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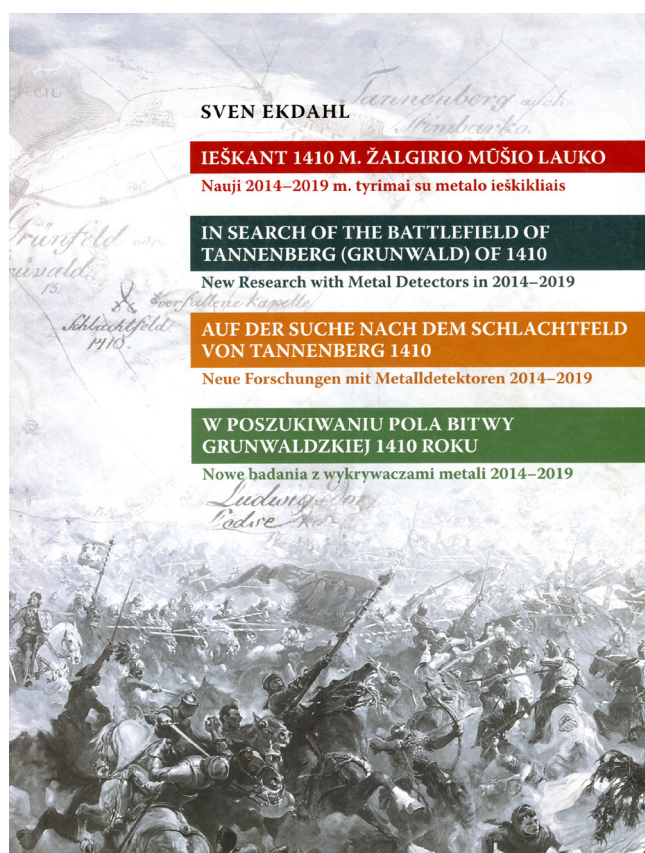
(REVIEW) SVEN EKDAHL, *IN SEARCH OF THE BATTLEFIELD OF TANNENBERG (GRUNWALD) OF 1410. NEW RESEARCH WITH METAL DETECTORS IN 2014–2019*, VILNIUS 2019, PP. 279. ON THE PROBLEMS OF BATTLEFIELD RESEARCH

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The problem of the course of the Grunwald Battle has aroused lively interest among Polish and European medievalists, military historians, archaeologists, and history enthusiasts for decades. They are fascinated with the still not fully deciphered course of the campaign of 1410 and with the course of this battle in particular, one of the greatest in medieval history.¹ Therefore, it is not surprising that a new publication by a well-known researcher of the Battle of Grunwald, Professor Sven Ekdahl, has been met with great interest by the scientific community.

The book was published in four languages (Lithuanian, English, German, and Polish), has a total of 279 pages and consists of introductory chapters, historical background, structure of the depiction of events, and presenting the results of individual research campaigns from 2014-2019. As a result of these archaeological campaigns, Sven Ekdahl has found that they support his hypothesis that the Polish-Lithuanian and Teutonic armies on the vast fields around the village of Grunwald-Stębark were positioned much more to the southwest than was taken into account by the older



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¹ Summary of research questions concerning the Battle of Grunwald, cf. Kwiatkowski 2015.

concepts of J. Voigt or A. Nadolski based on Jan Długosz's description (see p. 18-19).

From reading the first chapter one can already notice that Sven Ekdahl consistently omits previous achievements in the study of the Grunwald battlefield (authored by Professor A. Nadolski together with a team of collaborators) in favour of his own studies. For example, a list of literature concerning discussions on the location of the battlefield at Grunwald, exclusively citing the works of S. Ekdahl (p. 49, footnote 41), may serve as an example. It is also noteworthy that when he refers to various experts in order to support his thesis, not infrequently their selection is highly questionable – such as Romulad Odoj, quoted several times (see p. 35, footnote 27; p. 37, footnote 29), otherwise known for his inconsistencies and mistakes in descriptions.²

The book in question documents the course of the most recent survey of the Grunwald battlefield, carried out between 2014 and 2019. Dr Piotr A. Nowakowski of the Grunwald Battle Museum was the coordinator of this work. Each season a large group of detectorists carefully searched the designated research area, each season obtaining numerous historical materials, mainly arrowheads and crossbow bolts, equestrian equipment and horse ranks, and numerous period coins. This collection was presented to interested observers as an unusual and unprecedented result of the excellently organised research.

But is this picture not different? On the basis of rather laconic reports published in “*Nowe Studia Grunwaldzkie*”, as well as in the book in review, it can be stated that the way the work was done leaves a lot to be desired. Several decades ago battlefield archaeology developed its own methodology and method of presenting research results. The standard is the delineation of research sectors, planigraphy of finds, etc.³ However, the Grunwald survey was conducted in a very chaotic manner – no specific survey sectors (corridors) were delineated, the detectors moved freely on a ‘free electron’ basis within a generally designated area (individual crop fields). GPS tracks were not recorded for all passages, as some participants were without such devices. Thus, some of the material does not have a well-documented location. From reading the book (p. 89) we learn that in the first survey season in 2014, 15 of the 22 prospectors had devices that allowed them to record their passage routes. The reader thus misses the important fact that about 30% of participants did not have such devices. This state of affairs is implied to have been the case

during all the campaigns,⁴ confirmed by the fact that in the following chapters the author indirectly mentions that not all searchers recorded GPS tracks (e.g. p. 109). Thus, in spite of the fact that seven years have passed since the search was resumed, we have still not seen a proper study of the historical material acquired during that time. The perfunctory descriptions of the recovered objects prepared by A. Miksa and later by P. Kutyla, published in the above-mentioned “*Nowe Studia Grunwaldzkie*” can hardly be regarded as such.⁵ This documentation is also used by Sven Ekdahl. Most of the items included in the inventories are dated broadly, between the 15th and 16th centuries. This begs the question – on what grounds are these items connected with the Battle of Grunwald?

Yet another problem is the lack of properly prepared maps with planigraphy of recovered artefacts, specifying particular categories of objects, e.g. spearheads of bolts, coins, etc. Such maps, when they appear in the publications, are completely illegible (e.g. Fig. 27). Such studies have been standard in research conducted on battlefields for many years.⁶ The lack of such lists makes it impossible in practice to use the results of the research.

Future analyses of the course of the battle will be all the more difficult because Sven Ekdahl highlights the clear substantive differences between the reports published by Piotr A. Nowakowski and what was actually surveyed during the 2014-2019 seasons. For example, 128 hectares were supposed to have been surveyed in 2014⁷ compared to the 155 hectares reported by Glenn Abramsson (p. 91-93). Is this a simple error or does it mean that material concerning about 30 hectares has ‘escaped’ somewhere?

Similar differences are detailed for subsequent research seasons, with inaccuracies also noticeable in the number of finds of particular categories of militaria (e.g. p. 125). It is also worrying that the cooperation paths of the people involved in the project had already diverged during the 2016 campaign and the finds from this season do not have traced passage routes with GPS devices. These are to be supplemented in the future (p. 135). From the 2016 season some of the historic materials were not included in the inventory lists prepared by E. Miksa (p. 137). These numerous shortcomings will certainly affect the results of the study in the future.

⁴ See e.g. Nowakowski 2015, 80, Fig. on p. 81; Nowakowski 2016, 114.

⁵ E.g. Miksa 2017; Miksa 2018; Miksa 2019-2020; Kutyla 2019-2020.

⁶ See Wrzosek 2017, 90-92, Fig. 10.

⁷ Nowakowski 2015, 80.

² Strzyż 2011, 86-87.

³ For more information on this topic, see Wrzosek 2017, 86-87.

In S. Ekdahl's work, objects that have been identified as related to the battle have been published in such a way that is completely inconsistent with previous practice. These are photographs of antiquities usually taken before conservation, often photographed in bags together with metrics. Unfortunately, this state of preservation has not changed much to this day. So how to conduct a scientific study of them in such conditions?

The results presented in this way very clearly confirm Sven Ekdahl's hypothesis that the battle took place further to the south-west than the reconstructions made so far by, among others, A. Nadolski. However, there is a catch in this reasoning: the entire battlefield and its surroundings have not yet been thoroughly researched. The researchers clearly do not take into account that the technical development of metal detectors, vastly improved in the 40 years since the previous research was conducted, allows for a much more accurate search than the equipment used by Polish teams in the 1960s and 1980s. The site, which has already been the subject of archaeological interest in the past, should therefore also be thoroughly re-examined.

Mention should also be made of the inadequate linguistic correction of the text and the numerous inaccuracies in terminology. For example, while the object depicted in Fig. 24 is correctly described in German as an 'arrowhead', in Polish and English it is incorrectly labelled as a 'lance/spearhead'. Similar doubts can be raised about the caption of Fig. 58. On p. 183, Fig. 66 refers in the caption to the finding of a spur; arms experts may be surprised to find it incorrectly described as a 'wheel spur'. In the table of contents in the Polish language version some of the titles of Glenn Abramsson's reports were not translated, leaving the English 'search tracks' (pp. 89, 107), which looks rather odd as a result. Another big oversight is calling the profile, which is an illustration of GPR research, a 'vertical cross-section of one of the excavations' (Fig. 51) or the statement that during the survey 'eighty-seven cartridges were found...' (p. 167).

The picture of research chaos that emerges after reading Ekdahl's book is summed up in the Appendices

(p. 224-268), which present the reader with reports from individual research seasons, but above all with details of the correspondence between Professor Ekdahl, the Museum Directorate, and Piotr A. Nowakowski. This correspondence concerns the history of cooperation between the above-mentioned researchers and documents the withdrawal of Professor Ekdahl from the battlefield research. It is difficult to say which side is right in such matters. However, it is in good taste to clarify the disputed issues concerning the copyrights to the research and the problem of using the acquired materials without the consent of the Museum Directorate directly between the researchers and the institution in question, rather than to publish private correspondence.

To conclude, despite the apparently large volume and large format, the four-language edition of S. Ekdahl's work can be summed up rather briefly: form over substance. The concept of an alternative march route of the Polish-Lithuanian army has been known for a long time and is not a novelty now. On the other hand, the presented research results which support it cannot be considered comprehensive in any way. It is a pity that the work was conducted in such a chaotic manner, as Sven Ekdahl himself points out by quoting inconsistencies between the reports in "Nowe Studia Grunwaldzkie" and Glenn Abramsson's studies. Despite some personnel changes in the project of the Museum of the Battle of Grunwald, there is no sign of this state of affairs changing radically. Unfortunately, it has to be stated that all the latest publications of the results of archaeological research of the Grunwald battlefield leave much to be desired, to put it mildly.

At the end of the reading it is also appropriate to mention another sad circumstance. Although the Battle of Grunwald is a flagship example of Polish patriotism, the research is conducted using more 'guerrilla' methods, with considerable involvement of Norwegian, Danish, and Lithuanian forces and resources. The question arises whether the Polish state itself can even afford to conduct reliable research of the Grunwald battlefield?

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