



Henning P. Jürgens. *Johannes a Lasco in Ostfriesland: Der Werdegang eines europäischen Reformators.* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002. viii + 428 pp. EUR 69.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-16-147754-6.



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A well-connected, noble, humanist-educated Polish clergyman destined for a career in the ecclesiastical hierarchy or service to the royal court converts to Protestantism and spends half a decade attempting to institute religious reforms with unclear results in the far-flung fringes of the Holy Roman Empire. The seemingly narrow focus of this study's title almost immediately inspires the question, "Ostfriesland, wo liegt denn das?"

Nevertheless, Juergens's analysis superbly rescues this topic from the obscurity of mere antiquarian interest. He effectively demonstrates the complex interplay of political, ecclesiastical, diplomatic, military, familial, and ideological factors that set the stage for Lasco's tenure in Ostfriesland. He also takes cues from the best biographies by not only bringing his subject to life, but also enlivening and sharpening our understanding of both the local and international contexts in which Lasco operated.

Linguistic limitations have hampered Lasco research in the past. In particular, western European scholars have paid too little attention to Polish sources. Moreover, they have focused especially on the period after Lasco took on the role as superintendent of the Dutch refugee churches in London in 1549, from which period his major treatise on church organization survives. Those scholars who have looked at the earlier period in Ostfriesland (1542-49) usually view it through the lens of Lasco's

later writings and activities. Juergens's biography offers an important corrective to both of these impediments. First, Juergens is fully engaged with the Polish sources and secondary literature: he expertly reconstructs the Polish events and circumstances surrounding Johannes a Lasco's development and career. Second, Juergens has avoided the common methodological shortcoming that is interested in this earlier period in Lasco's career as a Protestant Reformer only as a precursor to his later work. Juergens tells no "Whig history" in this book—rather the 1540s are allowed to stand on their own, and readers witness the impact of broad European factors in the localized context of the small territory of Ostfriesland.

In contrast to most other Protestant reformers of the first half of the sixteenth century, Johannes a Lasco (1499-1560) emerged from the highest social strata. Despite being relative newcomers to the circle of Polish magnates, the Laskis found success in the Polish court and church. His father held a number of low-level military offices that elevated the family, but most prominent was Johannes' uncle Jan Laski, who ultimately held the highest religious position in Poland as Archbishop of Gnesen and Primate of the Polish church. Growing up around his uncle's residence in Krakau and spending six years studying in Italy, Johannes a Lasco began his career with some of the finest political, religious, and cultural

associations of his generation.

Lasco was ordained in 1521 and took a post as royal secretary. His position at the royal court would have associated him with the large military, foreign policy, and religious concerns facing King Sigismund I in the 1520s, in particular, military conflicts with Moscow and the Teutonic Knights, increased involvement with the mounting Habsburg and Ottoman conflict in southeastern Europe, and the emerging issue of the reception of Protestant/Lutheran ideas (e.g. the king's fierce crackdown against religious innovation and urban independence in Danzig in 1525).

In this political context, then, Lasco continued his rise through the patronage circles of his uncle, adding new benefices, and hoping for the possibility to become a bishop. Lasco was also significantly impacted by the diplomatic activities of his older brother Hieronimus, who had already led several missions for Sigismund to the courts of European rulers. While accompanying one of these missions, Lasco met the Basel-based humanist, Erasmus of Rotterdam. Although the correspondence between Erasmus and Poland has been the focus of several studies, Juergens's present volume synthesizes this largely Polish scholarship rather nicely, and his own careful analysis of the correspondence fills out our picture of Lasco and his reform-oriented contacts. The picture of Lasco's subsequent stay in Erasmus's household is both entertaining and enlightening as Juergens gives us a glimpse into the inner workings of the complex web of personal, political, family, and religious influences that shaped this exciting period in the intellectual life of Europe and this significant episode in Lasco's own development.

After such successful positioning within elite Polish ecclesiastical, royal, and intellectual circles, why then did Johannes a Lasco leave his homeland and later take up residence in the seemingly insignificant territory of Ostfriesland? Juergens locates the key to understanding this ultimate decision in the diplomatic activities of his older brother, who for almost a decade found himself involved in the conflict over the succession to the Hungarian throne after the Battle of Mohacs in 1526. Juergens meticulously examines the Laskis's role in the Hungarian conflict (including Hieronimus's many diplomatic missions, imprisonment, and ultimate switching over to the Habsburg side in 1535) and convincingly argues that it was the political situation that kept Lasco from his clear ambitions for a higher position in the church—*not* any Protestant leanings.

Despite the common mining of Lasco's early biography for indications of his conversion to Protestantism, one must be careful in attempting to judge at what point Lasco's religious commitments crossed over to Protestantism from a humanist-influenced reform-minded theology. We find Lasco in an explicit role as a Protestant proponent only after 1542-43. Juergens is vigilant to avoid making assumptions that go beyond the surviving sources, and he provides a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of Lasco's life, correspondence, and travels between 1537 and 1542. Shortly after beginning his trip to the west in 1537, the precise chronology becomes somewhat shadowy. Even Lasco's marriage (by 1540) is not in itself, Juergens argues, unambiguous evidence that Lasco had yet intended a sharp break with the Roman Church. Indeed, Lasco's subsequent refusal to accept a calling as superintendent of the churches in Lutheran Ostfriesland raises the interesting possibility that Lasco was not yet in the Protestant camp. Thus, though the clergyman Lasco had clearly taken up a position of church reform, he might not yet have seen himself as in opposition to the Roman Church.

Lasco complicates our picture of the later Protestant Reformer still further during his return trip to Krakau in 1541 by making an oath of allegiance to the unity and authority of the Roman Church. This oath seems to confirm (assuming that Lasco was not acting out of mere financial considerations) that he sought the possibility to work again from his position in his church offices in Poland in order to implement some of his reform ideas. It was also during this trip that his diplomat brother died following further hazardous missions and imprisonment, perhaps freeing Lasco to act without fear of damaging Hieronimus's often precarious diplomatic positions. Taking clues from Lasco's correspondence, Juergens explains Lasco's subsequent actions with the thesis: "After the oath, after the frustration of the hope for a position in Poland, Lasco decided to become Superintendent in Ostfriesland and thereby carried out the turn to the Reformation, for want, as it were, of the possibility to be active in Poland according to his conceptions. Only in the subsequent years did he develop a distinctly Reformed theology and became a Protestant Reformer" (p. 159).

So after providing a detailed account of the interesting and rather unusual path toward Protestantism taken by this Reformer, Juergens turns, in the last half of his book, to Lasco's activities as Superintendent of Ostfriesland with its Lutheran church ordinances. Lasco had by 1542-43 taken up the earlier offer of the East Frisian count. Juergens gives readers a thorough reconstruction

of the local and regional political situation and religious climate, of the various background factors that impacted, drove, and sometimes limited Lasco's activities in Emden. To his credit, Juergens never succumbs to the all-too-common temptation to fill in holes left by the sources by extrapolating back from later institutions and experiences.

From the beginning, the outsider Lasco faced local opposition to his reforms. Moreover, Lasco always had to work against the backdrop of East Frisian political maneuverings between the former count's Protestant widow, Anna, and his Catholic brother, Johann, as they struggled for control over the regency of the territory. Especially as Count Johann built connections to the Habsburg court in Brussels, Lasco, who was already known to the Habsburgs and was now particularly disliked since his turn to Protestantism, faced ever greater scrutiny. Both Lasco and Countess Anna had to deal regularly with political consequences from Lasco's typically uncompromising stance against his critics.

Lasco's first major efforts were aimed at eliminating a few groups and practices that he felt were detrimental to the Protestant community he wanted to foster. In particular he worried about the Catholic practices continuing in the surviving monastery just outside of Emden, he wanted to purify the churches of images, and he was concerned about the rather large presence of radical Protestant sects in Ostfriesland (including followers of Menno Simons and of David Joris). Although Lasco's role in establishing long-lasting institutions of church discipline and congregational oversight in Ostfriesland (Emden's consistory and the East Frisian Coetus, or company of pastors) is well documented elsewhere, the present reevaluation of these institutions' foundations is more fulfilling. Juergens's total engagement with the surviving correspondence of all the participants allows him to retell the stories surrounding Lasco's activities, strategies, and the opposition he faced in sharper detail and with finer distinctions than has been previously done. Although he remains more tentative in his conclusions than others have been, Juergens also looks more creatively for insights about motivations and intentions in the context of Lasco's political maneuvering, effective rhetoric in his communication with the countess, wide-ranging correspondence, and his rather high opinion of his own role in spreading Protestantism.

Despite Ostfriesland's lack of participation in the Schmalkaldic war, the involvement of some leading East Frisian nobles with the Schmalkaldic League raised the Emperor's ire. Lasco's presence and his connections with

leading Protestants increased the political pressure on the countess. With the Augsburg Interim looming, Lasco considered an invitation from Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, although he still sought an appointment in Poland. Countess Anna had previously stood with and supported her superintendent through numerous conflicts, but the current political situation for Ostfriesland did not allow Anna to continue supporting Lasco in light of the Augsburg Interim and the heavy criticisms from Brussels. Lasco then accepted Cranmer's invitation to London.

Juergens has written an immensely satisfying biography. While he makes no attempt to cover Lasco's entire life, he has provided a thorough account of some of the lesser known periods. The book's first half takes advantage of the geographic and intellectual breadth of Lasco's connections to open a window onto the complex interplay of religious, political, and intellectual issues across Europe, including the often neglected Poland and Eastern Europe. Through Juergens's subsequent analysis of Lasco's stay and work in Ostfriesland, we see in sharp focus the way in which these broader forces and ideas impacted one episode in the career of this prominent Protestant Reformer. Furthermore, this book provides a service by synthesizing the full range of Polish and western European scholarship on Lasco. Juergens's painstaking attempt to reconstruct the entire corpus of correspondence from, to, and about Johannes a Lasco will also foster further Lasco scholarship: his appendix includes a 23-page table listing 1055 known letters involving Lasco (about 10 percent have been lost). Juergens's critical reading of this correspondence allows him to flesh out certain episodes, to correct certain misperceptions, and to offer nuanced interpretations regarding a number of important aspects of Lasco's life and career. The book would have been aided by a couple of maps (perhaps one broadly of Europe showing Lasco's travels and connections, and one close-up each of Poland and Ostfriesland/Emden to aid non-specialists in a few rather specific descriptions), and non-Ostfriesland-specialists would probably benefit on two or three occasions from slight expansion of the background discussion around mention of a specific East Frisian document or event. But these are quite insignificant criticisms of an important and well-done book.

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