienwerder was distinctive for its size and strength. The fortress consisted of upper and lower castles and a lower ward (*vorborch*); it also had a harbour inside. The walls of the stronghold were at least partially of brick and stone, whereas all the rest castles on the Nemunas' banks were timberworks then. According to the chronicles, their height reached 17 m and their thickness at the top was 3 m. It is likely that Marienwerder was of the motte-and-bailey type, then popular in Europe.

After completion of the castle, 40 brothers of the Teutonic Order were settled there. The castle's garrison probably consisted of some 300 to 400 men. The castle was equipped by gunpowder firearms: bombards and the *pixidibus* (of smaller calibre). Komtur Heinrich von Cleen was the commander of the castle. The Teutonic Order planned for Marienwerder to become the crusaders' base for further battles against the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

In July 1384, the political circumstances changed essentially. The Lithuanian dukes unified their forces and decided to attack Marienwerder. Around September 19–21, 1384, the siege began; it lasted for about six-and-a-half weeks. Lithuania marshaled a particularly large army led by the dukes Jogaila (Jagiełło), Vytautas, and Skirgaila. The attackers used stone-throwing machines, gunpowder cannons and battering rams. The defenders' forces weakened, but a relief expedition led by the Order's marshal Conrad von Wallenrod arrived by ships in the middle of October. However, substantial assistance was not provided for Marienwerder. In the beginning of November the decisive attack had been launched, and the castle capitulated on November 6. It was destroyed by the Lithuanian forces afterwards.

The main reason why the castle was captured by the Lithuanians was the superiority of their forces. Lithuania had concentrated numerous and technically well-equipped troops there, whereas the Teutonic Order was not able to oppose sufficient force to defend the castle.

Data concerning losses of the Teutonic Order are very inaccurate in the sources; however, it can be assumed that some 150 warriors were captured after the surrender of the castle. About 30 of them could be brothers of the Order. Overall, more or less 55 brothers and 205 other fighters were captured during the military action from July 9 to November 6.

Lithuania had scored a substantial victory at Marienwerder. The Order suffered heavy losses and gave up its positions in a strategic location. The war between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Teutonic Order was not over yet, but the Order no longer built any more castles even further to the east. It may therefore be concluded that the expansion of the Teutonic Order to the east which had been started from Torun was stopped at Kaunas.

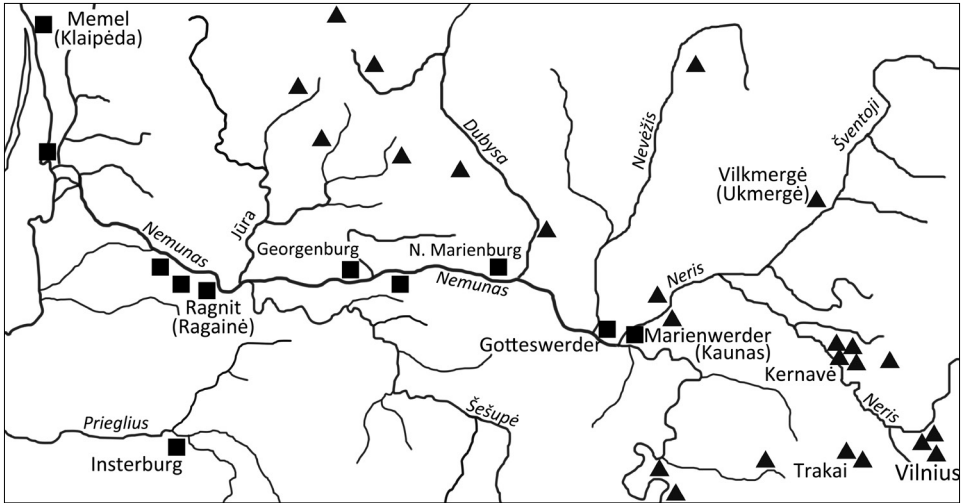


Figure 1. Main castles of the Teutonic Order and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the region under consideration in 1384

Locations of the Teutonic Order's castles marked with squares. Locations of castles of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania marked with triangles. Only the castles discussed in the paper are named. The chart compiled by the author, completed by Manvydas Almonaitis.

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## **The capture of the Marienwerder Castle, or where the Teutonic Order's expansion to the East was stopped**

### **Abstract**

This paper analyzes the construction, features, and significance of the Marienwerder castle, and its capture by Lithuanian forces in 1384. Located in what is now Kaunas, the castle represented the furthest eastern point of the Teutonic Order's penetration into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. As the sparse historiography on it suggests, the event seems to have been overlooked by contemporary historians. In fact, this castle of the Teutonic Order was not just an ordinary fortress, but a mighty stronghold. A detailed analysis of primary sources allows classifying the capture of Marienwerder as a major event in the war between the Order and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as well as one of the major victories scored by the latter. It may be concluded that the Teutonic Order's expansion to the east, which had been started from Torun, was then stopped at Kaunas.

**Keywords:** Marienwerder; Lithuania; Kaunas; Teutonic Order; Baltic Crusades; Vytautas; Jogaila (Jagiello); 1384

## **Zajęcie zamku Marienwerder albo gdzie zakończyła się ekspansja zakonu krzyżackiego na wschód**

### **Streszczenie**

W artykule analizowane są budowa, znaczenie i zajęcie w 1384 r. zamku zakonu krzyżackiego Marienwerder, który mieścił się na terytorium miasta Kowna. Był to najbardziej wysunięty na wschód zamek krzyżacki, który najgłębiej wchodził w terytorium Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego. Skromna historiografia świadczy o tym, że został on zapomniany przez współczesnych historyków. A jednak mowa jest tu nie o zwykłej rezydencji zakonu, a o potężnej twierdzy. Szczegółowa analiza źródeł pierwotnych pozwala uważać zajęcie zamku Marienwerder za jedno z najważniejszych wydarzeń w wojnie między zakonem krzyżackim a Wielkim Księstwem Litewskim, jak również jednym z największych zwycięstw tego ostatniego. Można również twierdzić, że ekspansja zakonu na wschód, rozpoczęta od Torunia, zakończyła się na Kownie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Marienwerder; Litwa; Kowno; zakon krzyżacki; Witold; Jagiello; 1384

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