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QUARTERS IN THE MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY SYSTEM IN LATE MEDIAEVAL PRUSSIAN TOWNS*

Abstract

The article seeks to comparatively analyse the functions implemented in the Late Middle Ages by quarters in the main towns or cities of Prussia, including Rechtstadt Danzig (Main City of Gdańsk), Altstadt Königsberg (Old Town of Königsberg [today Kaliningrad]), Braunsberg (Braniewo), Altstadt Thorn (Toruń), and Kulm (Chełmno). Special attention is placed on answering the question of how the quarters participated in the municipal authority structures and the relationships between town councils and the commons. Quarters in Prussian towns developed since the fifteenth century, somewhat later than in East Central European towns. Establishment of these units was based on several premises: organisation of fiscal accountancy, fire safety concerns, military purposes, and town councils' strivings to reinforce control over the dwellers. Influenced by the city revolts at the beginning of the fifteenth and in the sixteenth century, town councils took efforts to create a system of mobilisation and communication with the inhabitants that would work without the intermediation of guilds (as in Elbing [Elbląg], Danzig, and Thorn). Subordination of the older quarters to the municipal authorities caused, moreover, that in the face of internal or external threat, the community appeared as a community ruled by town councillors.

Keywords: urban history, Prussian towns, urban space, urban community, late medieval towns and cities

Neighbourhood communities in mediaeval towns have, until most recently, aroused no special interest among Polish historians focusing on urban areas. Halina Manikowska has identified a deficit in this particular research field: assessing, at the turn of our century, the ups and downs of Polish urban historiography, she remarks that “we are

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basically setting off as regards neighbourhood structures”.¹ Quarters, which appeared in the Middle Ages in almost all large and medium-sized towns of Central and East Central Europe, have to be regarded as one of the most important forms of neighbourhood community. To define the urban areas which are most frequently termed a *quartale*, *Viertel*, or *Quartier*, in Latin and German sources, two elements are key: the precisely determined spatial scope and the administrative and legal status as confirmed by the urban legislation. The earlier research in mediaeval Central European urban areas perceived quarters chiefly through the prism of their functions in the military and defensive organisation and in the fire protection system, as well as in the context of development of the communal system.² The social aspects have been considered to a larger extent in the urban quarter research only since the 1970s. From the beginning of the twenty first century onwards, quarters have been part of the interest of researchers dealing with neighbourhood and social perception of urban space.³

The origins of quarters in large towns of the German Reich date to the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, although in towns developing on the basis of Roman town-planning tradition – such as Vienna, for example – divisions into quarters began in the early thirteenth century.⁴ The chronology of the development of quarters

¹ Halina Manikowska, ‘Miasta i mieszczaństwo na ziemiach Polski w średniowieczu – postulaty i perspektywy badawcze’ in Wojciech Fałkowski (ed.), *Pytania o średniowiecze. Potrzeby i perspektywy badawcze polskiej mediewistyki* (Warszawa, 2001), 114.

² For a discussion of the earlier research, see Johannes Schultze, ‘Die Stadtviertel. Ein stadthistorisches Phänomen’, *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte*, xcii (1956), 18–39.

³ Robert Jütte, ‘Das Stadtviertel als Problem und Gegenstand der frühneuzeitlichen Geschichtsforschung’, *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte*, cxxvii (1991), 235–60; Arnd Reitemeier, ‘Kirchspiele und Viertel als “vertikale Einheiten” der Stadt des späten Mittelalters’, *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte*, cxli/cxlii (2005/2006), 603–40; Jeroen F. Benders, ‘Nachbarn und Behörde. Formen und Funktionen von Vierteln und Nachbarschaften in spätmittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Städten im Osten und Norden der Niederlande anhand der Fälle Zutphen und Groningen’, in Hanno Brand, Sven Rabeler, and Harm von Seggern (eds.), *Gelebte Normen im urbanen Raum. Zur sozial- und kulturgeschichtlichen Analyse rechtlicher Quellen in Städten des Hanseraumes (13. bis 16. Jahrhundert)* (Hilversum, 2014), 130–3.

⁴ Ferdinand Opl, *Alte Grenzen im Wiener Raum* (Kommentare zum Historischen Atlas von Wien 4) (Wien, 1986), 92–3; Ernst Pitz, *Die Entstehung der Rats Herrschaft in Nürnberg im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert* (München, 1956), 130–1; Schultze, ‘Die Stadtviertel’, 30–1.

in the largest East Central European cities shows no significant delay compared to the Reich's cities. The split of the urban area of Breslau into four quarters is confirmed by sources dated to the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century; the quarters of Cracow are mentioned in a statute dated 1375.⁵ In the light of existing research, quarters originally contributed to the defence of the ramparts. As towns developed, they took over other municipal administrative functions, mainly fire protection, control of inhabitants, care of the poor and orphans, and the fiscal organisation. In late mediaeval period, with exacerbated conflicts for power in towns, quarters became one of the arenas where communities expressed their political aspirations. For this reason, in certain towns, commanders and representatives of quarters were appointed, at the end of the fifteenth and in the early sixteenth century, for the assemblies electing town councils and controlling municipal finances. The quarter-based neighbourhood community gained, in turn, the right to participate in making decisions regarding their own quarter or the town in its entirety.⁶

Quarters in large Prussian towns have hitherto been studied mainly from the local standpoint, in the context of research into individual urban hubs. The research presented herein regarding the quarters in the Main City of Danzig, the Old Town of Königsberg, Braunsberg, the Old Town of Thorn, and Kulm attempts at comparatively analysing the functions that determined the development of this particular form of neighbourhood community. Special attention is placed on the question in what ways the quarters participated in, and contributed to, the municipal authority structures and in/to the political relationships between oligarchic town councils and the commons.

Quarters were introduced in the Main City of Danzig in 1416, immediately after the suppression of the artisan revolt which was targeted

⁵ Mateusz Goliński, 'Wokół przemian przestrzennych polokacyjnego Wrocławia', in Jerzy Rozpędowski (ed.), *Architektura Wrocławia*, ii: *Urbanistyka* (Wrocław, 1995), 31; Theodor Goerlitz, *Verfassung, Verwaltung und Recht der Stadt Breslau*, Part 1 (Würzburg, 1962), 8; Marcin Starzyński, *Das mittelalterliche Krakau. Der Stadtrat im Herrschaftsgefüge der polnischen Metropole*, Städteforschung, Reihe A: Darstellungen, 92 (Köln, Weimar, and Wien, 2015), 93.

⁶ Ferdinand Opll, 'Wien – nach Köln eine der bedeutendsten Städte des Regnum Theutonicum. Ein Städtevergleich', in Wilhelm Janssen and Margret Wensky (eds.) *Mitteleuropäisches Städtewesen in Mittelalter und Frühneuzeit. Edith Ennen gewidmet* (Köln, Weimar, and Wien, 1999), 73; Jütte, 246–7; 'Das Stadtviertel', Schultze, 'Die Stadtviertel', 25, 31; Benders, 'Nachbarn', 142–4.

against the merchant-dominated town council and the monetary policy pursued by the territorial ruler. For this reason, attacks from the burghers affected, in the first place, the councillor named Gerd von der Beke, who rented the Danzig mint and was a member of the group of followers of the Teutonic Order.⁷ The internal situation sorted out, the town council submitted to the Grand Master a letter describing the undertakings meant to contribute to the municipal and territorial authorities' increased control over the local commons. The petition mentions, in the first place, that the city is divided into quarters: "Zcum irsten. Wie sie die Stat in vier teyle haben geteylet" – each headed by one of the four burgomasters supported by his two assistants elected among members of the council and the court of lay assessors (or, lay judges' benches).⁸ The subsequent points concerned a limitation of the municipal government (the territorial ruler had to consent to election of new councillors) and increased control of the council and territorial authority over the guilds. Hence, the origins of the *Rechtstadt* Danzig's quarters should be associated with the town council's strife for creating new tools with which to control the town's society. The course of the 1416 revolt demonstrated the weakness of the existing structures, which were mainly based on control of craftsmanship guilds. The division of the area into quarters was meant to create conditions for direct contacts between the municipal authorities and the burghers, neglecting the corporate organisations. As it was stated in the petition to the Grand Master, the burgomaster, in his capacity as the quarter-master, was expected not only to administer his district but also to visit its inhabitants and be aware of the needs they have reported.⁹

The new stage in the development of Danzig's quarters was set by a *Willkür* (Pol. *wilkierz*, i.e. set of regulations enacted by the town council) dated 30 June 1451 which modified the organisation of the quarter authorities and allocated to them tasks related to the city's fire

⁷ Max Toepen (ed.), *Acten der Ständetage Preußens unter der Herrschaft des Deutschen Ordens* I (Leipzig, 1878), 282–90; Paul Simson, *Geschichte der Stadt Danzig*, i (Danzig, 1913), 146.

⁸ Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz Berlin-Dahlem, XX. HA, Ordensbriefarchiv, no. 2452.

⁹ *Ibid.*, "sal vor eyn virteyl rathen, den sal ouch das Qwartir besuchen, wenn sie einer bedurffen".

protection and military organisation.¹⁰ As stated in the introduction to the said regulations, those contributing to the establishment of the quarters included councillors and lay judges as well as the commons, though no representative of the latter was appointed as a member of the quarter's authorities. Each of the quarters was headed by three elder *Quartierherren*, another two elected from the council team and one from the lay judges. Participation of the dwellers was only marked when it came to building a lower-level neighbourhood community authority. Quarters were split into units called *Rotts*, formed of inhabitants of ten houses and headed by the *Rottmeisters* elected by burghers: "dat eke 10 hueser in elkem quartirsal hebben eyne ratemeister". In the case of fire or military threat, those residing within the individual *Rotts* were supposed, led by their *Rottmeisters*, to submit themselves to the command of the quarter's elders. During the Thirteenth Years' War, 1454–66, quarters were used not only in organising the town's defence system but also for fiscal purposes. The list of 1,513 inhabitants of Danzig paying taxes on mercenary troops, compiled in 1460, is broken down into three quarters.¹¹ The city order statute issued by the town council in the latter half of the fifteenth century reinforced the importance of quarters in the fire protection system and in what may be termed the street security maintenance system.¹²

Quarter-based neighbourhood communities in Danzig provided, however, no spatial or organisational framework for participation of the citizens in making decisions and expressing their aspirations for contributing to the municipal authority. In the course of the conflicts for power between the town council and the commons which took place in 1520–6, the citizens' postulates were submitted by guild elders and by spontaneously created leaders of the populace.¹³ That quarters might contribute to building the representation of burghers was only proposed by the royal commission appointed to settle internal conflicts within large Prussian cities. On 20 July 1526, King Sigismund I the Old (Zygmunt Stary) issued a statute determining the new administrative model for the city of Danzig. Apart from the

¹⁰ Paul Simson, *Geschichte*, iv: *Urkunden bis 1626* (Danzig, 1918), 105.

¹¹ State Archives in Gdańsk, ref. no. 300, 12, 398; Paul Simson, *Geschichte*, i (Danzig, 1913), 257, 260.

¹² Simson, *Geschichte*, i, 305.

¹³ Maria Bogucka, 'Przemiany społeczne i walki społeczno-polityczne w XV i XVI w.', in Edmund Cieślak (ed.), *Historia Gdańska*, ii: 1454–1655 (Gdańsk, 1982), 227–36.

old administrative and judicial bodies – the town council and the lay assessors' court – the *Statuta Sigismundi* established a new body as a representation of citizens, called 'the council of one-hundred men' (*centumviri*). Its members were to be elected by the council within the respective four quarters, twenty-five from each quarter among merchants and elders of the four main guilds.¹⁴ Making the neighbourhood community part of the new political system was thus essentially meant to challenge the position of guilds against the merchant oligarchy and to increase the council's influence on the composition of the body representing the citizens.

The interrelation between the quarter organisation and the building of authority structures above the municipal corporation became evident also in the course of internal conflicts occurring in 1525–6 in Elbing, both being towns chartered under the Lübeck law – namely, Elbing and Braunsberg. A commission appointed by the king granted both cities new statutes in August 1526, which formally took into account the commons' postulates regarding their participation in the rule, but actually confirmed the oligarchic domination of the patriciate. Composed of thirty-two citizens, the council, which was meant to function as a consulting body to the town council, included six representatives of each quarter and eight members of the main guilds. Town councils preserved, however, the right to elect citizens representing the quarters.¹⁵

Similarly to Danzig, the Altstadt Elbing introduced the division into quarters in the second decade of the fifteen century; however, the functions to be fulfilled by the new system of inhabitants' organisation were dissimilar to those present in Danzig. The city's division into five quarters was first mentioned in 1414, in the context of the town council's expenditure on redevelopment of the ramparts. Each quarter was headed by two councillors, to whom the town had entrusted funds earmarked for the construction works. It can be presumed on this basis

¹⁴ Paul Simson, 'Die Danziger Stadtverfassung im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert', *Korrespondenzblatt des Gesamtvereins der deutschen Geschichts- und Altertumsvereine* 53 (1905), 7; Bogucka, 'Przemiany społeczne', 246.

¹⁵ Max Toeppen, *Elbinger Antiquitäten. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des städtischen Lebens im Mittelalter* (Danzig, 1873), 260; Henryk Zins, 'Rewolta w Elblągu w 1525 r.', *Zapiski Historyczne* xxii, 4 (1956), 7–50; Andrzej Groth, 'Ustrój', in Andrzej Groth (ed.), *Historia Elbląga*, ii, Part 1 (Gdańsk, 1996), 38; Franz Buchholz, *Braunsberg im Wandel der Jahrhunderte* (Braunsberg, 1934), 98.

that residents of each of the quarters were responsible for keeping in good condition and defending their allocated section of the town's fortifications.¹⁶ Improvement of the city walls' or ramparts' defence system was, therefore, of primary importance for introduction of the quarters in Altstadt Elbing. Actions taken by the municipal authorities in view of improving the city's defensive potential were correlated with the dominant tone appearing in the justification of subjecting Elbing to the Polish and Lithuanian army after the Battle of Grunwald of 15 July 1410, where the Teutonic Order troops were defeated.¹⁷ The introduction to the land register set up in 1417 states that a poor condition of the fortifications disabled the defence and forced the city to pay homage to the Polish king.¹⁸ The council's involvement in the organisation of the quarter system is attested by a register described as *Registrum de custodia murorum, turrium atque valvarum civitatis*, kept from 1417 to 1452 to record the names and surnames of quarter elders and facts related to defence of the ramparts and fire safety.¹⁹

Noteworthy is the fact that until 1428 the names of the elders were recorded in two different lists, based on the functions fulfilled by the quarters. One of them concerned fire safety ("von dem brande") and, apart from the elders' names, specified the fire-fighting equipment that ought to have been stored in four of the quarters. The other list testified to the tasks fulfilled by the five quarters mentioned in 1414 as part of the city's defence system – "dy stat bynen czu vorwarende". Described in it are sections of the walls, towers and turrets as well as city gates defended by dwellers of the five quarters and the guilds. The abolishment in the early 1420s of the fifth quarter made it possible to standardise the quarter systems, originally set up for defence of the walls and for the organisation of fire services,

¹⁶ Markian Pelech (ed.), *Nowa księga rachunkowa Starego Miasta Elbląga 1404–1414*, ii (Warszawa, Poznań, and Toruń, 1989), no. 1440.

¹⁷ Markian Pelech, 'Die Teilnahme der Altstadt Elbing am Großen Krieg (1409–1411) und ihre während des Krieges erlittenen Schäden', *Beiträge zur Geschichte Westpreußens*, x (1987), 52–4.

¹⁸ State Archives in Gdańsk, ref. no. 369, 1/ 118, 1; Theodor Hirsch, Ernst Strehlke, and Max Toeppen (eds.), *Scriptores rerum Prussicarum*, iii (Leipzig, 1866), 400.

¹⁹ State Archives in Gdańsk, ref. no. 369, 1/3006; Max Toeppen, 'Das Elbinger Kriegsbuch', *Altpreussische Monatsschrift* 36, 2 (1899), 263–5; Janusz Tandecki, *Średniowieczne księgi wielkich miast pruskich jako źródła historyczne i zabytki kultury mieszczańskiej (organizacja władz, zachowane źródła, działalność kancelarii)* (Warszawa and Toruń, 1990), 121.

respectively.²⁰ From 1432 onwards, the *Registrum de custodia murorum* features comprehensive records related to all the functions performed by quarters – that is, internal defence of the town’s area, fire safety, and control of the armament possessed by the burgers: “die stat bynnen czu vorwachten das fuer und brand, und ouch den hamasch bynnen der stadt czu besehende”.²¹ The lists of the quarters’ dwellers, compiled in the middle of the fifteenth century, were connected to the functioning of the quarters.²²

Each of the quarters was headed by six elders, two of them elected among the council members and four among burghers.²³ Based on the information contained in the sources dating to the early sixteenth century, it may be presumed that the town council appointed all the elders, including those from the circle of citizens. Initially, the main guilds delegated their representatives to the quarter’s authorities, but in the 1420s the town council deprived them of this right, probably fearing increased importance of guilds.²⁴ An interesting image of exercising the council’s power within the quarters is provided in the account on the city’s defence during an unexpected attack of the Teutonic Order troops on Elbing in 1521, as per the local chronicle by Christoph Falk.²⁵ In describing the preparations for the defence, the chronicler points, among other things, to the role of the quarters in mobilising the burghers. Each quarter possessed its own ensign which was kept at the house of the councillor acting as the commander. The moment information on the threat of attack or fire appeared, the quarter’s dwellers were supposed to gather around the councillor who,

²⁰ In the early 1420s, the section of the walls adjacent to the Dominican monastery, which was initially defended by inhabitants of the fifth quarter and the guilds of fishermen and clothiers/drapers, was allocated to the fourth quarter; State Archives in Gdańsk, ref. no. 369, 1/ 3006, 12, 35; Artur Semrau, ‘Die Register über die Bewachung der Altstadt Elbing aus dem 15. Jahrhundert’, *Mitteilungen des Copernicus Vereins für Wissenschaft und Kunst zu Thorn*, xxix (1921), 51–3.

²¹ 369, 1/3006, 18–34; Toeppen, ‘Das Elbinger Kriegsbuch’, 265–73.

²² State Archives in Gdańsk, 369, 1/ 2988, 2989, 2991, 2992.

²³ State Archives in Gdańsk, ref. no. 369, 1/ 3006, 3, 13, 18, 22–4, 27–34.

²⁴ Bertha Quassowski, ‘Obriegkeitliche Wohlfahrtspflege in den Hansestädten des Deutschordenslandes (Braunsberg, Elbing, Königsberg, Kulm and Thorn) bis 1525’, ii, *Zeitschrift des Westpreußischen Geschichtsvereins*, lx (1921), 53–4.

²⁵ Christoph Falks, *Elbingisch-Preussische Chronik. Lobspruch der Stadt Elbing*, (ed.) Max Toeppen (Leipzig, 1879), 77; Marian Biskup, “Wojna pruska” czyli walka Polski z Zakonem Krzyżackim z lat 1519–1521 (Olsztyn, 1991), 398–407.

in the middle of the street, in front of his house, held the standard unfolded. A unique identification sign, organisational structure and common action doubtlessly offered the basis for formation of the neighbourhood community's identity. It has however to be stressed that the quarter's dwellers commonly defending the town or participating in extinguishing fires appeared as a community operating under the leadership of the council.

The sources do not answer the question when and in what circumstances the town of Kulm brought about its division into quarters. Zenon H. Nowak supposed that it could have taken place at the beginning of the fifteenth century, in association with the modernisation of the defence system after the experience of the war of 1409–11;²⁶ however, this hypothesis has not been confirmed based on the sources. The earliest extant description of Kulm's quarters is part of the introduction to a register set up around the year 1430 to record the rents paid by realty owners.²⁷ It may therefore be presumed that in Kulm – as well as in some German towns, Würzburg being an example – the need to organise a system of collecting rents and taxes was the most important premise behind establishing the quarters.²⁸ The quarters in Kulm primarily served fiscal purposes also in the modern period. There is only one source-based piece of information testifying to their other functions: a municipal statute of 1590 includes an instruction to elect from the quarters those burghers who exercised oversight of the wells.²⁹

A mention of the quarters in Thorn first appears in a *Willkür* of 1523. They probably existed before then, for in reference to the quarter masters (Ger. *Viertelherren/Viertelmeister*) this source refers to a good old habit.³⁰ Initially, the quarters' functions were mainly limited to

²⁶ Zenon Hubert Nowak, 'Przyczynek do układu przestrzennego średniowiecznego Chełmna', Sławomir Kalembska et al. (eds.), *Historia i Archiwistyka; księga pamiątkowa ku czci profesora Andrzeja Tomczaka* (Toruń, 1992), 311.

²⁷ Dörte Meyer and Günter Meyer (eds.), 'Ein Kulmer Zinsbuchaus der Mitte des 15. Jahrhunderts (um 1448–1457)', *Quellen und Darstellungen zur Geschichte Westpreußens*, xl, 3 (Münster, 2017), 25–6; Franz Schultz, 'Die Stadt Kulm im Mittelalter', *Zeitschrift des Westpreußischen Geschichtsvereins*, xxiii (1888), 11.

²⁸ Reitemeier, 'Kirchspiele', 629.

²⁹ Zbigniew Zdrójkowski, 'Nieznane źródła prawa chełmińskiego z XVI i XVII w.', *Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne*, xxiii, 2 (1971), 155; Marek Grzegorz Zieliński, *Chełmno civitas totius Prussiae metropolis XVI–XVIII w.* (Bydgoszcz, 2007), 59–61.

³⁰ State Archives in Toruń, Records of the City of Toruń (Akta Miasta Torunia), Cat. II, I, no. 4, 5.

aspects of fire safety. The postulate to determine the functions of commanders of urban quarters was among the demands submitted by a delegation of the citizens to the town council on 13 November 1523.³¹ It is thus apparent that, rather than establishing a system of quarters in Thorn, the regulations of 1523 considerably extended the tasks of their elders and thereby initiated a dedicated quarter-managing office within the town council.³² The adoption of the statute marked the conclusion of the burghers' revolt against the council, which had lasted since March 1523. The new municipal statute aimed, primarily, at reinforcing the power position of the town council, including through introducing new instruments of control of the urban life.³³ It is in this context that the tasks allocated to the elders of the respective quarters ought to be considered. Although the *Willkür* mentions the election of such elders, it gives no details of the procedure, apart from the enactment providing that one of the elders has to be a member of the council. The duties of quarter elders essentially consisted of controlling the inhabitants' political attitudes, observance of the law, and the condition of the buildings situated within the limits of their subordinate districts; the other responsibilities included caring about fire safety and readiness to defend the city walls. Quarter elders were supposed to inspect all the houses within their districts twice in a year, in the spring (three weeks after Easter) and in the autumn (three weeks after St Martin's feast day). The reports the quarter commanders were obliged to submit to the councillor in charge of construction affairs were meant to specify the condition of the ramparts, types and number of buildings and other structures (houses, sheds, granaries, cellars), street cobblestones and cleanness of the streets, wells, fire extinguishing equipment, and occupancy of the living spaces. Responsibilities of quarter elders included, moreover, submittal of information on the residents of their subordinate quarters. The council was interested in individuals holding the municipal rights, the job structure of the

³¹ Józef Buława, *Walki społeczno-ustrojowe w Toruniu w I połowie XVI wieku* (Toruń, 1971), 95.

³² Helena Piskorska, *Organizacja władz i kancelarii miasta Torunia do 1793 r.* (Toruń, 1956), 17; Stefan Cackowski, 'Terytorium, ludność władze miejskie', in Marian Biskup (ed.), *Historia Torunia*, ii, Part 1: *W czasach renesansu, reformacji i wczesnego baroku 1548–1660* (Toruń, 1994), 34.

³³ Marian Biskup, *Historia Torunia*, ii, Part 1: *U schyłku średniowiecza i w początkach odrodzenia 1454–1548* (Toruń, 1992), 158–9; Buława, *Walki społeczno-ustrojowe*, 134–45.

locals, the quantity and quality of armament kept at homes, and stocks of cereal. Quarter superiors were also expected to inform on any and all offences against the law and the statutory regulations (*Willkür*), and control the work of the guardians. What is more, they took over part of the duties related to the care of the orphans, were expected to present to the council information on deceased orphans and control the accounts of those administering the minors' estate. The council perceived the quarter elders as one of the instances of the vertical authority structure; it is for this reason that they were expected to appoint the *Zehenden* (commanders of ten men) and *Rottmeisters* to take command of smaller units that helped mobilise the residents in the event of fire or external military threat.³⁴

The immediate reason behind the launch of quarters in Altstadt Königsberg in 1505 was a fire that destroyed a portion of the city's built-up area. In order to improve the fire protection system, the town council appointed eight elders for each of the quarters, among whom, in each of the teams, two came from the council and the lay assessors' court and four represented the citizens. Their main task was to care about the condition of the fire-fighting equipment and observance of the fire protection regulations. With the publication of the quarter-establishing statute, the town council purchased leather pails, ladders and hooks useful in extinguishing fires; the implements were distributed to the *Rottmeisters* of the respective quarters.³⁵ It has to be emphasised that, as opposed to the other Prussian towns, the quarters of Königsberg probably had no essential role in the city area's defence system – as may be inferred from a statute regarding the city's defence system, issued by the Grand Master in 1507, which includes no instructions whatsoever in respect of quarters.³⁶

³⁴ State Archives in Toruń, Records of the City of Toruń, Cat. II, I, no. 4, 5–6; Quassowski, 'Obrigkeitliche Wohlfahrtspflege', 57; Buława, *Walki społeczno-ustrojowe*, 135, 144.

³⁵ Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin-Dahlem, XX. Hauptabteilung, Ordensbriefarchiv, no. 18 985.

³⁶ Roman Czaja, 'Statut o obronności Królewca z początku XVI wieku', in Grażyna Rutkowska and Antoni Gąsiorowski (eds.), *Memoria viva: studia historyczne poświęcone pamięci Izabeli Skierskiej (1967–2014)* (Poznań, 2015), 728–35.

CONCLUSION

The extant sources present quarters as a rather diverse phenomenon, given the homogeneous urban landscape of late mediaeval Prussia. This observation holds true with respect to the chronology as well as functions of the neighbourhood communities. Danzig and Elbing had their quarters set up in the second decade of the fifteenth century, whereas for Thorn, Braunsberg, and Königsberg such structures are only attested by sources dating to the early sixteenth century. Compared to the lands of Poland and the German Reich, quarters in Prussian towns appeared with some delay, which cannot be satisfactorily explained without relevant sources available. It is possible that in the early fifteenth century the tasks related to defence of ramparts and fire protection system were mainly implemented with support of local guilds and informal neighbourhood communities. While analysis of testimonies related to quarters in Prussian towns confirms the view that their neighbourhood communities were multifunctional, it points, in parallel, to diverse circumstances of their introduction. In Kulm, quarters were fundamentally established to meet the needs of the local fiscal accounting system; in Königsberg, the basic premise was fire safety considerations; in Elbing, military purposes came to the fore; in Danzig and Thorn, the respective town councils' strivings for reinforced control of the inhabitants.

The establishment of quarters in large Prussian cities was also influenced by the determinants related to late mediaeval internal conflicts, although less intensive in Prussia compared to the Reich; yet, the commons' postulates to participate in the municipal authorities and control of town councils posed a threat to the dominant position of the merchant oligarchy.³⁷ The sources evidencing military performances offered by the residents of Thorn and Elbing indicate that until the early fifteenth century the local artisans fulfilled their duties mainly by intermediation of the guilds.³⁸ Apparently, such a situation would

³⁷ Edmund Cieślak, *Walki ustrojowe w Gdańsku i Toruniu oraz w niektórych miastach hanzeatyckich w XV wieku* (Gdańsk, 1960), *passim*.

³⁸ Dieter Heckmann, with Krzysztof Kwiatkowski [contrib.] (eds.), *Das Elbinger Kriegsbuch (1383–1409). Rechnungen für städtische Aufgebote* (Veröffentlichungen aus den Archiven Preussischer Kulturbesitz 68) (Köln, Weimar, and Wien, 2013), 92, 93, 97, 98, 103, 106, 110–12, 159–60; Krzysztof Mikulski, Janusz Tandecki, and Antoni Czacharowski (eds.), *Księgi szosu i wykazy obciążeń mieszkańców Starego*

undermine the observation that organisation of military contingency forces according to guilds was typical of towns whose political system was guild-based, whereas towns ruled by merchant oligarchs organised their municipal military troops through the quarters.³⁹ The political and economic supremacy of merchants, together with the administrative tools launched for the councils, since the 1380s, to control the guilds, ensured stability of the institutional framework of Prussian towns or cities. The dominant influence of the merchant oligarchs on the rule in the urban area was first undermined only by the Danzig revolt of 1416. A similar situation reappeared, now across Prussia, in the 1520s. Influenced by these experiences, the town councils, supported to this end by the territorial authorities, made endeavours to develop a system of mobilisation of the locals which would circumvent the intermediation of guilds. Extant sources attest to the functioning in Elbing, Danzig, and Thorn, in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, of vertical organisational structures which were based upon topographic divisions and neighbourhood communities (quarters, *Rotts*, tens) that enabled the councillors to directly communicate with the dwellers and to control the local community. Subordination of quarter elders to the municipal authority implied, moreover, that under internal or external threat, the municipality appeared as a community ruled by its councillors.

trans. Tristan Korecki

Miasta Torunia z lat 1394–1435 (Toruń, 2002), 135–68; Krzysztof Kwiatkowski, 'Die militärische Funktion der Städte unter der Herrschaft des Deutschen Ordens in Preussen (vom 13. bis zum Anfang des 15. Jh.)', in Roman Czaja and Carstern Jahnke (eds.), *Städtelandschaften im Ostseeraum im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Toruń, 2009), 184; Krzysztof Kwiatkowski, with Danuta Molenda [contrib.], *Wojska Zakonu Niemieckiego w Prusach 1230–1525. Korporacja, jej pruskie władztwo, zbrojni, kultura wojny i aktywność militarna*, *Dzieje Zakonu Niemieckiego*, 3 (Toruń, 2016), 172–3.

³⁹ Schultze, 'Die Stadtviertel', 28; Reitemeier, 'Kirchspiele', 634; Eberhard Isenmann, *Die deutsche Stadt im Mittelalter 1150–1550. Stadtgestalt, Recht, Verfassung, Stadregiment, Kirche, Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft* (Wien, Köln, and Weimar, 2012), 455.

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