

MONUMENTA LITERARIA PRUSSIAE

Cezary Tryk

SOKOLNICTWO  
W PRUSACH KRZYŻACKICH  
I KSIĄŻĘCYCH  
OD XIV DO XVII WIEKU



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Friedrich [II., Heiliges Römisches Reich, Kaiser], *De arte venandi cum avibus*

## FALCONRY IN TEUTONIC AND DUCAL PRUSSIA IN THE 14<sup>TH</sup>–17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

[SUMMARY]

When studying the issue of falconry in Teutonic and Ducal Prussia, we have to bear in mind that these were the natives – Prussians – who were hunting with the birds of prey, which was confirmed by sources referring to funeral rites. A chronicler Peter of Duisburg (14<sup>th</sup> c.) provides us with the information that the rich Prussians (nobiles) when burnt on stakes were accompanied with various weapons, hunting devices as well as dogs and falcons. Elements of that rite are also mentioned in another source – Traktat Dzierzgoński of 1249, when referring to a deceased being accompanied on their journey to the afterlife by, among other things, falcons. That, seemingly, strange rite, was a common medieval practice in the territories of Scandinavia, Ruthenia and Lithuania. The Prussians were likely to take up the skill of hunting with the birds of prey either from Scandinavians or Slaves. There are numerous indications pointing at the north and Scandinavian falcons offered by the Teutonic Knights as a tribute from Pomerania to the Polish King Casimir the Great. The very first falconry of the Teutonic Knights in Prussia was founded in Königsberg and must have functioned already in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century as in 1357 a Teutonic falconer of Königsberg sold 39 falcons to England. In 1396 the falconry was established in Malbork and in a short time it became a leading center of falconry of the Teutonic State in Prussia. Falcons from the entire Teutonic territory and neighboring areas were sent there for training and birds of prey were presented as gifts by the Grand Master to over 30 courts.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries Prussian falcons were considered in Europe perfect for hunting, which is best reflected by emperor Maximilian I writing in 1502 to the Grand Master that he lacked the *Prussian* falcons and asking for *fourteen best birds*. The high quality of the Prussian falcons is also reflected in the remarks of Pero López de Ayala, an author of the Spanish treaty *Libro de la caza de las aves* of the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. At the court of the French king, he highly admired a falcon offered to the ruler by the *Grand Master of Prussia*. He claimed it to be the best

one in the world (*el mejor garcero del mundo*). No wonder that all over Europe, even in distant Spain, the Prussian falcons were so highly appreciated and desired by numerous dignitaries and monarch. Moreover, an expression *Prussian falcons* appearing in the 15<sup>th</sup> century sources suggested that they were highly appreciated and clearly distinguished from other bird of prey. Their high value was due to their excellent hunting skills and resistance to unfavorable weather conditions. Konrad von Jungingen, who in May 1401 offered a falcon to Władysław II Jagiełło, extolled the virtues of the bird including its marvelous flight and tremendous efficiency when attacking herons.

In order to train birds of prey it was first necessary to catch them. As far as geographical location is concerned, Prussia was a great ally of the Teutonic Knights. Vast forest areas, a coastline and spring and autumn migration routes along with a close vicinity of Scandinavian countries – the source of various breeds of northern falcons, made Prussian falconries rich with numerous birds of prey. The *Tresslerbuch*, the book of the Malbork treasurer, offers us the most detailed account of origins of the birds of prey sent to Malbork. In the years 1399–1409, when the register of the expenditures of the Malbork treasury was prepared, around 1500 birds of prey were delivered to Malbork, mostly from the area of Königsberg where they were caught by the Teutonic falconers mainly at the Curonian Spit. Other birds were sent from Livonia, Gotland and territories of the Bishopric of Sambia and Erm-land. The catching spots, referred to as *lege* or *ledge*, located at the Curonian Spit were especially intensively explored. In general, the Curonian Spit has remained within falconers' interest for a very long time as still, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Caspar Hennenberger marked on his map a place called *Falkenheide*, a falcon catching spot being a flat area  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile long and wide. He has also mentioned *Kalland* - another place located at the Curonian Spit. In the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Caspar Stein made references to two *falckenbuden* in the neighborhood of the Cranz inn (presently *Zelenogardsk*).

A variety of Prussian birds of prey attracted to that region numerous falconers from other countries, including in the early 15<sup>th</sup>-century falconers of Saxony, Franconia, Meissen, March and Poland. The Europe famous Dutch falconers have also reached Prussia and even in the 17<sup>th</sup> century they annually visited a so called *Jakischkischen Heide*, where on a 600 wloka marsh, located between the Curonian Spit and the River Minga (*Minia*), they set up their catching devices.

Falcon catching has usually started in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of August and lasted until late autumn or winter or even spring in the case of northern falcons. When analyzing delivery dates of falcons reaching Malbork, we can notice that most of them were sent at the beginning of December, only few in spring.

Falconers were catching nestlings (Germ. *Nestling*, Polish: gniazdosz, gniazdownik) as well as young (Polish: *rabca*, Germ. *lapard, junge*) or old flying birds (Germ. *hagard*, Polish: *dziwok*) by means of various types of nets, traps or limes.

Unfortunately, the Order's sources do not bring any descriptions of such devices. We may presume that Teutonic falconers used methods and devices similar to the ones common in Poland or other countries. Particular attention should be given to descriptions of a falcon catching included in the work of M. Cygański, a practicing falconer hunting in Royal Prussia, in a close vicinity of Ducal Prussia. The author of *Myslistwo ptasze* mentioned high skills of Prussian falconers but refrained from commenting on their methods as he considered them too complex to be described.

We may presume that the most popular devices were various types of nets set up near falcons' nests or spots where the birds were likely to appear. A white or black dove as well as a hen were used as a lure. The moment the falcon attacked the quarry, a well-hidden falconer pulled the rope attached to an appropriately set out net which covered the raptor.

Nowadays it is difficult to make a list of birds of prey used in the Prussian falconry as we lack the knowledge concerning the phenomenon of breed variability resulting from environmental or weather conditions and having an impact on the plumage color or the size of the bird. The same breed was referred to in various ways depending on e.g. the bird's sex, plumage or age when it was caught. The sources for Prussian falconry most commonly used a general term *falcken* that should be understood as a peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*). When analyzing the treatises on the old falconry, the main observation is that the terms *falco*, *falck*, or *sokol* used to be understood as one breed, which makes us presume that a term *falcken* found in the Teutonic sources should refer to a peregrine falcon. When sending a greater number of falcons, the Teutonic Knights purposely noted down the rare breeds, e.g. a gyrfalcon (*gyrfalcken*). However, if they were also sending hawks, they were noted down separately, usually as *habich* or *mewserhabicht*, which might have resulted from the fact that hunting with those birds had a different character as hawks are considered the birds of low flight. *Falcken* must have been common birds and peregrine falcons were considered as such at that time.

Another breed of birds of prey popular in the old Prussia determined on the basis of the sources is a gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*), in Polish also referred to as the Icelandic falcon (Germ. *der Gerfalke*). Both in Europe and in the Arabic countries specializing in the falconry, that bird was considered as the most appropriate for hunting. In the Prussian sources gyrfalcons were usually referred to as *gyr- gir- ger-* and *geierfalcken*. Remarks concerning the use of these birds are common. The expenditures of the *Tresslerbuch* make us conclude that the Order paid for that breed much more (usually 4 grzywna) than for an "ordinary" falcon. Information about purchases of gyrfalcons in the book of the treasurer appeared in the years 1399, 1401, 1402, 1403, 1405, 1408 and 1409. According to the list of expenditures of the treasurer the greatest number of gyrfalcons was purchased in 1408. Two of them were sent from the aldermanship of Grobin (8 grzywna), one

from Königsberg (4 grzywna), one, with no place of origin mentioned, cost 4 grzywna. In the years 1399–1409 there were eleven gyrfalcon purchased for 27.5 grzywna. Taking into account the fact that in the years mentioned above the Order acquired 1413 falconers, such a low number of gyrfalcons proves that even in the case of “wholesale” purchase and shipping that breed remained a true rarity, which also explains their high price. Bearing in mind that the Icelandic falcons were treated – as the old falconry treatises seem to suggest – as especially desired for hunting, it is easier to understand why they were a truly regal gift. In that context it is not surprising that remarks concerning *gyrfalcken* were always underscored in the Teutonic registers of falcons sent to foreign courts. We also come across three remarks concerning gyrfalcons in the registers of birds offered as gifts in the years 1533–1569 by Albert of Hohenzollern.

Another bird of prey appearing in the sources is a hawk, usually referred to as a *habich* or *mewserhabicht*. It is mentioned relatively seldom, though more often than gyrfalcon, presumably due to its current prevalence all over Europe. As catching a hawk did not pose a major problem, it was not often “exported” from Prussia. However, training a hawk, especially an older one, was not an easy task, which might have had an impact of considering well-trained hawks as a valuable gift.

The purchase of falcons took up the greatest part of falconry expenditures – in the years 1398–1409 they were  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the total. The prices of falcons purchased by the Order at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century usually varied between 1 and 2 grzywna of silver. The further the distance (Windawa, Grobin, Ozylia), the higher the price, still, the costs of transport were covered separately. The birds acquired in northern part of the Teutonic State might have been considered more valuable, whereas the least expensive (usually 1 grzywna) were birds sent to Malbork by the commander of Königsberg. Birds purchased in the Bishopric of Ermland usually cost 1.5 grzywna whereas the ones from the Bishopric of Sambia, Livonia, the Bishopric of Ösel–Wiek or Gotland were 2 grzywna per bird.

The costs of transport constituted the second part of the total expenditures on falconry in the Teutonic State in Prussia. The costs can be divided into two groups – the first one includes the costs of delivering birds to Malbork – a collecting point for all falcons, the second covers the transport from Malbork to foreign courts, which was definitely more expensive especially when bearing in mind that they were sent to several dozen of courts, including overseas ones (England). In 1400 the transport of falcons to 16 courts, excluding bird food, was 76 grzywna, whereas a delivery to Malbork was 22 grzywna. All costs associated exclusively with transport were 21.79% of all expenditures (451.9 grzywna) earmarked that year for the falconry.

The total falconry expenditures for the years 1398–1409 were 3322 grzywna, out of which 2231 were spent for purchase of falcons. Within ten years 1399–1409 the lowest amount of money spent on falconry was 171.9 grzywna (1407),

the highest – 451.9 grzywna (1400). Having added and averaged all expenditures recorded in that period, the Order was annually spending around 306 grzywna for falconry, which made about 10% of annual Order's diplomatic spending.

Birds were delivered to Malbork and sent further in appropriate cages, referred to as *Kase* or *Kage*. The birds of prey were perched at least at the human height. The cut was made in the middle of the rung to attach the long jesses. The cages could be neither too small nor too big or too high, not to cause problems during transport as it might lead to wing damage or, in case of severe frost that makes falcon's claws stiff, the bird might fall off the perch. A part of a cage was covered with a linen cloth to prevent birds' damage. One cage could hold eight to twelve falcons.

When sending falcons to foreign courts, apart from paying porters, the sender had to cover the costs of falcon food which were not low as the birds had to be fed mainly with poultry. Information concerning the amount and type of food for birds of prey was noted down when sending falcons to Burgundy or England. In 1400 the falconers with two cages of falcons were sent to England and given four 4 grzywna for food to be purchased in England. For the time of transport the birds of prey were provided with 2 kopa of hens and 10 kopa of eggs. In addition, 5 korzec of grain was purchased for the hens. The total cost of transport was 9.5 grzywna. In 1406 an unknown number of falcons transported to England was provided by the grand steward with 129 hens and 10 kopa of eggs. Additional money was spent on 16 szefel (korzec) of barley, 1 szefel (korzec) of wheat for the hens and 4 storage barrels for barley and water as well as 2 baskets for the hens. In 1409 falcons sent to Burgundy were fed with 50 hens and 4 rams.

The expenditures on falconry in Prussia included also utensils and falconers' furniture. Falconers of the Teutonic Order used the hoods for birds' heads and falconry bells, presumably also gauntlets. The sources do not mention the remaining items such as: falconer bags, block perches, jesses, creances or lures, which might suggest that they were making them themselves. However, we do find information about other accessories – *Falkenschilde*, characteristic for the old falconry. They were little silver or golden plates attached to falcons' legs, bearing the name of falcon's owner. *Falkenschilde* were used when hunting in case any of the birds got lost or escaped. The falcons of the Grand Master had silver plates with ducal coats of arms. Such expenditures are rarely mentioned as they were used only for the birds that accompanied the Grand Master. In 1404 twelve silver *schildichin* with ducal coats of arms cost 1 grzywna and two 2 skojec. In 1408 we come across a remark about 12 *falkenschilde* that together with two silver seals for the land commander and procurator of Tylża cost 2 grzywna. That amount of money suggests that the Grand Master was hunting with 12 falcons.

At the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century there were two or three falconers and possibly one bird catcher active in Malbork, one falconer in Königsberg and a few



falconers in Windawa and Grobin who had, however, a different scope of responsibilities including bird catching and delivering them to Malbork. Presumably each of them had two helpers as such a number of people was paid when delivering birds to Malbork. A total number of falconers active in the Teutonic State in the period in question ranged between 5 to 7, with additional 20 helpers. The bishops of Sambia, Ösel–Wiek and Ermland also had his personal falconers.

Falconers of the Grand Master were well-off as their annual income might have reached 90 grzywna, however, its considerable part covered the costs associated with falcon catching. We can easily analyze the income of the major falconer of Malbork – Piotr. In 1400 he was given back 30½ grzywna for the purchase of 19 falcons in Sambia. He has also obtained 3 grzywna for the falcons he caught and received 4 grzywna and 3 kopa of the Prague groschen for his knechts. He was also paid 3 grzywna for delivering the birds of prey from the grand commander to the indicated recipients (among others to the Hungarian king and the bishop of Chełmno). Falconers were supported by knechts that might have been employed mainly for transporting falcons or bird catching, preparing nets or other devices. They were usually paid 1 grzywna for the transport, sometimes they were also given cloth or shoes, as it was the case of knechts transporting falcons from Ruthenia or Lithuania. With all certainty falconers were also taking part in transporting birds to foreign courts, though we do not know what amount of money was spent on their remuneration as a total cost of transport, including “strawne” and bird food, is usually mentioned. In 1408 the falconer Piotr was paid 27.5 Prussian grzywna, 20 Hungarian gulden (10 grzywna and 20 skojec) and 7 kopa of the Prague groschen (10.5 grzywna) for transporting falcons to Hungary, France, Württemberg, Nuremberg and to the count of Katzelenbogen.

Highly-advanced Prussian falconry at the time of the Teutonic Order was indivisibly linked with diplomacy as the birds of prey were used as unique and precious gifts. The importance of that type of presents in the Order’s diplomacy was already stressed by 19<sup>th</sup>-century Prussian and Polish historians who underscored their political (winning allies and military resources) and economic benefits (obtaining free duty on wine).

The analyses of the available sources make us conclude that since the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the Teutonic Order was annually sending abroad several dozen or over a hundred of falcons. These numbers have varied depending presumably on the number of the birds of prey acquired by Teutonic falconers. A tradition of sending falcons as gifts was continued also in the ducal times and in the times of Albert of Hohenzollern we may talk about its upturn. Only at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century such presents ceased to play an important political role and were gradually put aside.

The recipients of falcons included over thirty royal, electoral, ducal, count, archbishop or bishop, mainly German courts. Some of them received the Teutonic

falcons only sporadically, others almost every year. The expenditures noted down in the *Tresslerbuch* along with the register of falcons offered as gifts preserved in the *Ordens Folianten*, enable us to make a list of recipients of the Prussian falcons in the years 1399–1409, 1431–1432, 1434–1438, 1449 and 1451–1453.

Such presents were of special importance at the times of military conflicts between the Order and Poland. There was a considerable decrease in the number of falcons sent by the Order, especially to their traditional allies from the circle of duchies of the German Reich. It can be clearly noticed especially before the military conflict of 1409–1411. When analyzing the number of falcon shipments taking place in the previous years we see that preparations to win the allies for the oncoming war started already in 1408. In 1407 the Order sent only 57 falcons (including 3 hawks) to 12 foreign courts whereas in the year preceding the outbreak of the military conflict (1408) the number of recipients and birds being sent significantly increased. Moreover, the Order sent more gyrfalcons – the most valuable birds of prey. The Teutonic Knights have sent 90 falcons, it is almost twice as many as the year before, to 17 courts – 5 more than in the previous year. These differences suggest that falcons must have been a specific encouragement to support the Order. We should rather exclude that a difference in numbers of falcons sent in 1407 and 1408 was a result of a smaller number of birds being caught in 1407 as out of 92 birds shipped to the Malbork 56 were sent abroad. A year later out of a total number of 122 birds, 90 were sent, which means that even in case of unfavorable year the Order had a reserve that could be used when needed. Similarly to the situation before the great war, also during the conflict between Poland and the Order (1431–1435), there was a noticeable increase in the number of diplomatic efforts of the Grand Master aimed at finding allies. It was also reflected in the higher number of birds of prey sent as gifts, as noted down in the registers of falcon shipments in the years 1431–1432 and 1434–1438.

The greatest number of birds of prey was sent in 1431 when the army of the Order invaded the Dobrzyń Land, Kujawy and Krajna. A significant increase in the number of falcons observed in that year is even more evident when compared with shipments taking place already after signing the peace in Brześć Kujawski, it is after 1435. In 1435 the Order sent 89 falcons, a year later only 53, in 1437–98, and in 1438–57. In the first year of war (1431) the Teutonic Knights shipped 155 birds of prey and a year later 128. It seems that the falcons being offered were partly bringing the desired results, as exemplified by the letter of Ludwig, the Palatinate of Rhine, of 1 January 1431 to the Grand Master thanking for 8 falcons and offering his military support.

The falcons from Teutonic Prussia, particularly famous and appreciated, found a number of willing buyers, which is confirmed by numerous letters to the Grand Masters asking for falcons. The Order did not always respond positively, trying to select only such recipients who would bring them the greatest benefits.

Nevertheless, the refusals to send falcons were formulated in a diplomatic manner, usually giving as a reason an insufficient number of wild birds being caught due to unfavorable weather conditions.

A special place in the hierarchy of the recipients of Teutonic falcons was taken by the Rheinland that also supplied the Order with wine. The commander of Koblenz – a famous wine trading center – was obliged to supervise the wine export to the cellars of the Grand Master in Malbork. It turned out that the number of falcons offered to Duke of Cleve, the Rheinland Palatinate, or to Burgrave of Nuremberg had considerable impact on a successful wine trading. These dignitaries complained on numerous occasions about a low number of falcons being delivered and threatened the Grand Master that if a situation persisted, it would result in imposing duty on wine sent to Prussia.

In the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the falconry in the State of the Teutonic Order might have experienced a considerable stagnation. Historic sources bring almost no information about the period between 1453 (the time of sending falcons to foreign courts) and 1492, which might have been a result of the Thirteen Years' War and its consequences. We may presume that during military actions, as it was the case of previous wars (1431–1435), the shipment of falcons stopped. After signing the Peace of Thorn, the Teutonic falconry must have experienced significant difficulties due to the loss of Malbork, the famous falcon training center, and financial difficulties as we have to bear in mind that after the Thirteen Years' War the Order's income was considerably reduced. Maintaining the falconry, especially sending falcons abroad, was very expensive and it might have had an impact on a decrease in the number of birds being sent. The falconry flourished again in the last decade of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. At the beginning of the 1490s, during the rule of the Grand Master Johann von Tieffen, the sources mention again the shipments of falcons from Teutonic Prussia. Their number clearly increased at the times of his followers: Duke Frederic of Saxony and Albert of Hohenzollern. Both rulers, originating from the ducal families of the German Reich, pursued intensive diplomacy connected with a rejection of the Peace of Thorn and an attempt to get independent from Poland. These actions would not be possible without a support of emperor Maximilian who hoped to use the case of Teutonic Prussia as a means of exerting political pressure on the Jagiellonian dynasty, his rivals in Bohemia and Hungary. His active involvement in the issues of the Order was reflected in numerous falcons he was offered and requested. Moreover, a rapid secularization of the Order's authorities might have positively influenced a development of falconry. Already in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century an official ban on hunting with falcons by the Order's Brethren was not much respected, which is proved by an instruction of Konrad von Erlichshausen (1441) addressed to two inspectors of the Order's districts in Livonia, forbidding them to enter the church with dogs or falcons.

Changes that took place in Prussia after the secularization had also an impact on falconry. The duke introduced regalia for falcon catching, resulting from the then contracts between falconers and the ruler who employed them. Already in the period of the first 10 years the duke maintained his falconer referred to as *Falkenmeister* or *Falkenfaber*, and offered him usually a two-year contract. He was obliged by the duke to hand in to the ruler, not to any other person, all the falcons he would take from the nests or catch in any other way. Moreover, he was obliged to teach and train the young falconers. A falconer was paid 1 grzywna for an "ordinary" falcon and 3 grzywna for a *Geierfalken*. A ducal nomination was usually valid for two years, then it was either renewed or the duke hired another falconer. A short-time contract might have been partly explained with an attempt to keep the falconers diligent, on the other it functioned as a kind of protection against possible frauds with changing the selected falcons during their transport to foreign recipients as the most common one. Such a situation is reflected in the complaints of the Queen Mary, the governor in the Netherland, who in 1546 complained to the Prussian duke that his falconers were changing the falcons meant for her, selling the better ones and delivering her the worst birds. To avoid such practices, the duke added a special attachment to the "falcon letters" – a feather cut out of the falcon's tail to make it possible for the receivers to check whether the bird was not changed by proving if the feather belonged to the falcon selected by the duke. Only during the rule of Albert's followers, his son Albert Frederick, falconers were allowed to trade with falcons, though only with the ones not selected by the duke.

One of the most interesting sources concerning the falconry in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Prussia is a register of falcons sent from Prussia to foreign courts in the years 1533–1569. It is significant due to a broad time span it encompassed, which offers a possibility to analyze changes related to the number of falcons being sent and the circle of their recipients. It is also an evidence that the Prussian falcons remained an attractive present, it provides us with an account of a persisting tradition of hunting with the birds of prey and, above all, it reaffirms the role of Duke Albert in their delivery. A closer analysis makes us notice some dependencies between the number of falcons being granted and the ducal politics towards their recipients. In the period in questions 1796 birds of prey were sent from Ducal Prussia. If we divide it into 30 years, we get an annual average of about 57 falcons. In fact, the number of falcons varied greatly, as in 1537 78 birds were sent, in 1550 and 1560 80 each year and in 1533 only 34.

The analysis of the above mentioned register brings a few conclusions. When compared with the previous period (Teutonic Prussia) the hierarchy of granting the falcons has changed. The shipments of falcons to foreign courts was a specific reflection of changes in international politics of Prussia resulting from the secularization of the Teutonic State, making it a fief of the Polish Crown and declaring Lutheranism an official religion in Prussia. In that way Prussia found itself in conflict

with the then political powers – the Emperor and Papacy. The situation was most clearly reflected in the number and directions of falcon shipments. These changes concerned especially the duchies of the German Reich and the Emperor himself as until recently he had been the one most generously presented with falcons. The judgement of the Reich's court sending Albert on exile (1532) and officially declaring him the enemy of the Emperor, must have influenced a number of falcons granted to Charles V, as he received the birds only three times: in 1540, 1543 and 1544.

By significantly favoring the French rulers (Francis I, Henry II, Francis II, Charles IX) as to the number (10–12) of falcons (often also gyrfalcons), is also a reflection of a general tendency in diplomatic efforts of Albert of Hohenzollern. France, being then the main enemy of the Habsburgs, automatically became the duke's ally. In spite of the fact that Albert feared an official alliance with France and did not take such a risk, in the hierarchy of granting the falcons the French court occupied the first place. The lack of an open alliance with France, due to the fear for a final breach with the Emperor and dependency of Prussia from Poland remaining among the Habsburgs' allies, was also reflected in the falcon presents.

An analysis of a well-established tradition of sending falcons to England also brings interesting results. The last Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, Albert of Hohenzollern, maintained friendly contacts with England, however, after transformation of the Teutonic State into a secular duchy, diplomatic contacts with England were interrupted. They were resumed after a reform of the church aimed at declaring the English king its head, which took place in 1534 and coincided with resuming diplomatic contacts with Albert. It was presumably the initiative of Henry VIII who in that year sent to Prussia William Paget, a member of a secret royal council. The English king was honored by duke Albert with 12 falcons. Later on, Paget delivered the falcons to the king along with letters to other English magnates also accompanied by falcon gifts. Since then, falcons were regularly sent to the court of Henry VIII and after his death to his followers (Edward VI, Maria Tudor and Elisabeth I), as well as they were generously offered to the dignitaries of the English court. Such presents were usually accompanied by letters. Thanks to these gifts and contacts maintained, Albert received current information concerning the situation at the English court and diplomatic initiatives of the kings. As some of the letters addressed to the English court suggest, the duke hoped for obtaining help from the king of England in case of a military conflict of Ducal Prussia with the Emperor. Moreover, during the reign of Elisabeth I, a passionate hunter, who systematically received Prussian falcons, the duke made several attempts to retrieve the ships of the Prussian merchants captured by privateers on Queen's duty. Good contacts with Elisabeth were to help Albert to achieve the best conditions for his merchants to maintain trade with England. He was even successful in that field as in 1563 Elisabeth gave her consent to free trade of a ducal merchant Antoni Maillt

between the English and German coast. The Queen ensured him that there her royal "captains" would not cause any problems, which she made due to her friendship with the duke. A rich correspondence referring to the shipment of falcons to the English court provides us not only with information concerning the Prussian falconry in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. An important element of these letters is a political context and various diplomatic efforts of the Prussian dukes, which may complement the state of our knowledge about the relationships between Ducal Prussia and England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Albert of Hohenzollern by means of the falcons was trying to obtain information from the English court and get a support of people close to the king. The duke used falcons as a pretext for making and maintaining the acquaintances (provided that it was beneficial for him), if it was not the case, the recipient did not develop closer relationships (cooperation on information exchange).

When by means of falcons duke Albert deepened the relationships with France and England, he also limited the number of falcons sent to some German duchies, which meant a sudden political turn to some of contemporary or former allies of the Teutonic State. According to a register for the years 1533–1569, the list of recipients from the duchies of the German Reich has significantly decreased when compared with the Teutonic period. As a Protestant, duke Albert has found himself within the duchies introducing Reformation and that is why the Prussian falcons were rather sent to Protestant rulers than to Catholic duchies. Permanent recipients of the Prussian falcons included predominantly Albert's allies, being at the same time proponents of German Reformation. According to the number and a multiple of falcons sent, the first place is granted to duke Philip, the ruler of Hessen who was usually offered six falcons and given the birds of prey every year between 1533 and 1544.

Similarly to other countries, also in Poland the duke supported the efforts of his diplomatic services with presents in a form of birds of prey, especially to win the favor of the nobles, predominantly Protestant families of Wielkopolska and Małopolska. A visible element of creating closer links with them were tokens of friendship in a form of precious falcons.

Diplomatic presents offered by the Prussian dukes to Philip II of Spain were of a smaller importance. However, as they were kindly accepted, they were sent there on regular bases. The rules of the Prussian duchy must have known about Spanish king's passion for hunting. It should be remembered that the costs of sending the birds of prey from Königsberg to Spain must have been really high, which did not prevent duke Albert and his followers from continuing to send them until 1579. It is clear from the context of the correspondence that Philip II of Spain was into hunting with birds of prey and highly appreciated the falcons sent from Prussia, which, again, proves the high level of training of ducal falconers and the quality of the birds being delivered. The fact of expressing on numerous occasions

his gratitude for delivering "intact" falcons also proves high skills of the falconers on such a long journey. Even today the transport of birds requires much effort on the side of the falconers to provide the birds with optimum peace and comfort. \* The fact of delivering healthy birds ready for hunting after a long journey, lasting even four months, must have aroused a sheer admiration, as evidenced by remarks of the king in his letters to the duke.

At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century there was a significant decrease in the number of falcons being sent from Prussia, which was a result of a growing independence of the Prussian State. On the other hand, there was a successive drop in interest in that form of hunting all over Europe in favor of hunting with firearms. Nevertheless, it does not mean a total degradation of that type of hunting, however, when compared with previous periods, a considerable change has been noticed as it became only an entertainment of a ruler (if he was into it), it was, however, the end of acquiring and sending Prussian falcons on a large scale.

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